Everyday, during our lives, we become content with our usual day to day pattern. Every now and then, we unexpectedly come across something that reminds us of our own life. Imagine a sunny day with not a cloud in the sky, trying to relax and cash a fish, but not knowing that catching a fish could be the realization of life. In the poem “The Fish” by Elizabeth Bishop, the fisherman or fisherwoman finds himself or herself through a fish. We may or may not know what, when, or how we will react when we find what reflects us in our lives.

During the beginning of the poem, the person who was fishing caught a fish, but he or she “held him beside the boat half out of water, with my hook fast in the corner of his mouth” (Bishop l. 2-3). Here the person fishing does not realize what this fish meant to her, but, once she looked a little closer to see his image, she soon had curiosity of what he had been through. Elizabeth Bishop uses a fair amount of imagery to prove her theme, which is realizing oneself. For example, “He hung a grunting weight, battered and venerable” (Bishop l. 7-8). This is the first sign of the person fishing, comparing himself or herself to the fish. She says the fish is venerable, which means commanding respect, because of great age or impressive dignity. (“vulnerable” 2012.) When this is brought up, it seems as if the person fishing feels like she is vulnerable as well and instantly compares herself to the fish. As she looks more in depth at the fisher, the speaker realizes that the fish already had five big hooks/ grown firmly in his mouth” (Bishop l. 54-55) She compares that to “medals with their ribbons/frayed and wavering/ a five
haired beard of wisdom / trailing from his arching jaw” (l. 59-62) This is where he or she could compare all of her battles in life, and the ones that she won to the battles that this fish has obviously won. For example, people everyday deal with some kind of battle; we have our scars and memories to remember the victories we won.

However, no matter what age we are, we still want to have respect. As the person fishing starts to see the real beauty in the fish, he or she can also see beauty in the self. The person who was fishing was filled with victory when first catching the fish; this is evident when the speaker says, “I caught a tremendous fish” (Bishop l.1). She even was the only person out of five people to catch this fish. Even with all the victory, and satisfaction she felt from being the only person to pull this fish out of the water, looking at this fish made her look at herself. She had gained respect for the fish, because the fish reminded her much of herself. Each day, we go through struggles either big or small, but, in the end, that always makes us respect other people when we see someone struggling. For example, she says, “And I let the fish go” (Bishop l. 74). The speaker makes it evident that the reason the person fishing lets the fish go is because the person who caught the fish gained respect for the fish though old age.

Throughout the poem, Elizabeth Bishop gives several examples about the person fishing life, and how it has just passed by. A few examples would include the old fish, the five hooks he still has in his mouth, and “the little rented boat” (Bishop l. 65). What will it take for someone to realize where his or her own life has gone? Many people may believe that everything happens for a reason. Elizabeth’s poem could have had many different scenarios, but the theme had to come from when the person fishing found himself or herself though the fish, and let the fish go into the water to survive another day. Life is hard, and, sometimes, we have to look for things outside of our comfort zone. In this case, the interaction between nature and human helped two lives be
rescued.

Throughout the poem, the fish’s imagery is what makes the poem so meaningful. Here and there/ his brown skin hung in strips/ like ancient wallpaper/ and its pattern of darker brown was like wallpaper/ shapes like full-blown roses/ stained and lost through age (l. 9-15). Here the person fishing is talking about the fish, but it could be taking as not only imagery to the fish. It could also mean that she was comparing the fish to her own home, and how the old fish compared to how she had let her home go with her age. The narrator says that, “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” (l. 16-21). This portrays that the fish has been to many different places throughout his life. He is now stuck in a pond or lake that is nasty and it is like he is just waiting on his death bed. In comparison to the person fishing this could mean that she has been many places in her life, which are much better than where she is at today.

In conclusion, the way the author wrote the poem was to connect the reader to the fish. In most cases when someone is fishing it is for a sporting event, or dinner. When Elizabeth Bishop was writing this poem, her main objective was the get the reader to connect personal life to the fish. The person who was fishing had rented a boat that, “had a rusted engine” (l. 68) and was colored a “bailer rusted orange” (l.67) This boat was rented for leisure time and a getaway for the person fishing, but it turned into something different the expected fishing trip. The narrator says, “where oil had spread a rainbow/ around the rusted engine” (l.67, 68). Finally, the person fishing sees, “Rainbow, rainbow, rainbow/ and she let the fish go” (l. 73-74) For many people, a rainbow has a meaning of being beautiful and promising. It may take catching a fish and seeing a rainbow from oil, but, when someone realizes the changes that need to be mad in his or her life, the outcome is beauty.
Works Cited

