

Chasing fish:  
comparing the  
ultimate goals found  
in "the old man and  
the sea" and...



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We are all chasing our own fish. We're all trying desperately to grasp something that is just out of our reach. For Santiago, the main character in Hemingway's *The Old Man and The Sea*, he is chasing a literal fish. He exhibits exceptional amounts of patience towards this fish - as one must when pursuing an important goal - spending eighty-four uneventful days at sea in hopes of finally snagging the monster. Santiago sacrifices his physical and mental stability whilst in pursuit of his ultimate goal, and if one looks at the bigger picture, *Kicking Bird of Dances with Wolves* does the same. But, in order to compare the ultimate goals of the main characters, we must first deduce what *Kicking Bird's* "fish" is. What is it that keeps slipping for his clutches?

Some could argue that *Kicking Bird's* metaphorical "fish" is the white man, that he is constantly yearning to understand their customs and way of life. This would explain his inquisitiveness and interest toward Lieutenant Dunbar throughout the book. Though this is sound reasoning, I would argue against it. If *Kicking Bird's* "fish" is the white man, then he would have caught it long ago when he adopted *Stands With A Fist* into his family. *Kicking Bird* would have been given the opportunity to examine the white customs first hand - however limited they were - from *Stands With A Fist* when she was younger and not fully assimilated into the Sioux culture yet. *Kicking Bird* isn't wanting to only understand the white man's way of life and customs, but his motives as well. He wants to fully understand why the white man is pioneering through the Sioux Lands, and what it is they are hoping to accomplish by doing so. By analyzing the book and *Kicking Bird's* actions throughout, one

could come to the conclusion that Kicking Bird's "fish" is the understanding of the white man's incentive.

When compared side-by-side, Santiago's and Kicking Bird's behavior towards their respective "fish" are nearly identical. Just as Santiago tolerates the marlin's antics - regardless of how frustrating they may be - Kicking Bird is incredibly patient with the antics of Lieutenant Dunbar. Towards the beginning of *Dances With Wolves*, Kicking Bird observes a far more patient attitude towards Dunbar than others in the tribe. An example of such behavior appears when the Lieutenant tries to convey the word "buffalo" despite the language barrier. Instead of deeming Dunbar crazy for rolling around in the dirt and trying to leave like *Wind In His Hair*, Kicking Bird sits quietly and tries to decipher the meaning behind Dunbar's makeshift skit. Kicking Bird also takes it upon himself to help the other members of the tribe teach Dunbar the Sioux language, a monotonous task that requires an extensive amount of patience. Why would Kicking Bird take on such a tedious task if it is not to gain what he is seeking, if it isn't to catch his "fish?"

Kicking Bird believes that being civil with Dunbar will help him build up a trust with the Lieutenant, and forging such trust would finally allow Kicking Bird to ask what it is that the white man wants so badly from the Sioux land. Later on in the book, Kicking Bird comes extremely close to broaching the topic with Dunbar. He asks the Lieutenant how many white men will be passing through the Sioux land, and the answer Dunbar gives is a very ominous "like the stars." Though Kicking Bird's long-standing question is partially answered with how many white men are coming, he is still unaware <https://assignbuster.com/chasing-fish-comparing-the-ultimate-goals-found-in-the-old-man-and-the-sea-and-dances-with-wolves/>

of the reason behind the white man's actions. He is still in pursuit of that aspect of his "fish."

Both Santiago and Kicking Bird sacrificed much for their "fish." They both relinquish parts of their lives to pursue their ultimate goals, and some of their actions yield harsh consequences. Santiago nearly dies of dehydration, and is forced to cope with the cuts in his palms and the cramps in his shoulders from fighting with the marlin for three days and three nights. Kicking Bird has to deal with the condemning attitudes of numerous tribe members regarding his acceptance of Dunbar. Both men finally made it to shore, so to speak; Santiago made it back to his home - however empty-handed - and Kicking Bird was no longer ridiculed for his fondness of Dunbar. Although both survived their respective chase, both essentially became the pursuit of their "fish," and in the end, neither truly caught it.