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Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Moby-Dick

by Herman Melville

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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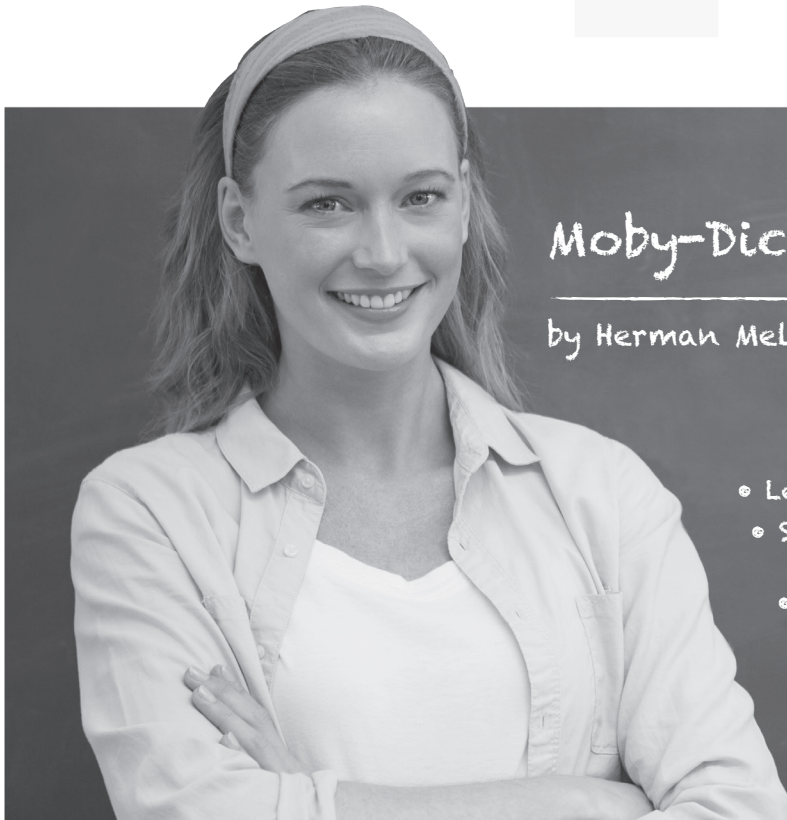
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Item No: 300701

Moby-Dick

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. define and cite examples from the text of numerous literary terms.
2. write a character analysis of Ahab.
3. define various vocabulary words from the text.
4. infer meanings about *Moby-Dick* which are not directly stated.
5. follow the complicated style of Melville.
6. discuss various interpretations of Ahab's obsession.
7. compare and contrast as they appear in *Moby-Dick*:
 - good and evil
 - black and white
 - life and death
8. enumerate the causes of Ahab's desire to kill the whale.
9. define various nautical terms.
10. recognize and explain some of the many allusions to:
 - the Bible
 - Shakespeare
 - History
 - Mythology
11. discuss the ambiguities in the book, specifically:
 - Queequeg's beliefs in the power of the mind to heal
 - reasons why Starbuck does not kill Ahab when the opportunity presents itself
 - the nature of Fedallah
 - Ishmael's survival
12. compare and contrast:
 - "The Savage" and the civilized
 - Pip and Ahab
 - Starbuck and Stubb
 - Ahab and other whaling captains
 - Ahab and Moby-Dick
 - Ahab and Starbuck

Moby-Dick

Questions For Essay and Discussion

1. One critic has stated, “Throughout Melville’s *Moby-Dick* we find the ‘savages’—Queequeg, Tashtego, Daggoo, and others—acting with a degree of civility which meets and often surpasses that of their fellow sailors.” Write a compare and contrast essay using the above as your thesis statement. Remember to cite textual examples.
2. Ishmael, at one point, says that his choice of a whaler was not of his own free will. What influences does he cite for his choice?
3. In Chapter three, Ishmael describes a painting hanging on the wall of the Spouter Inn. What relevance does this painting have to the book as a whole?
4. What is the thematic function of Fedallah?
5. Evaluate the system of whale classification that Ishmael proposes in Chapter thirty-two. Does it have any validity in spite of its misconceptions, obsolete notions, and anthropomorphisms? Why or why not?
6. Supply some examples of foreshadowing as it is used by Ishmael throughout *Moby-Dick*.
7. In your opinion, is the mysterious “Spirit-Spout” of Chapter fifty-one actually *Moby-Dick*?
8. In Chapter fifty-eight, Ishmael observes that the population at large considers the sea to be more dangerous than the land. What reasoning does he base this assertion on? Do you agree with him?
9. Biblical references are spread liberally throughout the novel, in locations, themes, allegories, and even characters’ names. Write an essay explaining those references that strike you as most relevant to the novel.
10. In Chapter nine, considerable time is spent on an interpretation of the story of the biblical Jonah. How does this story relate to the novel, and to Ahab in particular?
11. Explain whether or not *Moby-Dick*’s actions are anthropomorphic.
12. Defend or refute the following statement:
Ahab’s monomania stems from the loss of his leg to the white whale.

Moby Dick

Chapters 1 and 2

VOCABULARY

cataract – a waterfall
circumambulate – to walk around
congealed – gelled; solidified
dubious – doubtful
extant – in existence
infallibly – without error
insular – island-like; isolated
involuntarily – without willingness
metaphysical – supernatural
palsied – shaky
tribulation – a problem, difficulty

1. What reason does Ishmael give for going to sea? What is important about his name?

2. Name the three positions that Ishmael does *not* wish to occupy aboard ship.

3. Why does Ishmael go as a sailor, rather than as a passenger?

Chapters 11 and 12

VOCABULARY

confabulation – a conversation
dauntlessness – lack of fear
idolater – a heathen; worshipper of idols
propensity – a tendency
revulsion – a sudden change of feeling
undulating – waving
vitiating – spoiled

1. Ishmael asserts that “a sleeping apartment should never be furnished with a fire.” Why not?

2. What, besides friendship and a bed, do the two men share?

3. What is Queequeg’s status among his people?

4. Why was Queequeg eager to leave his island? Why was he unsuccessful in his quest?

5. Why has Queequeg stayed away from his homeland for so long?

Chapters 34 and 35

VOCABULARY

expatiate – to speak at length
inclement – severe
languor – laziness
portentous – foreboding
progenitors – ancestors
serene – calm
sleight – skill
tabernacle – an honored dwelling place
tumult – confusion

1. In what order do the officers report to Ahab's cabin for dinner?

2. What does Ishmael say about Flask and dinner?

3. What is Tashtego's way of speeding up the service at the harpooneer's table?

Chapters 80 and 81

VOCABULARY

august – honored
citadel – a protected chamber
cumbrous – clumsy
encumbrance – a burden
indomitable – unable to be overpowered
indubitably – undoubtedly
invertedly – in an upside-down manner
paregoric – a drug that relieves stomach cramps
rudimental – basic
sounded – dove deeply under water
superincumbent – positioned above

1. Which bone does Ishmael suggest would be a better indication of the whale's character than the brain?

2. What is the name of the ship the Pequod meets in chapter 81?

3. Why is the ship's name ironic?

4. What do the mates think about the German whalers during the chase after the old bull?
