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The Old Man and the Sea
Ernest Hemingway



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Prestwick House

P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938

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800-932-4593

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Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

The Old Man and The Sea

Pages 9 – 24 (until Santiago goes to sleep)

1. The narrator tells us that the old man was considered “the worst form of unlucky.” The sail of his skiff was patched with flour sacks and looked like “the flag of permanent defeat.” The man is gaunt, and his hands have deep scars. In spite of this, we are told, “Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated.” Describe a person you know is unlucky but refuses to give up. How does this person affect you?
2. The old man tells the boy that he is “a strange old man.” Do you agree?
3. In your opinion, should the boy help the old man to the extent he does? Who in your life do you help? What about this person makes you want to help him or her?
4. The boy believes that the old man is the best fisherman. When the old man tells him there are better fishermen, the boy says, “There are many good fishermen and some great ones. But there is only you.” How do you think the boy would explain his devotion to the old man?

The Old Man and The Sea

Pages 25 – 43 (until the fish actually takes
the bait)

8. What is your feeling toward the boy? What would you like to tell the boy's father about the boy?

9. The old man dreams of "lions on the beach." What are some dreams you have?

10. Re-read the discussion of the sea as masculine or feminine. If you were a fisherman, how would you think of the sea?

11. Hemingway gives the reader a detailed explanation of the careful and exact way the old man baits and drops his fishing lines. Then, we are told the old man's philosophy about keeping his lines. He thinks to himself, "Everyday is a new day. It is better to be lucky. But I would rather be exact. Then when luck comes you are ready." What is your philosophy about luck; do you depend on luck, or are you careful about details all of the time so that you are ready for every opportunity? Do you think the events of life can be explained completely by luck, or do you think that humans can influence some of life by being ready for luck?

Tell a story from your own experience, something that you have observed or experienced directly, that illustrates your viewpoint.

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Pages 44 – 61 (until Santiago notices the clouds)

18. After the man has definitely hooked his great fish, what image or mental picture do you have in your mind of the old man?

19. The narrator tells us that, as the man and his skiff are being towed out to sea by the huge fish, the man rested “and tried not to think but only to endure.” Tell about a difficult time in your life, when you tried to endure it by not thinking about your situation, but by just resting.

20. Imagine that you are in the old man’s situation of being towed out farther and farther from land by a great fish you plan to bring back eventually. What would you do?

21. What is your opinion of this old man, who is allowing himself to be in this position? How would the situation be different in the modern world?

22. The old man remembers a time he caught a female marlin and her mate stayed with her until the end. How did this story make you feel? What image do you have of this scene, including the colors?

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34. How did you feel about the old man when you read his memory of arm wrestling?
35. Describe the image you have of the man catching the dolphin. Be sure to include the details of color.
36. The old man returns to his reflections on the greatness of the fish, the great dignity of the fish, and his sympathy for the fish. He decides, "I do not understand these things....but it is good that we do not have to try to kill the sun or the moon or the stars. It is enough to live on the sea and kill our true brothers."

What would you like to say to the old man at this point?

37. What is your evaluation of the old man's decision not to make a drag with the oars, but to sleep?