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

### Finding the Beauty in Suffering

After failing to catch a single fish for 84 days, old Cuban fisherman, Santiago, makes the catch of a lifetime: a massive marlin too strong to reel in. For three days, Santiago struggles against the monstrous and beautiful fish in an epic battle between man and beast. What will this battle teach Santiago about nature, suffering, and ultimately, himself?

### Be a Better Reader

As you work through the study guide for *The Old Man and the Sea*, you'll also practice these skills, which will help you when you read novels in the future, for school assignments or just for fun.

1. Describe how characters in a novel are developed.
2. Describe the plot development and structure of a novel.
3. Describe and analyze the role of setting in a novel.
4. Identify and analyze the themes in a novel.
5. Identify and analyze an author's purpose and perspective.
6. Explain how historical context affects readers' understanding and appreciation of a novel.

### Behind the Scenes

At the age of 18, American author Ernest Hemingway volunteered as a Red Cross ambulance driver during World War One. During a battle in Italy, he was badly injured by shrapnel and forced out of service. His first novel, *A Farewell to Arms*, fictionalized his wartime experience and ultimately led him to his new career as a writer. His sparse description and short sentences revolutionized the literary world, and he soon became known for his hyper-masculine representation of men. This depiction, however, was actually a representation of Hemingway himself, who enjoyed fishing, hunting, boxing, and even bullfighting!

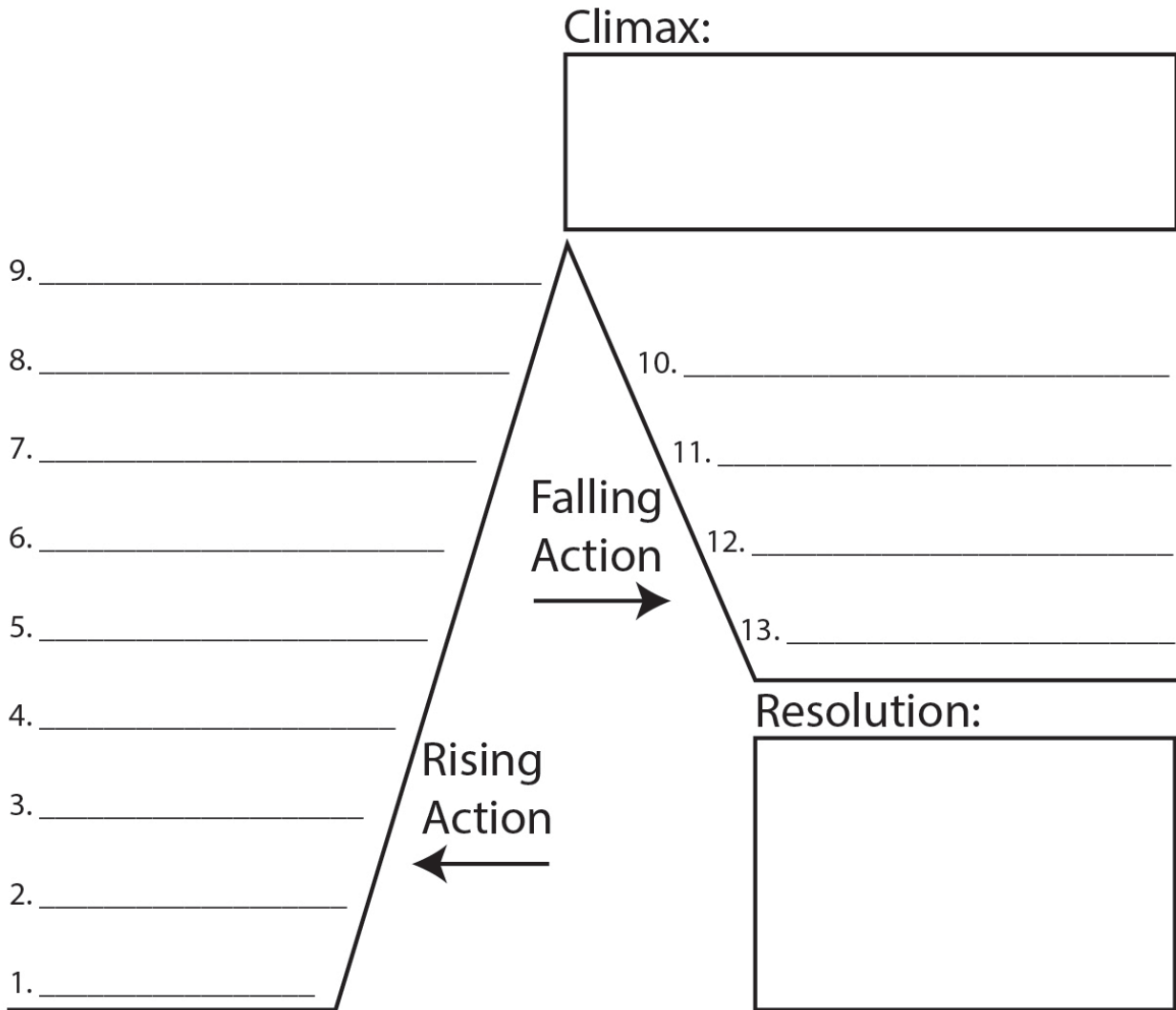
In the 1930's, Hemingway moved to a coastal town in Cuba, surrounding himself with beautiful scenery in where he found great inspiration. While writing for *Esquire Magazine*, Hemingway documented the real-life story of a Cuban fisherman and his battle with a massive marlin. The fisherman was dragged out to sea by the fish, and during an epic-battle, sharks destroyed the fisherman's prized catch. The fisherman was rescued days later, dehydrated and delirious. As he had done with *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway fictionalized the moving, real-life events to create a bestselling novel, *The Old Man and the Sea*.

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### The Plot

*The Old Man and the Sea* has a straightforward, linear plot line as Santiago battles against the massive marlin. How do you think Santiago's struggle will end? As you read *The Old Man and the Sea*, fill in the boxes for each element of the novel's plot.



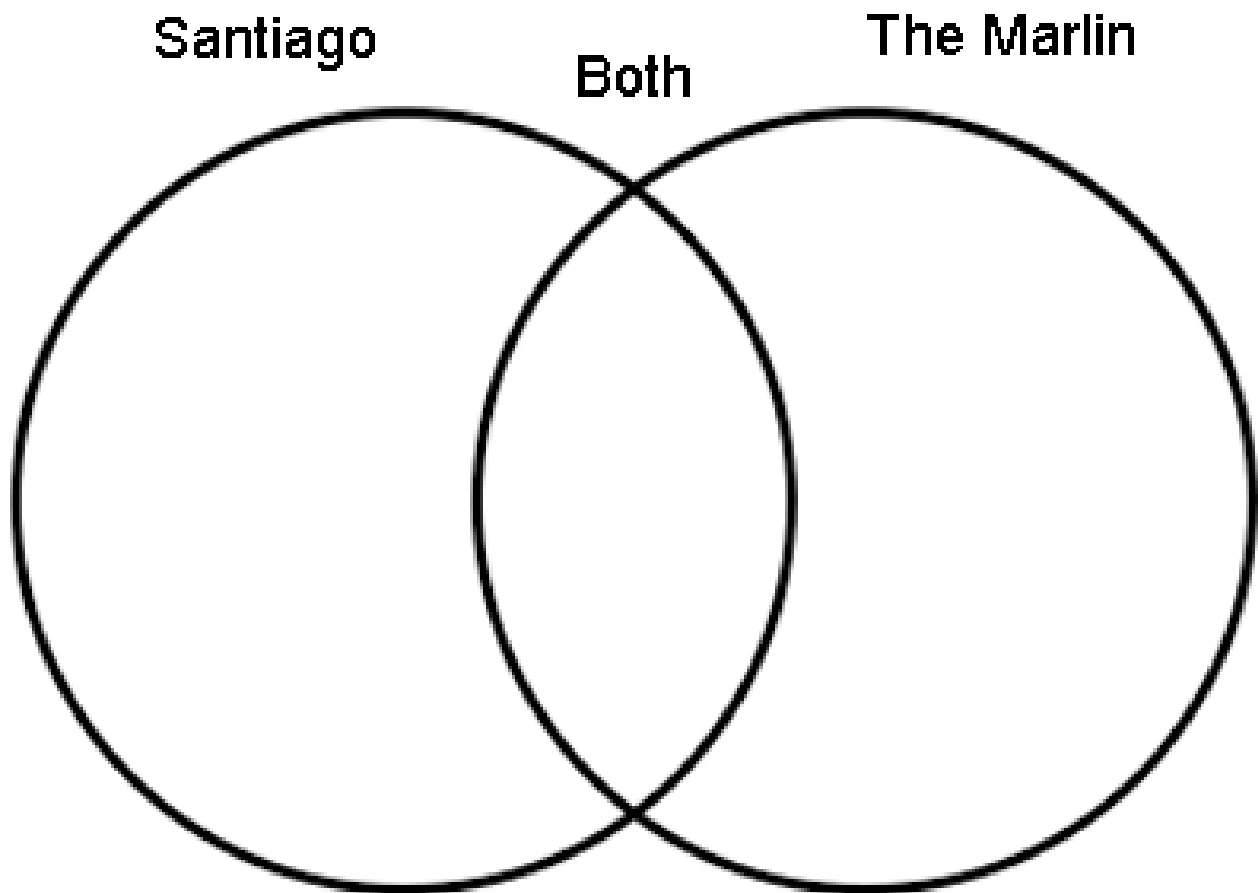
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### **The Characters**

The two main characters in the novel, Santiago and the marlin, are actually very similar even though one is a man and one is a fish. Both are engaged in an epic battle and face the harrowing moment in which one must kill or be killed. Hemmingway writes about both characters in a very similar way!

Use the diagram below to note the characteristics and descriptions Hemmingway gives to each character. Note the description Hemmingway gives Santiago in the left circle, and the description Hemmingway gives the marlin in the right circle. Note the characteristics Santiago and the Marlin share in the center circle.

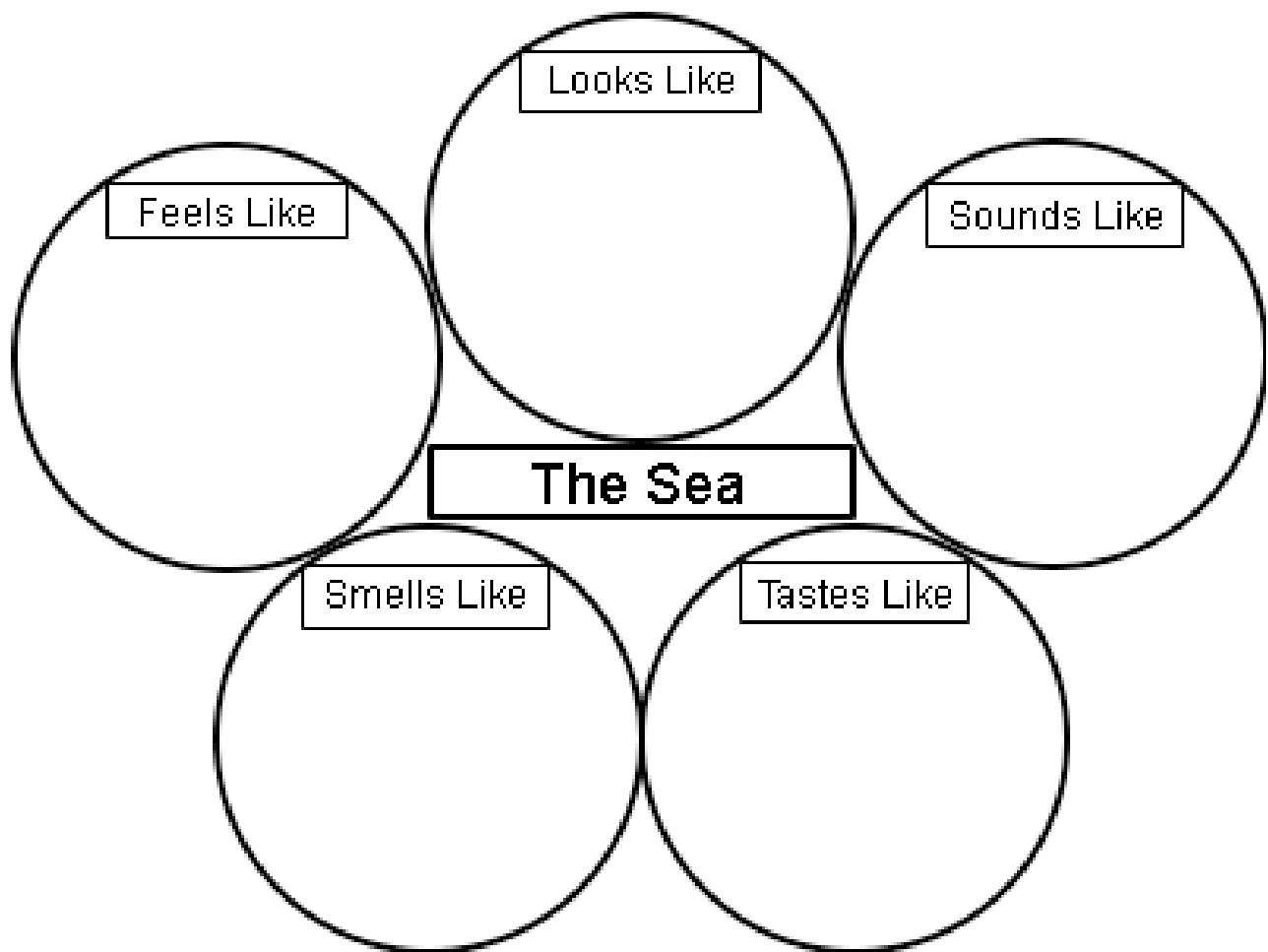


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### The Setting

For the majority of the novel, Santiago is alone in the middle of the sea. Through Hemingway's description, the novel's setting – the sea – almost becomes a character in its own right. Use the diagram below to note descriptions of the sea using all five senses: touch, sight, sound, smell, and taste. Be sure to include direct quotes from the novel—phrases and sentences that are used to describe the sea – as well as explanations in your own words about what these details suggest.



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### Tracking Themes

What is Ernest Hemingway trying to say about life and its struggles through Santiago's battle with the marlin? The main themes of *The Old Man and the Sea* are related to determination, honoring struggle, and death. See if you can identify and analyze those themes.

**Step 1:** What parts of the plot seem related to a possible theme in the novel? (Think about the main conflict and how it got resolved or worked out.)

**Step 2:** Which characters seem related to a possible theme? Consider the secondary characters (not just Santiago and the marlin). What do these characters suggest about life, struggles, and death?

**Step 3:** How does Ernest Hemingway utilize symbols to hint at the novel's themes? What objects, people, or places stand for something "bigger" in the story?

**Step 4:** What does the novel's title suggest about the novel's theme? Why do you think Hemingway named this novel *The Old Man and the Sea* rather than *The Old Man and the Marlin*?

**Step 5:** Write one or two of the novel's main themes in your own words.

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### Talk About It

What do you think about Ernest Hemingway's great novel about a man and a fish? Is it like other books you've read? In the space below each question, write an answer based on your own experiences and your own understanding of the plot. Include some textual evidence or examples that helped you arrive at your answer.

1. When *The Old Man and the Sea* was first released, some literary critics felt Hemingway was lashing out at them. They read the novel as a symbol for Hemingway's writing career, in which Hemingway was symbolized by Santiago and the sharks symbolized the critics. What message do you think Hemmingway was sending readers through Santiago's struggle at sea?

Textual Evidence

2. The ending of *The Old Man and the Sea* has divided readers for generations. At the end of the novel, do you think Santiago's story is one of sadness or of hope? Does it change your opinion to know that Hemmingway committed suicide after a lifelong struggle with depression?

Textual Evidence

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### **Represent!**

Show what you know about *The Old Man and the Sea* and its message about overcoming obstacles. Choose one of these projects to complete and share with your teacher, classmates, and others.

### **Choice 1: Fictionalizing Personal Struggle**

Every day, we face struggles in our lives and must make the decision to give up or continue battling. *The Old Man and the Sea* is an epic narrative of one man's struggle to bring home a giant marlin, a struggle that lasts three whole days. Santiago's story is one of great determination, sadness, and beauty. Throughout our own struggles, we face these same emotions, but typically on a smaller scale. This resonance is one of the main reasons why *The Old Man and the Sea* has been read, studied, and discussed for generations.

For this project, you will create a short story based on a personal struggle that you overcame. The story can be about any personal struggle, not only a struggle with nature. For example, your story could be about facing a fear, overcoming an illness, or learning a new skill. The only requirement is that your story follows a traditional plot structure with rising action, a climax, and falling action. Remember, you are fictionalizing your personal struggle, so your story should contain characters, dialogue, and conflict, just like *The Old Man and the Sea* does!

You can document your three-day struggle as a written diary (which will be delivered as a word document), or as a recorded and uploaded video diary. As you document your project, be sure to comment on how your emotional journey compares / contrasts to Santiago's!

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### Choice 2: Mapping the Story

The novel's setting, of the coast of Havana, Cuba almost becomes a character in its own right through Hemmingway's evocative descriptions. The sea is present in every element of the story's plot, and the world created through Hemmingway's world is huge, despite the fact that the story is confined to a small geographical region. In this way, *The Old Man and the Sea* creates two vivid maps for the readers: a literal geographical map of the area, and a story map of the novel's rising and falling action.

For this project, you will merge the two maps of *The Old Man and the Sea* together into one cohesive story map. Using an actual map of Cuba and the novel's descriptions, create a replica map of Cuba. Each point of interest on the map should relate to a scene from the novel. For example, you might note on the map where Santiago's home is, where the Cuban fishermen generally cast their lines, and where Santiago hooks the marlin. Your map should contain at least 10 points of interest from the novel.

There are many different ways in which you may complete this project. You may choose to illustrate the map, build a topographical map with paper-Mache or clay, or create an animated or digital map. If you decide illustrate or build a model of the map, upload a your scanned images / photographs. If you create an animated or digital map, upload a link or compress your video to make it less than 10 MB, and upload your video file.