

ERNEST HEMINGWAY BOOK REVIEW

book review

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In 1953, Ernest Hemingway won the Pulitzer Prize in fiction for his book *The Old Man and the Sea*. After gaining awareness and popularity from his previous books, Hemingway was regarded as one of the most important writers of the 20th century. Hemingway's style of writing, which he called "iceberg writing," was a plain style of writing that was less wordy than the literature at that time. It's called "iceberg writing" because the real meaning in the text is deeper than what's on the surface of the book. Hemingway once said that "A good writer does not need to reveal every detail of a character or action," and that mindset is very obvious in his novella *The Old Man and the Sea*.

The Old Man and the Sea takes place in Havana, Cuba in the mid-20th century. The story follows an old, intrepid man named Santiago.

Santiago is a fisherman, but he's been unlucky for the past eighty-four days and has caught no fish. Motifs and symbolism follow Santiago throughout his journey. Santiago's aging body is a recurring point in the story; his hands cramp, his vision blurs, and his muscles feel weak. There isn't a single sentence

from Hemingway that is without purpose and the entire novella is filled with rich writing about Santiago's unbridled determination. The contrast between Santiago's mindset and his body is one way that Hemingway makes his novella

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compelling. Though Santiago is a hard working man, he is still weak from his old age and faces problems both physical and mental. He encounters many obstacles in his journey; some stem from the ruthless ocean, and others from his own crippling body. More contrast exists between Santiago and some of the townsfolk of Havana. Santiago's apprentice sees him as a wise teacher with lots of experience out at sea, but the locals see Santiago as nothing more than an oldman who has no fish or family.

While reading *The Old Man and the Sea*, one of the first things I realized was how visual the book is, no object is left without a description, and every description Hemingway uses feels like something that really exists. For example, the imagery used to describe the local bar is very descriptive. The reader is told what the building looks like, what the people inside look like, and even what kind of cup everyone drinks out of.

Because of his plain style of writing, there is little to no ambiguity and almost every remark made is clear. Whether or not Hemingway is writing about a physical action or a feeling, he is always straightforward about what's happening, there's never any kind of metaphor for what's going on. Though there aren't many characters in the book, and their descriptions are brief, it's easy to get an idea in your head about what they might look like or what they sound like because of Hemingway's style.

One of the most influential pieces of modern literature, Ernest Hemingway's novella *The Old Man and the Sea* is also an important piece of North American literature. The style of prose that's written, accompanied by the universal problems among humans is what makes *The Old Man and the Sea* such a masterpiece. There's a lot to learn from Santiago, about fishing or about life as a twentieth century man. His determination can be inspiring to anyone, and his resilience is something many strive for.

Whether you're a fisherman from Cuba or not, you can still benefit from reading *The Old Man and the Sea*. It's no wonder why it won the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction in 1953, because of Hemingway's love of the culture in Cuba, because of his love of fishing, and his love of writing. ○