

"Moby Dick is an enormous whale who accidentally hurt a captain called Ahab. I was sad when the whale was caught." James, 9



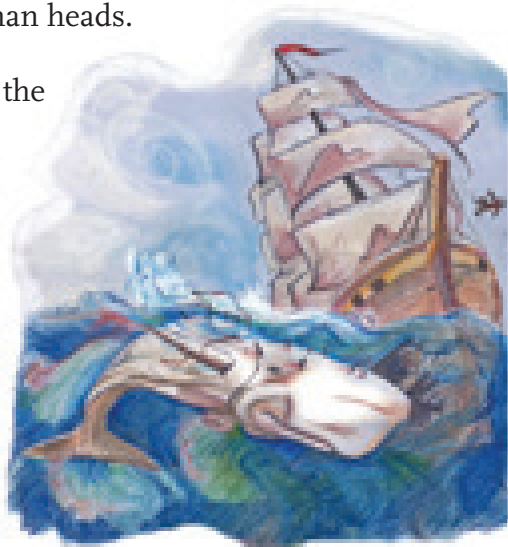
'Breach your last to the sun, Moby Dick!' cried Ahab. 'Thy hour and thy harpoon are at hand!'

Why does Captain Ahab look like a man who's being crucified? How did he come by that hideous scar and the false leg made of a whale's bone? And why is he obsessed by Moby Dick, the great white whale?

Ishmael, the new recruit, has other strange shipmates. There's Queequeg for instance, covered in weird tattoos and selling shrunken human heads.

And what of the shadowy figures creeping on board the whaling ship *Pequod*?

Ahab leads them all in reckless pursuit of Moby Dick. Will he succeed in killing the whale, or will Moby Dick lure Ahab and his crew to destruction?



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Lexile® Level	AR Level	Word Count
730L	4.5	6,393

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MOBY DICK

Herman Melville

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HERMAN MELVILLE



Retold by Margaret Elphinstone
Illustrated by Katy Elphinstone

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Accelerated Reader

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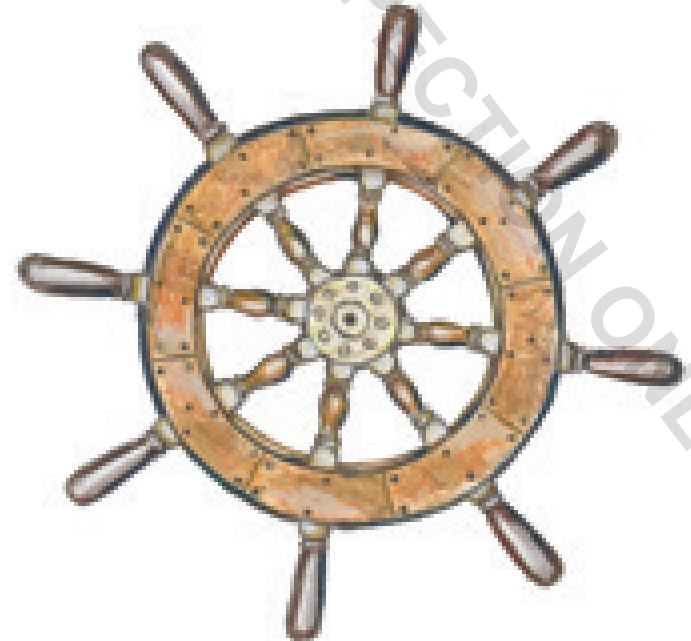


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THE CHARACTERS



Captain Ahab

Ahab is determined to pursue Moby Dick to the death. But whose death?

Ishmael

Ishmael wants adventure, but will he survive the whaling trip with the obsessive Captain Ahab?



Queequeg

At first Queequeg terrifies Ishmael. So why do they become friends?



Tashtego and Daggoo

Why does Ahab need Tashtego and Daggoo? What do they contribute to the ship?

Fedallah

Who is Fedallah, Ahab's mysterious companion? Exotic stowaway, or something more sinister?



Starbuck, Stubb and Flask

These three mates run the ship, but are they really backing Ahab?

Moby Dick

Whalers around the world dread Moby Dick, but what is it that is so scary about this particular whale?





‘And God created great whales.’
The Bible, Book of Genesis

MOBY DICK

Call me Ishmael.

It was snowing when I arrived. Lights shone from inn windows into icy streets. I came to a smoky light under a sign – *The Spouter Inn* – on a bleak corner where the wind howled. Inside it was like the bulwarks of an old condemned ship. Arching over the bar was a whale’s jawbone. The walls were hung with spears and harpoons. Some seamen were looking at pieces of carved whale ivory. All this was new to me. I’d never been in Nantucket before, but I’d decided to go whaling. I was curious about the idea of a great whale.

The landlord said he didn’t have a separate room. ‘You ain’t no objections to sharing a harpooner’s blanket, have ye? If you’re going a-whaling you’d better get used to that sort of thing.’

‘That depends on the harpooner,’ I said.

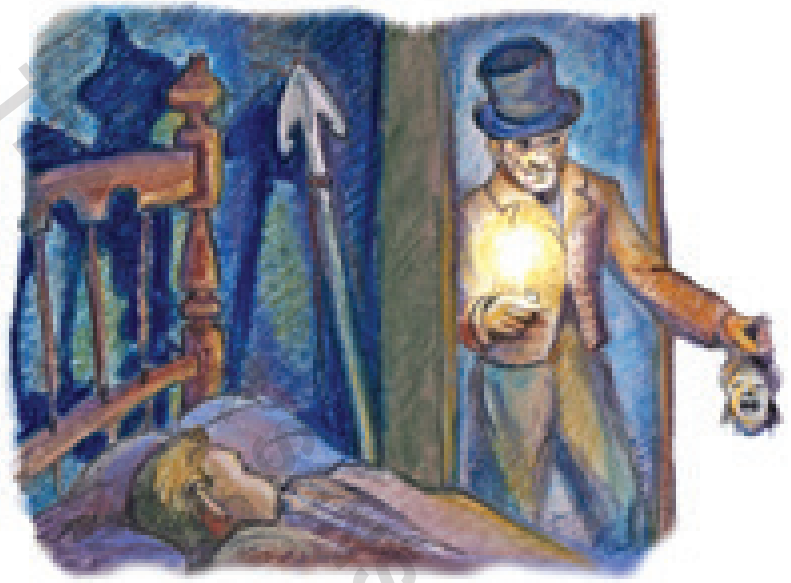
‘He’ll be here afore long. He’s from the South Seas. He’s brought over a load of embalmed New Zealand heads. Great curios! He’s sold all on ’em but one. Tomorrow’s Sunday, and it wouldn’t do to be out sellin’ human heads when folks is going to churches. You want supper?’

Supper over, the bar began to fill with sailors. I didn’t want to drink, and if I had to sleep two to a bed I might as well get the best place for myself. I was shown into a small room, cold as a clam, with a huge bed.

I looked round. Someone had left a rolled hammock, a great many bone fishhooks, and a seaman’s bag. A tall harpoon stood at the bedhead. I got into bed and blew out the candle.

I was woken by a heavy footfall. I pretended to be asleep.

Holding a light in one hand and a shrunken New Zealand head in the other, a stranger entered the room. He didn’t look at me, but stooped to take something from his bag. Then he turned. Such a face! It was of a dark, purplish,



yellow colour, stuck over with blackish squares. I thought, he’s been in a fight! Then he turned to the light, and I realised that his face was covered in tattoos. And what is it, thought I, after all? It’s only his outside. A man can be honest in any sort of skin.

He stuffed the New Zealand head into his bag, pulled out a tomahawk and took off his top hat. He had no hair, just a small scalp-knot twisted up on his head. If he hadn’t been between me and the door, I’d have bolted out of it quicker than ever I bolted a dinner.

Real Reads version just shortens the original, rather than leaving out much plot. It does omit some incidents, however, for example when Queequeg nearly dies of fever but returns to life again – one of many images of death and resurrection in the book.

- *Moby Dick* is full of allusions to the Bible, Shakespeare and other books. When readers understand the allusions they can see even more meanings and ideas in the story. Melville has a wonderful style, mixing together many rich forms of talking and writing, from the Bible to the dialect of American whalers. Shortening the story meant leaving out many sentences and conversations that would sing in your mind if you read them, as perhaps you will one day. The *Real Reads* version has changed Melville's language as little as possible to give you an idea of the richness of his text.

Back in time

Herman Melville, an American, wrote *Moby Dick* in the middle of the nineteenth century, when whaling was a major industry and the United States had the largest whaling fleet in the world.

At that time, before the discovery of petroleum, whale oil was widely used for lighting streets and houses and for industrial oil. Other whale products, such as baleen, were used much as we use plastics today. As industry expanded and living standards rose across the world, there was more and more demand for whale products.

With the increase in whaling, the whale populations in the more accessible parts of the oceans declined rapidly. Few people then realised the consequences of over-hunting. It was another hundred years before serious steps were taken to preserve whale numbers. The cruelty of whale-hunting was even less understood. Instead of protecting the vanishing whales, hunters travelled further and further to find whales, making journeys which could take them round the world and last three years or more.

Nantucket, an island near Cape Cod off the east coast of the United States, was a major whaling centre at the time of *Moby Dick*, although it was beginning to lose influence to New Bedford on the nearby mainland. These whaling ports attracted seamen of many different backgrounds and many