



Exploring Junior Cycle Texts

The Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway

The Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway is a novel included as part of the Prescribed Material for Junior Cycle English (For the student cohorts commencing Junior Cycle in 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026 and 2027 and presenting for examination in 2026, 2027 and 2028, 2029 and 2030).

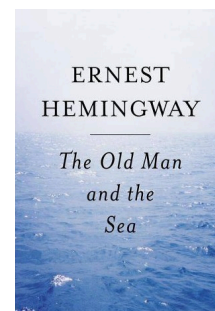


Image courtesy of
Scribner Book Company

Please note:

- The following tasks might be completed over a series of lessons.
- You may like to adapt and adjust the tasks to suit your context.
- *The Old Man and the Sea* covers themes which could be considered sensitive and controversial. You may wish to consult with our READY Framework to support you in your study.



Scan the QR code or click here to
access a Getting Started with Guide
for this Text

Before you read... (Teacher Guidance)

1. Visual Prediction

Show some images relating to the text. Ask pupils: what story might this tell?



2. Thematic Discussion

Pose a short scenario for pupils: *Imagine you've worked for days to achieve something, but when you finally succeed, you feel both proud and sad.* In pairs, guide students to discuss why sometimes success might feel painful. Have them come up with suggestions for times when victory may come with a cost.

3. Examining Vocabulary

On the board, write or display key words from the extract (without context): *faint, strain, harpoon, agony, silver, blood, brother, slave work.* Ask pupils to predict the mood or tone they expect from the extract based on these words. Encourage them to justify and explain their ideas.



Extract

Background: The novel takes place in the 1940s in the Gulf Stream off the coast of Cuba. Santiago, an old fisherman, has been locked in a long, exhausting struggle with a giant marlin. In this extract, we see the fisherman struggle to make his first catch in over 84 days.

He felt faint again now but he held on the great fish all the strain that he could. I moved him, he thought. Maybe this time I can get him over. Pull, hands, he thought. Hold up, legs. Last for me, head. Last for me. You never went. This time I'll pull him over.

But when he put all of his effort on, starting it well out before the fish came alongside and pulling with all his strength, the fish pulled part way over and then righted himself and swam away.

"Fish," the old man said. "Fish, you are going to have to die anyway. Do you have to kill me too?"

He took all his pain and what was left of his strength and his long gone pride and he put it against the fish's agony and the fish came over onto his side and swam gently on his side, his bill almost touching the planking of the skiff and started to pass the boat, long, deep, wide, silver and barred with purple and interminable in the water.

The old man dropped the line and put his foot on it and lifted the harpoon as high as he could and drove it down with all his strength, and more strength he had just summoned, into the fish's side just behind the great chest fin that rose high in the air to the altitude of the man's chest. He felt the iron go in and he leaned on it and drove it further and then pushed all his weight after it.

Then the fish came alive, with his death in him, and rose high out of the water showing all his great length and width and all his power and his beauty. He seemed to hang in the air above the old man in the skiff. Then he fell into the water with a crash that sent spray over the old man and over all of the skiff.

The old man felt faint and sick and he could not see well. But he cleared the harpoon line and let it run slowly through his raw hands and, when he could see, he saw the fish was on his back with his silver belly up. The shaft of the harpoon was projecting at an angle from the fish's shoulder and the sea was discolouring with the red of the blood from his heart. First it was dark as a shoal in the blue water that was more than a mile deep. Then it spread like a cloud. The fish was silvery and still and floated with the waves.

The old man looked carefully in the glimpse of vision that he had. Then he took two turns of the harpoon line around the bitt in the bow and hid his head on his hands.

"Keep my head dear," he said against the wood of the bow. "I am a tired old man. But I have killed this fish which is my brother and now I must do the slave work."

Now I must prepare the nooses and the rope to lash him alongside, he thought. Even if we were two and swamped her to load him and bailed her out, this skiff would never hold him. I must prepare everything, then bring him in and lash him well and step the mast and set sail for home.



Activities Based on Extract (Teacher Guidelines)

These prompts are designed to support close reading and personal response. They may be used orally or in writing, individually or in groups.

1. Visual Response

Have pupils sketch or describe (in words) one image that stands out from the extract. Underneath, they write three adjectives to describe the mood of this moment. Then share and compare as a class.

2. Language Analysis

Give students the question: How does Hemingway use language to create tension in the extract? Students should record their ideas as an analytical paragraph. Scaffolding could be provided through step-by-step instructions. Have them choose a quote which is beautiful or powerful, identify any techniques used in it, note what it makes the reader think etc.

3. Symbolism

Guide pupils to discuss the symbolism of Santiago's catch. This could be done through posing questions such as

- Why does the old man feel respect for the fish, even as he kills it?
- What might the fish symbolise? Nature, struggle, pride, beauty, or something else?
- What does the phrase "*slave work*" at the end suggest about his victory?

Reflect and Respond (Teacher Guidance)

These activities extend engagement with the extract and invite creative and personal responses. Use individually, in pairs, or in groups.

1. Victory and Loss

Give pupils the quotation below and guide them in writing a short paragraph explaining what they think it means. "*I have killed this fish which is my brother.*"

2. Creative Monologue

Invite students to write a short monologue or diary entry from the perspective of the sea watching the struggle. Encourage use of sensory language to capture mood and movement.

3. Personal Response

Guide students to write a personal or analytical piece exploring what true strength means to them, using Santiago as inspiration.

4. Persuasive Writing

Give pupils the prompt below and guide them in writing a persuasive response exploring whether humans should see themselves as masters of nature or part of it. Prompt: *Respect for nature means knowing when to stop fighting it.*

5. Poster Design

Ask students to design a poster for the film adaptation of this novel in pairs. They should decide what elements they will focus on: theme, character etc. Then on paper or digitally, students should create a film poster which would encourage an audience to watch the film. Ask pairs to present their work and justify their creative decisions.