CHARACTER SKETCHES:

SANTIAGO:

Santiago is an impoverished old man who has endured many ordeals, whose best days are behind him, whose wife has died, and who never had children. For 84 days, he has gone without catching the fish upon which his meager existence, the community's respect, and his sense of identity as an accomplished fisherman all depend. As a result, the young man who is like a son to him (the young man who, since the age of five, has fished with him and learned from him) now fishes, at the behest of his parents, with another fisherman.

Indeed, Santiago's philosophy and internal code of behavior make him unconventional in his society (as critics such as Bickford Sylvester have mentioned). Santiago's dedication to his craft (beyond concerns of material gain or survival) separates him from the pragmatic fishermen motivated by money. He stands apart from Cuba's evolution to a new materialism and a village fishing culture converting to a fishing industry. He remains dedicated to a profession he sees as a more spiritual way of life and a part of nature's order in the eternal cycle that makes all creatures brothers in their common condition of both predator and prey.

What Santiago desperately wants is one epic catch — not just to survive, but to prove once more his skill, reassert his identity as a fisherman, secure his reputation in the community, and ensure for all time that Manolin will forever honor his memory and become his successor in what matters most in life. For Santiago, what matters most in life is to live with great fervor and nobility according to his beliefs, to use his skills and nature's gifts to the best of his ability, to struggle and endure and redeem his individual existence through his life's work, to accept inevitable destruction with dignity, and to pass on to the next generation everything of value that he has gained. In these desires, he reflects the desires of us all.

What makes Santiago special is that despite a lifetime of hardships that have hurt him (as the morning sun has always hurt his eyes), he is still a man in charge and an expert who knows the tricks of his fisherman's craft. His eyes remain young, cheerful, and undefeated. He knows how to rely on the transcendent power of his own imagination to engender the inspiration and confidence he needs and to keep alive in himself and others the hope, dreams, faith, absorption, and resolution to transcend hardship.

MANOLIN:

Manolin is Santiago's last and deepest human relationship, his replacement in the generational cycle of human existence, the one to whom he wishes to entrust his skill as a fisherman, the transforming power of his vision, and his memory. As Santiago is mentor, spiritual father, and the old man or old age, Manolin is pupil, son, and the boy or youth. Manolin loves and cares for Santiago, and at the story's end, he professes his faith in Santiago and everything Santiago represents. Living up to his name, which is the diminutive of Manuel (Spanish for Emmanuel, the Redeemer), Manolin articulates for Santiago the true meaning of his great struggle, which has brought him the intangibles he craves. Three times, Manolin professes his faith in Santiago. In accepting the marlin's spear, Manolin demonstrates once and for all that he clearly understands and accepts all that Santiago wishes to bequeath him — and all that comes with that inheritance.