The Old Man and the Sea  
By Ernest Hemingway

Organizational Patterns: The book is read from beginning to end with no chapters or breaks in between. There are no pauses, but rather a continuous story hour by hour. The story takes place over the course of five days and each day contains its own events. A possible topic to discuss with students might be the lack of chapters. What significance would this produce? (For example, the reader goes without breaks just as Santiago and the fish did.) Also the sequence of events is in chronological order making everything in the present and easy to follow. How does this affect the reader? Would it be different if Santiago was retelling his adventure of the past after it had happened?

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Themes:

Pride- Santiago’s pride is manifest through his determination to kill the fish. This is what accounts for his losses and successes. On one hand his pride pushed him to fish too far out and caused him great physical exhaustion and pain in his reluctance to let the fish go. On the other hand his success in capturing and conquering the great fish is attributed to his pride which drove him to not give up such a task. His pride produces love and hate for the great fish and sea at the same time.

Perseverance- Santiago accomplishes his goal of killing the fish and making it back to the island. He survives out in the sea completely alone with only a few tools, raw food, and one bottle of water. The fish ceaselessly pulls him away from the island for days before tiring. All the while Santiago has to tightly hold the metal line which cuts his hands and makes his left one cramp. The pain doesn’t deter the old man in the least. Even after capturing the fish, Santiago fights the sharks off with anything he has left from the skiff. Not having something to aid him doesn’t discourage him in the least. During his contest with the fish the old man remembers an arm wrestling match he won that lasted 24 hours because
neither man would give in. The old man is a great example of preserving and overcoming obstacles that loom in the way of accomplishing a goal.

Inevitable consequences- The book illustrates how life comes with inevitable consequences. There are certain unavoidable outcomes that result from decisions made and course of actions taken. Santiago says to the fish he loves and respects him very much, “But I will kill you dead before this day ends.” (54) No matter what the fish does it is inevitable he will die. Another example is the sharks eating the marlin. After the fish is stabbed it leaves a trail of blood for sharks to follow. As much as one wishes Santiago and the fish could arrive safely and whole back at the port it is inevitable that sharks will smell the blood and feed on the fish. As in life there are certain unavoidable consequences that result from actions taken.

Setting: The majority of the story takes place out in the sea or ocean off the north shore of Cuba, located in the Caribbean. The old man lives in shack made from parts of royal palms found on the Island. The shack is located on a hill within a small fishing community. The year (though never stated in the book) seems to be about 1950.

Students would need to know about the island of Cuba and surrounding Caribbean. This could be accomplished through pictures and maps. It may also be helpful if they could see pictures of Cuban communities, people, boats, and fishing villages.

(Map taken from http://www.cubatravelusa.com/CUBA%20MAP%2009-02.gif)

Point of view: The story is told by a third-person narrator the entire time. It never changes point-of-view. The reader hears dialogue between Santiago and Manolin, and between the fish and Santiago, but it is always from the third-person point-of-view as if the reader is silently watching Santiago.

Ricks, BYU, 2008
Literary Terms
Characterization

Direct: The reader comprehends the characters through direct statements by the narrator.

Santiago- “The old man was thin and gaunt with deep wrinkles in the back of his neck. [...] Everything about him was old.” (Page 9-10.)

The Marlin- “His head and his back were dark purple in the sun and the stripes on his side showed wide and a light lavender. His sword was as long as a baseball bat...” (Page 62.)

Indirect:

The reader receives much indirect characterization about the old man, the fish, and the boy through their actions. The old man is determined, humble, poor, knowledgeable about fishing, etc. The fish is strong-willed, great, enduring, strange, etc. The boy is kind, thoughtful, loving, loyal, helpful, etc. By each character's actions and choices much is revealed about their true nature.

Conflict

Internal: Santiago has internal struggles to keep his mind clear and not delirious. He has internal struggles to determine what to do in each instance. He has an internal struggle to endure the pain and discomfort of holding the line for so long.

External: The temperaments of the weather and the sea are in his favor throughout the story, but he struggles externally with the fish pulling him for days and not giving up. He struggles with his physical body that aches and cramps. He fights hunger, thirst, and fatigue. He combats sharks with any tools he has left.
**Affective Issues:**
Students may evaluate their situation in life concerning the material comfort they enjoy and their own work ethic.

Poverty- The old man is very poor. He sleeps on a bed covered in newspapers and goes barefoot. He has almost nothing to eat. He lives in a self-made shack. Questions for students to consider include: Do I live like that? Why or why not? Why does Santiago live like that? Does much of the world live like that? What can I do to avoid that kind of poverty and/or help others? How can I demonstrate a greater appreciation for the material wealth I enjoy daily?

Endurance- The old man is extremely determined. So much so that he endures exhaustion and pain for days in order to accomplish his designs. Are people like that? Am I like that? How much? Was it worth it for the old man? What motivates me? How much would I endure in order to achieve my goals? Do I give up easily or often? Do I resist quitting when things get hard?

**Vocabulary Issues:**
There are many words associated with fishing and boats that may be unfamiliar to the students. Also there are many Spanish names for things within the book. This list includes most of them:

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**Background Knowledge:**
Some information concerning the following would be add more meaning to the story.
Fisherman’s way of life – Understanding that fishermen rise really early and work really hard every day. There is constant maintenance work to be done on a boat.

Baseball – an extremely popular sport in the United States and other countries, including Cuba, at the time. Joe DiMaggio played for the NY Yankees from 1936-1951.

Cuban economy in 1950 – Further exploration of cultural aspects. This is a Spanish speaking country with many poor citizens.

Love fishermen and sailors have for the ocean – Fishermen like Santiago are driven because of their deep love for the sea and its creatures rather than worldly wealth. Santiago will never be rich, but that is not why he fishes every day. Deep respect and understanding for the sea and its creatures accompanies this love.

Implications for Students of Diversity:
The setting and characters of this book are Cubans living in Cuba. It would be essential to explain a little bit about Cuba and the language spoken there. (Many Spanish words appear within the novel.) There is one scene in the book where Santiago relates an arm wrestling match he had with a black man. There is no racism necessarily implied in the book, but the mention of ethnic diversity may need to be addressed. A teacher could find out if any students in the class are from Cuba or have been there and want to share any insights or cultural observations they have. Also if there are any Spanish speaking students the teacher could honor them by having them translate the Spanish words to the class as necessary. A teacher should speak of Cuban and Spanish in a positive light so that if there are any prejudices held in the class perhaps their minds might be opened to the truth that we can learn from all cultures and that diversity is a strength.

Gender Issues:
There really aren’t too many gender issues presented in the book. For one, women are almost entirely absent. The only indication of them is in reference to loving or giving partners like the sea which Santiago prefers to call La Mar because it is feminine and he loves the sea like a female companion or lover. Rather the story tends to focus on the struggle of the old man. Gender issues raised by this story may be centered on these questions: In what ways do society’s expectations for a man to provide for himself or family influence Santiago? (Does this add to his pride or determination? Why or why not?) If Santiago fails to capture the fish will this mean he fails as a man? As a fisherman?
Central Question:

What does it mean to be defeated?

*The Old Man and the Sea* causes the reader to consider what it really means to be defeated. Often defeat is associated with being beaten or having lost. But if one loses almost everything and never gives up are they considered defeated? From the first pages where we meet Santiago, he is a struggling (some say defeated) fisherman. Even the patched sail of his ship “looked like the flag of permanent defeat.” (9) Santiago is old, very poor, and out of luck. He hasn’t caught a fish in 84 days. Many viewed him as already defeated. But yet within him burns determination and life. He still strives endlessly to fish every day to support his existence. Is that a characteristic of a defeated man? What is the true meaning of defeat? When one is beaten down and losing does that mean they are defeated? Or does defeat only come when one entirely cease to keep trying, when one completely gives up the will to continue? The old man captures the fish yet fails to bring it back to shore intact so that he might sell the flesh. Did he completely fail? Was he defeated? Did he ever give up? Was there anything gained at all? These would all be very good questions to consider and discuss among students.

Research Issues/Project Ideas

Ricks, BYU, 2008
Perseverance Picture Poster- Students may put together a poster that relates through pictures (drawings, images, or photographs) an experience that have had where they persevered. (Ex: maybe they tried out for a sport and the pictures would show them practicing, being hurt or sore and still playing, losing games and still playing hard, missing goals but not giving up, then showing tryouts, and any other aspects that shows how they had to persevere in order to reach their goal, etc.) Maybe they didn’t make the team, but they can still do a poster demonstrating the endurance it took.

Research more about the ocean and its creatures, especially Marlin. Have students present to the class all the information they find. (This may be very interesting for students that have never been to the ocean or seen Marlin.)

Research more about deep sea fishing – There may be students who have had this opportunity and can tell about all that it requires (the modern tools and technology) and contrast that with how Santiago fishes. Have them explain which method they would prefer to use and why or why not.

**Information/Functional Texts**
These books were suggested from the website Sparksnotes.com for further reading