



Santiago's Strength and Struggle in Ernest Hemingway's "The Old Man and The Sea"

Muthuselvi. P¹,

II M.A. English, Sathyabama Institute of Science & Technology, Chennai.

Ms. S. Nithyasri²,

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sathyabama Institute of Science & Technology, Chennai.

ABSTRACT:

This research paper focuses mainly on the themes of Strength and struggle in Ernest Hemingway's novella *The Old man and the Sea* through analysing the protagonist of the novella Santiago. He is an old and experienced Cuban fisherman. He did not catch any fish for the past 84 days but he was determined and hopeful, and one fine day he catches a giant marlin fish and he fights alone in the deep sea. He does not give up and showed great courage, patience and inner strength. The story highlights how true strength does not always mean winning but comes from trying your best and staying strong even when things go wrong. Santiago's struggle becomes a powerful symbol of human dignity, endurance, and the will to keep going.

This paper discusses how Hemingway presents these ideas through simple yet meaningful language, powerful images, and the deep character of Santiago, making the story both inspiring and timeless. The title "Strength in Struggle" means being strong during hard times. Santiago struggles a lot, but he never gives up. This shows his true strength. That is why this title is a good match for the story.

KEYWORDS: Santiago, Strength, Struggle, Marlin and Fish.

INTRODUCTION:

Ernest Hemingway was a famous American author and journalist. He is known for his short and simple writing style, often called the "iceberg theory," where much of the meaning lies beneath the surface of the words. Hemingway served in World War I, and his experiences deeply influenced his writing, which often focused on themes of war, bravery, loss, and human struggle. He wrote several important novels such as *A Farewell to Arms*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and *The Sun Also Rises*. In 1952, he published *The Old Man and the Sea*, which brought him wide recognition and won the Pulitzer Prize. Two years later, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. Hemingway's works continue to be studied around the world for their powerful themes and unique style. He died in 1961, but his legacy as one of the greatest writers of the 20th century lives on.

Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* is a powerful story that explores the strength of the human spirit through the life of an old fisherman named Santiago. Written in 1952, this novella won the Pulitzer Prize and later contributed to Hemingway receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature. Though the story appears simple on the surface, it carries deep meaning about courage, endurance, and personal dignity. Santiago, the main character, is a poor and lonely fisherman who has not caught a fish for 84 days. Despite his hardships, he remains determined and hopeful.

ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELLA:

The Old Man and the Sea tells the story of an old fisherman named Santiago who lives in a small village by the sea in Cuba. Santiago is kind, wise, and experienced, but he is also very poor. He hasn't caught a single fish in 84 days, and many people think he is unlucky. A young boy named Manolin used to go fishing with him, but his parents told him to go with a more successful fisherman. Still, Manolin loves and respects Santiago and continues to help him.

One day, Santiago decides to sail far out into the sea to try his luck again. After a long wait, he hooks a giant marlin. The fish is incredibly strong and drags Santiago's boat deep into the ocean. Santiago holds the fishing line with his bare hands. Even though his hands get cut and his body aches, he refuses to give up. He fights the fish for three days and nights. During the struggle, he talks to the marlin and shows it respect, saying it is noble and strong, just like him. At last, Santiago manages to kill the marlin. Although he is exhausted, he is proud of his catch. He ties the marlin to the side of his boat and begins his journey back home. But soon, sharks smell the blood of the fish and begin to attack. Santiago fights the sharks bravely. He kills some of them, but more keep coming. In the end, they eat the whole marlin, leaving only its bones.

Santiago returns to shore with nothing but the skeleton of the great fish. He is tired, weak, and sad. However, the villagers see the huge bones and realize that he had caught an extraordinary fish. Manolin is proud of Santiago and promises to fish with him again. This paper focuses on Santiago's journey and the many struggles he faces, both physical and emotional. It explores how Santiago's fight with the giant marlin becomes a symbol of inner strength, showing that true success lies not in victory, but in effort and perseverance. By examining Santiago's thoughts, actions, and the challenges he overcomes, this study highlights Hemingway's message about the quiet power of never giving up, even when faced with failure. Santiago's story is not just about catching a fish—it is about the strength found in struggle and the dignity of the human spirit.

STRENGTH AND STRUGGLE IN THE NOVELLA:

Hemingway's Novella *Old man and the sea* mainly focuses on the themes of strength and struggle through Santiago's Character. Santiago is the main character in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. He is an old Cuban fisherman who lives a poor and lonely life. He has not caught a fish for 84 days, and many people think he is unlucky. But Santiago does not give up. He is calm, patient, and hopeful. These qualities make him a strong and inspiring character. Santiago is very brave. Even though he is old and weak, he goes far into the sea to try again. When he hooks a giant marlin, he does not let go, even though the fish is strong and the fight is long. He holds the line with his bare hands for three days and nights. His hands bleed, and his body hurts, but he keeps trying. This shows his determination and strength.

Santiago is also wise and experienced. He knows the sea well and respects it. He talks to the fish, the birds, and even the sea. He calls the marlin his "brother" because he sees it as a noble and worthy opponent. Santiago does not fish just for money—he fishes because it gives his life meaning. He finds peace and purpose in the struggle. Even when sharks eat the marlin, and he returns home with only the skeleton, Santiago does not lose his pride. He is dignified in defeat. The people in the village, especially the boy Manolin, see his strength and respect him more. Santiago teaches us that real success comes from trying your best, not from the result. In short, Santiago is

a symbol of hope, courage, and human spirit. He shows us that even in failure, there can be pride, and even in struggle, there can be beauty.

The title of the research paper can be justified through analysing the Santiago's journey of fishing through Physical, mental and emotional strength and through the way Santiago respects his profession and his struggle in fishing and analysing Marlin as a symbol of quiet heroism.

Physical Strength and Endurance

Santiago's journey into the sea is physically demanding. At over 70 years old, he still takes his small boat alone into deep waters. When he hooks the giant marlin, the struggle becomes intense. For three days and nights, he holds the fishing line with his bare hands, which causes his palms to bleed and his body to ache. He barely eats or sleeps but refuses to give up. Santiago's physical strength, even in old age, shows his determination and commitment. He may be weak in body, but his spirit remains unbroken.

Mental and Emotional Strength

Beyond physical effort, Santiago's inner strength is shown through his thoughts and attitude. While at sea, he often speaks to himself, the fish, and nature, showing he is lonely but mentally strong. He encourages himself during moments of doubt. Santiago never complains or blames others for his condition. His respect for the marlin, which he calls "brother," shows his humility and deep connection to life and nature. Even when sharks attack and eat the marlin, he continues fighting, showing emotional courage in the face of loss.

Respect for Nature and the Fish

Hemingway shows that Santiago is not just a fisherman, but someone who deeply respects nature. He does not see the marlin as a simple prize, but as a noble creature. He admires its strength, beauty, and spirit. This connection reflects Santiago's understanding of life—where man and nature are linked through struggle and survival. His respect for the sea, birds, and even the sharks (though they destroy his catch), adds depth to his character and highlights his wisdom.

Struggle and Defeat

Even though Santiago catches the marlin, he loses it to sharks. Some may think this means he failed. But Hemingway shows that true success is in the effort and courage shown during the struggle, not just in the outcome. Santiago's battle is long, painful, and ends in loss—but he is not defeated.

"But man is not made for defeat," he said. "A man can be destroyed but not defeated."

He returns home tired and empty-handed, but with pride. The skeleton of the marlin is proof of his greatness. The villagers, and especially the boy Manolin, recognize his bravery and strength.

Symbolism and Meaning

Santiago's struggle is not just about fishing—it represents the struggles all people face in life. The marlin stands for a great goal or dream, and the sharks represent the problems that try to take it away. Santiago's refusal to give up, even when the odds are against him, is a message about human dignity and perseverance. Hemingway uses simple language but fills it with deep meaning. Santiago becomes a symbol of quiet heroism—a man who fights with all he has, not for reward, but for self-respect and purpose.

SUMMATION:

Santiago's journey in *The Old Man and the Sea* is a powerful example of strength found through struggle. Though he is old, poor, and alone, he shows great courage, patience, and dignity. He teaches us that success is not only about winning, but about never giving up. Ernest Hemingway's story reminds us that life is full of challenges, but

we must face them with faith in ourselves. Santiago's story remains timeless because it speaks to the strength that lives in every human heart. Santiago is a hero because he never stops fighting.

REFERENCES:

Primary source:

- Hemingway, Ernest. *The old man and the sea*. Charles Scribner's sons, new york,1952.

Secondary sources:

- Ernest Hemingway – Biographical. NobelPrize.org. Nobel Prize Outreach 2025.
- Lichtenstein, Jesse. "The Old Man and the Sea." LitCharts. LitCharts LLC, 22 Jul 2013
- Smith, Tom. "The Old Man and the Sea". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 21 Jul. 2025,
- Deshmukh, sagar. "A thematic study of old man the sea". IJNRD, volume no 8,2023,P.P,341 343.
- Sharma,susheel. "The theme and vision of endurance in Ernest Hemingways "The Old Man and the Sea". JIMR, volume 17 issue 10,2022. P.P,74-84.

