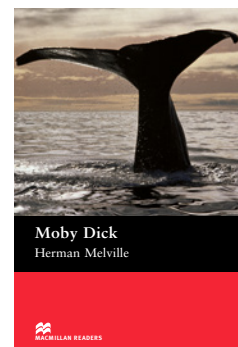


**Moby Dick by Herman Melville****ABOUT THE STORY**

The narrator of the story, Ishmael, is a young man who is looking to go on a sea voyage. He meets a man called Queequeg and together they decide to get work on a whaling ship. They set sail on the ship, the *Pequod*, and meet the captain, Ahab, who has a false leg made from a whale's jaw. Ahab is obsessed with catching Moby Dick, the whale that took his leg. He is prepared to do whatever it takes to achieve this, even if it endangers the life of the crew of his ship. The story describes the voyage and their pursuit of the whale. In the extract, Ahab is talking to the first mate, Starbuck, about his life.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Born in 1819 in New York City, Herman Melville was an American author and poet. When he was 20 he became a sailor, then went to work on a whaling ship; at the time, whaling was a profitable and successful profession. After returning to the US in 1844, he was encouraged by his family to publish his tales of life at sea. The result was his first book, *Typee*, which was hugely successful. After publishing a number of other successful travel accounts he went on to write *Moby Dick* in 1850, but it was badly received and didn't sell well – this was partly because the whaling industry was now in decline due to the overhunting of whales. He died in 1891 and it was only some years later, in the 1910s, that his work was rediscovered and people began to appreciate his books.

Chapter 15

Moby Dick!

It was a clear blue morning the next day. The sea and sky were the same color of blue, and the air was soft and warm. The sun was high in the sky and small birds circled round our masts as we sailed.

5 Ahab was walking up and down the deck, his eyes shining like two small fires as he stared out to sea. His beard was twisted and knotted and his face was burned a deep brown by the sun and wind. He looked over the side of the ship and watched his own shadow in the water. At 10 first, the beautiful morning seemed to do nothing to improve his dark thoughts, whatever they were. But as the minutes went by his face softened. Then a tear slowly rolled down his cheek and fell into the ocean.

Starbuck was watching the old man. He saw how heavily 15 Ahab leaned over the side of the ship. He moved and stood beside him. Ahab turned. "Starbuck?" he said.

"Yes, sir," said Starbuck.

"Oh, Starbuck," said Ahab. "It's a soft, warm day, with a gentle wind. I struck my first whale on a day like this.

20 I was a boy-harpooner, only eighteen years old. Forty years ago! I've chased whales for forty years, Starbuck. Forty years of storms, and all the terrible dangers of sailing. In all those years I've only been ashore for three

of them. Sometimes I stop and think about my life. I 25 think about the meals of dry bread I've been forced to eat when the poorest man on land has fresh fruit and bread on his table. I think about the time I've spent away from my pretty wife. On the day after we were married, I sailed for Cape Horn. I think about the way 30 I've chased like a madman after whales, day after day. I've been a fool, Starbuck. Why do I do it?"

"Captain, you're being hard on yourself," said Starbuck.

"Am I, Starbuck?" answered Ahab. "How much richer or better am I after these forty years? Look at me! I've 35 lost my leg in the hunt. Look at my scarred face. Look at my gray hair. I'm an old man. Old and tired. Stand closer to me, Starbuck. Let me look into a human eye. It's better than looking into the sea or sky. I see green land, and my warm comfortable home in your eye. I 40 see my wife and child."

He put a hand on Starbuck's shoulder. "I won't let you risk your life, my friend," he went on. "Not when you have that far-away home that I can see in your eye. You and your men will stay aboard the *Pequod* when 45 the chase for Moby Dick begins, Starbuck."

"Captain," said Starbuck. "Why should anyone chase that hated fish? He's a monster. Give up this chase for the white whale. Let's turn the ship around and head for home. Let's sail away from these deadly waters. 50 How wonderful it will be to see old Nantucket again!

VOCABULARY FOCUS

masts (line 4): tall poles that sails hang from on a ship

deck (line 5): the outside top part of a ship that you can walk on

knotted (line 7): twisted, containing knots

harpooner (line 20): someone who hunts whales and big fish using a blade on a pole

ashore (line 23): on land i.e. not on the sea

scarred (line 35): permanently marked on the skin as a result of damage to it

aboard (line 44): in or on a ship, bus, train or plane

**Moby Dick by Herman Melville****Before reading**

- 1 You are going to read a story called *Moby Dick*, which was written by the American author Herman Melville. Read *About the author*. What job(s) did he do besides being an author and poet?**
- 2 *Moby Dick* describes a voyage at sea. What or who do you think *Moby Dick* is? Choose the correct option, then read *About the story* to check your answers.**
 - a the name of a sailor
 - b the name of a ship
 - c the name of a whale
- 3 *Moby Dick* can be described as a tragedy, with a lead character (Ahab) who has a fatal flaw. Read *About the story* again. What is Ahab's fatal flaw?**

While reading

- 1 Read the extract. Decide if these statements are true (T) or false (F). Correct the false sentences.**
 - 1 The extract is set on the deck of the ship. T / F
 - 2 Ahab is an experienced sailor. T / F
 - 3 He has been at sea for 37 of the last 40 years. T / F
 - 4 His wife and child have followed him on his travels. T / F
 - 5 Starbuck agrees that Ahab has been a fool. T / F
 - 6 Ahab thinks his life is better for having been at sea. T / F
 - 7 Ahab doesn't want Starbuck to risk his life. T / F
 - 8 Ahab and Starbuck are probably both from Nantucket. T / F
- 2 Read the extract again and answer the questions.**
 - 1 What is the mood of the passage at the beginning? How does the author create this?
 - 2 What is the mood by the end of the passage? Why does it change?
 - 3 Who is the focus of the passage? Ahab or Starbuck?
 - 4 How does Ahab feel in the passage? What words or phrases tell you this?

3 Work in pairs to discuss these questions.

- 1 In the extract, Ahab seems to have a number of regrets. What specific regrets does he mention?
- 2 What kind of life is he dreaming of?
- 3 How does the writer describe Ahab physically? What simile is used to describe him? Can you find another simile in the extract?
- 4 What similarities and differences are there between Ahab's and Starbuck's feelings towards the whale? What do you think the whale may mean to both characters?

After reading**1 Work in small groups to discuss these questions.**

- 1 What do you think about Ahab's desire to hunt *Moby Dick*? Do you think he is unusually obsessed or do you think it is a natural reaction, given that the whale took his leg? What do you think you would do in the same circumstances?
- 2 What do you think Ahab will do – will he continue to hunt *Moby Dick* or will he return to his family? Why do you think that?

2 You are now going to role-play a conversation between Starbuck, Ahab and another member of the ship's crew to decide whether to continue or turn back. Work in three groups. Each group should take one of the three roles and make notes below on your reasons for wanting to continue or turn back. Depending on your role, think about some or all of the following arguments as well as any ideas of your own:

- potential profit from killing the whale
- Ahab's desire for revenge (would this allow him to make sensible decisions as captain?)
- environmental concerns over killing the whale
- Starbuck's desire to see his family again
- potential dangers at sea (ship sinking, bad weather, etc.).

reasons for continuing	
reasons for turning back	

3 Now work with two students who took the other roles and role-play your conversation. Make sure you reach a decision about whether to continue or turn back.