

Herman Melville

Moby Dick

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EXIT TEST	126
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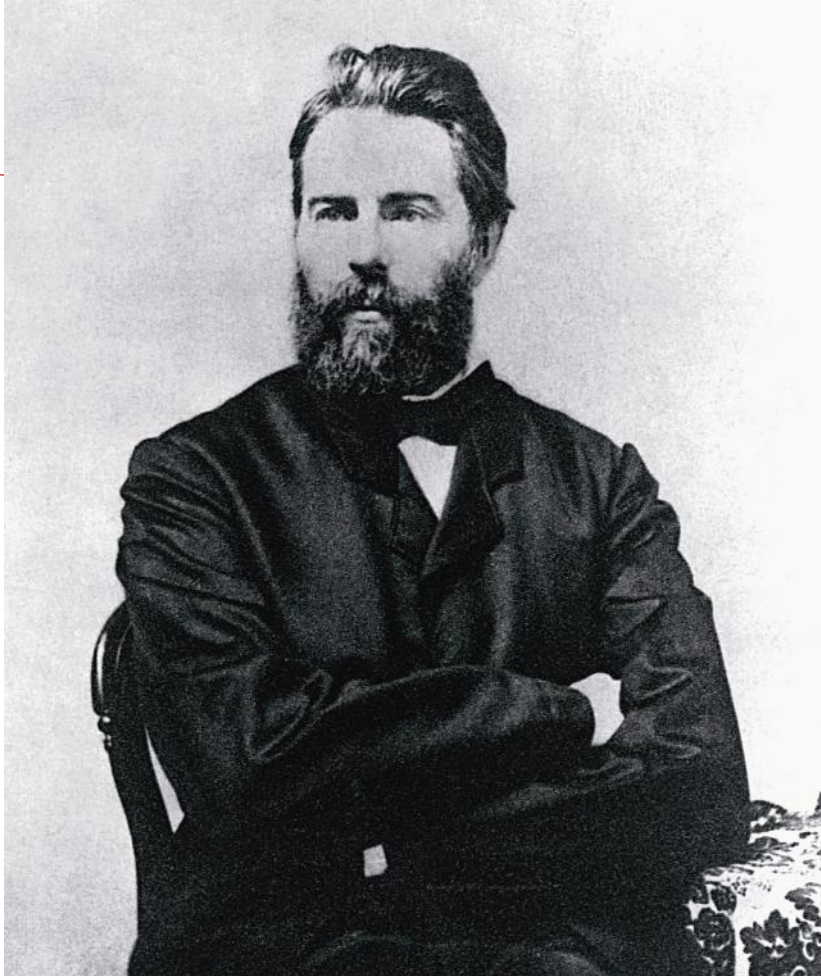
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This story is recorded in full.

 These symbols indicate the beginning and end of the passages
 linked to the listening activities.



A photograph of **Herman Melville** taken in the 1860s.

About the Author

Melville was born on August 19, 1819 in New York City and grew up there with his seven brothers and sisters. His family was wealthy and descended from the early colonial families of New York. He had a happy childhood, but when he was only twelve his father went bankrupt and died soon after. Melville never forgot the tragedy of his father's death.

In 1839, unable to find satisfactory work on land, Melville went to

sea as a cabin boy on the British ship *St Lawrence*. He crossed the Atlantic to Liverpool and then returned to America. Life was difficult but the excitement of life at sea attracted him, and in 1841 he went to sea on the whaling ship the *Acushnet*. The cruelty of the ship's officers and the terrible living conditions caused Melville and a friend to desert¹ the ship on the island of Nukahiva in the South Pacific in July 1842.

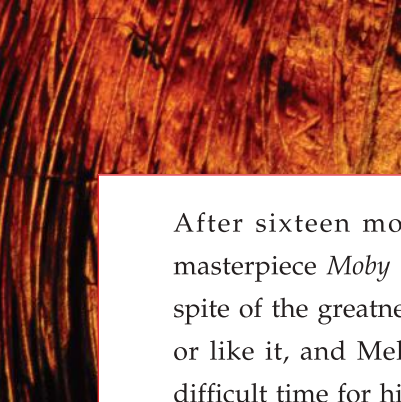
After a month among the cannibals of the island, Melville escaped on an Australian whaler which took him to Tahiti. There he was imprisoned temporarily. After a month on the nearby island of Moorea, he went to work on the Nantucket whaler *Charles and Henry* until April 1843. Then, after spending almost six months in Honolulu, he decided to become a sailor on the *United States* but when the ship finally arrived in Boston in 1844 he left it and decided not to go to sea any more.

In 1846 he began his career as a writer with *Typee*, which gave an exciting account of the natives he met during his stay on the island of Nukahiva. *Omoo*, a novel based on his life in Tahiti, was published in 1847. Both books were very successful.

White Jacket, a strong protest against the punishments in the U. S. Navy, appeared in 1850, and shocked many readers. Soon the U. S. Congress passed a law which banned certain types of punishment, and Melville became a very popular and respected writer.

He married Elizabeth "Lizzie" Shaw in 1847 and they moved to Pittsfield, Massachusetts, where he became a friend of another famous American writer, Nathaniel Hawthorne. This was a very important friendship for Melville.

1. **desert** : to leave without permission.



After sixteen months of hard work, Melville completed his masterpiece *Moby Dick* in 1851, and dedicated it to Hawthorne. In spite of the greatness of this work, most people did not understand or like it, and Melville's popularity began to decline. This was a difficult time for him because he started to have debts and he had a family to support.



Gregory Peck as **Captain Ahab** in John Huston's 1956 film version of *Moby Dick*.

In 1866 he began working as a United States customs inspector at New York City harbor. When he retired in 1885 he wrote the short novel *Billy Budd*, which was published in 1924, long after his death. Melville died on September 28, 1891. Thirty years after his death Americans began reading his works again and he became recognized as a literary genius. His representation of life was powerful and realistic and he was aware of the many social problems of his time. He attacked slavery, war and the abuse of immigrants. In his works he showed man's tragic efforts in fighting against fate and evil. He had a deep understanding of the human mind and soul. Some of Melville's other works include: *Mardi* (1849), *Pierre* (1852), *Israel Potter* (1855), and *The Piazza Tales* (1856). Melville was also an excellent poet. He privately published his poetry in *Battle-Pieces* (1866), *Clarel* (1876) and *John Marr and Other Sailors* (1888). Herman Melville is one of America's greatest writers. His novel *Moby Dick* continues to appear on lists of the 100 best books ever written.

1 Comprehension check

Answer the following questions.

- 1 Where and when was Melville born?
- 2 What was the sad event of Melville's youth?
- 3 What was Melville's first experience at sea?
- 4 What was the *Acushnet*?
- 5 How long was Melville a sailor?
- 6 How did Melville react to the punishments of sailors aboard the *United States*?
- 7 What is *Typee* about?
- 8 How long did it take for *Moby Dick* to be appreciated as a masterpiece?



A

B

C

D

E

F

G

H

I

1 Setting

Match the words with the letters. Use a dictionary to help you.

- 1 masts 2 masthead 3 chains 4 hull 5 deck
6 rope 7 oars 8 harpoons 9 bow of a ship 10 stern



J

Before you read



1 Listening

Listen to the beginning of Chapter One. You will hear about Ishmael, a young sailor, and why he wants to go to sea. For questions 1-6, complete the sentences.

- 1 When Ishmael feels depressed, he realizes that he should
- 2 Ishmael sees no good reason why he should to travel on a ship.
- 3 Ishmael doesn't care if he has to a sea captain.
- 4 Ishmael believes that cleaning a ship's decks is
- 5 Ishmael believes that it is a good idea the other sailors on a ship.
- 6 The main thing that attracts Ishmael about the sea is

2 Reading pictures

Look at the picture on page 15 and answer the following questions.

- 1 What kind of person do you think this character is? Kind? Shy? Dangerous? Other?
- 2 Where do you think he is from?
- 3 Would you mind sharing a hotel room with him? Why or why not?
- 4 Invent a name for this character and then report your ideas to the class.

3 Vocabulary

Match the words with the pictures. Use your dictionary if you want.

1 coffin

2 sign

3 fish hooks

4 lock of hair



A



B



C

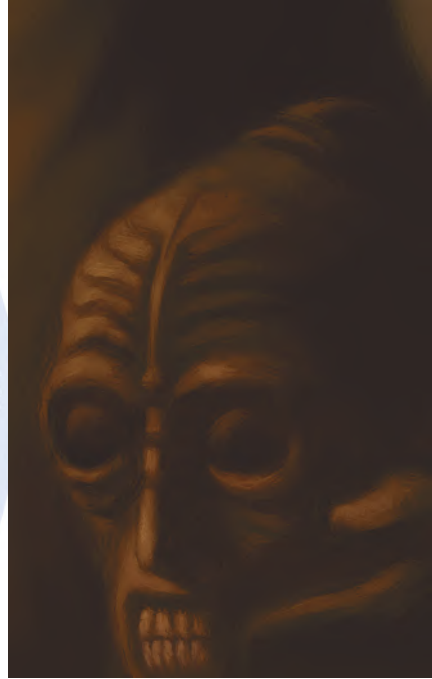


D



CHAPTER ONE

The Spouter Inn



0 Call me Ishmael. Some years ago I set out to sea, having little money and nothing particularly interesting to do on shore. I thought I would sail around the world. Whenever I feel like a cold, wet November morning, and I start following funerals, then I know it's time to go back to the wide open sea. It always makes me feel better because the sea is magic — it has always been magic. It is an endless source of life and mystery.

1 When I go to sea I always go as a simple sailor and never as a passenger. Why should I pay when I can get paid for my work? I certainly don't mind taking orders from an old sea captain. And if I have to clean the decks, or mend a sail, so what? It's good, honest work and I don't mind it.

2 The men you meet at sea are both good and bad, and I always try to get along with them. It's wise to be friendly with the people you have to live with on a ship.

3 But the main reason I want to go to sea is the great whale.