

The Old Man and the Sea Themes

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Themes

Resistance to Defeat: Santiago, an old fisherman who has gone 84 days without catching a fish, embodies the struggle against defeat. Despite his hardships, Santiago never surrenders. He ventures farther into the ocean than ever before and battles the marlin for three days and nights. He endures immense physical pain and exhaustion. He fights off sharks even when the situation appears hopeless. Whenever despair threatens, Santiago finds strength in his memories of youthful days, his pride in proving himself a worthy role model for Manolin, or by comparing himself to his hero, Joe DiMaggio. Santiago's journey shows the universal human struggle to survive. As Santiago observes, "A man can be destroyed but not defeated." The novel argues that it is not the victory over inevitable fate that defines a person, but the effort and struggle against it.

Pride, Honor, and Respect: Pride in *The Old Man and the Sea* is portrayed as a vital force that pushes Santiago to greatness. It is Santiago's pride that fuels his endurance during the difficult days at sea. Importantly, Santiago does not attempt to be more than he is. When Manolin calls him the best fisherman, Santiago humbly disagrees. His pride comes from striving to be the best fisherman he can be. He sees his struggle with the marlin as a way to show Manolin "what a man can do and what a man endures." Ultimately, Santiago's catch of the marlin fish becomes a symbol of honor. Though Santiago is unable to bring the marlin to the shore in full, his struggle itself earns the respect of his fellow villagers.

Friendship: The bond between Santiago and Manolin is integral to Santiago's ultimate triumph over the marlin. Santiago serves as a mentor and companion, while Manolin offers support, bringing food, clothing, and encouragement, especially during Santiago's unlucky streak. Even when Manolin is not present, Santiago continues to draw strength from the boy's support and his belief that Manolin would be disappointed if he gave up. Nevertheless, Santiago refuses to succumb to loneliness far into the sea. He finds companionship in the creatures around him. The flying fish are his "principal friends," and the marlin, through their shared struggle, becomes his "brother." He talks to the stars, the ocean, and even to himself to stave off despair.

Christian Allegory (Santiago is a Christ-like Figure): In *The Old Man and the Sea*, Christian imagery is deeply embedded. Santiago stands for a Christ-like figure throughout his struggles. Santiago's wounded hands become Christ's crucified hands. During the shark attacks, Santiago lets out a sound similar to a man being crucified. When Santiago returns to shore, he carries the mast on his shoulder to his shack. This mirrors Christ's burden of carrying the cross to his crucifixion. Lastly, when Santiago lies down to rest in his bed, his posture resembles Christ on the cross. More significantly, Santiago becomes a Christ-like figure through how he turns defeat into victory.

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