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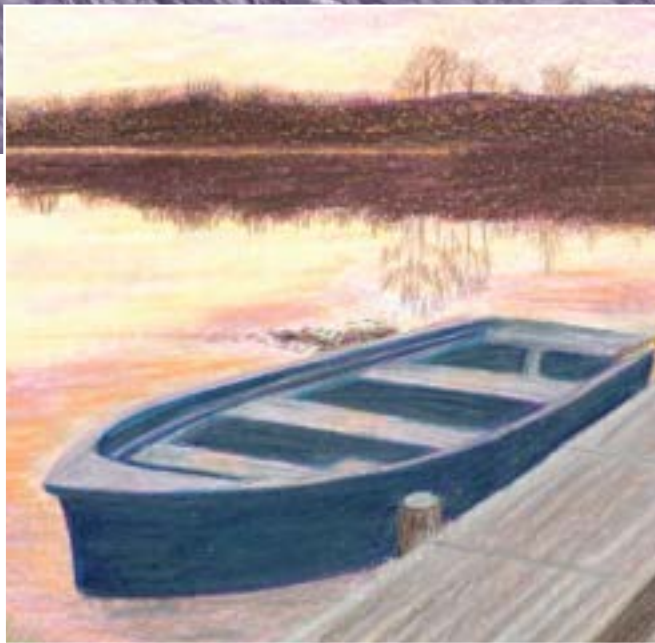
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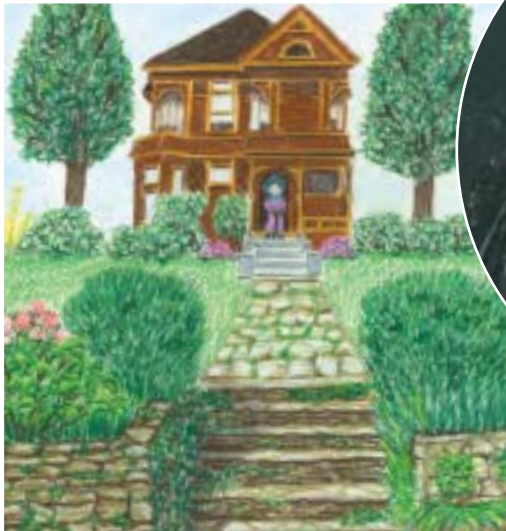
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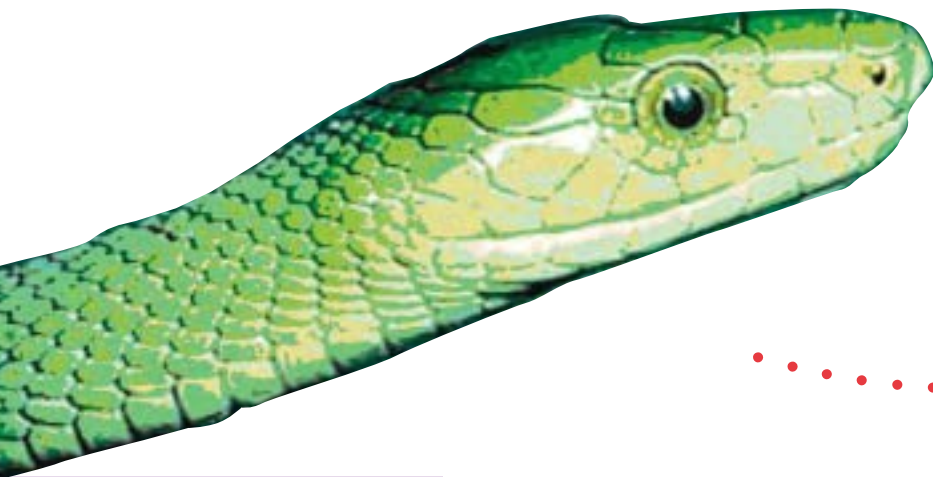


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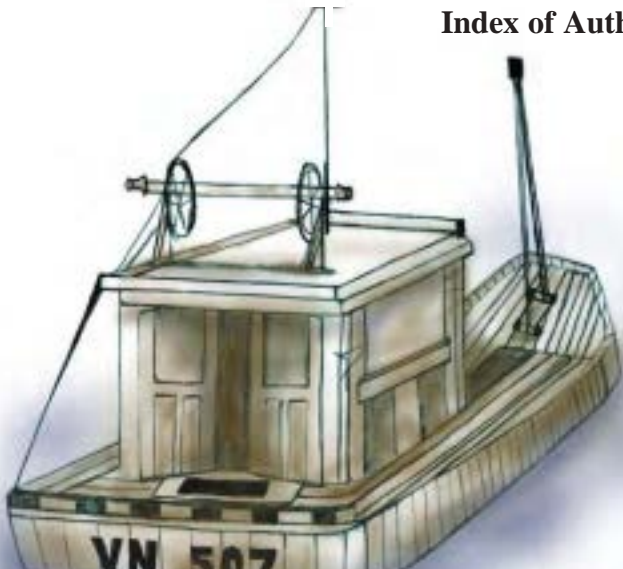
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Mosdos Press Literature Anthologies

Opal for 3rd Grade

Ruby for 4th Grade

Coral for 5th Grade

Pearl for 6th Grade

Jade for 7th Grade

Gold for 8th Grade

A vintage-style illustration featuring a central window with four panes. The window looks out onto a night sky filled with stars. Two birds are flying in the sky, one in the middle pane and one in the lower-left pane. The window is framed by a white border. In the foreground, there is a large, colorful bouquet of flowers, including red, pink, and white blossoms, with green leaves and stems. To the right of the window, there are tall, thin grasses and a large, vibrant pink flower. The background is a light, textured surface with some faint, curved lines. The text "A professional writer is" is written across the middle of the image in a black, serif font, with the word "is" at the end of the line.

A professional writer is



SHORT Stories

an amateur who didn't quit.

Blueprint for Reading

the Author

**Arthur Gordon
(1912-2002)**

Arthur Gordon was born in Savannah, Georgia. He graduated Yale University, later receiving a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford University. He was managing editor of *Good Housekeeping* magazine as well as editor of *Cosmopolitan*. As a freelance writer, he turned out more than 200 stories and magazine articles, as well as a novel and several nonfiction books. His hobbies included fishing, hunting, and boating—all reflected in *The Sea Devil*.

Background Bytes

Which do *you* think is more important: work or play? In contemporary society, do we work so many hours, with such intensity, that we need to renew ourselves with mental and physical recreation? Do we also develop skills while playing that enable us to better focus when we are back at work?

We are no longer a society of farmers, hunters, and laborers. Appliances assist all of us with household tasks. Much of our professional work consists of thinking and sitting. To offset the absence of physical conditioning, many people go jogging each day. Others take yoga, go to exercise classes, or play sports regularly.

Are those folks who engage in strenuous and dangerous activities responding as well to the lack of physical challenge in modern society? Is the additional element of risk a big draw in mountain climbing and underwater exploration? The human neurological and physiological design may be exactly why some of us feel the call of the wild!

Into The Sea Devil

The Sea Devil is an action-adventure story about a person who ordinarily works with his head, not with his hands. His job requires clear thinking, but provides no physical challenge. Consequently, he seeks out a challenging hobby.

Night fishing is hard work and dangerous, with the additional satisfaction of yielding food for the practitioner's table. For the protagonist, night fishing allows him to experience his skill in activity fundamental to human survival, by himself. Here there is no boss nor the teamwork required at so many job sites.

However, this hunter who thinks he is safe is suddenly plummeted into the world of his prey and becomes one of the hunted. The pace of the narrative leaves the reader breathless. The action is described as it occurs chronologically, with the events in sequence. The theme of the story is revealed in the life-and-death struggle of the protagonist. A secondary theme is the enforced physical idleness and safety of contemporary culture. The protagonist is weary of this and seeks out a confrontation with natural forces. Another powerful thematic thread is the desire to return to an earlier, more primitive state that requires self-reliance and gives life deeper meaning.

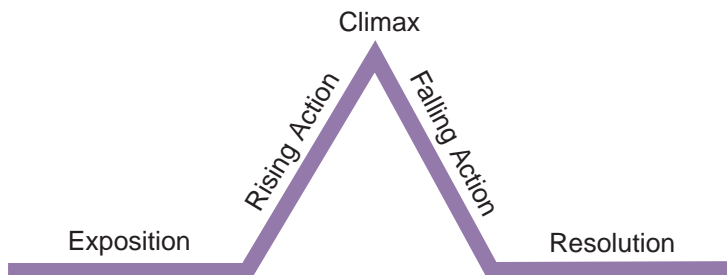
The Sea Devil

Before you read the story:

Make two lists of at least five entries each. One list will have jobs requiring brains; the other list will have jobs requiring muscles. After making your lists, look them over. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each type of job? Then, write a brief statement telling what would be satisfying and unsatisfying about a job requiring only brains. Write the same kind of statement for a job requiring only muscles.

Focusing on the Plot

Every story has a **plot**. Simply put, this means every story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. More specifically, in literary terms, the beginning is the **exposition**, the part of the story that explains background, characters, and setting. The middle of the story includes the **rising action**, adding complications to the story's conflicts, the **climax**, or point of greatest suspense or interest, and the **falling action**, the logical result of the climax. The end of the story is the **resolution**, showing how the conflict is resolved.



Word Bank

Lagoon is an odd word for the English language—with that funny “-oon” ending. What other words can you think of that end “-oon”? **Lagoon** has two sources: The Irish word *loch*, meaning “lake,” as in the Loch Ness monster, and the Latin word *lacuna*, meaning “a pool, a pond” or “a gap”—as a gap in an old manuscript.

barnacle
droning
equilibrium
furrow
futile

imminent
impeding
lagoon
mottled
perimeter

placid
preeminence
respite
simultaneously
teeming

tenaciously
torrent



Arthur Gordon

The Sea Devil

The man came out of the house and stood quite still, listening. Behind him, the lights glowed in the cheerful room, the books were neat and orderly in their cases, the radio talked importantly to itself. In front of him, the bay stretched dark and silent, one of the countless lagoons that border the coast where Florida thrusts its green thumb deep into the tropics.

It was late in September. The night was breathless; summer's dead hand still lay heavy on the land. The man moved forward six paces and stood on the sea wall. The tide was beginning to ebb.

Somewhere out in the blackness a mullet¹ jumped and fell back with a sullen splash. Heavy with roe,² they were jumping less often, now. They would not take a hook, but a practiced eye could see the swirls they made in the glassy water. In the dark of the moon, a skilled man with a cast net might take half a dozen in an hour's work. And a big mullet makes a meal for a family.

The man turned abruptly and went into the garage, where his cast net hung. He was in

1. A *mullet* (MUL it) is a spiny-finned fish that lives in shallow seas.

2. The term *roe* (RO) refers to fish eggs.

Word Bank

lagoon (luh GOON) *n.*: an area of shallow water open to the sea but separated from the ocean by low, sandy dunes



his late twenties, wide-shouldered and strong. He did not have to fish for a living, or even for food. He was a man who worked with his head, not with his hands. But he liked to go casting alone at night.

He liked the loneliness and the labor of it. He liked the clean taste of salt when he gripped the edge of the net with his teeth as a cast netter must. He liked the arching flight of sixteen pounds of lead and linen against the starlight, and the weltering crash³ of the net into the unsuspecting water. He liked the harsh tug of the retrieving rope around his wrist, and the way the net came alive when the cast was true, and the thud of captured fish on the floorboards of the skiff.⁴

He liked all that because he found in it a reality that seemed to be missing from his twentieth-century job and from his daily life. He liked being the hunter, skilled and solitary and elemental.⁵ There was no conscious cruelty in the way he felt. It was the way things had been in the beginning.

The man lifted the net down carefully and lowered it into a bucket. He put a paddle beside the bucket. Then he went into the house. When he came out, he was wearing swimming trunks and a pair of old tennis shoes.

The skiff, flat bottomed, was moored⁶ off the sea wall. He would not go far, he told him-

3. A *weltering crash* is one that causes a lot of noise and movement in the water.

4. A *skiff* (SKIF) is a small, flat-bottomed boat suitable for one person.

5. Here, *elemental* (EL uh MEN til) means simple or basic.

6. When a boat is *moored* (MOORD), it is secured by an anchor or cable.

self. Just to the tumbledown dock half a mile away. Mullet had a way of feeding around old pilings after dark. If he moved quietly, he might pick up two or three in one cast close to the dock. And maybe a couple of others on the way down or back.

He shoved off and stood motionless for a moment, letting his eyes grow accustomed to the dark. Somewhere out in the channel a porpoise blew with a sound like steam escaping. The man smiled a little; porpoises were his friends. Once, fishing in the Gulf, he had seen the charter-boat captain reach overside and gaff⁷ a baby porpoise through the sinewy⁸ part of the tail. He had hoisted it aboard, had dropped it into the bait well, where it thrashed around, puzzled and unhappy. And the mother had swum alongside the boat and under the boat and around the boat, nudging the stout planking with her back, slapping it with her tail, until the man felt sorry for her and made the captain let the baby porpoise go.

He took the net from the bucket, slipped the noose in the retrieving rope over his wrist, pulled the slipknot tight. It was an old net, but still serviceable; he had rewoven the rents⁹ made by underwater snags. He coiled the thirty-foot rope carefully, making sure there were no kinks. A tangled rope, he knew, would spoil any cast.

The basic design of the net had not changed in three thousand years. It was a mesh circle with a diameter of fourteen feet. It measured close to fifteen yards around the circumference and could, if thrown perfectly, blanket a hundred fifty square feet of sea water. In the center of this radial trap¹⁰ was a small iron collar where the retrieving rope met the twenty-

three separate drawstrings leading to the outer rim of the net. Along this rim, spaced an inch and a half apart, were the heavy lead sinkers.

The man raised the iron collar until it was a foot above his head. The net hung soft and pliant¹¹ and deadly. He shook it gently, making sure that the drawstrings were not tangled, that the sinkers were hanging true. Then he eased it down and picked up the paddle.

The night was black as a witch's cat; the stars looked fuzzy and dim. Down to the southward, the lights of a causeway made a yellow necklace across the sky. To the man's left were the tangled roots of a mangrove swamp;¹² to his right, the open waters of the bay. Most of it was fairly shallow, but there were channels eight feet deep. The man could not see the old dock, but he knew where it was. He pulled the paddle quietly through the water, and the phosphorescence¹³ glowed and died.

For five minutes he paddled. Then, twenty feet ahead of the skiff, a mullet jumped. A big fish, close to three pounds. For a moment it hung in the still air, gleaming dully. Then it vanished. But

7. To *gaff* (GAF) a porpoise is to use a hook-like iron instrument to spear and capture it.

8. The *sinewy* (SIN yoo wee) part of the tail is the part that is tough and firm, without bone.

9. *Rents* (RENTS) are tears in the net.

10. *Radial trap* refers to the way the drawstrings of the net radiate from a small iron collar, like spokes from the center of a wheel.

11. Something that is *pliant* (PLY unt) is easily bent, or flexible.

12. A *mangrove swamp* is a grove of low trees with tangled roots growing on a tract of wet, spongy land.

13. *Phosphorescence* (FAHS fuh RESS intz) refers to the glowing or luminous appearance of some sea life at night.

the ripples marked the spot, and where there was one there were often others.

The man stood up quickly. He picked up the coiled rope, and with the same hand grasped the net at a point four feet below the iron collar. He raised the skirt to his mouth, gripped it strongly with his teeth. He slid his free hand as far as it would go down the circumference of the net, so that he had three points of contact with the mass of cordage¹⁴ and metal. He made sure his feet were planted solidly. Then he waited, feeling the tension, the fierce exhilaration of the hunter at the moment of ambush, the atavistic desire¹⁵ to capture and kill and ultimately consume.

A mullet swirled, ahead and to the left. The man swung the heavy net back, twisting his body and bending his knees so as to get more upward thrust. He shot it forward, letting go simultaneously with rope hand and with teeth, holding a fraction of a second longer with the other hand so as to give the net the necessary spin, impart the centrifugal force¹⁶ that would make it flare into a circle. The skiff ducked sideways, but he kept his balance. The net fell with a splash.

The man waited for five seconds. Then he began to retrieve it, pulling in a series of sharp jerks so that the drawstrings would gather the net inward, like a giant fist closing on this segment of the teeming sea. He felt the net quiver, and he knew it was not empty. He swung it, dripping, over the gunwale,¹⁷ saw the broad silver side of the mullet quivering,

saw too the gleam of a smaller fish. He looked closely to make sure no stingray¹⁸ was hidden in the mesh, then raised the iron collar and shook the net out. The mullet fell with a thud and flapped wildly. The other victim was an angelfish, beautifully marked, but too small to keep. The man picked it up gently and dropped it overboard. He coiled the rope, took up the paddle. He would cast no more until he came to the dock.

The skiff moved on. At last, ten feet apart, a pair of stakes rose up gauntly¹⁹ out of the night. Barnacle-encrusted, they once had marked the approach from the main channel. The man guided the skiff between them, then put the paddle down softly. He stood up, reached for the net, tightened the noose around his wrist. From here he could drift down upon the dock. He could see it now, a ruined skeleton in the starshine. Beyond it a mullet jumped and fell back with a flat, liquid sound. The man raised the edge of the net, put it between his teeth. He would not cast at a single swirl, he decided; he would wait until he saw two or

14. *Cordage* (KOR dij) refers to the mass of cord or ropes making up the net.

15. An *atavistic desire* (AT uh VISS tik dih ZY ir) is a strong longing.

16. A *centrifugal force* (sen TRIF yoo gul FORSS) causes an object moving in a circle to move away from the center of the circle.

17. The *gunwale* (GUN il) is the upper edge of the side of a vessel.

18. A *stingray* (STING RAY) is a fish with a long, flexible tail, armed with a bony, poisonous spine.

19. Here *gauntly* (GAWNT lee) means desolately or grimly.

Word Bank

simultaneously (SY mul TAY nee iss lee) *adv.*: concurrently; occurring at the same time

teeming (TEEM ing) *adj.*: occurring or existing in great quantities or numbers; swarming

barnacle (BAR nih kul) *n.*: a sea-dwelling, hard-shelled creature that often attaches itself to ship bottoms and timber

three close together. The skiff was barely moving. He felt his muscles tense themselves, awaiting the signal from the brain.

Behind him in the channel he heard the porpoise blow again, nearer now. He frowned in the darkness. If the porpoise chose to fish this area, the mullet would scatter and vanish. There was no time to lose.

A school of sardines surfaced suddenly, skittering along like drops of mercury. Something, perhaps the shadow of the skiff, had frightened them. The old dock loomed very close. A mullet broke water just too far away; then another, nearer. The man marked²⁰ the spreading ripples and decided to wait no longer.

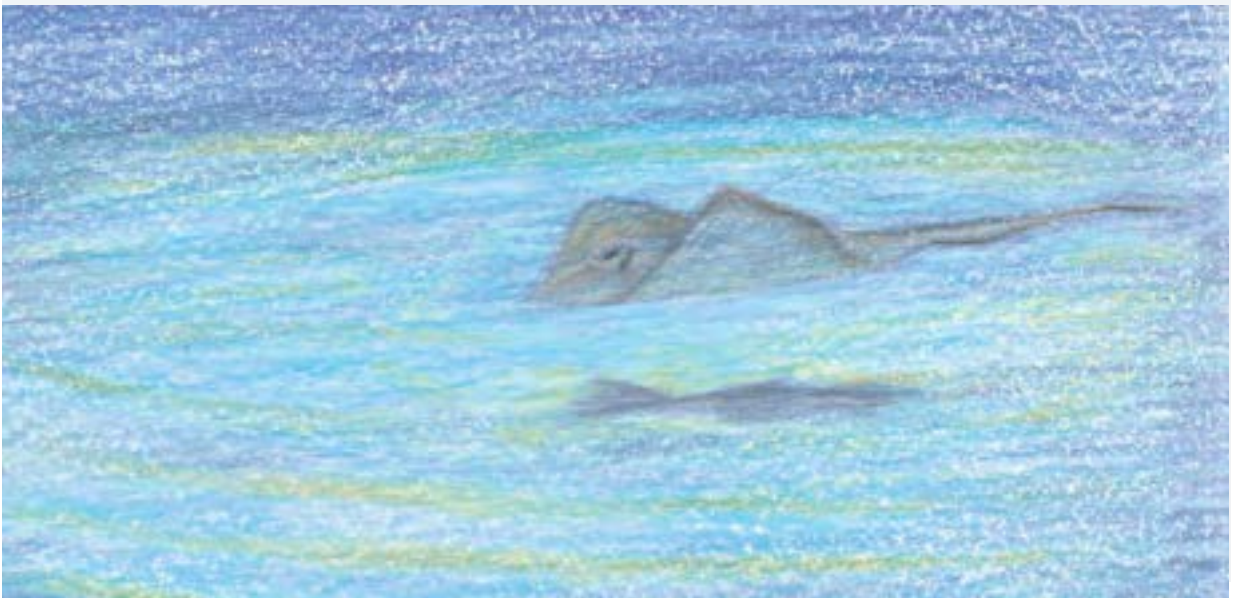
He swung back the net, heavier now that it was wet. He had to turn his head, but out of the corner of his eye he saw two swirls in the black water just off the starboard bow.²¹ They were about eight feet apart, and they had the sluggish oily look that marks the presence of some-

thing big just below the surface. His conscious mind had no time to function, but instinct told him that the net was wide enough to cover both swirls if he could alter the direction of his cast. He could not halt the swing, but he shifted his feet slightly and made the cast off balance. He saw the net shoot forward, flare into an oval, and drop just where he wanted it.

Then the sea exploded in his face. In a frenzy of spray, a great horned thing shot like a huge bat out of the water. The man saw the mesh of his net etched against the mottled blackness of its body and he knew, in the split second in which thought was still possible, that those twin swirls had been made not by two mullet, but by the wing tips of the giant ray of the Gulf Coast, *Manta birostris*, also known as clam cracker, devil ray,

20. *Marked* (MARKT) means noticed or noted.

21. Facing the front of the boat, the *starboard bow* (STAR BORD BOU) is the right-hand side of the front of a vessel.



Word Bank

mottled (MAHT ild) *adj.*: marked with spots or blotches of different colors or shades

sea devil.

The man gave a hoarse cry. He tried to claw the slipknot off his wrist, but there was not time. The quarter-inch line snapped taut. He shot over the side of the skiff as if he had roped a runaway locomotive. He hit the water headfirst and seemed to bounce once. He plowed a blinding furrow for perhaps ten yards. Then the line went slack as the sea devil jumped again. It was not the full-grown manta of the deep Gulf, but it was close to nine feet from tip to tip and it weighed over a thousand pounds. Up into the air it went, pearl-colored underbelly gleaming as it twisted in a frantic effort to dislodge the clinging thing that had fallen upon it. Up into the starlight, a monstrous survival from the earliest of times.

The water was less than four feet deep. Sobbing and choking, the man struggled for a foothold on the slimy bottom. Sucking in great gulps of air, he fought to free himself from the rope. But the slipknot was jammed deep into his wrist; he might as well have tried to loosen a circle of steel.

The ray came down with a thunderous splash and drove forward again. The flexible net followed every movement, impeding it hardly at all. The man weighed a hundred seventy-five pounds, and he was braced for the shock, and he had the desperate strength that comes from looking into the blank eyes of death. It was useless. His arm straightened out with a jerk that seemed to dis-

locate his shoulder; his feet shot out from under him; his head went under again. Now at last he knew how the fish must feel when the line tightens and drags him toward the alien element that is his doom. Now he knew.

Desperately he dug the fingers of his free hand into the ooze, felt them dredge a futile channel through broken shells and the ribbon-like sea grasses. He tried to raise his head, but could not get it clear. Torrents of spray choked him as the ray plunged toward deep water.

His eyes were of no use to him in the foamstreaked blackness. He closed them tight, and at once an insane sequence of pictures flashed through his mind. He saw his wife sitting in their living room, reading, waiting calmly for his return. He saw the mullet he had just caught, gasping its life away on the floorboards of the skiff. He saw all these things and many others simultaneously in his mind as his body fought silently and tenaciously for its existence. His hand touched something hard and closed on it in a death grip, but it was only the sharp-edged helmet of a horseshoe crab, and after an instant he let go.

He had been underwater perhaps fifteen seconds now, and something in his brain told him quite calmly that he could last another forty or fifty and then the red flashes behind his eyes would merge into darkness, and the water would pour into his lungs in one sharp painful shock, and he would be finished.

This thought spurred him to a desperate

Word Bank

furrow (FUR oh) *n.*: a narrow groove-like or trench-like depression in any surface

impeding (im PEED ing) *v.*: causing delay, interruption, or difficulty

futile (FYOO till) *adj.*: incapable of producing any result; useless; not successful

torrent (TOR int) *n.*: a stream of water flowing with great rapidity and violence

tenaciously (tih NAY shiss lee) *adv.*: holding fast; characterized by keeping a firm hold

effort. He reached up and caught his pinioned²² wrist with his free hand. He doubled up his knees to create more drag. He thrashed his body madly, like a fighting fish, from side to side. This did not disturb the ray, but now one of the great wings tore through the mesh, and the net slipped lower over the fins projecting like horns from below the nightmare head, and the sea devil jumped again.

And once more the man was able to get his feet on the bottom and his head above water, and he saw ahead of him the pair of ancient stakes that marked the approach to the channel. He knew that if he was dragged much beyond those stakes he would be in eight feet of water, and the ray would go down to hug the bottom as rays always do, and then no power on earth could save him. So in the moment of respite that was granted him, he flung himself toward them.

For a moment he thought his captor yielded a bit. Then the ray moved off again, but more slowly now, and for a few yards the man was able to keep his feet on the bottom. Twice he hurled himself back against the rope with all his strength, hoping that something would break. But nothing broke. The mesh of the net was ripped and torn, but the draw lines were strong, and the stout perimeter cord threaded through the sinkers was even stronger.

The man could feel nothing now in his trapped hand, it was numb; but the ray could feel the powerful lunges of the

unknown thing that was trying to restrain it. It drove its great wings against the unyielding water and forged ahead, dragging the man and pushing a sullen wave in front of it.

The man had swung as far as he could toward the stakes. He plunged toward one and missed it by inches. His feet slipped and he went down on his knees. Then the ray swerved sharply and the second stake came right at him. He reached out with his free hand and caught it.

He caught it just above the surface, six or eight inches below high-water mark. He felt the razor-sharp barnacles bite into his hand, collapse under the pressure, drive their tiny slime-covered shell splinters deep into his flesh. He felt the pain, and he welcomed it, and he made his fingers into an iron claw that would hold until the tendons were severed or the skin was shredded from the bone. The ray felt the pressure increase with a jerk that stopped it dead in the water. For a moment all was still as the tremendous forces came into equilibrium.

Then the net slipped again, and the perimeter cord came down over the sea devil's eyes, blinding it momentarily. The great ray settled to the bottom and braced its wings against the mud and hurled itself forward and upward.

The stake was only a four-by-four of

22. His wrist was *pinioned* (PIN yund), or bound very tightly, to the net.

Word Bank

respite (RESS pit) *n.*: a delay or stopping for a time, especially of anything distressing or difficult; an interval of relief

perimeter (puh RIM ih ter) **cord** *n.*: a rope marking the boundary or outer limits of an area or object

equilibrium (E kwill LIB ree um) *n.*: a state of rest or balance

creosoted²³ pine, and it was old. Ten thousand tides had swirled around it. Worms had bored; parasites had clung. Under the crust of barnacles it still had some heart left, but not enough. The man's grip was five feet above the floor of the bay; the leverage was too great. The stake snapped off at its base.

The ray lunged upward, dragging the man and the useless timber. The man had his lungs full of air, but when the stake snapped he thought of expelling the air and inhaling the water so as to have it finished quickly. He thought of this, but he did not do it. And then, just at the channel's edge, the ray met the porpoise, coming in.

The porpoise had fed well this night and was in no hurry, but it was a methodical creature and it intended to make a sweep around the old dock before the tide dropped too low. It had no quarrel with any ray, but it feared no fish in the sea, and when the great black shadow came rushing blindly and unavoidably, it rolled fast and struck once with its massive horizontal tail.

The blow descended on the ray's flat body with a sound like a pistol shot. It would have broken a buffalo's back, and even the sea devil was half stunned. It veered wildly and turned back toward shallow water. It passed within ten feet of the man, face down in the water. It slowed and almost stopped, wing tips moving faintly, gathering strength for another rush.

The man had heard the tremendous slap of the great mammal's tail and the snorting gasp as it plunged away. He felt the line go slack again, and he raised his

dripping face, and he reached for the bottom with his feet. He found it, but now the water was up to his neck. He plucked at the noose once more with his lacerated hand, but there was no strength in his fingers. He felt the tension come back into the line as the ray began to move again, and for half a second he was tempted to throw himself backward and fight as he had been doing, pitting his strength against the vastly superior strength of the brute.

But the acceptance of imminent death had done something to his brain. It had driven out the fear, and with the fear had gone the panic. He could think now, and he knew with absolute certainty that if he was to make any use of this last chance that had been given him, it would have to be based on the one faculty that had carried man to his preeminence above all beasts, the faculty of reason. Only by using his brain could he possibly survive, and he called on his brain for a solution, and his brain responded. It offered him one.

He did not know whether his body still had the strength to carry out the brain's commands, but he began to swim forward, toward the ray that was still moving hesitantly away from the channel. He swam forward, feeling the rope go slack as he gained on the creature.

Ahead of him he saw the one remaining stake, and he made himself swim faster until he was parallel with the ray and the rope trailed behind both of them

23. *Creosoted* (KREE uh SO tid) means treated with creosote, a strong-smelling, oily liquid used to preserve wood.

Word Bank

imminent (IM ih nint) *adj.*: likely to occur at any moment

preeminence (pree EM ih nintz) *n.*: superiority to all others



in a deep U. He swam with a surge of desperate energy that came from nowhere, so that he was slightly in the lead as they came to the stake. He passed on one side of it; the ray was on the other.

Then the man took one last deep breath, and he went down under the black water until he was sitting on the bottom of the bay. He put one foot over the line so that it passed under his bent knee. He drove both his heels into the mud, and he clutched the slimy grass with his bleeding hand, and he waited for the tension to come again.

The ray passed on the other side of the stake, moving faster now. The rope grew taut again, and it began to drag the man back toward the stake. He held his prisoned wrist close to the bottom, under his knee, and he prayed that the stake would not break. He felt the rope vibrate as the barnacles bit into it. He did not know whether the rope would crush the barnacles, or whether the barnacles would cut the rope. All he knew was that in five seconds or less he would be dragged into the stake and cut to ribbons if he tried to

hold on, or drowned if he didn't.

He felt himself sliding slowly, and then faster, and suddenly the ray made a great leap forward, and the rope burned around the base of the stake, and the man's foot hit it hard. He kicked himself backward with his remaining strength, and the rope parted, and he was free.

He came slowly to the surface. Thirty feet away the sea devil made one tremendous leap and disappeared into the darkness. The man raised his wrist and looked at the frayed length of rope dangling from it. Twenty inches, perhaps. He lifted his other hand and felt the hot blood start instantly, but he didn't care. He put this hand on the stake above the barnacles and held on to the good, rough, honest wood. He heard a strange noise, and realized that it was himself, sobbing.

High above, there was a droning sound. Looking up, he saw the nightly plane from New Orleans inbound for Tampa. Calm and serene, it sailed, symbol of man's superiority. Its lights winked red and green for a moment; then it was gone.

Slowly, painfully, the man began to move through the placid water. He came to the skiff at last and climbed into it. The mullet, still alive, slapped convulsively with its tail. The man reached down with his torn hand, picked up the mullet, let it go.

He began to work on the slipknot doggedly with his teeth. His mind was almost a blank, but not quite. He knew one thing. He knew he would do no more casting alone at night. Not in the dark of the moon. No, not he.

Word Bank

droning (DRONE ing) *adj.*: continuous, low, monotonous

placid (PLASS id) *adj.*: pleasantly calm or peaceful



Studying the Selection

First Impressions

*Which brief passage does most to bring the story to life for you?
Which part do you find most amusing?*

✓ Quick Review

1. What activity was the man engaged in? What method did he use?
2. What was the result of his first cast?
3. What was the result of his second cast?
4. What would happen if the man were pulled out past the old dock?

In-depth Thinking

5. Give three examples that show the man is skilled at cast-fishing.
6. Dragged by the ray, the man closes his eyes and imagines the scene at home. What is gained by contrasting the imagined scene with the present experience of the man?
7. Why are we told the man had saved a baby porpoise? How is it related to the story?
8. What does the author mean when he says the man feels “the tension ... the fierce exhilaration of the hunter at the moment of ambush, the atavistic desire to capture and kill and ultimately consume”? Contrast this feeling with his usual way of obtaining food.

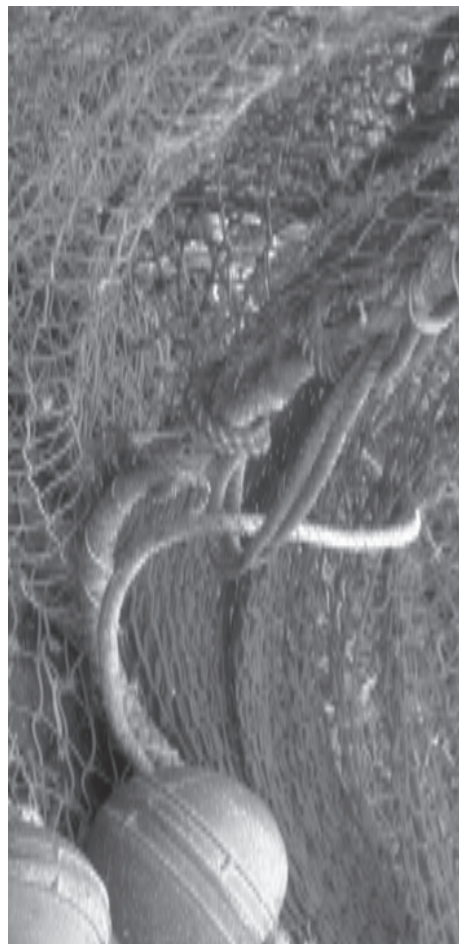
Drawing Conclusions

9. The author uses many contrasts in this story. The silence outdoors contrasts with the noise of the radio in the house. The wild struggle of the man and the stingray contrasts with the peaceful setting of the man's home. The man's job contrasts with his fishing experiences. Referring to these contrasts, explain how the author uses them to make a statement about the conflict between man and nature. What is the author's view of the conflict? Why do people challenge nature?
10. People who work in offices, at desks, looking at computer screens all day, often feel apart from the natural world. What kind of jobs put people in more direct contact with nature? Would these jobs be more satisfying than office jobs? Why or why not?

Focusing on the Plot

The **plot** of *The Sea Devil* is a series of events told in **chronological** order. There is a major **conflict**, encompassing minor conflicts as well. Complete the following activities to help you better understand plot.

1. Assign each part of the story to the proper plot element, explaining which action corresponds to which plot element: **exposition**, **rising action**, **climax**, **falling action**, and **resolution**.
2. Find the bits of **exposition** occurring in the middle of the action. Show how they reveal theme.
3. Another element of plot is foreshadowing. **Foreshadowing** is an early incident or comment hinting at or predicting a later action. Find an example of foreshadowing, and explain how it connects with a later event in the story.



Creating and Writing

1. Discuss the character's irritation with everyday life and his desire for adventure. Does the author favor this quest for excitement, or does he disapprove? Is he neutral? Use specific references to the story to support your thesis.
2. Write a brief sketch in which a character's search for adventure takes a bad turn. Pay attention to setting, action, and the character's thoughts. Use vivid words.
3. Give an oral report on the differences between stingrays and porpoises. Explain why a porpoise is a good choice as the 'hero' of the story and the stingray is a good 'villain.'



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The **WORDS!**

I collected them in



p o e t r y

all *shapes*

AND

SIZES

and

hung them

like

BANGLES

IN

My Mind.

Most pages are omitted from this preview.

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Blueprint for Reading

Background Bytes

When used as a verb, the word *lure* means to attract. For some people, *lure* has connotations of attracting or drawing in a deceiving way. When used as a noun, a lure is a kind of decoy, live or especially artificial bait used in fishing or trapping.

Who made the first lure? Legend has it that one day James Heddon, while waiting for some friends at Dowagiac Creek in Dowagiac, Michigan, was whittling a piece of wood, shaping it like a fish. When he cast the wood into the lake, almost immediately a bass snapped at it. Fishing lures had been invented. Some fishing lures are very beautiful—even to humans, although not to eat!—and the older fishing lures are valued by collectors.

Into The Fish

The Fish is quite an extraordinary poem, longer than many of the other works included in this anthology, with some very subtle **allusions**. (An **allusion** is a passing or casual reference to something, either direct or implied.) Look up the words *grunt* and *isinglass* in the dictionary, and see if you can find definitions that fit cleverly with the poem.

As you reread the poem—and it surely deserves at least three readings—see if you can begin to sense the theme. What is the poet telling us? What happens to the speaker in the poem? Think about how the speaker notices things about the fish. In the beginning of the poem, what does the speaker say about the fish that is positive? What does the speaker say about the fish that may make the fish seem distasteful or that makes you squeamish? What happens after the speaker mentally dissects the fish? By the end of the poem, what has the speaker learned? What have you, the reader learned? If you can answer these questions, it is likely that you understand the theme.

Focusing on Figurative Language and Simile

When Babette Deutsch describes fireworks as a “chrysanthemum,” we are not expected to take this idea **literally**. There is, of course, no flower in the sky. We are, however, expected to take the image **figuratively**. Many of us have seen fireworks that in fact look like huge flowers.

By making such comparisons—and **figurative language** is the language of comparisons—poets help us to *see*, *hear*, *touch* (the physical experience of feeling), *smell*, and *taste*. In a figurative way, they give us eyes to see with and ears to hear with.

As you read *The Fish*, look for Bishop’s use of **similes**, figurative language in which the writer makes a comparison by using the words *like* or *as*. For example, Ms. Bishop writes that the brown skin of the fish “hung in strips like ancient wallpaper.” What do her similes help us see?

The Fish

I caught a tremendous fish
 and held him beside the boat
 half out of water, with my hook
 fast in a corner of his mouth.
 5 He didn't fight.
 He hadn't fought at all.
 He hung a grunting weight,
 battered and venerable¹
 and homely. Here and there
 10 his brown skin hung in strips
 like ancient wallpaper,
 and its pattern of darker brown
 was like wallpaper:
 shapes like full-blown roses
 15 stained and lost through age.
 He was speckled with barnacles,²
 fine rosettes³ of lime,
 and infested
 with tiny white sea-lice,
 20 and underneath two or three

ragged green weed hung down.
 While his gills⁴ were breathing in
 the terrible oxygen
 —the frightening gills
 25 fresh and crisp with blood,
 that can cut so badly—
 I thought of the coarse white flesh
 packed in like feathers,
 the big bones and the little bones,
 30 the dramatic reds and blacks
 of his shiny entrails,⁵
 and the pink swim-bladder
 like a big peony.⁶
 I looked into his eyes
 35 which were far larger than mine
 but shallower, and yellowed,
 the irises backed and packed
 with tarnished tinfoil
 seen through the lenses
 40 of old scratched isinglass.⁷

1. *Venerable* (VEN er uh bil) means worthy of respect or reverence because of old age or other admirable characteristics.

2. *Barnacles* (BAR nih kulz) are small, shelled marine creatures that attach themselves to ship bottoms and other floating objects.

3. *Rosettes* (roe ZETZ) are rose-shaped arrangements of ribbon or other material used as ornaments or badges.

4. The *gills* are the organ through which fish breathe oxygen dissolved in water.

5. The *entrails* (EN tray ilz) are the inner organs of the body, sometimes specifically the intestines.

6. A *peony* (PEE uh nee) is a plant with large, showy flowers.

7. *Isinglass* (I zin GLASS) is a thin, tough, and transparent material. The term *isinglass* also refers to a pure, translucent or transparent form of gelatin obtained from the air bladders—or swim bladders—of some fish.

They shifted a little, but not
to return my stare.

—It was more like the tipping
of an object toward the light.

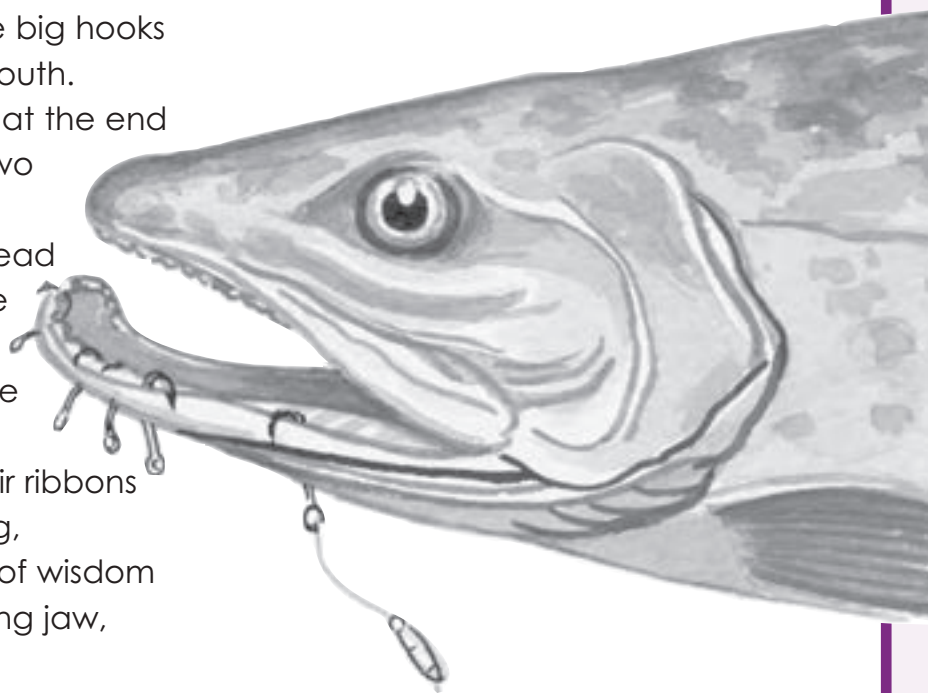
45 I admired his sullen face,
the mechanism of his jaw,
and then I saw
that from his lower lip
—if you could call it a lip—
50 grim, wet, and weaponlike,
hung five old pieces of fish-line,
or four and a wire leader
with the swivel still attached,
and with all their five big hooks
55 grown firmly in his mouth.

A green line, frayed at the end
where he broke it, two
heavier lines,
and a fine black thread
still crimped from the
strain and snap

60 when it broke and he
got away.

Like medals with their ribbons
frayed and wavering,
a five-haired beard of wisdom
trailing from his aching jaw,

65 I stared and stared
and victory filled up
the little rented boat,
from the pool of bilge⁸
where oil had spread raining
70 around the rusted engine
to the bailer rusted orange
and sun-cracked thwarts,⁹
the oarlocks¹⁰ on their strings,
the gunnels¹¹—until everything
75 was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!
And I let the fish go.



8. Here, *bilge* (BILJ) refers to the water, or seepage, that accumulates in the enclosed area at the bottom of a vessel.

9. The *thwarts* (THWORTS) are the seats on a boat, especially those used by the rowers.

10. The *oarlocks* (OR LOX) are U-shaped devices that provide pivots for the oars in rowing.

11. The *gunnels* (GUN ilz) refer to the gunwales or the upper edges of the side of a vessel.

Studying the Selection

First Impressions

Is The Fish a 'fish story'?

✓ Quick Review

1. Bishop offers a complete description of the fish. Describe its skin, its insides, its eyes, its lip.
2. Which colors does Bishop use in her description?
3. Describe the boat. Note: This boat is not a rowboat.



In-depth Thinking

4. Why doesn't the fish fight back?
5. Why do you think Elizabeth Bishop gives the details of the fish's appearance in the order that she does? How does each group of details affect you?
6. The speaker's attitude towards the fish changes several times. How does the speaker feel in the beginning? In the middle of the poem? At the end? Which words or phrases does the speaker use at various points that lead you to the conclusions you have drawn?
7. What is the contrast between the fish and the boat? Why is that contrast so important?



Drawing Conclusions

8. Why does the speaker throw the fish back? What is the theme of the poem?
9. Would you have thrown the fish back? Describe the thinking that would have led to your decision.
10. Do you think the speaker's experience would have a lasting effect on a person?



Focusing on Figurative Language and Simile

One kind of figurative language is the **simile**, a comparison between two unlike people, objects, or creatures using the words *like* or *as*. For example, if we say that a kitten's fur is as black as night, we are suggesting to the mind's eye a quality of the color of the fur. (We may also be alluding to a quality of mysteriousness!) There are many overworked or clichéd similes: for example, "as warm as toast," "as stubborn as a mule," "as quiet as a mouse." When writers use similes, they try to create comparisons that offer fresh ways of seeing.

1. Find six similes in the poem. Explain the comparison in each one.
2. What other comparisons can you find in the poem that may not use the words *like* or *as*?
3. How does Bishop's use of comparisons add to our understanding of what happens to the speaker in *The Fish*?

Creating and Writing

1. Write an essay in which you discuss the "victory [that] filled up/the little rented boat."
2. Elizabeth Bishop's description of the fish is so clear that we can easily picture it. Choose an object to describe. Include two similes in your description.
3. Why would it have been a poor idea to call the poem *Victory*?
4. Design a fishing lure.

