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R A I N B O W S

# Moby Dick

Herman Melville



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R A I N B O W S

Herman Melville

# Moby Dick

Adaptation, dossiers and activities by  
Raffaele Polichetti and Maureen Simmons



**edisco**



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# The Author

## Herman Melville



**Herman Melville** was born in New York City in 1819, the third of eight children of a prosperous merchant. Both his parents were descended from the early settlers<sup>1</sup> in New York. In 1832, the family went bankrupt and Herman's father died suddenly. Melville tried to support his family by taking on various jobs, from banking to teaching.

In 1839, at the age of 20, he made his first voyage across the Atlantic Ocean as a cabin boy.

Then, in 1841, he joined the crew of the whaling ship<sup>2</sup> *Acushnet*. The thrilling adventure that occurred during the next three years would provide him with material for his first novels.

When they arrived in Polynesia, he was captured by local cannibals and held for several months. When he returned, friends encouraged Melville to write about his experience. *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (1846) became his first literary success; the continuation of his adventures appeared in his second book, *Omoo* (1847).

After ending his seafaring<sup>3</sup> career, Melville started to read voraciously. In 1847, he married Elizabeth Shaw. At first, they settled in New York, then they moved to the Berkshire Mountains. He lived near writer Nathaniel Hawthorne, who became a close friend and confidant. In 1849, Melville wrote *Mardi and a Voyage Thither*, a philosophical allegory, and *Redburn: His First Voyage*, a humorous novel. In 1850, *White Jacket*, based on the author's fourteen months' service in the United States Navy, was published.

In 1851, he completed his masterpiece, **Moby Dick, or the Whale**. Hawthorne provided Melville with precious feedback on his manuscript, and encouraged him to change the first draft – a detailed account of whaling – into an allegorical novel.

1. *settler*: a person who arrives, especially from another country, in a new place in order to live there and use the land.

2. *whaling ship*: a ship that hunts whales.

3. *seafaring*: connected with traveling by sea.

Considered by modern scholars to be one of the great American novels, the book was not appreciated by Melville's contemporaries and he made very little money from it. The following two novels – *Pierre* (1852) and *The Confidence Man* (1857) – met a similar fate.

During the 1850s, Melville supported his family by farming and writing stories for magazines. He traveled to Europe in 1856, where he saw his friend Hawthorne for the last time. During that visit, it became clear to Melville that his novel-writing career was finished. In 1857, after returning to New York still unnoticed by the literary public, he stopped writing fiction. He became a customs inspector<sup>4</sup>, a job he held for twenty years, and began to write poetry.

The Civil War made a deep impression on Melville and became the principal subject of his verse. Melville's first published book of poems was *Battle Pieces and Aspects of the War: Civil War Poems* (1866). The volume is regarded by many critics as a work as ambitious and rich as any of his novels. He went on to write and publish three more volumes of poetry, including *Clarel: A Poem and a Pilgrimage* (1876), but received little critical acclaim<sup>5</sup>.

Melville died of a heart attack on September 28, 1891 at the age of seventy-two. It wasn't until the 1920s that the literary public began to recognize Herman Melville as one of America's greatest writers. His last novel, *Billy Budd, Sailor*, was posthumously published in 1924.

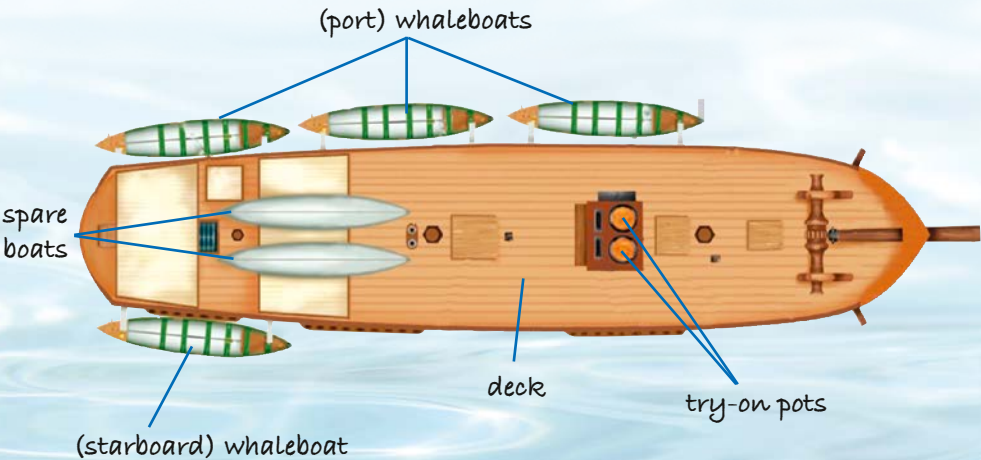
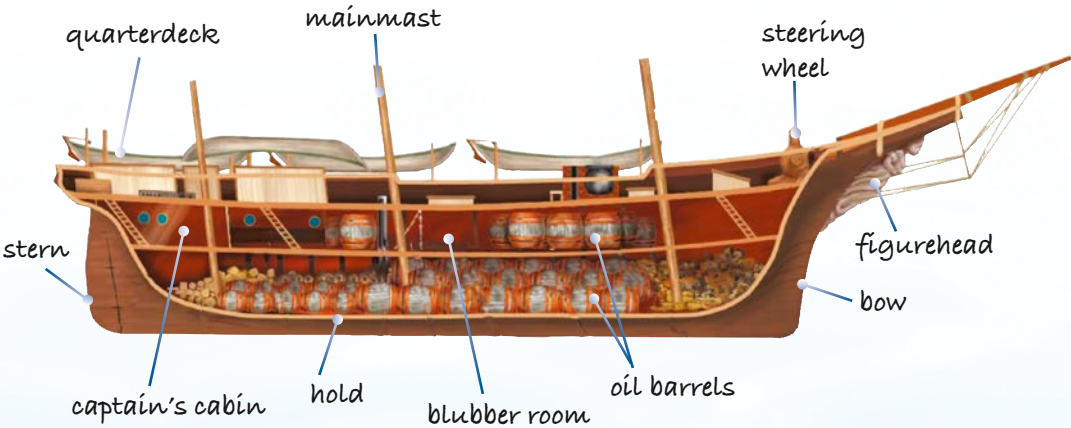
4. *customs inspector*: person who controls the movement of goods and

people across international borders.  
5. *acclaim*: public approval and praise.



*Heart of the Sea* (Ron Howard, 2015)

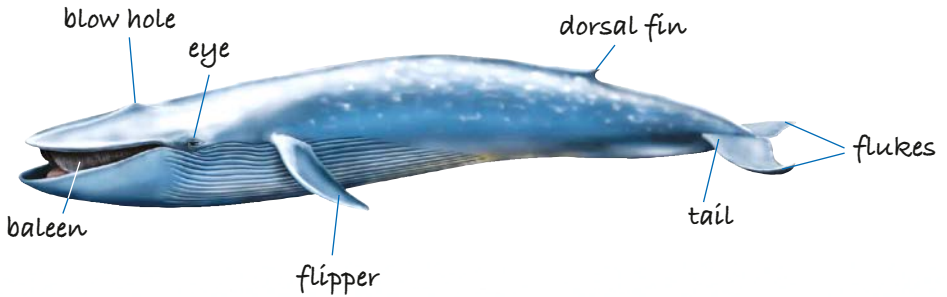
# MAIN PARTS OF A WHALING SHIP



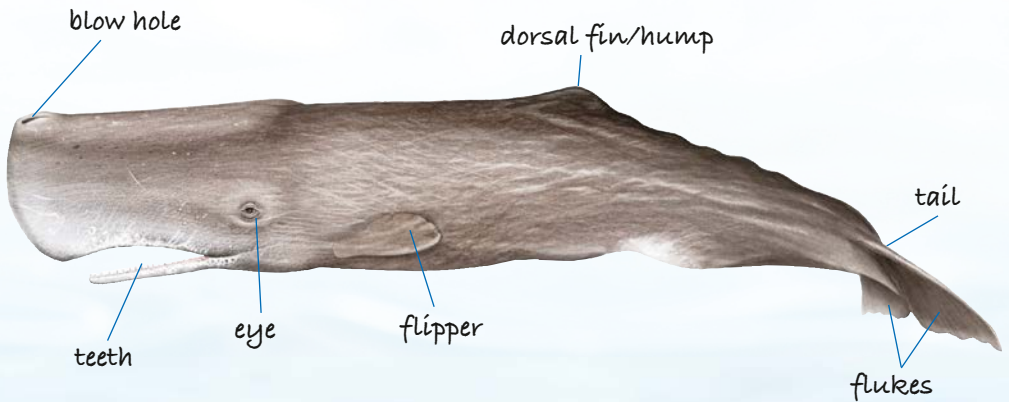


# FEATURES OF THE TWO GROUPS OF WHALES

## BALEEN WHALE (Blue whale)



## TOOTHED WHALE (Sperm whale)



### DID YOU KNOW THAT ...?

Male whales are called *bulls*, females are called *cows* and the young whales are called *calves*.





**BEFORE READING**

- 1 **GEOGRAPHY TEST.** This novel is about the captain of a whaling ship who wants to hunt a huge white whale at any cost. Setting off from the coast of Massachusetts (US), he chases the whale sailing through several seas and oceans as far as north-east Australia. With the aid of the map below, which shows the route of the ship, tick the seas and oceans she will cross.



- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> a. Mediterranean Sea    | <input type="checkbox"/> f. Arctic Ocean    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> b. North Atlantic Ocean | <input type="checkbox"/> g. Antarctic Ocean |
| <input type="checkbox"/> c. South Atlantic Ocean | <input type="checkbox"/> h. Indian Ocean    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> d. North Pacific Ocean  | <input type="checkbox"/> i. Caribbean Sea   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> e. South Pacific Ocean  | <input type="checkbox"/> j. South China Sea |

- 2 **What do you know about whales?** In the table below, five facts are true and five are false. Write T or F in the boxes provided.

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| a. They are fish.                            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. They are mammals.                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. They have warm blood.                     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Mothers give birth by laying eggs.        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. Mothers feed their young with their milk. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. They are hunted for their flesh.          | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g. They never dive under water.              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| h. They are not carnivorous.                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| i. They are the largest animals on Earth.    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| j. Males tend to live on their own.          | <input type="checkbox"/> |



# Moby Dick

## It's time for the sea

### Chapter 1



Call me Ishmael. Some years ago, having little or no money in my purse and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I decided to sail around and see the watery part of the world. Whenever it is a damp November in my soul, whenever I find myself following every funeral I meet, then I understand it is about time I went to sea as soon as I can.

But mind you, I never go to sea as a passenger. No, I go to sea as a simple sailor because they pay me for my trouble, whereas they never pay passengers, do they? On the contrary, passengers must pay. I don't mind taking orders and cleaning decks or making repairs. Finally, I go to sea as a sailor because of the exercise and pure air of the deck.

This time I decided not to sail on a merchant ship but on a whaling<sup>1</sup> one! Perhaps the main reason for my unusual choice was the idea of meeting a whale – the biggest animal in the world. Such a phenomenal and mysterious sea creature excited my curiosity. Then, the wild and distant seas where they live helped to strengthen my wish.

So, I packed my old bag, left New York and arrived in New Bedford, Massachusetts, on a very cold Saturday night in December. I was very disappointed to learn that the small ship for Nantucket Island – the whaling capital of the world – had already sailed. I had to wait till the following Monday for another ship. So, I had to find accommodation and food. I had very little money and knew no one in that town.

'So, wherever you go, Ishmael,' I said to myself, 'be sure to inquire the price.'

But all the inns<sup>2</sup> looked unaffordable<sup>3</sup>. I felt tired, hungry and cold. I was losing hope when, not far from the port, I saw

1. *whaling*: the activity of hunting whales.

2. *inn*: a place where a traveler can get accommodation and food.

3. *unaffordable*: costing so much that one doesn't have enough money to pay for it.



an old sign with these words: “The Spouter Inn – Peter Coffin”.

‘Coffin<sup>4</sup> ... what a strange family name,’ I thought. It was a dilapidated<sup>5</sup> house but that inn was the right place for a cheap, temporary place to stay and so I went in.

I stepped into a badly-lit, stinking<sup>6</sup> room with blackened walls. There were harpoons<sup>7</sup> and lances<sup>8</sup> fixed to the walls, and a large painting of a whale attacking a whaling ship during a storm. I saw some young seamen who were drinking and talking loudly. Soon, I found Peter Coffin, the landlord, a middle-aged man.

“I need a room for tonight and for...”

“Sorry, man. We’re full up,” he interrupted me immediately.

“Oh, are you? I don’t know where to go and I’m very tired.”

“Wait... If you have no objections to sharing a bed with another sailor, a harpooner, I can give you accommodation. I suppose you’re going whaling, so you’d better get used to that sort of thing.”

“Well, I don’t like sleeping two in a bed, two men I mean... But if there’s no other choice... Which of those men is the one?”

“He’s not in now, he’s gone out but he’ll be back soon. Do you want supper? All right, take a seat. It’ll be ready immediately.”

I was soon called for supper and told to go to the next room. It was very cold in there, there was no fire at all – the landlord said he couldn’t afford wood for it. Just two miserable candles lit the room. But the meal was good – meat with potatoes and a large cup of hot tea.

When I finished eating, I asked the landlord if my room-mate had arrived in the meantime. He answered,

“No, he’s still out. But you’ll recognize him immediately, he’s a dark-skinned man.”

“Does he always keep such late hours? It’s nearly twelve o’clock.”

“No,” he answered, “generally he’s an early bird – early to bed and early to rise. But tonight, he went out to sell his head.”

“His head? What do you mean, Mr. Coffin?”

“I think he’s having problems in selling his head, here the market’s overstocked<sup>9</sup>.”

4. *coffin*: a long box in which the body of a dead person is buried.

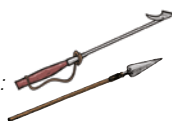
5. *dilapidated*: old and in very bad condition

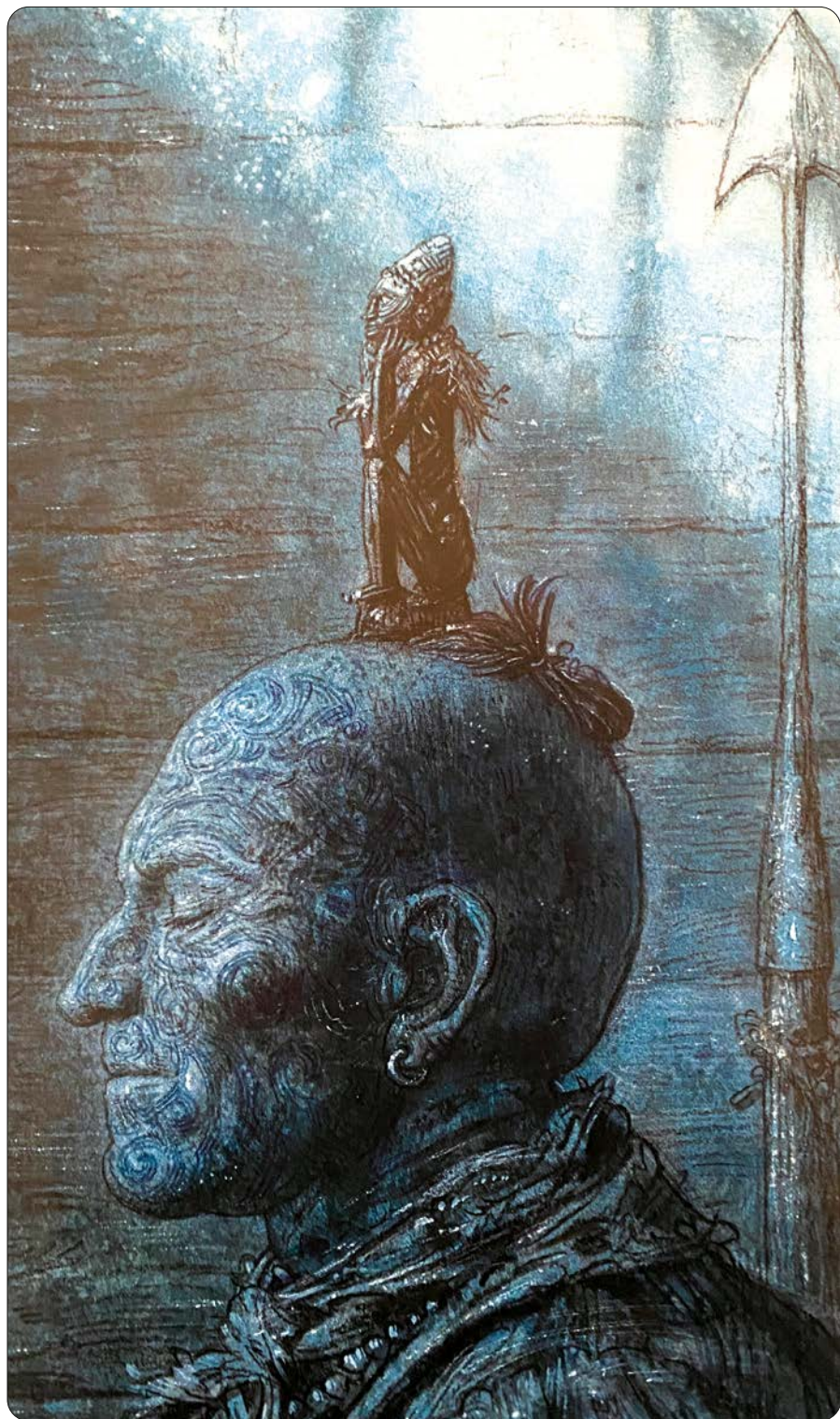
6. *stinking*: having a very unpleasant smell.

7. *harpoon*:

8. *lance*:

9. *is overstocked*: has more supplies than are needed.





Queequeg (illustration by A. Lomaev, Pegasus Books, 2017)



“With what?” shouted I.

“With heads!”

“Hey, are you kidding me?”

“No, listen,” said the landlord with a smile on his face. “This man comes from the South Seas. He brought five dried New Zealand heads. He’s sold all of them except one and tomorrow’s Sunday. It wouldn’t be nice to go around selling a head while people are going to church, would it? So, he’s trying to find a buyer by tonight.”

“But, landlord, that harpooner seems to be a dangerous man! Is he a cannibal?”

“As long as he pays regularly, I don’t mind what he is. But come, it’s getting very late, you’d better go upstairs and sleep.”

The room was small and cold. It just had a big bed and an old chest<sup>10</sup>. I could also see a large seaman’s bag, containing the harpooner’s clothes. There was also a parcel of hooks<sup>11</sup> on the shelf over the unlit fireplace, and a tall harpoon standing at the head of the bed.

I took off my clothes, blew out the candle and immediately jumped into the bed – the room was ice-cold. The mattress was so uncomfortable that I couldn’t get to sleep despite my tiredness. However, I was nearly falling asleep when I heard heavy footsteps in the passage. ‘That must be the harpooner’, I thought.

Holding a light in one hand and a dry head in the other, the stranger entered the room and started to undress. Good heavens, what a sight! He was very tall and muscular, of a dark, purplish, yellow color, with large tattoos all over his body. He had no hair on his head except for a small piece at the back. He looked really frightening!

He opened his bag and put the horrible New Zealand head into it. I thought of slipping out of the window, but it was the second floor. I confess I was now very afraid of him as if he were the devil himself.

He took out of his pocket a little wooden statue, put it in the unlit fireplace and started to pray to it. Then, he took out of his bag a tomahawk<sup>12</sup>, lit it from the lamp at one end and began to smoke tobacco. Finally, he blew out the candle and jumped into the bed.

10. *chest*: (here) a large strong box, usually made of wood, used for storing things.

11. *hook*: 

12. *tomahawk*: 



"Who you? (...) I kill you." And (...) he lifted his tomahawk-pipe to hit me  
(from *Moby Dick* by John Huston, 1956).

He touched me so now I was petrified and unable to speak with fear.

"Who you?" he said. "Who you? You no speak... you no speak me? Well, I kill you." And saying so, he lifted his tomahawk-pipe to hit me.

"Landlord, for God's sake, Peter Coffin!" shouted I. "Landlord! Watch! Coffin! Angels! Save me!"

"Speak! Tell me who you be, or I kill you!" cried the stranger in a deep voice.

But thank heaven, at that moment the landlord came into the room light in hand. Jumping from the bed, I ran up to him.

"Don't be afraid now," said Coffin grinning<sup>13</sup>. "Queequeg wouldn't harm a hair of your head. Queequeg, listen, you'll be sharing the bed with this man, understand?"

The tattooed man nodded and, pointing with his tomahawk-pipe to the other side of the bed, he said to me, "You get in." He did this in a civil and kind way. I stood looking at him a moment and I thought that it was better to sleep with a sober<sup>14</sup> cannibal than a drunken Christian.

"Good night, landlord," said I, "you may go."

I got into bed again and fell asleep almost immediately. I never slept better in my life.

13. *grinning*: smiling widely.

14. *sober*: not drunk.



When I woke up the next morning, I found Queequeg's arm thrown over me in the most loving and affectionate manner.

"Queequeg," I said quietly, "wake up." But he wouldn't wake up. So, I slipped under his arm and called him loudly this time. He shook himself all over and sat up in bed, looking at me and rubbing his eyes. Then, he got out of bed, started dressing and then got washed. Soon after, Queequeg took some soap and, to my great astonishment, shaved himself with the head of his harpoon! Finally, he went downstairs.

Afterwards, I followed him into the bar-room, now full of sailors who were nearly all whalemén. We all ate hot rolls and drank coffee, except Queequeg, who had a lot of rare<sup>15</sup> beefsteak. After breakfast, he lighted his tomahawk-pipe sitting quietly and I went out to take a walk.

New Bedford is a lovely city and you do not only see sailors and fishermen but also fine, civilized people. The houses are well built and some of them are elegant and impressive. Among its buildings, there stands the Whaleman's Chapel, a place that everybody visits when in this town. In this religious construction, I saw several memorials to seamen lost at sea. One of them struck me most and read:

*SACRED TO THE MEMORY OF THE LATE CAPTAIN EZEKIEL HARDY,  
WHO WAS KILLED BY A WHALE IN THE SEA OF JAPAN, AUG 3<sup>RD</sup>, 1833.  
THIS TABLET IS ERECTED TO HIS MEMORY BY HIS WIDOW.*

Killed by a whale? I shuddered<sup>16</sup> at the thought of what could happen to me. I sat down and was surprised to see Queequeg near me. He looked around like a curious, excited child in a toy shop. After a while, the priest, Father Mapple, arrived and went to a strange pulpit<sup>17</sup>, built like the bow of a ship. Incredible but true, the old man climbed up to the pulpit on a rope ladder! He had been a sailor himself in his youth and was loved by everyone. He

15. *rare*: (of meat) not cooked for very long and still red.

16. *shudder*: to shake suddenly because of a very unpleasant

thought or feeling.

17. *pulpit*: a raised place in a church from which the priest speaks to the people.



Soon I proposed a social smoke and, producing his tomahawk-pipe, he offered me a puff (*Moby Dick*, San Francisco Opera, photo by C. Weaver, 2012)

addressed his congregation<sup>18</sup> by calling them ‘Shipmates’. His sermon was about Jonah, the biblical prophet<sup>19</sup> who was swallowed by a whale. I shuddered again.

Returning to the inn, I found Queequeg there all alone; he had left the church before me. He was sitting on a bench before the fire holding that little idol of his, whose name was Yojo. You cannot hide your soul – through all his tattoos, I could see the traces of a simple, honest heart; and his large, deep eyes seemed symbols of a spirit that could fight against a thousand devils. Here was a man some twenty thousand miles from home, thrown among people as strange to him as though he were on the planet Jupiter. And yet, he seemed entirely at his ease, showing absolute calmness, content with me, his new friend, equal to himself.

Soon I proposed a social smoke and, producing his tomahawk-pipe, he offered me a puff. And then, we sat exchanging puffs from that strange pipe, regularly passing it between us. When our smoke was over, he pressed his forehead against mine, embraced me round the waist, and said that from this time we were very close friends – he would gladly die for me, if necessary.

After supper, and another social smoke, we went to our room together. He made me a present of his last dry head and gave

18. *congregation*: a group of people who have come together in a religious building.

19. *prophet*: a person sent by God to teach the people and give them messages from God.



me half of his thirty dollars in silver and said it was mine. I refused his generous gift but he insisted and pushed the coins into my trousers pockets. I let them stay. Then, he prayed to his wooden idol. I am a good Christian but decided to join him in his prayers because he had been to the Whaleman's Chapel in the morning. We both were religious men even though he was a pagan<sup>20</sup>.

But we did not go to sleep without some little chat. I asked Queequeg to tell me about himself. At first, I had problems understanding his English, but picking up some keywords, I practically got all he said.

He was the son of the King of Kokovoko, an island in the South Seas, and a member of a primitive tribe that practiced cannibalism eating the flesh<sup>21</sup> of enemies killed in battle. Queequeg was a skilled hunter and a brave warrior<sup>22</sup>. However, since he was a young boy, he had wanted to see the Christian world. One day, an American ship stopped there and just before they were sailing away, he asked the captain if he could join the crew. Queequeg was rejected but he didn't give up. He took a boat and very quickly rowed it to the ship. When he reached it, he kicked the boat away and managed to climb up. The captain admired his determination and courage, and decided to let him stay. Queequeg had left the island and had gone to sea because he was curious about the outside world and wanted to learn about other cultures; he was also seeking adventure and excitement. He had sailed around the world three times and had quickly become a skilled harpooner.

I told him that whaling was my desire, and informed him of my intention to sail to Nantucket, the most promising port for a whaleman to embark from. He immediately decided to accompany me to that island and to share his life with mine. I happily agreed because, besides the affection I now felt for Queequeg, he was an experienced harpooner, and as such, he could be very useful to me, as I was absolutely ignorant of the mysteries of whaling, though very familiar with the sea.

20. *pagan*: a person who holds religious beliefs that are not part of any of the world's main religions.

21. *flesh*: the soft part of the body of

a person or animal that is between the skin and the bones.

22. *warrior*: a soldier, usually one who has both experience and skill in fighting, especially in the past.

...three ships were going whaling, all on a three-year voyage. I chose one called *Pequod* (illustration by M. Summers from *Moby Dick*, Barnes & Noble Books, 1994).

His story being ended with his pipe's last dying puff, Queequeg embraced me, pressed his forehead against mine, and blowing out the light, we went to bed, and very soon were sleeping.

The next morning, Monday, after selling the dry head to a barber, we sailed to Nantucket. Here we were told that three ships were going whaling, all on a three-year voyage. I chose one called *Pequod*, which was

an old-fashioned, three-masted<sup>23</sup> ship decorated with whale bones.

I saw a man on the ship who seemed to be the captain and cried, "Ahoy!<sup>24</sup> Are you the captain of this ship?"

"No, I'm Captain Peleg, one of her owners. What do you want?"

"I'd like to sign on<sup>25</sup> as a member of the crew."

"Ah, would you? Have you ever been whaling?" said Captain Peleg.

"No, Sir, never. But I'm a quick learner and I'm sure I'll be able to..."

"Ha, ha. So, you learn quickly... Have you met Captain Ahab?"

"No, who's Captain Ahab?"

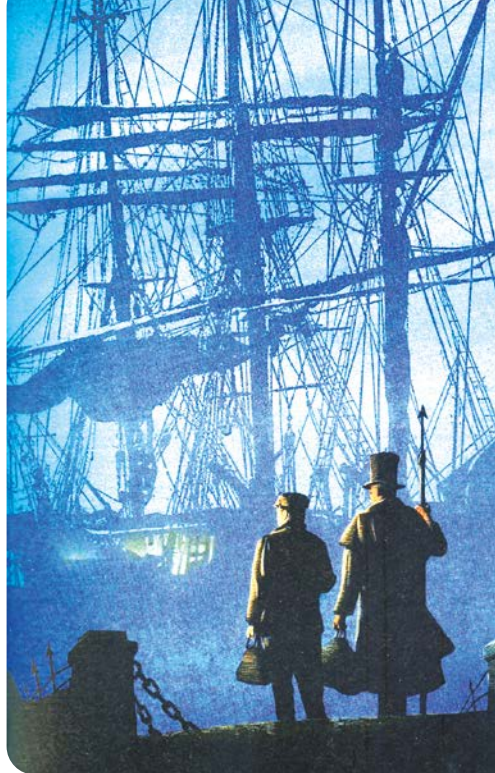
"The captain of the *Pequod*, an excellent sailor. He's sick right now. You can recognize him because he's only got one leg. The other one was eaten by the biggest and most monstrous whale of the seas!"

"Oh, how terrible! But not all whales do that, I imagine, do they?"

"No, not all of them, that's right. Do you still want to sign on?"

"Yes, I do."

"All right, come aboard<sup>26</sup>, then."



23. *three-masted*: with three masts.

24. *ahoy*: a shout used, especially by people in boats, to attract attention.

25. *sign on*: to sign a contract which says

that you agree to do a job.

26. *aboard*: on or onto a ship (also plane, bus or train).



"Sir, I have a friend with me here who wants to sign on, too."

"That man? He's very strange... He looks like a pagan."

"He's been whaling for many years, he's an expert harpooner."

"Mm... I don't know..."

Noticing the man's doubts about him, Queequeg took his harpoon, quickly tied a rope to its ring tightly and, aiming at a glass bottle floating a long way away in the sea, said,

"Cap'ain, you see bottle on water dere? You see 'im? Well, look you!"

He threw the harpoon which hit the bottle and smashed it. Then, he drew the harpoon back to the quay<sup>27</sup>. The co-owner of the *Pequod* was amazed and immediately told him to sign on, too.

We were told to come back the morning after to bring our bags and help with the preparation of the ship. While we were going back to the inn, a shabby<sup>28</sup>, old man approached us and said,

"Hey, mates, are you going to embark on that ship?"

"The *Pequod*, you mean? Yes, why?" I asked.

"Have you already met Captain Ahab?"

"No, we haven't. He's sick now but he'll be all right soon."

"Ha, ha! He'll be all right soon... He'll be all right soon..., ha, ha!" The strange man started to laugh in a crazy way. "Listen to me, that man will never be all right, do you understand?"

"Hey, what are you saying? Are you a little strange in the head? We know he lost one leg because of a whale but they say he's a good..."

"It's not only his leg! That man's a demon and that ship's doomed<sup>29</sup>!"

"Demon... doomed... You must be crazy! What's your name?"

"Elijah," he replied and walked away laughing like a madman.

Elijah, I thought, was a biblical prophet who predicted the death of an evil king, whose name was... Ahab! For a while, I thought about this ominous<sup>30</sup> meeting. I was worried about the voyage but then I said to myself: 'That crazy old man won't ruin my new sea experience!'.

---

27. *quay*: a platform in a harbor where boats come in to take on and off their goods.

28. *shabby*: badly dressed in clothes that have been worn a lot.

29. *doomed*: certain to fail, or be destroyed.

30. *ominous*: suggesting that something unpleasant is likely to happen in the future.

**WORKING ON THE TEXT**

**1** Answer the following questions.

- a. What reasons does Ishmael give for going to sea?
- b. Describe "The Spouter" Inn where Ishmael found accommodation.
- c. Where was Ishmael's roommate and what was he doing?
- d. Who is Queequeg and where does he come from?
- e. Describe Queequeg's appearance.
- f. What was strange about Queequeg's shaving and his breakfast?
- g. Describe New Bedford.
- h. What was unusual in the pulpit of the Whaleman's Chapel?
- i. What does Ishmael mean by saying: "You cannot hide your soul"?
- j. What presents did Queequeg give Ishmael?
- k. How did Queequeg convince the captain of the American ship to take him aboard?
- l. Why was Ishmael happy about Queequeg's decision to accompany him to Nantucket?
- m. Who was the man on the *Pequod* Ishmael talks to?
- n. How did Queequeg convince Capt. Peleg to take him aboard?
- o. What did Elijah warn Ishmael and Queequeg of?

**2A** Decide whether the following sentences are true or false.

- |   | T                        | F                        |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. New Bedford was the whaling capital of the world.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Ishmael wanted a room for one night.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Sailors are used to sharing accommodation.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. The meal was as poor as the inn's condition.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. Queequeg ate both human and animal flesh.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. The room in the inn was heated by a fireplace.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g. Queequeg's tomahawk had two functions.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| h. Ishmael would rather have slept with a Christian, even if he had been drunk, than with a cannibal. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| i. One of the memorials in the Whaleman's Chapel was devoted to a captain killed by a shark.          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| j. In Kokovoko, Queequeg was a prince.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| k. The man Ishmael talks to was the captain of the ship.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| l. In the Bible, Elijah was a prophet and Ahab a king.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**2B** Now correct the false sentences in your exercise book.



## WORKING ON VOCABULARY

3 Match each noun to its antonym.

- |               |                          |              |
|---------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| a. landlord   | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. certainty |
| b. early bird | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. boredom   |
| c. tiredness  | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. concern   |
| d. serenity   | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. energy    |
| e. excitement | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. night owl |
| f. doubt      | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. tenant    |

4 Use some of the above antonyms to complete these sentences.

- Captain Ahab's health was giving serious cause for .....
- Ishmael signed on mostly to relieve ..... and depression.
- A ..... is a person who pays rent for the use of a building.
- A ..... is a person who enjoys staying up late at night.

## WORKING ON GRAMMAR

5 **COMPOUND ADJECTIVES.** In English, it is possible to transform a noun into a past participle by simply adding the suffix *-ed*; combined with an adjective, we obtain a Compound Adjective. Transform the following sentences using a two-word Compound Adjective.

- Mr. Coffin is a man in middle age → Mr. Coffin is a *middle-aged* man.
- Whales are sea animals that have warm blood.  
Whales are ..... sea animals.
  - Ishmael's roommate is a man whose skin is of a dark color.  
Ishmael's roommate is a ..... man.
  - Queequeg is a cannibal with a kind heart.  
Queequeg is a ..... cannibal.
  - The *Pequod* is a ship with three masts.  
The *Pequod* is a ..... ship.
  - Peleg tells Ishmael that Ahab has one leg.  
Peleg tells Ishmael that Ahab is a ..... man.

6 **The Cannibal's Cauldron.** Queequeg speaks broken English, i.e. his English is full of mistakes. Find his statements in this chapter and write them correctly in your exercise book.



## WORKING ON SKILLS

## Listening



7

**B2 First** *Towns in Moby Dick.* Listen to an analysis on the American places Melville talks about in Chapter 1 and complete the text below.

Melville often writes of the (1)..... towns on the north-eastern coast of the United States. Here, New York, (2)..... and Nantucket are all places that deal in (3)..... and other port activities. New Bedford is also a very (4)..... town – rather than the relatively (5)..... town it is today – and New York has yet to become one of the (6)..... largest and most prosperous cities. In this chapter, a man from (7)..... and a man from New York City quietly and happily (8)..... together in New Bedford and in Nantucket – these (9)..... places were among the most diverse and (10)..... American towns in the mid-1800s.

## Speaking

8

Religious issues in *Moby Dick*. Comment on the following statement made by Ishmael; then, answer the question below.

- *Then, Queequeg prayed to his wooden idol. I am a good Christian but decided to join him in his prayers.*
- *Why was Father Mapple loved by everyone?*

## Writing

9

**B2 First** Imagine you are Ishmael looking forward to sailing off from Nantucket toward your new whaling experience. Write a letter to your parents using 140-190 words. Tell them:

- *how you have settled in New Bedford*
- *about a 'strange' friend you have met there*
- *about the whaling ship you are going to sail on.*

21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY SKILLS

10

Six of the sixteen skills required for students of the 21<sup>st</sup> century refer to *Character Qualities*: Curiosity • Initiative • Determination • Adaptability • Leadership • Social and Cultural Awareness.

Queequeg seems to have all of these Character Qualities, except one. Can you say which one it is and give examples for the other five?



## ISHMAEL, QUEEQUEG AND RACISM

In the time of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, in which racism was particularly strong, in *Moby Dick*, Herman Melville compares **civilization and savagery**<sup>1</sup>. By placing a “civilized” protagonist (Ishmael) alongside a “savage” co-protagonist (Queequeg), Melville intends to show the similarities between two seemingly<sup>2</sup>-opposite characters.

When Ishmael meets Queequeg (probably a Maori) in the Spouter Inn, at first, he is scared to death; later on, he claims that *“it’s better to sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian”*. This statement expresses clearly Melville’s idea that **external appearance and customs do not necessarily reflect the quality of the internal being** – never judge a book by its cover, as the saying goes.

This opposes the popular ideas of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century which claimed that whites were naturally superior to all others. The relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg shows the readers that the belonging to an ethnic group or another **does not mean that one person is morally better than another**. This was a belief shared among all white supremacists<sup>3</sup> at the time when Melville wrote *Moby Dick*.

The pleasant Polynesian harpooner contributes significantly to the **themes of friendship and diversity** in the novel. Although Queequeg is a pagan, Ishmael increasingly notices the man’s independence, dignity<sup>4</sup>, good heart, extraordinary courage, and generous spirit.

1. *savagery*: (here) uncivilized condition.
2. *seemingly*: appearing to be.
3. *supremacist*: a person who believes that their own race is better than others and should be in power.
4. *dignity*: calm, serious, and controlled behavior that makes people respect you.





*Moby Dick alla prova, Teatro dell'Elfo (photo by M. Foccardi, 2022)*

Born a prince, Queequeg gave up a life of comfort on his native island when he climbed aboard a visiting American whaling ship and insisted on joining her crew. His purpose was to experience the world of which he had only heard stories – the Christian world. Ishmael, too, wants to see the world. What they discover is that **a man's soul is more important than his appearance or even his religion.**

Although the theme of friendship receives less consideration once the *Pequod* sails, Queequeg is a constant presence in Ishmael's life and he will show his deep feelings toward Queequeg when the latter falls seriously ill – **a remarkable example of friendship and racial tolerance**<sup>5</sup>.

Queequeg personifies<sup>6</sup> the idea of otherness<sup>7</sup> throughout the story. As we will see in the following chapters, the destruction of the myth of the "other" allows Melville to create a radically diverse community on the *Pequod* (see also Extension 2). The American writer shows the **hierarchy**<sup>8</sup> of society with whites at the top, expressing their superiority over the non-whites, but simultaneously shows the non-whites in a positive light. In some cases, he represents them as deserving more respect than the whites.

*Moby Dick* shows the **ignorance of whites through the stereotypes** they make about non-whites, and their beliefs that any skin color different from the color white is considered "savage".

5. *tolerance*: willingness to accept behavior and beliefs different from your own.

7. *personify*: to be a perfect example of something.

8. *otherness*: being different in

appearance/character from what is generally accepted.

9. *hierarchy*: a system in which people are arranged according to their importance.





# Moby Dick

Moby Dick, Herman Melville’s masterpiece, is considered one of the greatest novels in world literature. Ishmael, a simple sailor, relates his adventures on board an American whaling ship. Her gloomy but charismatic captain, Ahab, is a tortured soul – he is obsessed by the desire and determination to hunt a gigantic white whale that has taken off one of his legs. He wants to take revenge on the animal at any cost, indifferent to danger, weather conditions, the ship’s original mission, and the sailors’ lives. The reader is enriched by stimulating in-depth analyses about racism, globalization, whales and whaling, and the main themes of the novel.

beginner

• A1 (Breakthrough)

elementary

• A2 (Waystage)

pre-intermediate

• B1 (Threshold)

✓ intermediate

• B2 (Vantage) .....

post-intermediate

• C1 (Effectiveness)

Levels of accredited examination boards:

Cambridge English:	First
Trinity:	Grade 7, 8 / ISE II
City & Guilds (Pitman):	Intermediate
ESB:	Intermediate 2, 3
Edexcel:	Intermediate



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