

# The Old Man and the Sea Study Guide

by Calvin Roso

For the novel by  
Ernest Hemingway

CD Version



Progeny Press

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**The Old Man and the Sea Study Guide**

A Progeny Press Study Guide

by Calvin Roso

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## Synopsis

*We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;  
persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. . . .  
Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away,  
yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.*

—2 Corinthians 4:8,9,16

After 84 days without taking a fish, Santiago is soon to catch something larger than he can ever imagine. It is his courage and perseverance of character that enables him to go out to sea in his weather-beaten boat each day.

In the midst of ridicule from younger fishermen, Santiago finds courage in his friendship with a young boy, Manolin, who has fished with Santiago since he was five years old. But because of Santiago's "bad luck," Manolin's parents will not allow the boy to fish with Santiago any more.

This short novel shows the outcome of one man's endurance in the midst of defeat, and how the friendship of a young boy gives him hope. *The Old Man and the Sea* won author Ernest Hemingway the Pulitzer Prize in 1953.

## Second Day at Sea

(Pages 53–86)

*Then he was sorry for the great fish that had nothing to eat and his determination to kill him never relaxed in his sorrow for him. How many people will he feed, he thought. But are they worthy to eat him? It is enough to live on the sea and kill our true brothers.*

### Vocabulary:

A *synonym* is a word that means the same or nearly the same as another word. Read the following sentences from the book. For each of the underlined words, select two synonyms from the word box below.

*Word Box*

---

quest	shake	sword	fluctuation
fabricate	surge	blade	invent
	wobble	journey	

---

1. He was too tired even to examine the line and he teetered on it as his delicate feet gripped it fast.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. But what is his plan, he thought. And what is mine? Mine I must improvise to his because of his great size.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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3. He could see the prisms in the deep dark water and the line stretching ahead and the strange undulation of the calm.

\_\_\_\_\_

4. His sword was as long as a baseball bat and tapered like a rapier and he rose full length from the water and re-entered it . . .

\_\_\_\_\_

5. “. . . I promise to make a pilgrimage to the Virgin of Cobre if I catch him.”

\_\_\_\_\_

**Stream of Consciousness:**

1. *Stream of consciousness* is the technique of presenting a narrative as the continuous flow of a character’s thoughts and responses. In *The Old Man and the Sea*, once Santiago is alone on the sea, his inner thoughts and spoken dialogue are presented in stream of consciousness as each idea suggests another.

For example, consider the paragraph beginning “This is the second day now that I do not know the result of the *juegos*, he thought.” In that one paragraph, Santiago’s thoughts move from baseball scores, to DiMaggio, to bone spurs, to fighting cocks, to endurance, and finally to wishing he was the marlin.

Find another passage that demonstrates this style.

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2. During Santiago's second day at sea, the stream of consciousness technique becomes more apparent. Why might the author choose to use this technique more frequently at this point in the story?

**Questions:**

1. Why did Santiago want the marlin to jump?
  
2. During the first day at sea, we began to see a relationship develop between Santiago and the marlin. How does this relationship deepen on the second day?
  
3. How does Santiago injure his right hand? What happens to Santiago's left hand?
  
4. What does Santiago do with the tuna he caught on the previous day?

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5. How does the thought of Joe DiMaggio inspire Santiago during the second day at sea?
6. What incident from his past did Santiago call to mind to give himself confidence? Why might this incident give Santiago confidence in his struggle against the marlin?
7. Why did Santiago give up arm-wrestling?
8. Why does Santiago look for a swirl in the water when he throws the carcass of the dolphin overboard?

#### **Analysis:**

9. In the last section we discussed parallel characters and listed ways in which Hemingway used Santiago and the marlin as parallel characters. List four more ways we see a parallel drawn between Santiago and the marlin on this second day at sea.



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10. Hemingway uses birds to parallel and symbolize different aspects of Santiago's experience. For example, early in his journey out Santiago notices the small birds who "were always flying and looking and almost never finding." This parallels Santiago's experience on the previous 84 days. Then, just prior to Santiago's success in finding and catching the marlin, a man-of-war bird is seen catching fish.

On Santiago's second day at sea, a tired warbler rests on Santiago's stern. What might the appearance of this bird say about Santiago at this point in the story?

11. Santiago wonders if the warbler is a young warbler who has never crossed the gulf before, and he understands that the warbler will "learn about the hawks soon enough."

"Take a good rest, small bird," he said. "Then go in and take your chance like any man or bird or fish."

What general statement does Santiago seem to be making about the process of growing older?

12. Read again the description of the marlin as it leaps from the water. Hemingway does not give specific measurements of the fish (except to say that it is two feet longer than Santiago's boat), but he lets the reader understand the immensity of the fish through the use of descriptive language. Write down the descriptive words or phrases that are used to communicate the size of the fish.

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13. At times during the second day at sea, Santiago imagines himself in the position of the marlin he has hooked. “If I were him, I would put in everything now and go until something broke.” List two other times Santiago imagines himself in this position.
  
14. Santiago seems to wish he were the marlin because the marlin possesses certain qualities he admires. What are these qualities? What qualities does Santiago recognize that he himself possesses?
  
15. In the midst of his fatigue, Santiago thinks, “I wish he’d [the marlin] sleep and I could sleep and dream about the lions. . . . Why are the lions the main thing that is left?” Why do you suppose that the lions are the main thing that Santiago dreams about?
  
16. Before Santiago dreams of the lions, he has two other dreams. What are these dreams and what might they symbolize?

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**Dig Deeper:**

17. At the beginning of his struggle against the marlin, Santiago makes little acknowledgment of or reference to God. Now, as his second day begins, Santiago says “God let him [the marlin] jump.” Later he says “God help me to have the cramp go.” Finally he makes promises to God. What does he promise to do if he catches the fish?
  
18. On the second day at sea, Santiago makes a vow to God. Read Numbers 30:1, 2; Deuteronomy 23:21–23; Ecclesiastes 5:4–6; Matthew 5:33–37; and James 5:12. What do these verses say about making vows to God and making vows in general? What difference do you see between the Old Testament verses and the New Testament verses? Why do you think they differ?
  
19. Though we have not seen Santiago pray or talk to God before, suddenly we see him talking to God and saying prayers a number of times. Why do you think this is? Read Philippians 4:6, 7; Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18. How do these verses say we should pray? Is Santiago doing this? Give an example of how you could do this in your daily routine.

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20. As noted earlier, Santiago finds ways to encourage himself in the midst of difficulty. Read Psalm 94:18,19, Lamentations 3:21–24, and Hebrews 10:23–25. What can Christians do to encourage themselves in the midst of difficulty?

### **Optional Exercises:**

- *Using Stream-of-Consciousness:* Recall an important incident or event from your life. As you think about it, pay attention to how your thoughts and actions flow together in a continuous stream. Write a one-page narrative relating the incident using the stream-of-consciousness technique.
- Read the following passage and then draw or paint a picture of the scene.

A small bird came toward the skiff from the north. He was a warbler and flying very low over the water . . . . The bird made the stern of the boat and rested there. Then he flew around the old man's head and rested on the line where he was more comfortable.

“How old are you?” the old man asked the bird. “Is this your first trip?”

- Write a poem describing the marlin's journey in the sea or relating events from the marlin's limited point of view.

## Answer Key

### *Exposition*

#### *Vocabulary:*

1. wrapped or rolled; 2. thin and angular; 3. kind or generous; 4. land worn away by water, wind, or ice; 5. will or determination

#### *Characterization:*

1. **Santiago:** We are told that he is old, he fishes alone, and that he has not caught a fish for 84 days. We are told that he is considered “salao, which is the worst form of unlucky.” As if to reinforce this, the author ends the paragraph by saying that the old man’s sail looks like “the flag of permanent defeat.” **Manolin:** We know right away that the boy cares for the old man. He had fished with Santiago until his parents had ordered him to go in another boat. He feels sad when he sees the old man come in each day with no fish. Even though he is not fishing with Santiago, he helps Santiago carry all of his gear.

2. The second paragraph emphasizes Santiago’s age. The third paragraph contrasts this by telling us that everything about Santiago is old “except his eyes.” The effect is heightened by the use of contrasting descriptions. In the second paragraph, Santiago’s scars are described as being “as old as erosions in a fishless desert.” But his eyes are described as being “the same color as the sea, . . . cheerful and undefeated.” The contrast between these descriptions—one dry and fishless, the other being the sea (and presumably full of fish)—shows the sharp contrast between Santiago’s outward appearance and something within him which remains young.

3. Santiago’s home is just a shack. The mast of his skiff is nearly as long as the one room of the shack. Inside there is just a bed, a table, a chair, and a place on the dirt floor for cooking. The sparseness of the shack suggests that Santiago may spend most of his time fishing on the sea. It also speaks of Santiago’s poverty, but may also hint at a simplicity of spirit—a man who does not desire many things. There is no food (and we know that Santiago has not caught any fish) so Santiago must be supported by others, specifically the boy and the man who gives the boy food and beer. We learn that Santiago was married, but that he will not display the picture of his wife because it makes him feel lonely. The two pictures that he does display suggests that Santiago is (or at least his wife was) Catholic.

#### *Questions:*

1. The initial conflict or problem introduced in the exposition is that Santiago has not caught a fish for 84 days.
2. The boy’s parents told him he couldn’t fish with Santiago any longer because Santiago had gone to sea 40 days without catching a fish. This was “salao, which is the worst form of unlucky.”
3. Some of the other fishermen make fun of Santiago. However, the older men look at Santiago with sadness. They seem to have pity for him.
4. The boy has taken it upon himself to make sure that Santiago has food to eat. Also, it appears that another man in the village, Martin, is helping by giving food to the boy to give to Santiago.

#### *Analysis:*

5. The fact that Santiago’s scars have healed reminds the reader that it has been a long time since Santiago last brought in a fish.
6. When he is insulted by the other fishermen, Santiago makes no reply.
7. The reminder that Santiago once caught many fish after day 87 foreshadows that Santiago might catch fish soon.
8. Santiago relates to Joe DiMaggio because DiMaggio’s father was a fisherman.
9. Answers may vary. Santiago’s dreams possibly symbolize that he is living in the past, or that he has not lost the faith and courage of his youth. These dreams, like Santiago’s eyes, are a part of Santiago that remains young.

#### *Dig Deeper:*

10. This passage defines faith as “being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see.”
11. They have faith that Santiago will catch a fish. This is not based on superstition about luck, but rather on Santiago’s skill as a fisherman.
12. Answers may vary. What seems to be most important to Santiago are the great skills of the individual players on the team. Even if his favorite team loses, Santiago admires how DiMaggio plays. Similarly, we can see that it does not matter to Santiago if he was “unlucky” in fishing. He knows that he has the skill to bring in fish, and that is all that seems to matter to him.