



Colorado Book Club Resource

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR MOBY DICK BY HERMAN MELVILLE

1. Why does the novel's narrator begin his story with "Call me Ishmael"?
2. How does Ishmael's relationship to Queequeg change from the time they meet to the sailing of the Pequod?
3. Why does Melville include stage directions in some chapters (e.g., "The Quarter-Deck")?
4. Why does Ahab pursue Moby Dick so single-mindedly?
5. Why does Melville have Fedallah offer a prophecy that Ahab interprets in his favor, but which turns out otherwise?
6. Why does Starbuck decide against killing Ahab, despite believing that it is the only way to "survive to hug his wife and child again"? Why does Starbuck fail to convince Ahab to give up his pursuit of Moby Dick ("The Symphony")?
7. Why does Ahab offer the doubloon to the first member of the crew to spot Moby Dick?
8. Why does Ishmael digress from his story to meditate on the meaning of whiteness ("The Whiteness of the Whale")?
9. Why does Melville begin the novel by adhering to the conventions and limitations of a first-person narrator, but violate them later?
10. Why is Ishmael so concerned with past efforts to represent whales, in writing as well as other media, and the extent to which these efforts have succeeded or failed?
11. Why does Ishmael include in his story so many details about life and work aboard a whaling ship?
12. Does the novel support or undermine Ishmael's contention that "some certain significance lurks in all things, else all things are little worth"?
13. Why does the coffin prepared for Queequeg become Ishmael's life buoy once the Pequod sinks?
14. Who or what is primarily responsible for the destruction of the Pequod and, except for Ishmael, her crew?"
15. Why does the Rachel rescue Ishmael?
16. How has his experience aboard the Pequod affected Ishmael?



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17. On what basis should we determine the point at which ambition turns into obsession?
18. Is knowledge always at least partly harmful, either in its application or the cost of acquiring it?
19. What is the significance of the whale? What do you think Melville intends in developing such a vicious antagonism between Ahab and the whale?
20. How does the presence of Queequeg, particularly his status as a "savage," inform the novel? How does Melville depict this cultural clash?
21. How does whaling as an industry function metaphorically throughout the novel? Where does man fit in in this scenario?
22. Melville explores the divide between evil and virtue, justice and vengeance throughout the novel. What, ultimately, is his conclusion? What is Ahab's?
23. What do you think of the role, if any, played by religion in the novel? Do you think religious conventions are replaced or subverted in some way? Discuss.
24. Discuss the novel's philosophical subtext. How does this contribute to the basic plot involving Ahab's search for the whale? Is this Ishmael's purpose in the novel?
25. Discuss the role of women in the novel. What does their conspicuous absence mean in the overall context of the novel?

Discussion questions provided by the publishers.



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