

Moby Dick

Herman Melville

A Before Reading

- 1 a In the 1800s, whaling was an important American industry for the collection of oil, but a dangerous activity for the crews of the whaling ships, who were often away at sea for several years. What dangers do you think they faced at sea? Write a list.

Example: *illness and disease*

- b Which other animals have been hunted in the past or now? Why? Do you think hunting can be necessary or should it be illegal?
- 2 The story includes vocabulary connected to ships, whales and death. Some of these words are in the box below. Write the words in the correct column in the table. You can use page 6 of the book to help with the first two columns.

drown sails jaw tail deck anchor spout rigging
coffin fin hearse mast stern

Parts of a ship	Parts of a whale	Death
	<i>spout</i>	

- 3 a *Moby Dick* is one of the most famous works of American literature and it starts with the famous opening line "*Call me Ismael*". Do you know any other books with famous first lines? How important is the first line of a story in your opinion?
- b Do you think that *Moby Dick* is a true story based on real facts or a fictional, invented one? Now read page 5 of the book to check your answer. Do you usually prefer reading true stories or fiction?
- c *Moby Dick* is the name of the white whale in the story. Do you know any other stories in which one of the most important characters is an animal?

B While reading

- 4 During the voyage, the *Pequod* meets many other ships. As you read, keep a record of the ships she meets, where they come from and what news they give of Moby Dick.

Name of ship	Country of origin	News of Moby Dick
<i>The Albatross</i>	<i>England</i>	<i>No news, as it was too windy to hear the captain's words.</i>

- 5 a The characters in the story give a lot of importance to signs which they believe show good or bad luck. As you read, make a list of these signs.

Signs of good luck	Signs of bad luck
<i>Ismael choosing the ship he would sail on with Queequeg</i>	<i>Elijah's warning</i>

- b Are you a superstitious person? If so, which objects, signs and actions do you believe can bring good or bad luck? Do you think that people now are more or less superstitious than they were in the 1800s?

C After Reading

6 a **Queequeg describes his motivations for travelling as a sailor:**

"I wanted to learn about different lands and different people. Then I planned to go back to my island and teach these things to my own people. I believed I would learn things to make my people even happier and cleverer. But I soon discovered that people everywhere can be both miserable and bad." (page 14)

Do you think that travelling helps you learn new things and makes you happier and cleverer? Or can we learn as much by staying at home? Write your ideas of the advantages and disadvantages of travelling in the table.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<i>You can learn new things and become more open-minded</i>	<i>It's time-consuming and sometimes uncomfortable</i>

7 *"Moby Dick... is also known as the story about an individual's struggle against fate or against nature, and about the battle between good and evil, the great white whale symbolising evil. However, Ahab's determination to destroy the whale can be seen as evil and wicked too."* (page 5)

- a In your opinion, does good or evil win in the end? Is Ahab crazy to be angry with an animal, as Starbuck suggests (page 25), or is it normal for him to want revenge for his lost leg? Could the crew have stopped him trying for revenge?
- b Like Queequeg, do you believe that we can choose whether or not to live or die (page 59)? Or, as Fedallah accepted his death, do we have to accept fate?

8 a Were you surprised by the end of the story? Did you guess that Ismael was the 'third man'? Is it a believable ending that he managed to survive?

- b Write a different ending for the story in which Ahab is successful in killing *Moby Dick* on his third attempt. Include details of:
 - how Ahab killed the whale
 - how Ahab and the crew reacted to the killing and what they did afterwards

9 **Write a character study of one of the characters from the story. Include details of:**

- their physical appearance
- their personality and what they believe and want
- their role on the ship and in the whale hunting
- their death (if they died)