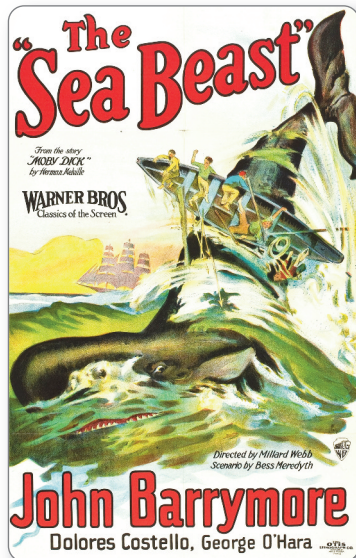




## MOBY DICK ON SCREENS AND STAGES

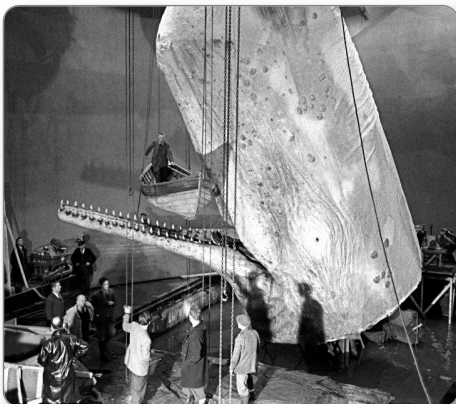


*The Sea Beast* (1926) is a silent movie directed by Millard Webb, starring John Barrymore, George O'Hara and Dolores Costello. It is the first adaptation of Melville's novel. However, this adaptation alters the novel's plotline by creating prequel<sup>1</sup> and sequel<sup>2</sup> elements not present in the original story – such as the love story between Esther and Ahab and the latter's safe return, respectively – and replaces Melville's tragic ending with a happy ending one.



*Moby Dick* (1930). In this extremely loose adaptation of Melville's novel, initially Ahab is not a bitter and revengeful<sup>3</sup> madman, but a lovable young man. In New Bedford, he meets and falls for Faith Mapple, daughter of the local minister. On one of his voyages, however, Ahab loses a leg to the monstrous Moby Dick. When he returns to New Bedford, he wrongly believes Faith doesn't want him because of his damaged appearance. So Ahab returns to sea with only one goal in mind – to kill the great White Whale.

**Director:** Lloyd Bacon; **Stars:** John Barrymore, Joan Bennett, Lloyd Hughes.



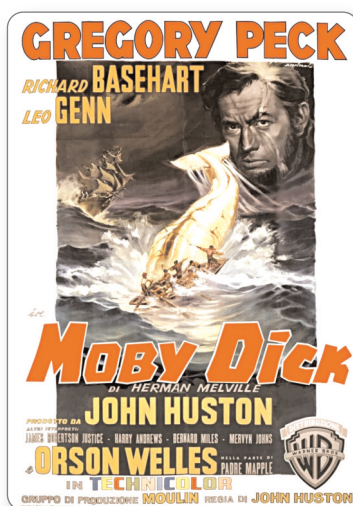
*Moby Dick* (1954). In this TV movie, the crazy, ruthless<sup>4</sup> Captain Ahab pursues the White Whale which took off his leg years before. **Director:** Albert McCleery; **Stars:** Sarah Churchill, Victor Jory, Lamont Johnson.

<sup>1</sup> *prequel*: a film about events that happened before those in a film that has already appeared.

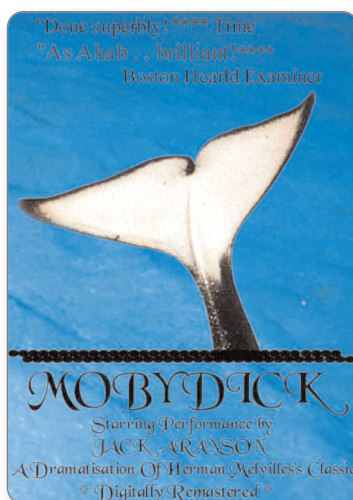
<sup>2</sup> *sequel*: a film that continues the story of an earlier one.

<sup>3</sup> *revengeful*: wanting revenge.

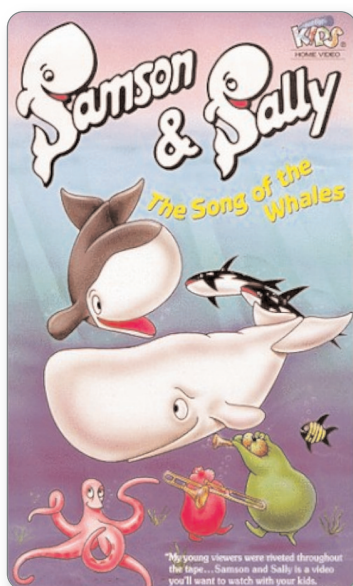
<sup>4</sup> *ruthless*: not thinking or worrying about any pain or sorrow caused to others.



**Moby Dick** (1956). The only survivor of a destroyed whaling ship tells the story of his captain's self-destructive obsession to hunt Moby Dick. It is considered the best adaptation of Melville's masterpiece. It received very positive reviews from critics and audiences and was a commercial success. John Huston won the Best Director Award. Gregory Peck's superb interpretation of Ahab is considered one of his best movie performances. The screenplay<sup>5</sup> was written by Huston himself together with Ray Bradbury, one of the most celebrated 20th-century American writers.



**Moby Dick** (1978). It is a movie with only one actor: Jack Aranson, a Shakespearean actor, who plays Ahab. Aranson gives life to Melville's poetic dialogue. It was directed by Paul Stanley. This film has been called the most authentic version of Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* by some critics.

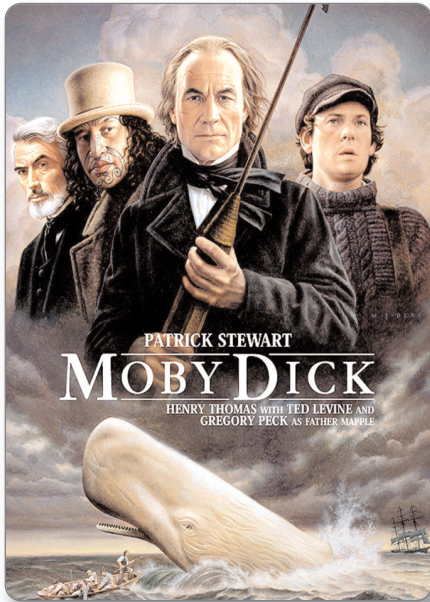


**Samson & Sally** (1984). Samson is a young whale that doesn't have friends. He spends his time listening to his mother's stories about the legendary<sup>6</sup> whale Moby Dick. Samson becomes fascinated about it and decides to go on a journey to find Moby Dick. This animated movie is based on the novel *The Song of the Whales* by Danish author Bent Haller.  
**Director:** Jannik Hastrup; **Voices:** Jesper Klein, Helle Hertz, Per Pallesen.

<sup>5</sup> **screenplay:** the words that are written for a film (= the script), together with instructions for how it is to be acted and filmed.

<sup>6</sup> **legendary:** very famous, admired and talked about a lot by people.



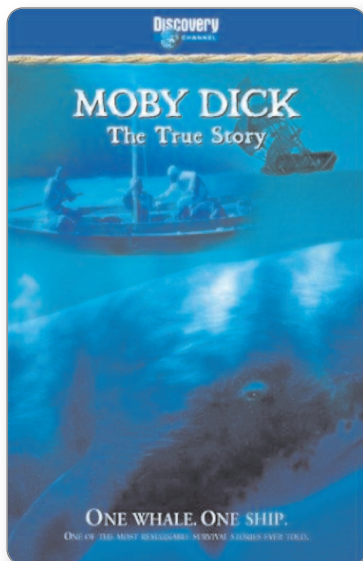


***Moby Dick*** (1998). It is an American television miniseries directed by Franc Roddam, and produced by Francis Ford Coppola. It was filmed in Australia in 1997 and first released in the United States in 1998. The miniseries consisted of two episodes, each running two hours. This is Gregory Peck's final on-screen role. Other actors are: Patrick Stewart, Henry Thomas and Ted Levine.

### ***Moby Dick – The True Story*** (2002).

This TV movie is the true story of the surviving sailors whose whaling ship – the *Essex* – was destroyed by a sperm whale. Herman Melville based his novel upon this true story (see Listening Activity on p. 121).

**Director:** Christopher Rowley; **Stars:** Greg Atkins, Justin Chatwin, Curtis Harrison.



### ***Monster Quest: The Real Moby Dick*** (2009).

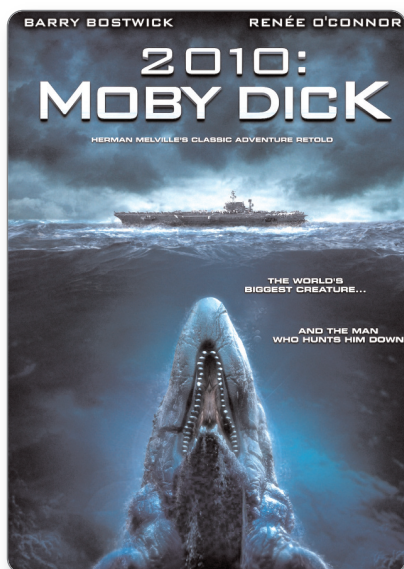
Monster Quest was a program that dealt with the search for various monsters reportedly<sup>7</sup> witnessed around the world. Following the reports of attacks that inspired *Moby Dick*, an investigative team searches for albino<sup>8</sup> sperm whales to see if there is any truth about their aggressive nature. This TV episode takes place in the Azores. History channel revived the Monster Quest series for special episodes beginning on August 28, 2020.

**Director:** Dave Zdon; **Stars:** Stan Bernard, H.T. Altman, Sasha Andreev.



<sup>7</sup> reportedly: according to what many people say.

<sup>8</sup> albino: born with no pigment (= color) in the hair or skin, which are white, or in the eyes, which are pink.



*2010: Moby Dick* is a 2010 American thriller film which is a loose adaptation of *Moby Dick*. The captain of a submarine hunts a gigantic prehistoric whale that took off his leg years before. The film stars Barry Bostwick as Captain Ahab, Renee O'Connor, Michael B. Teh, and Adam Grimes. It is directed by Trey Stokes.



*Age of the Dragons* (2011). In this fantasy movie, the great White Whale is the great White Dragon. Ahab has been badly damaged by the fire of the dragon, which has killed all his family as well. So, Ahab wants to take revenge against the beast.

Harpooner Ishmael joins Ahab on the *Pequod*, here an armored<sup>9</sup> land boat. **Director:** Ryan Little; **Stars:** Danny Glover, Corry Sevier and Vinnie Jones.



*In the Heart of the Sea* is a 2015 historical adventure drama film directed and co-produced by Ron Howard from a screenplay by Charles Leavitt. An international co-production between the United States and Spain, the film stars Chris Hemsworth, Benjamin Walker, Cillian Murphy, Tom Holland, Ben Whishaw and Brendan Gleeson. It is based on Nathaniel Philbrick's 2000 non-fiction book *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex*, about the sinking of the American whaling ship *Essex* in 1820, an event that in part inspired Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (see Listening Activity on p. 121). *In the Heart of the Sea* received mixed reviews from critics and was not a box-office<sup>10</sup> success.

<sup>9</sup> *armored*: protected by a strong covering.

<sup>10</sup> *box office*: the place at a theatre, cinema, etc. where the tickets are sold

<sup>11</sup> *props*: objects used by actors during the performance of a play or in a film.

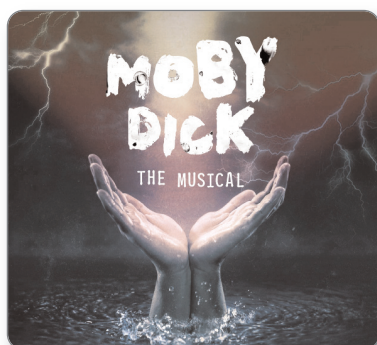
<sup>12</sup> *broom*: a brush on the end of a long handle, used for sweeping floors.



There have been a number of adaptations of *Moby Dick* in various other media, such as **radio programs, theater, music, comics, graphic novels, and literature**. Below are the most significant stage performances.



***Moby Dick Rehearsed*** (1955). It is a two-act drama by Orson Welles. The original cast included Welles himself, Christopher Lee, Kenneth Williams and Joan Plowright. Welles used minimal stage design. The stage was bare, the actors appeared in contemporary street clothes, and the props<sup>11</sup> were reduced to the minimum. For example, brooms<sup>12</sup> were used for oars, and a stick was used for a telescope.



***Moby Dick! The Musical***, a West End musical that premiered<sup>13</sup> in 1990. Money for a woman's college has run out, and the place will have to close. Using whatever they can find at hand, the girls mount an original production to collect money: a musical version of *Moby Dick*, featuring their headmistress in the role of Captain Ahab.



In 2000, **Jim Burke's adaptation of Moby Dick** toured the UK aboard the *Fitzcarraldo*, a theatre ship, in a co-production with Liverpool company Kaboodle. It won Best New Play and Best Fringe Production in the *Manchester Evening News* Theatre Awards.



Composer Jake Heggie and librettist<sup>14</sup> Gene Scheer wrote the **opera Moby-Dick** for the Dallas Opera's inaugural season in the Winspear Opera House. It premiered on April 30, 2010, with tenor Ben Heppner as Captain Ahab. The opera has since been staged by the State Opera of South Australia (August 2011), Calgary Opera (January 2012), San Diego Opera (February 2012), San Francisco Opera (October 2012), Washington National Opera (February/March 2014), and Los Angeles Opera (November 2015).

<sup>13</sup> *premiered*: performed a play or piece of music or showed a film/movie to an audience for the first time.

<sup>14</sup> *librettist*: a person who writes the words for a musical work for the theatre