

Classic Readers

# MOBY DICK

Herman Melville

retold by Jenny Dooley & Virginia Evans



Express Publishing

## All Aboard

Queequeg and I finally made it to the island of Nantucket – not much more than a sand dune and a beach. Among its few wooden homes and buildings we found an old inn called The Try Pots. It got its name from the two pots hanging by a tree near its entrance, which, I swear, resembled a gallows! These try pots are used for ‘trying out’ the whale’s blubber – which means boiling the oil out of it. But gallows or not, I’ll never forget the wonderful tasty chowder it served – so savory and delicious! Yes, clam chowder is one of New England’s treasures. And when that bowl of thick steaming soup was set on our table, we had the richest meal any whaleman could ask for!

The next day, from the ships preparing for their long whaling voyages, I chose one called the *Pequod* – an old yet proud-looking vessel. Its name, which comes from a famous tribe of Massachusetts Indians, appealed to me. Queequeg and I introduced ourselves to Peleg, who, along with Bildad, no longer sailed but were the owners of this fine ship. They didn’t appreciate my lack of whaling experience, but I did my best to convince them that I was eager to learn and to be at sea. Finally, they agreed to allow Queequeg and me to sail, after deciding to pay us quite a humble sum.

You may not be familiar with the whaling business, and I too was a learner, so let me briefly explain to you the main reason why humans chase these huge creatures.

During this time – the mid to late 1800s – almost all the candles, tapers and lamp oils that burn around the world come from some part of the whale’s body. Some people are quite fond of whale meat as a meal, too! This whaling business, though, mainly boils

down to just that – ‘business’. It’s not in a pot on a stove, but in profits! Companies and ship owners and agents don’t send their whalers and crews out for years at a time just for the sake of adventure! Oh, no, for them it’s about money. They expect their whalers to fill the ship’s barrels. The whale oil is the profit of the voyage, but for us it’s about more – especially since we make no real wages, just a share – and not exactly a princely one – of the profits. For us it’s surely about the adventure, too – the chase and the experience of battling the largest creature on Earth!

After officially signing up, I looked around for our captain. I wanted to meet the man who would lead and command us on the *Pequod*. Peleg described him as an odd but fearless character – uncommon and educated. “A grand, ungodly, but god-like man”. It was Peleg who also told me that the Captain, who was named Ahab, had only one leg! The other had been torn off by a great white whale – maybe even swallowed! Its replacement was made from whalebone, of all things! Apart from my pity for a man who’d lost a limb, I felt a sense of excitement about meeting this Captain Ahab, who had escaped a whale attack with his life.

There was great hustle and bustle on board the *Pequod* as the crew was preparing her to go to sea. Supplies for the long voyage were being loaded and sails were being mended. Only then did I begin to understand that I had really signed on for an entire three years on the world’s oceans! We had everything we wanted and needed aboard the *Pequod*. The steward, Dough Boy, even had his pantry stocked up with jars of pickles.

Dough Boy got his nickname from the fact that he was a very white-faced fellow. He was also a very nervous type of person –





## A Civilized Savage

### Comprehension

Read or listen to Chapter 3 and correct the following statements, using complete sentences.

- 1 Ishmael is shocked to see Queequeg lather his face.
- 2 Queequeg turns out to be a real savage.
- 3 Queequeg travelled from his island to Nantucket as a sailor.
- 4 Civilised people's habits and ideas impressed Queequeg.
- 5 New Bedford is a poor town with old, rundown houses.
- 6 Father Maple's audience consists of young couples.
- 7 The graves of those lost at sea are proof of how dangerous whaling business is.

### What do you think?

**A** Discuss the following questions.

- 1 Is Ishmael still scared of Queequeg? Explain.
- 2 While Ishmael is watching Queequeg dressing, washing, shaving and eating, he comes to an important realisation about himself and all 'civilised' people. What is this realisation? Do you agree? Why (not)?
- 3 What is Queequeg's impression of 'civilised' people? Why do you think he feels like that? Is it easy to understand people of different nationalities and lifestyles?

**B** Find the following extracts from Chapter 3 and discuss their meanings.

- 1 p. 17: 'He was not quite a caterpillar nor yet a butterfly!'
- 2 p. 18: 'I'll take a less civilized friend over someone full of false manners any day.'
- 3 p. 21: "Life's something like a ship's passage out of port, but not a complete voyage. A ship's driving force is its bow, its front end – like a church's platform should be life's guide."

## Language Practice

## I Fill in the gaps with the correct form of the words in capitals.

- |   |   |           |
|---|---|-----------|
| 1 | Ishmael thinks he isn't very civilised himself to ..... Queequeg.                                   | CRITIC    |
| 2 | The marble tablets in the cemetery are reminders of the fate of many ..... whaling men lost at sea. | FORTUNATE |
| 3 | Queequeg uses his spear ..... to shave his face.  | SKILL     |
| 4 | Danger is a ..... part of the whaling business.   | NATURE    |
| 5 | Queequeg ignores the coffee and hot rolls and spears a big ..... steak for breakfast.               | JUICE     |
| 6 | Ishmael thinks we all have our ..... so we shouldn't judge other people.                            | BELIEVE   |
| 7 | Queequeg dresses first and then allows Ishmael some ..... to get ready too.                         | PRIVATE   |

## II Fill in the gaps with the correct prepositions.

- Queequeg confides ..... Ishmael about his life story.
- Civilised people's habits and ideas had a bad effect ..... Queequeg.
- Queequeg is so fond ..... his harpoon that he takes it with him to the breakfast room.
- The whaling business Ishmael is about to become involved ..... is very dangerous.
- Queequeg turned his back ..... civilised people's silly customs.
- Ishmael joins Queequeg ..... a prayer to his ebony doll.
- The epitaphs at the cemetery are proof ..... the danger of the whaling business.
- The example of Jonah returning to the path of God is Father Mapple's message ..... his audience.

## Whale Watching

*The 'Pequod' and her crew were on a whale hunting voyage. Their business was to kill whales. Today, people are beginning to realise that whale watching is more valuable than whale hunting. They go on whale watching voyages to observe the largest creatures on Earth in their natural habitat. This way they can appreciate how important nature is and learn to respect and protect it instead of destroying it.*



### LIGURIAN SANCTUARY

*In 1999, Italy, France and Monaco signed an agreement which created the Whale Sanctuary in French and Italian waters. It is the largest protected area for sea mammals in the Mediterranean. The deep water and strong currents there bring food up from the bottom of the sea. This brings the whales near the coast to feed and makes the area perfect for whale watching. Here, scientists study the whales in their natural environment. Ecologists believe that whale watching, which is popular in the United States, Australia and New Zealand, is an excellent way to educate people about these extraordinary creatures. They are a beautiful gift of nature and deserve to be protected.*

# MOBY DICK

*Young Ishmael sets out on the whaling ship “Pequod” hoping to free himself from his earthly anger and sorrow. But the mad Captain Ahab, who hunts for the whale that tore off his leg, heads the great ship into dangerous waters. Will the “Pequod” return safely? Or will Ahab’s obsession with his mortal enemy end in death? Herman Melville’s fearsome adventure is the great American novel.*



Level 1



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