

# Different natural issues in the open boat novel

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



## **Natural Elements in The Open Boat**

It is interesting how, thus far in terms of analyzing nature in writing, how this seems to be the first story we've read in which nature does not have a positive or healing effect on its characters. Being the one of the earliest examples of naturalism—in which the concept of determinism and fate is stressed—it makes sense for the story to paint a picture of nature as having an indifferent attitude towards the men in the boat. It creates a more helpless and tragic atmosphere to the characters if they feel like it doesn't matter to the unyielding ocean whether they live or die. As mentioned in class, it would likely be worse to have nature not care about your fate than having it actively trying to kill you—at least with the latter, there is some semblance of importance placed on you. If nature and the ocean couldn't care less about these characters, it is made much more depressing and hopeless.

The conflict of man versus nature is quite clearly prevalent in *The Open Boat*, as it is a survival narrative based on the author's own experiences—and therefore, the emotions experienced by the narrator are likely real-life experiences the author underwent. Such descriptions of the sea can be found early in the story: "A singular disadvantage of the sea lies in the fact that after successfully surmounting one wave you discover that there is another behind it just as important and just as nervously anxious to do something effective in the way of swamping boats." This shows how never-ending and repetitive the waves are to these sailors—which paints a lifeless, almost robotic picture of how the ocean should be interpreted. One can tell

how the narrator's opinion of the sea changes over the course of the story, from the personification seen here—used to show the sea's desire to harm the boat's occupants—to the eventual indifference later described.

The personification continues, with “ The thing which had followed the boat and waited had evidently grown bored at the delay” towards the middle of the story. Maintaining the human-like characteristics of the sea but simultaneously changing the ocean's objective from killing the men to nothing at all is effective in that it retains the humanity of the water, and thus making its indifference all the more potent. The use of the word “ bored” in particular indicates the uselessness of the men in the eyes of the sea. These men are nothing to nature, not even a slight form or amusement. The fact that the ocean finds the fates of the men to be insignificant makes the despair of the characters and the conflict of the story heightened and more intense.