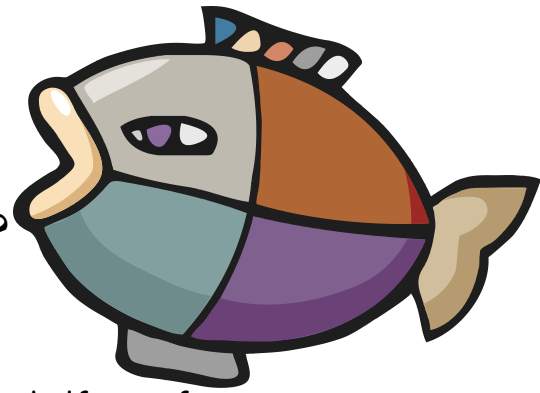


We Do:

The author's purpose is to _____?

"The Fish," by Elizabeth Bishop



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

While his gills were breathing in the terrible oxygen-the frightening gills, fresh and crisp with blood, that can cut so badly-I thought of the course white flesh packed in like feathers, the big bones and the little bones, the dramatic reds and blacks of his shiny entrails, and the pink swim-bladder like a big peony.

I looked into his eyes which were far bigger than mine but shallower, and yellowed, the irises backed and packed with tarnished tinfoil seen through the lenses of old scratched isinglass. They shifted a little, bit not to return my stare.-It was more like the tipping of an object toward the light. I admired his sullen face, the mechanism of his jaw, and then I saw that the lower lip -if you could call it a lip- grim, wet, and weaponlike, hung five pieces of fish line with all their big hooks 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 when it broke away.

Like medals with their ribbons frayed and wavering, a five-haired beard of wisdom trailing from his aching jaw. I stared and victory filled up the little rented boat, from the pool of bilge where oil had spread a rainbow around the rusted engine or the bailer rusted orange, the sun-cracked thwarts, the oarlocks on their strings, until everything was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow! And I let him go.