By E-learning.
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"Ceremony" by Leslie Marmon Silko

"Ceremony" by Leslie Marmon Silko is a novel that weaves together traditional Native American storytelling with contemporary narrative techniques. The story is set in the aftermath of World War II and follows the protagonist, Tayo, a young Native American man of mixed Laguna and white heritage, as he struggles with the psychological and spiritual wounds inflicted by his experiences in the war.

Here is a comprehensive summary of "Ceremony":

Setting:

The novel is set on the Laguna Pueblo reservation in New Mexico shortly after World War II. The narrative is deeply rooted in the cultural traditions of the Laguna people and explores the impact of historical trauma on individuals and the community.

Plot Summary:

- Tayo's Return from War: Tayo returns to the Laguna Pueblo reservation after serving in the Pacific during World War II. He is deeply affected by the horrors of war, including the death of his cousin Rocky.

- Struggles with PTSD: Tayo experiences post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and is haunted by memories of the war. His mental and emotional turmoil is compounded by his mixed heritage, making him feel like an outsider in both Native and white communities.

- Ceremonial Healing: Tayo's grandmother, a medicine woman named Betonie, recognizes his need for spiritual healing. She guides him through a ceremonial process that involves reconnecting with the land, participating in traditional rituals, and understanding the interconnectedness of all living things.

- Spiritual Journey: Tayo embarks on a spiritual journey to find healing and balance. Along the way, he encounters various spiritual entities, including the trickster figure, Ku'oosh, and the female mountain lion, Ts'eh. These encounters help Tayo understand the importance of harmony and the cyclical nature of life.

- Restoration of Balance: Through the ceremonies and rituals guided by Betonie, Tayo learns to confront and integrate his traumatic experiences. He realizes the importance of embracing both his Native heritage and the broader interconnectedness of all people and nature.

- Environmental and Cultural Themes: The novel explores environmental and cultural themes, emphasizing the impact of European colonization on Native lands and traditions. It underscores the importance of preserving cultural identity and reconnecting with the land.

- Ceremonial Conclusion: The novel concludes with Tayo participating in a rainmaking ceremony, symbolizing the restoration of balance and harmony within himself and the community.

Themes:

- Healing and Harmony: The central theme revolves around Tayo's journey toward healing and finding harmony within himself and the community.
- Cultural Identity: The novel explores the challenges of maintaining cultural identity in the face of historical trauma and external pressures.
- Nature and Spirituality: The interconnectedness of nature and spirituality is a recurring theme, emphasizing the importance of respecting and understanding the natural world.

"Ceremony" is a powerful and complex novel that blends Native American folklore, history, and spirituality to address the impact of war and colonization on individuals and communities. Leslie Marmon Silko's narrative style and thematic richness have earned the novel acclaim for its unique contribution to Native American literature.

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Full Summary of the novel

Returning home to the Laguna Pueblo reservation from World War II, via a Veteran's Hospital, Tayo must find a way to cure himself of his mental anguish, and to bring the rain back to his community. Combining prose and poetry, Ceremony interweaves the individual story of Tayo and the collective story of his people. As Tayo's journey unfolds, it is paralleled by poems telling old stories.

The trauma of thinking he saw his uncle Josiah's face among a crowd of Japanese soldiers he was ordered to shoot, and then of watching his cousin Rocky die, drove Tayo out of his mind. A period of time in a Veterans' Hospital gets him well enough to return to his home, with his Grandmother, his Auntie, and her husband Robert. This is the family unit that raised him after his mother, who had conceived him with an unknown white man, left him for good at the age of four. In his family's home Tayo faces not only their disappointment at the loss of Rocky, but also his continued grieving over his favorite uncle Josiah's death. He also contends with his guilt over a prayer against the rain he uttered in the forests of the Philippines, which he thinks is responsible for the six-year drought on the reservation.

As he slowly recuperates, Tayo realizes that he is not alone. His childhood friends Harley, Leroy, Emo, and Pinkie who also fought in the war contend with similar post-traumatic stress, self-medicating with alcohol. The company is little comfort. His old friends spend their drunken hours reminiscing about how great the war was and how much respect they got while they were in uniform. These stories only make Tayo think about the tremendous discrimination the Native Americans face at the hands of the whites, whom they nonetheless seem to admire, and he is even more saddened and infuriated. Just as Tayo begins to give up hope and to wish he could return to the VA hospital, his grandmother calls in the medicine man, Ku'oosh. Ku'oosh performs for Tayo a ceremony for warriors who have killed in battle, but both Ku'oosh and Tayo fear that the ancient ceremonies are not applicable to this new situation.

Tayo is helped but not cured by Ku'oosh's ceremony. It prompts him to consider his childhood, especially the summer before he left for the army. Although Auntie did her best to keep the two boys separate, Tayo and Rocky became close friends, and the summer after they graduated from high school, they enlisted in the army together. That summer, Josiah fell in love with Night Swan, a Mexican woman who lived just outside the reservation. At her urging, he invested in a herd of Mexican cattle, which

Tayo helped him to care for. As so often happens, there is a drought that summer. Having heard the old stories of how droughts are ended, Tayo goes to a spring and invents a rain ceremony. The following day it rains. In addition to helping the crops and the cattle, the rain keeps Josiah from visiting Night Swan. He asks Tayo to bring her a note. Tayo delivers the note, and in the process is seduced by Night Swan.

Realizing that his ceremony has not been enough for Tayo, Ku'oosh sends him to the nearby town of Gallup to see another medicine man, Betonie, who knows more about the problems incurred by the contact between Native American and white cultures. Although he is skeptical of Betonie's strange ways and especially high connection with the white world, Tayo tells him of his what is troubling him. Betonie listens and explains that they must invent and complete a new ceremony. Tayo accepts. Betonie tells Tayo stores of the old ceremonies as he performs them. Then Betonie tells Tayo stories of his grandfather, Descheeny, and the beginning of the creation of a new ceremony to stop the destruction the whites, an invention of Native American witchery, are wreaking on the world.

Betonie sends Tayo back home, reminding him that the ceremony is still far from complete. When he meets Harley and Leroy on the way home, Tayo slips back into their lifestyle for a moment, but soon moves on, heeding the signs Betonie told him of as he searches for Josiah's cattle. Tayo follows the stars to a woman's house. After spending a night with the woman, Ts'eh, Tayo heads up into the mountains. He finds Josiah's cattle fenced into a white man's pasture. While Tayo breaks into the pasture, the cattle run off to its far reaches, and Tayo spends all night looking for them. As dawn approaches, Tayo is about to give up when a mountain lion comes up to him. Tayo honors the mountain lion, and follows its tracks to the cattle. Just as he herds the cattle out of the pasture, two white patrolmen find Tayo. Not realizing that the cattle are missing, but knowing Tayo has trespassed, the patrolmen arrest Tayo. Before they can bring him to town, however, they notice the mountain lion tracks and let Tayo go in order to hunt it. As Tayo heads out, it begins to snow. Tayo knows this will cover the tracks of his cattle and of the mountain lion, making the patrolmens' efforts fruitless. On the way down the mountain, Tayo meets a hunter, who lives with Ts'eh. When they arrive back at her house, she has corralled Tayo's cattle, which she keeps until Tayo and Robert return with a cattle truck to gather them up.

Returning home with Josiah's cattle, Tayo feels cured. However, the drought persists, and Tayo knows the ceremony is not complete. He goes

to the family's ranch with the cattle, where he finds Ts'eh . They spend the summer together, but as it draws to an end Robert visits and warns Tayo that Emo has been spreading rumors about him. Shortly thereafter, Ts'eh tells Tayo that Emo and the white police are coming after him. Before she leaves, she tells Tayo how to avoid capture.

Following Ts'eh's instructions, Tayo easily evades the white police. Still running from Emo, he meets Harley and Leroy. Almost too late, Tayo realizes that Harley and Leroy have joined forces with Emo. Running again, Tayo finds himself in an abandoned uranium mine. As he looks at the gaping hole left in the earth, Tayo realizes that this is the last station of his ceremony, the one where he incorporates an element of white culture, the mine. All he has to do is to spend the night there and the ceremony will be complete. Soon Emo and Pinkie arrive. From a hiding place, Tayo must watch them torture Harley to death, and restrain himself from killing Emo in order to save Harley. With the help of the wind, Tayo survives the night. He returns home and goes back to Ku'oosh. After hearing all about Tayo's ceremony, Ku'oosh pronounces that Ts'eh was in fact A'moo'ooh, who has given her blessings to Tayo and his ceremony; the drought is ended and the destruction of the whites is stopped. Tayo spends one last night in Ku'oosh's house to finish off the ceremony, and then he returns home.

Some important themes of the novel

The Necessity of Tradition

In Ceremony, preserving tradition is essential to saving the Native American community. Both for Tayo and in the ancient stories, forgetting tradition brings massive drought and disaster. A key role of the medicine men is to preserve tradition, as is symbolized by the crates of artifacts they store. However, in order for tradition to survive, it must change with the times. The reservation medicine man, Ku’oosh, is unable to cure Tayo because he knows only the traditional healing ceremonies, which are not applicable to contemporary illnesses. As Betonie explains, traditions must be constantly reinvented to reflect the ever-changing reality of the world. Similarly, the novel shows the dangers of blindly adhering to traditions rather than trying to follow their intent. Auntie represents those who simply follow the dictates of traditions, as she mistrusts any form of interracial relationship. Josiah, on the other hand, represents those who follow the spirit of traditions, such as when he finds a way to interbreed Mexican and Hereford cattle to create a herd that will be both hardy and productive.

The Constant Threat of Drought

Water is essential to the survival of crops and animals for the Laguna, whose primary occupation is agriculture. Without city-sponsored plumbing and irrigation systems, and not wanting to interrupt the natural flow of water with dams, the Laguna are completely dependent on natural rainfall. Living in the desert land that comprises much of the southwest of the United States, the Laguna are constantly threatened by drought. Many of the traditional stories and ceremonies revolve around ensuring adequate rainfall. The primary signal of the spirits' displeasure with something the people has done is a drought, and one of the greatest feats of a destructive spirit is the creation of a drought. However, as Josiah tells Tayo when he is a child, everything has both its good and its bad sides. While too little rainfall can be disastrous, so can too much, as Tayo learns in the Philippine jungle. Tayo commits a grievous error when he forgets this lesson and, in the midst of a flood, curses the rain. Whether or not Tayo's curse is actually responsible for the drought on the reservation, it is essential for his health as well as for that of his community that he learn through his ceremony to respect the patterns of nature. Once he does that, the rain returns.

The Destructiveness of Contact Between Cultures

The contact between Native American and white cultures in Ceremony is largely destructive. While the novel presents its devastating effects in somber terms, it is not concerned with simply lamenting the fact that whites arrived on the American continent and established systems that prove fatal to the indigenous peoples. Rather, Ceremony presents an attempt to contend with the reality of a mixed cultural landscape in a way that allows Native American culture to persist, even as it changes. Tayo himself embodies the contact between Native American and white cultures, as he bears his mixed racial heritage in his green eyes. Tayo must learn to make use of the white parts of himself and of the world around him, without abandoning his primary allegiance to Native American traditions.

For many in the novel, the first contact between the cultures takes place in the white schools that the Native Americans attend. There, white teachers tell them that their stories are not true and that their understanding of the world is not valid. Most significant, the white teachers present a completely different view of science and nature, and, as a result, the younger generations of Native Americans want to abandon traditional farming practices. This creates an agricultural crisis that is

exacerbated by the pollution of reservation lands by white mines and military industry. In addition, white towns attract Native Americans with the prospect of white-collar jobs and good pay, but racism denies Native Americans access to those positions, while the cash they are able to make allows them greater access to the bars and the alcoholism whites have also introduced. All of these serve as strong indictments of the effect of whites on Native American culture. However, the relationship between white and Native American cultures is completely shifted in Ceremony when Betonie reveals that whites are an invention of Native American witchcraft. In the revelation, although they are still a primarily destructive force, whites are shown to be a part of Native American culture and traditions.

Characters of the novel

Tayo

The protagonist of the novel. Tayo struggles with a sense of belonging in his family throughout his childhood and of belonging in his community after his return from World War II. Educated in white schools, Tayo has always maintained a belief in the Native American traditions. Painfully aware of the social realities surrounding Native American life on and off the reservation—and Native American participation in World War II—Tayo is able to make use of his double consciousness (of white and Native American life) to cure himself and his community.

Let’s give an obvious detailed characterization of Tayo.

Tayo embodies the confluence of Native American and white cultures, both present in his ancestry, and in his experience, which brings him from the reservation, to the US army, to the Philippines, to a Veteran's Hospital, and back to the reservation. Carrying the signs of the cultural mixing in his green eyes often makes Tayo bear the brunt of a whole society's confusion at the ways in which the world is changing. Especially since he never knew his father and was abandoned by his mother at the age of four, Tayo encounters great difficulty in negotiating his mixed identity and experience. This is exacerbated by his Auntie who raises him with the constant reminder of his difference. Like most of his peers, Tayo is educated in white-run schools. Unlike his friends, however, he often finds the white ways of life faulty and continues to respect and to believe in the Native American traditions he learns from his family as well. Tayo is prepared to serve as a bridge between the older and younger generations of Native Americans.

World War II interrupts Tayo's life, as it does to most Americans of his generation. He comes of age on the battlefield, amidst tremendous death and destruction. His awareness of the connections among of all people and all things makes it incredibly difficult for Tayo to kill in a war he does not understand, in a place far from his home. The majority of the Native American men who return from World War II drown their trauma in alcohol, full of confused anger. Tayo, however, is more sad than angry. Painfully aware of the ways in which Native Americans were and are mistreated by whites, Tayo is not interested in glorifying his time in the army. These characteristics allow him to respond to the help the medicine men Ku'oosh and Betonie offer.

His lifelong desperation to belong in his family and his community, along with his deep-seated belief in the power of the old traditions, allow Tayo to take up the challenge offered by Betonie and to undertake the completion of the ceremony, which can cure both himself and his people. Although he often falters along the path, Tayo's acceptance of the Native American mythical world allows him to benefit from the aid of accidents, animals, spirits, and the elements.

Betonie

The medicine man who guides Tayo through his ceremony. Betonie lives on the edge of the Navajo reservation, on a cliff overlooking the white town of Gallup. Feared and mistrusted by many for his eccentricities and for his contact with whites, Betonie comes from a long line of medicine men and women who struggle to create a new ceremony that will answer to the needs of the contemporary world. His wisdom is a key element in Tayo's cure.

Auntie

Tayo's aunt. As the eldest daughter in her family, Auntie is in charge of running the household and caring for the family. Although she performs her duties diligently, Auntie is a proud and spiteful woman. She is largely responsible for Tayo's sense of exclusion from his family. In addition to following the old Native American traditions almost blindly, Auntie is a devout Christian who thrives on martyrdom.

Josiah

Tayo's uncle. Josiah is the person who teaches Tayo the Native American traditions and makes him feel most at home in the family. Although he adheres strongly to tradition, Josiah is not afraid of change, falling in love

with the Mexican Night Swan and following her advice to undertake raising a herd of Mexican cattle crossbred with Herefords.

Harley

Tayo's childhood friend. Harley returns from fighting in World War II apparently less troubled than Tayo but with a severe alcohol addiction. Harley tries to be a good friend to Tayo but is impeded by his alcoholism.

Rocky

Tayo's cousin and adoptive brother. He represents for Tayo and his family the perfect success of a Native American to integrate white society. Much to everyone's dismay, Rocky dies in the Philippines during World War II.

Grandma

Tayo's grandmother and the matriarch of the family. Already old and wise when Tayo is just a child, Grandma intervenes at key moments in Tayo's life to bring him to the medicine men or to provide tidbits of advice in the form of seemingly random comments.

Night Swan

Josiah's girlfriend. Night Swan is a strong, smart, sexy, self-aware woman. She is the first of two Mexican women who appear in the novel to represent an aspect of the contact between white and Native American cultures. A former cantina dancer, she also seduces Tayo in order to teach him his first lesson about miscegenation and change.

Old Ku'oosh

The Laguna medicine man. A very traditional medicine man, Ku'oosh does not have the wherewithal to invent the new ceremonies needed to treat the new diseases. He does, however, possess the wisdom to send Tayo to see someone else and to embrace Tayo when he returns with the completed new ceremony.

Emo

A childhood acquaintance of Tayo's. Emo has always been critical of Tayo for his mixed race and been full of an undirected rage which only increases as a result of his fighting in World War II. Like the other war veterans, he is unable to find a place for himself on his return, and spends his time drinking and reliving idealized memories of his army days. When Tayo criticizes Emo's idealization of his army days, Emo's rage becomes directed at Tayo.

Robert

Auntie's husband. Robert is a mild-mannered quiet man who has little power in the family. He generally minds his own business, adhering to the old traditions. Robert shows his deep caring for Tayo as he welcomes him home from the war and as he warns him of Emo's impending attack.

The Woman

A sacred figure in Laguna cosmology incarnated as Ts'eh to help Tayo in his ceremony. Ts'eh appears at three moments in Tayo's journey to help him with the cattle and to teach him about wild herbs, love, and evading his pursuers.

Descheeny

Betonie's grandfather. Along with the Mexican woman, Descheeny, a medicine man, began the creation of the new ceremony that would be able to cure the world of the destruction of the whites. He was the first of his people to recognize the need for collaboration between Native Americans and Mexicans.

Mexican Girl

Betonie's grandmother. As a Mexican woman, like Night Swan, she represents the miscegenation of white and native American cultures. Wise even as a young girl, she begins the new ceremony along with Descheeny. She raises Betonie and ensures that he gains the tools he will need to continue the ceremony.

A Hunter

An animal spirit sacred to the Native Americans. He appears to Tayo in both his animal and his human forms to help him catch Josiah's cattle.

Leroy

A childhood friend of Tayo's. Harley's drinking buddy who fought in the war with him, Leroy is Harley's sidekick.

Pinkie

A childhood friend of Tayo's. Emo's drinking buddy and sidekick. Pinkie is eventually betrayed and killed by Emo.

Laura

Tayo's mother. Unable to negotiate the conflicting lessons she learned at home and at school, Laura became a victim of the contact between white

and Native American cultures. Consumed by alcoholism, she conceived Tayo with an anonymous white man and, by the time Tayo was four years old, she was completely unable to care for him.

Helen Jean

A woman Harley and Leroy pick up in a bar. Helen Jean represents all of the young Native American women who went to the white towns looking for a good job and end up being dragged into prostitution and alcoholism.

The Underground Railroad by Colson Whitehead

"The Underground Railroad" by Colson Whitehead is a novel that reimagines the historical Underground Railroad as an actual physical network of tunnels and trains, providing a powerful exploration of the experiences of African American slaves in the 19th century. Here's a comprehensive summary of the novel:

Setting:

The novel is set in the southern United States during the 19th century, with a focus on the life of a young slave named Cora.

Plot Summary:

- Introduction to Cora: The story begins with the life of Cora, a young slave on a Georgia plantation. Cora is an outcast even among other slaves, and her mother Mabel had escaped the plantation years earlier.

- Escape: Cora decides to escape with a fellow slave named Caesar, who introduces her to the Underground Railroad. In Whitehead's narrative, the Underground Railroad is depicted as a literal network of secret tunnels and trains that aid slaves in their journey to freedom.

- The Journey: Cora and Caesar's journey takes them to various states, each representing a different facet of the slavery system. The novel explores the different ways in which slavery is manifested, from seemingly benevolent societies to brutally oppressive ones.

- Pursuit by Ridgeway: A relentless slave catcher named Ridgeway is hired to bring Cora back to the plantation. Ridgeway is obsessed with capturing Mabel, Cora's mother, who had eluded him years earlier.

- South Carolina: Cora and Caesar reach South Carolina, where they encounter a seemingly progressive society that harbors a dark secret. The state experiments with eugenics and sterilization to control the African American population.

- North Carolina: In North Carolina, the author depicts a dystopian society where slavery has evolved into a genocidal practice. Escaped slaves are hunted by ruthless patrols, and those who sympathize with them face severe consequences.

- Tennessee and Indiana: Cora continues her journey through Tennessee and Indiana, facing both kindness and hostility. Along the way, she grapples with the trauma of her past and strives for a sense of agency and freedom.

- Conclusion: The novel concludes with Cora's journey taking her to an underground station in Indiana. She faces a choice between continuing her journey to freedom or confronting her past and seeking justice.

Themes:

- Freedom and Agency: The novel explores the concept of freedom and the agency of enslaved individuals to shape their destinies.

- Dehumanization: Whitehead depicts the dehumanizing impact of slavery on both the enslaved and those who perpetuate the institution.

- Historical Realities: While the novel is a work of fiction, it incorporates historical elements to portray the harsh realities of slavery in the United States.

Style and Reception:

Colson Whitehead's novel received widespread critical acclaim for its inventive approach to historical fiction and its exploration of the enduring

impact of slavery on American society. "The Underground Railroad" won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the National Book Award for Fiction.

The novel's blending of historical facts with speculative elements serves as a powerful vehicle for addressing the psychological and physical trauma of slavery, making it a significant work in contemporary American literature.

Full Summary of the novel

The Underground Railroad tells the story of Cora, a teenager who runs away from the Georgia plantation where she and her family have been slaves for three generations. Cora's grandmother Ajarry was brought to the United States from Africa on a slave ship and died after decades working in the fields of the Randall plantation. Cora's mother, Mabel, ran away, abandoning Cora, and everywhere she goes, Cora looks for answers about her mother's fate. Left without her mother to protect her, Cora is mistreated by the other slaves, although she shows her fierce nature, challenging a slave named Blake who tries to take her garden plot, and protecting a young slave from the cruel master Terrance. Finally, she escapes with another slave, Caesar. They make it to a stop on the underground railroad, but not before some locals try to capture them and Cora kills a teenage white boy in order to get away.

The underground railroad, in this novel, is an actual railroad with stations below farms and houses. The first train takes Cora and Caesar to South Carolina, where they are able to live more like free people. The move from Georgia to South Carolina sets the pattern of telling a series of stories about Black experience not just during slavery but throughout American history.

In South Carolina, Cora and Caesar are met by Sam, a cheerful white station agent who will be their contact during their stay and assigns them new identities. Here, Cora and Caesar are housed, fed, and given jobs. Life is so much better than on the plantation, they are able to ignore things that don't seem fair. After working as a maid, Cora is sent to work as a "type" in a museum that puts forward a very false, positive version of African and slave life. One night, Cora and Caesar learn from Sam that the hospital they thought was helping them with free medical care is actually conducting government experiments to kill off and sterilize Black people. Then they learn that the slave catcher, Ridgeway, has arrived in search of

them. Cora escapes to the underground railroad platform, but Caesar is left behind, and Sam's house is burned to the ground.

Cora's next stop is North Carolina, where the situation for Black people, free or fugitive, is much worse. Cora is taken to the home of the reluctant station agent Martin Wells and his wife Edith, who is very upset by Cora's presence. Cora lives in a small hiding space in the Wells' attic, where she sees a horrible spectacle take place every Friday night on the town square. North Carolina has worked to expel or kill all Black people in the state, and Friday Festivals are a weekly display of racist propaganda ending with the hanging of a Black person, a grisly act in which the whole town participates. As time goes by, Cora improves her reading in the attic room, but there is no way out for her. Finally, Cora falls ill and has to be cared for in the Wells' home. Their maid Fiona informs on them, and that Friday night a group of night riders searches the house, finding Cora. With the patrollers is the slave catcher, Ridgeway, who chains Cora to his wagon and takes her with him, while Edith and Martin Wells are hanged from the oak tree.

Tennessee is even worse than North Carolina. Cora is taken through the state by Ridgeway and his two companions, a violent man named Boseman who wears a necklace of human ears, and an odd Black boy named Homer. They also have picked up a runaway named Jasper who constantly sings hymns. The first half of Tennessee they travel through is completely blackened by wildfires. Even the white settlers have been displaced. Halfway into their journey, annoyed by his singing, Ridgeway shoots Jasper in the face. They drive out of the fires, but the next series of towns are in quarantine due to a yellow fever outbreak. Finally, they stop in a town where Cora is acknowledged by a young Black man wearing glasses. After Ridgeway takes Cora to dinner and tells her about Caesar's death, they stop for the night in the woods outside of town. Boseman tries to rape Cora and Ridgeway punches him. At that instant, the man wearing glasses appears with two others, all armed. One shoots Boseman, another chases Homer, and the man with glasses fights with Ridgeway. Cora jumps on Ridgeway's back and they subdue him. Homer gets away, Ridgeway is chained to his own wagon, and Cora is rescued.

The man with glasses is Royal, a conductor on the underground railroad, who takes Cora to Valentine farm in Indiana. There she truly lives as a free woman, attending school and contributing to the life of the large farm occupied by free and escaped Black people. She and Royal begin a

romance, and she also becomes close to her housemate Sybil and Sybil's daughter, Molly. Valentine farm was founded by a light-skinned Black man named John Valentine, who often passed for white, and his wife Gloria. Every Saturday night on the farm there is a big feast followed by lectures, poetry readings, singing, and dancing. However, hostility from the nearby white community is growing as the whites feel threatened by the size of the Black community.

Royal takes Cora on a buggy ride and picnic and shows her an abandoned house with an underground railroad station beneath it. It is too small for an actual train and just has a handcar and a narrow tunnel. No one knows where it goes. The experience makes Cora uneasy, since she wants to settle on the Valentine farm and not be forced to flee on the underground railroad anymore. Sam appears on Valentine farm on his way to California and tells Cora that Terrance Randall is dead and no one is looking for her anymore.

On the night that two speakers, Mingo and Lander, debate the future of Valentine farm, a white mob arrives, killing Lander and Royal and many others. They burn down the buildings while the residents flee. Later, people will only know about the farm and the massacre because survivors tell the story to their descendants. Cora is captured by Ridgeway and Homer, who order her to take them to the underground railroad station.

Before the book ends, we learn that Cora's mother Mabel never made it farther than the swamp bordering the Randall plantation. As she was returning to take care of Cora, she was bitten by a poisonous snake and her body sunk into the swamp.

Cora takes Ridgeway to the abandoned railroad station, where she pulls him down the steps and he is mortally wounded. Homer tends to Ridgeway while Cora pumps the handcar down the tunnel. She travels for miles, then walks until she emerges into daylight. On the trail, she encounters three covered wagons, the last one driven by an older Black man named Ollie. He feeds her and tells her he is going to St. Louis to join a wagon train to California. She joins him and wonders about his story, which he will certainly tell her on the way.

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Some important themes of the novel

The Psychic Damage of Slavery

In addition to showing the physical brutality of slavery, Whitehead develops a theme of the lasting psychic damage to enslaved people. Ajarry's kidnapping and repeated sale leaves her believing enslavement and the plantation represent the "fundamental principles" of her life. In South Carolina and beyond, Cora consciously works to force thoughts of the plantation from her mind, which she cannot achieve completely. Homer provides a particularly striking example of this theme. Although Ridgeway frees him as soon as he buys him, Homer carries on serving him as if he were enslaved, even going so far as to shackle himself to the wagon every night. Whitehead presents him as a caricature in order to show that slavery has left him without the ability to imagine a different life for himself. Homer provides a more exaggerated version of the same damage Mingo suffers from. Mingo is proud to be free, but he disdains Black people who could not buy their freedom or who he thinks attract white disapproval. His body may no longer be enslaved, but slavery has left him unable to feel solidarity with other Black people. Although they are free, both he and Homer ally themselves with white power structures that support slavery. This shows the lasting damage of the institution of slavery.

The Connection between Literacy and Freedom

Throughout the novel, Whitehead explores the connection between literacy and freedom. In the novel as in American history, enslaved people are barred from learning to read, by law or by owners and overseers. On the Randall plantation, Connelly blinds Jacob for attempting to learn. In South Carolina, Miss Handler tells her students that North Carolina state law would fine her and whip the students, in addition to likely punishments from a master. As with the practice of separating kidnapped Africans from others who speak their language, literacy is outlawed in order to make it harder for enslaved people to communicate with each other and therefore harder for them to organize revolts. Literacy is a particularly powerful organizing tool, since it allows people to share ideas across distances, without needing to be in the same place at the same time. Preventing enslaved people from reading and writing is an important aspect of control of the enslaved population, a source of great concern for whites throughout the book. A teamster at Valentine farm notes that his former master said a literate Black person was more dangerous than an armed one and compares the library there to a pile of gunpowder.

Because literacy is such a powerful and forbidden tool, throughout the book, Black people value it highly. Caesar takes the risk of hiding a book at Randall because reading lets him feel mental freedom. Cora feels "nourished" by the opportunity to learn to read in South Carolina and believes it would make her mother proud, since it is part of pushing plantation life away from herself, creating a free identity. In the confinement of the North Carolina attic, almanacs allow her to imagine a future life where she will use their practical advice. Those almanacs have another association with freedom, in that Martin's father used them to keep track of the cycles of the moon for the sake of helping those escaping slavery. The people of Valentine farm value reading so highly that they build a library, a daring temple to literacy and freedom. When the mob burns it, Cora's first instinct is to run toward it. Literacy and freedom are deeply connected in the novel.

The Power of Community

During Cora's journey across the country, Whitehead shows examples of different ways people live together, developing a theme of the power of community. At the Randall plantation, Connelly and the Randalls work to prevent the enslaved people from forming a strong community. Selective punishment and small extensions of power turn people against each other. Moses becomes mean after Connelly makes him his eyes and ears. Scarce resources cause Ava and others jealous of Cora's plot to turn against her after Mabel runs away. In South Carolina, Cora sees the fear white people have of Black people forming communities. South Carolina uses medical experiments and forces sterilization to attempt to lower the population, while North Carolina forces them from the state and kills those who remain. Valentine farm in Indiana shows her how a community built on freedom and mutual uplift can create a place so strong it begins to heal the wounds of slavery, giving children space to thrive and families a chance to love each other without fear of forced separation. Valentine offers a model of the power of a community to create possibility.

Characters

Cora

The protagonist of the book. Cora begins the book as an enslaved teenager on the Randall plantation in Georgia. Left to care for herself after her mother Mabel runs away from Randall, Cora becomes fiercely brave, resilient, and resourceful. Throughout the book, Cora must continually find ways to save herself.

Let's make a detailed characterization of Cora

Cora, the protagonist of the novel, begins as a "stray" on the Randall plantation, a child with no one to look out for her after her mother Mabel runs away. Throughout the novel, Cora maintains a sense of disconnection from groups of people. At Randall, her identity as a stray makes it possible for Ava to force her from her cabin and into the Hob, where damaged and abandoned women live. Without allies, she must defend her garden plot from Blake alone, and the experience of standing up to him changes her. In that conflict, she finds the strength Ajarry had in defending the plot and Mabel had in running away. While she is still a stray, after the incident she is seen as a dangerous person rather than only a victim. Others keep their distance and spread rumors about her. Alice rejects her contributions to the feast on Jockey's birthday.

Although South Carolina seems to offer a chance to join a more welcoming community, Cora is wary there as well. While Caesar socializes with new people, Cora sticks to work and the dormitory, practicing her letters while the other girls gossip together. Only in Indiana, in the warm community of Valentine Farm, does Cora begin to reach out to others, building a friendship with Sibyl and Molly and a romance with Royal. Even there, however, she keeps her distance from most of the group, leaving when music leads to dancing. When the prospect of a vote on the future of the community looms, Valentine corrects her when she says that "they" rather than "we" will decide the next step. Cora does not believe the community will truly keep her safe, and it cannot. In the ghost tunnel with Ridgeway and Homer, Cora is once again left with no one to take care of her but herself. She escapes them and the threat of a return to Randall with the same ferocious determination that won her plot back from Blake.

Caesar

An enslaved man at the Randall plantation who convinces Cora to run away with him. Raised in a household where he was promised freedom at the time of his owner's death, Caesar longs for freedom. He is a skilled woodworker and literate, hiding books in the plantation schoolhouse as a means to feel some independence.

Arnold Ridgeway

An infamous slavecatcher who pursues Cora after she escapes from Randall. Ridgeway is smart, powerful, and cruel. He sees Black people as tools to be used for the progress of America, not as people.

Lovey

Cora's friend, also enslaved on the Randall plantation. Lovey is kind, loves dancing, and takes uncomplicated pleasure from rare moments of celebration.

Martin Wells

A reluctant Underground Railroad agent in North Carolina. Martin is a timid man, who shelters Cora but is too trapped by fear to move beyond passivity.

Ethel Wells

Martin's wife. Ethel is opposed to sheltering Cora, but when Cora becomes ill, she sees caring for her as a way to fulfill her desire to help and to love a woman.

Royal

A conductor on the Underground Railroad. Royal brings Cora to Valentine farm. Born free, Royal devotes himself to helping others escape slavery. He is kind, thoughtful, and loves Cora.

Mabel

Cora's mother, born into slavery on the Randall plantation. Mabel's run for freedom leaves Cora a "stray" on the plantation and gives Cora courage for her own escape.

Mingo

A powerful figure at Valentine farm. Mingo bought freedom for himself and his family and looks down on runaways.

Elijah Lander

A Black traveling orator and a leader at Valentine. The son of a white Boston lawyer openly married to a Black woman, Lander is brilliant and devoted to improving the lives of Black people.

John Valentine

The owner of Valentine farm. Valentine is a light-skinned freeman who builds a Black community on his land and uses his passing privilege to help other Black people buy adjoining farms.

Ajarry

Cora's grandmother. Ajarry is kidnapped in Africa and brought to Georgia as a slave.

Connelly

An overseer on the Randall plantation. Connelly is cruel and violent, frequently raping and sometimes killing enslaved people.

Nag

An enslaved woman at the Randall plantation. Nag comes to live in Hob when Connelly tires of her sexually. Although she has a reputation for haughtiness, Nag cares for Cora and helps her recover after Connelly beats her.

Homer

Ridgeway's ten-year-old Black driver. Homer is fastidious and devoted to Ridgeway.

Boseman

Ridgeway's assistant. Boseman is a simple and brutal man.

Blake

A slave on the Randall plantation. Blake is strong and overbearing, and he tries to take control of Cora's plot of land.

James Randall

A son of Old Randall. James runs the northern half of the plantation, where Cora lives.

Terrance Randall

A son of Old Randall. Terrance runs the southern half of the plantation, where he delights in cruelty and rapes many of the women.

Old Randall

The original owner of the Randall plantation. Old Randall is Ajarry's final owner.

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Fiona

The Wells's servant. Fiona is of Irish descent and she is a suspicious woman.

Molly

Cora's friend at Valentine farm. She is a reserved and careful ten-year-old.

Sibyl

Molly's loving mother. Sibyl escaped slavery with Molly in tow, a contrast to Mabel's leaving Cora behind.

Stevens

A medical school student in South Carolina. Stevens is a poor student who earns money working with body snatchers to provide cadavers for medical students to study.

Carpenter

A body snatcher in South Carolina. Carpenter is a large, imposing figure of Irish descent. He is crafty in his trade but uneducated and vicious.

Lumbly

A station agent at the Georgia Underground Railroad.

Ridgeway's father

A blacksmith who believes working with iron gives order to the world.

Alice

An enslaved cook on the Randall plantation.

Chandler

The brutal head patroller who hires Ridgeway.

Sam

An Underground Railroad station agent. Sam is an optimistic and caring bartender in South Carolina.

Jamison

A Senator and Master of Ceremonies at the North Carolina Friday Festival.

Moses

An enslaved man at the Randall plantation. Moses becomes mean when Connelly makes him a boss.

Gloria Valentine

John Valentine's wife. formerly enslaved, Gloria is a poised and graceful woman who has worked to remove plantation inflections from her speech.

Mrs. Garner

A slaveholding woman and Caesar's first owner. Mrs. Garner promises freedom for Caesar after her death, but the estate sells him instead.

Donald Wells

Martin Wells' father. Donald is a secret conductor of the Underground Railroad and reveals his secret on his deathbed.

Jacob

An enslaved man. Jacob is blinded by Terrence Randall for attempting to learn to read.

Mr. Fields

The curator of the Living History Museum.

Howard

An old man in Cora's class in South Carolina. Howard is tentative and embarrassed by his lack of skill in the English language.

Jasper

A runaway captured by Ridgeway. Jasper sings despite his deplorable condition.

Eugene Wheeler

A white lawyer in New York City. Wheeler recruits Royal into the Underground Railroad.

The Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway

"The Old Man and the Sea" is a novella written by Ernest Hemingway, published in 1952. It tells the story of Santiago, an aging Cuban fisherman, and his epic struggle with a giant marlin in the Gulf Stream. Here is a comprehensive summary:

Setting:

The story is set in a small fishing village near Havana, Cuba, and takes place entirely at sea.

Plot Summary:

- Introduction of Santiago: Santiago is an old and experienced fisherman who has gone 84 days without catching a fish. Despite his bad luck, the young boy Manolin still cares for and admires Santiago, though Santiago insists that Manolin fish on a more successful boat.

- The Epic Struggle Begins: Determined to break his unlucky streak, Santiago sails far out into the Gulf Stream. After a lengthy and exhausting battle, he hooks a giant marlin. The struggle between man and fish becomes a test of endurance and will.

- The Battle at Sea: Santiago's physical and mental strength are tested as he battles the marlin for three days and nights. He faces hunger, exhaustion, and painful cramps but remains determined to catch the fish.

- Friendship with the Marlin: Despite Santiago's efforts to catch the marlin, he forms a strange bond with the fish. He sees the marlin as a noble opponent worthy of respect, even referring to it as his brother.

- Sharks Attack: As Santiago finally catches the marlin, his triumph is short-lived. Sharks attack the marlin, and Santiago valiantly fights them off with a harpoon. By the time he returns to shore, only the marlin's skeleton remains.

- Santiago's Return: Exhausted and battered, Santiago returns to the village with the marlin's skeleton tied to his boat. He struggles to carry his mast back home, and the village fishermen are both amazed and saddened by the sight.

- Manolin's Return: Manolin, deeply moved by Santiago's ordeal, resolves to fish with him again. The bond between the old man and the boy remains unbroken.

Themes:

- The Struggle for Existence: The novella explores the inherent struggle for survival and the challenges posed by nature.

- Pride and Endurance: Santiago's pride and endurance in the face of adversity are central themes, portraying the indomitable spirit of the human condition.

- The Relationship Between Man and Nature: The novella reflects on the complex relationship between humans and the natural world, emphasizing the respect Santiago has for the marlin.

Style and Reception:

Hemingway's writing style is concise and economical, with a focus on minimalism and the iceberg theory—where much is left unsaid. "The Old Man and the Sea" received critical acclaim and won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1953. It is often considered one of Hemingway's masterpieces, celebrated for its powerful portrayal of human strength, perseverance, and the connection between man and nature.

Full summary of the novel

The Old Man and the Sea is the story of an epic struggle between an old, seasoned fisherman and the greatest catch of his life. For eighty-four days, Santiago, an aged Cuban fisherman, has set out to sea and returned empty-handed. So conspicuously unlucky is he that the parents of his young, devoted apprentice and friend, Manolin, have forced the boy to leave the old man in order to fish in a more prosperous boat. Nevertheless, the boy continues to care for the old man upon his return each night. He helps the old man tote his gear to his ramshackle hut, secures food for him, and discusses the latest developments in American baseball, especially the trials of the old man’s hero, Joe DiMaggio. Santiago is confident that his unproductive streak will soon come to an end, and he resolves to sail out farther than usual the following day.

On the eighty-fifth day of his unlucky streak, Santiago does as promised, sailing his skiff far beyond the island’s shallow coastal waters and venturing into the Gulf Stream. He prepares his lines and drops them. At noon, a big fish, which he knows is a marlin, takes the bait that Santiago has placed one hundred fathoms deep in the waters. The old man expertly hooks the fish, but he cannot pull it in. Instead, the fish begins to pull the boat.

Unable to tie the line fast to the boat for fear the fish would snap a taut line, the old man bears the strain of the line with his shoulders, back, and hands, ready to give slack should the marlin make a run. The fish pulls the boat all through the day, through the night, through another day, and through another night. It swims steadily northwest until at last it tires and

swims east with the current. The entire time, Santiago endures constant pain from the fishing line. Whenever the fish lunges, leaps, or makes a dash for freedom, the cord cuts Santiago badly. Although wounded and weary, the old man feels a deep empathy and admiration for the marlin, his brother in suffering, strength, and resolve.

On the third day the fish tires, and Santiago, sleep-deprived, aching, and nearly delirious, manages to pull the marlin in close enough to kill it with a harpoon thrust. Dead beside the skiff, the marlin is the largest Santiago has ever seen. He lashes it to his boat, raises the small mast, and sets sail for home. While Santiago is excited by the price that the marlin will bring at market, he is more concerned that the people who will eat the fish are unworthy of its greatness.

As Santiago sails on with the fish, the marlin's blood leaves a trail in the water and attracts sharks. The first to attack is a great mako shark, which Santiago manages to slay with the harpoon. In the struggle, the old man loses the harpoon and lengths of valuable rope, which leaves him vulnerable to other shark attacks. The old man fights off the successive vicious predators as best he can, stabbing at them with a crude spear he makes by lashing a knife to an oar, and even clubbing them with the boat's tiller. Although he kills several sharks, more and more appear, and by the time night falls, Santiago's continued fight against the scavengers is useless. They devour the marlin's precious meat, leaving only skeleton, head, and tail. Santiago chastises himself for going "out too far," and for sacrificing his great and worthy opponent. He arrives home before daybreak, stumbles back to his shack, and sleeps very deeply.

The next morning, a crowd of amazed fishermen gathers around the skeletal carcass of the fish, which is still lashed to the boat. Knowing nothing of the old man's struggle, tourists at a nearby café observe the remains of the giant marlin and mistake it for a shark. Manolin, who has been worried sick over the old man's absence, is moved to tears when he finds Santiago safe in his bed. The boy fetches the old man some coffee and the daily papers with the baseball scores, and watches him sleep. When the old man wakes, the two agree to fish as partners once more. The old man returns to sleep and dreams his usual dream of lions at play on the beaches of Africa.

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Some important themes of the novel

The Honor in Struggle, Defeat & Death

From the very first paragraph, Santiago is characterized as someone struggling against defeat. He has gone eighty-four days without catching a fish—he will soon pass his own record of eighty-seven days. Almost as a reminder of Santiago's struggle, the sail of his skiff resembles "the flag of permanent defeat." But the old man refuses defeat at every turn: he resolves to sail out beyond the other fishermen to where the biggest fish promise to be. He lands the marlin, tying his record of eighty-seven days after a brutal three-day fight, and he continues to ward off sharks from stealing his prey, even though he knows the battle is useless.

Because Santiago is pitted against the creatures of the sea, some readers choose to view the tale as a chronicle of man's battle against the natural world, but the novella is, more accurately, the story of man's place within nature. Both Santiago and the marlin display qualities of pride, honor, and bravery, and both are subject to the same eternal law: they must kill or be killed. As Santiago reflects when he watches the weary warbler fly toward shore, where it will inevitably meet the hawk, the world is filled with predators, and no living thing can escape the inevitable struggle that will lead to its death. Santiago lives according to his own observation: "man is not made for defeat . . . [a] man can be destroyed but not defeated." In Hemingway's portrait of the world, death is inevitable, but the best men (and animals) will nonetheless refuse to give in to its power. Accordingly, man and fish will struggle to the death, just as hungry sharks will lay waste to an old man's trophy catch.

The novel suggests that it is possible to transcend this natural law. In fact, the very inevitability of destruction creates the terms that allow a worthy man or beast to transcend it. It is precisely through the effort to battle the inevitable that a man can prove himself. Indeed, a man can prove this determination over and over through the worthiness of the opponents he chooses to face. Santiago finds the marlin worthy of a fight, just as he once found "the great negro of Cienfuegos" worthy. His admiration for these opponents brings love and respect into an equation with death, as their destruction becomes a point of honor and bravery that confirms Santiago's heroic qualities. One might characterize the equation as the working out of the statement "Because I love you, I have to kill you." Alternately, one might draw a parallel to the poet John Keats and his insistence that beauty can only be comprehended in the moment before death, as beauty bows to destruction. Santiago, though destroyed at the end of the novella, is never defeated. Instead, he emerges as a hero. Santiago's struggle does not enable him to change man's place in the world. Rather, it enables him to meet his most dignified destiny.

Pride as the Source of Greatness & Determination

Many parallels exist between Santiago and the classic heroes of the ancient world. In addition to exhibiting terrific strength, bravery, and moral certainty, those heroes usually possess a tragic flaw—a quality that, though admirable, leads to their eventual downfall. If pride is Santiago's fatal flaw, he is keenly aware of it. After sharks have destroyed the marlin, the old man apologizes again and again to his worthy opponent. He has ruined them both, he concedes, by sailing beyond the usual boundaries of fishermen. Indeed, his last word on the subject comes when he asks himself the reason for his undoing and decides, "Nothing . . . I went out too far."

While it is certainly true that Santiago's eighty-four-day run of bad luck is an affront to his pride as a masterful fisherman, and that his attempt to bear out his skills by sailing far into the gulf waters leads to disaster, Hemingway does not condemn his protagonist for being full of pride. On the contrary, Santiago stands as proof that pride motivates men to greatness. Because the old man acknowledges that he killed the mighty marlin largely out of pride, and because his capture of the marlin leads in turn to his heroic transcendence of defeat, pride becomes the source of Santiago's greatest strength. Without a ferocious sense of pride, that battle would never have been fought, or more likely, it would have been abandoned before the end.

Santiago's pride also motivates his desire to transcend the destructive forces of nature. Throughout the novel, no matter how baleful his circumstances become, the old man exhibits an unflagging determination to catch the marlin and bring it to shore. When the first shark arrives, Santiago's resolve is mentioned twice in the space of just a few paragraphs. First, we are told that the old man "was full of resolution but he had little hope." Then, sentences later, the narrator says, "He hit [the shark] without hope but with resolution." The old man meets every challenge with the same unwavering determination: he is willing to die in order to bring in the marlin, and he is willing to die in order to battle the feeding sharks. It is this conscious decision to act, to fight, to never give up that enables Santiago to avoid defeat. Although he returns to Havana without the trophy of his long battle, he returns with the knowledge that he has acquitted himself proudly and manfully. Hemingway seems to suggest that victory is not a prerequisite for honor. Instead, glory depends upon one having the pride to see a struggle through to its end, regardless of the outcome. Even if the old man had returned with the marlin intact, his moment of glory, like the marlin's meat, would have been short-lived. The glory and honor Santiago accrues comes not from his battle itself but from his pride and determination to fight.

Kinship & Connection

Throughout the story, Santiago fosters a myriad of connections with others, despite the solitary nature of fishing and Santiago's own particular seclusion. For instance, he forms a deeply spiritual connection with the very marlin he wishes to catch. Though it's easy to imagine most hunters think of their prey as purely that, Santiago respects the marlin and feels grateful for its persistence, and even shows a willingness to die in the marlin's stead, should the marlin persist. The act of catching the marlin comes to feel less like an individual need, and more like a collaborative experience in which both are active participants, even partners.

Santiago also finds connection with Joe DiMaggio. Providing both a moral compass and a framework for understanding the true nature of resilience, thoughts of DiMaggio bring Santiago comfort; he feels a kingship for this man he's never met and imagines what it might be like to bring DiMaggio fishing while discussing baseball with Manolin, who likewise offers Santiago a sense of community. The bond they have is formed through fishing, and although Manolin has been forbidden from working with Santiago, it's clear from how they reminisce about their time together that they mean a great deal to one another. After all, "The old man had taught the boy to fish and the boy loved him."

Characters

Santiago

The old man of the novella's title, Santiago is a Cuban fisherman who has had an extended run of bad luck. Despite his expertise, he has been unable to catch a fish for eighty-four days. He is humble, yet exhibits a justified pride in his abilities. His knowledge of the sea and its creatures, and of his craft, is unparalleled and helps him preserve a sense of hope regardless of circumstance. Throughout his life, Santiago has been presented with contests to test his strength and endurance. The marlin with which he struggles for three days represents his greatest challenge. Paradoxically, although Santiago ultimately loses the fish, the marlin is also his greatest victory.

Let's make a detailed characterization of Santiago

Santiago suffers terribly throughout The Old Man and the Sea. In the opening pages of the book, he has gone eighty-four days without catching a fish and has become the laughingstock of his small village. He then endures a long and grueling struggle with the marlin only to see his trophy catch destroyed by sharks. Yet, the destruction enables the old man to undergo a remarkable transformation, and he wrests triumph and

renewed life from his seeming defeat. After all, Santiago is an old man whose physical existence is almost over, but the reader is assured that Santiago will persist through Manolin, who, like a disciple, awaits the old man's teachings and will make use of those lessons long after his teacher has died. Thus, Santiago manages, perhaps, the most miraculous feat of all: he finds a way to prolong his life after death.

Santiago's commitment to sailing out farther than any fisherman has before, to where the big fish promise to be, testifies to the depth of his pride. Yet, it also shows his determination to change his luck. Later, after the sharks have destroyed his prize marlin, Santiago chastises himself for his hubris (exaggerated pride), claiming that it has ruined both the marlin and himself. True as this might be, it is only half the picture, for Santiago's pride also enables him to achieve his most true and complete self. Furthermore, it helps him earn the deeper respect of the village fishermen and secures him the prized companionship of the boy—he knows that he will never have to endure such an epic struggle again.

Santiago's pride is what enables him to endure, and it is perhaps endurance that matters most in Hemingway's conception of the world—a world in which death and destruction, as part of the natural order of things, are unavoidable. Hemingway seems to believe that there are only two options: defeat or endurance until destruction; Santiago clearly chooses the latter. His stoic determination is mythic, nearly Christ-like in proportion. For three days, he holds fast to the line that links him to the fish, even though it cuts deeply into his palms, causes a crippling cramp in his left hand, and ruins his back. This physical pain allows Santiago to forge a connection with the marlin that goes beyond the literal link of the line: his bodily aches attest to the fact that he is well matched, that the fish is a worthy opponent, and that he himself, because he is able to fight so hard, is a worthy fisherman. This connectedness to the world around him eventually elevates Santiago beyond what would otherwise be his defeat. Like Christ, to whom Santiago is unashamedly compared at the end of the novella, the old man's physical suffering leads to a more significant spiritual triumph.

The Marlin

Santiago hooks the marlin, which we learn at the end of the novella measures eighteen feet, on the first afternoon of his fishing expedition. Because of the marlin's great size, Santiago is unable to pull the fish in, and the two become engaged in a kind of tug-of-war that often seems more like an alliance than a struggle. The fishing line serves as a symbol of the fraternal connection Santiago feels with the fish. When the captured marlin is later destroyed by sharks, Santiago feels destroyed as well. Like Santiago, the marlin is implicitly compared to Christ.

Manolin

A boy presumably in his adolescence, Manolin is Santiago's apprentice and devoted attendant. The old man first took him out on a boat when he was merely five years old. Due to Santiago's recent bad luck, Manolin's parents have forced the boy to go out on a different fishing boat. Manolin, however, still cares deeply for the old man, to whom he continues to look as a mentor. His love for Santiago is unmistakable as the two discuss baseball and as the young boy recruits help from villagers to improve the old man's impoverished conditions.

Joe DiMaggio

Although DiMaggio never appears in the novel, he plays a significant role nonetheless. Santiago worships him as a model of strength and commitment, and his thoughts turn toward DiMaggio whenever he needs to reassure himself of his own strength. Despite a painful bone spur that might have crippled another player, DiMaggio went on to secure a triumphant career. He was a center fielder for the New York Yankees from 1936 to 1951, and is often considered the best all-around player ever at that position.

Perico

Perico, the reader assumes, owns the bodega in Santiago's village. He never appears in the novel, but he serves an important role in the fisherman's life by providing him with newspapers that report the baseball scores. This act establishes him as a kind man who helps the aging Santiago.

Martin

Like Perico, Martin, a café owner in Santiago's village, does not appear in the story. The reader learns of him through Manolin, who often goes to Martin for Santiago's supper. As the old man says, Martin is a man of frequent kindness who deserves to be repaid.