

MOBY-DICK

JAKE HEGGIE AND GENE SCHEER

SOCIAL STUDIES: The World through Letters

Students will

- Read for information
- Research a time period for multiple events, inventions, and individuals of various cultures
- Draft a letter to a relative discussing current events based on research
- Understand the relevance of cultures and historic events within a given time period

Copies for Each Student: *Moby-Dick* Synopsis, “Our Author, Herman Melville”, Activity Worksheet, Letter Example

Copies for the Teacher: *Moby-Dick* Synopsis, “Our Author, Herman Melville”, Activity Worksheet, Letter Example

Getting Ready

Prepare internet access for research for guided practice or group work.

Gather pens, pencils and additional writing paper as needed for your students.

Introduction

Explain to your students that like all works of theater, opera is a result of teamwork. The librettist and composer must work together and communicate to ensure the success of an opera or project. Communication today is as simple as sending texts, face-time, snap chat, and email, but during the time when the novel *Moby-Dick* was written, the means for communication were much less immediate. Today, we know a lot about historical events and individuals due to information gathered from personal and official letters.

Have students discuss what they believe people wrote about in their letters during the mid-1800's and the types of letters sailors received at ports while away on voyages. You may want to guide the discussion so that the students begin to understand the presence of historic and cultural references to music, inventions, and political movements during the 19th century. Have your students read the Letter Example and *Moby-Dick* Synopsis. Give each student a copy of the Activity Worksheet or display it on a screen. Give an overview of the assignment, and point out the information your students are expected to research and write about. To align with Texas TEKS, you may provide and tailor research topics according to your grade level:

6th Grade: Societies of the contemporary world.

7th Grade: Texas history, from natural Texas to present.

8th Grade: United States history from the early colonial period through Reconstruction.

U.S. History Studies since 1877: U.S. History from Reconstruction to the present day.

World History Studies: Societies of ancient Greece, Rome, India, Persia, China, and Medieval to Renaissance Europe.

Guided/Independent Practice

Depending on your grade level, the ability of your students, and time constraints, you may choose to have students work as a whole class, in small groups, with a partner, or individually. Read the directions on the Activity Worksheet. Have students select topics and begin research. This can be done in class or as an outside assignment. Have students draft a letter to a relative or friend aboard a whaling ship being sure to include the required information from their research. Have students share their letters individually, or by groups, and tell the class why they chose the particular location and events that were in their letter.

Evaluation

Have students present their ideas to the class for discussion and evaluation. The teacher may want to guide the discussion.

For Further Study

Students may want to do additional research on librettists, composers, or civilizations during a specific time period or other related topics online or in their school library. Their findings can be shared with the class at the beginning of a later lesson.

If time allows

If time allows, have students write create an outline for an opera based on one of their historic events or inventions mentioned in their letter.

TEKS

Social Studies

6th Grade

113.18. b. 16 A Culture

The student understands that all societies have basic institutions in common even though the characteristics of these institutions may differ. The student is expected to: (A) identify institutions basic to all societies, including government, economic, educational, and religious institutions.

113.18. b. 17 A,B Culture

The student understands relationships that exist among world cultures. The student is expected to: (A) identify and describe how culture traits such as trade, travel, and war spread; (B) identify and describe factors that influence cultural change such as improved communication, transportation, and economic development.

113.18. b. 21 A,B Social studies skills

The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to: (A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software; interviews; biographies; oral, print, and visual material; and artifacts to acquire information about various world cultures; (B) analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions.

7th Grade

113.19 b. 21 A Social studies skills

The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to: (A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software, databases, media and news services, biographies, interviews, and artifacts to acquire information about Texas.

8th Grade

113.20 b. 23 C Culture

The student understands the relationships between and among people from various groups, including racial, ethnic, and religious groups, during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. The student is expected to: (C) identify ways conflicts between people from various racial, ethnic, and religious groups were resolved.

113.20 b. 24 A,B Culture

The student understands the major reform movements of the 19th century. The student is expected to: (A) describe the historical development of the abolitionist movement; and (B) evaluate the impact of reform movements, including educational reform, temperance, the women's rights movement, prison reform, abolition, the labor reform movement, and care of the disabled.

113.20 b. 29 A Social studies skills

The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired through established research methodologies from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to: (A) differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software, databases, media and news services, biographies, interviews, and artifacts to acquire information about the United States.

United States History Studies Since 1877

113.41. c. 26 A,B,C Culture

The student understands how people from various groups contribute to our national identity. The student is expected to: (A) explain actions taken by people to expand economic opportunities and political rights, including those for racial, ethnic, and religious minorities as well as women, in American society; (B) discuss the Americanization movement to assimilate immigrants and American Indians into American culture; (C) explain how the contributions of people of various racial, ethnic, gender, and religious groups shape American culture

113.41. c. 29 A,B,D Social studies skills

The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to: (A) use a variety of both primary and secondary valid sources to acquire information and to analyze and answer historical questions; (B) analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing and contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations, making predictions, drawing inferences, and drawing conclusions; (D) use the process of historical inquiry to research, interpret, and use multiple types of sources of evidence

World History Studies

113.42. c. 25 A,B Culture

The student understands how the development of ideas has influenced institutions and societies. The student is expected to: (A) summarize the fundamental ideas and institutions of Eastern civilizations that originated in China and India; (B) summarize the fundamental ideas and institutions of Western civilizations that originated in Greece and Rome.

113.42. c. 29 F Social studies skills

The student applies critical-thinking skills to organize and use information acquired from a variety of valid sources, including electronic technology. The student is expected to: (F) analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, drawing inferences and conclusions, and developing connections between historical events over time.

Correlates: Language Arts, Drama

Gardner's Intelligences: Verbal-Linguistic, Logical/Mathematical, Intrapersonal

Bloom's Taxonomy: Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Synthesis, Evaluation (1956)

Remember, Understand, Apply, Evaluate, Create (2001)

Sources

Herman Melville Biography. Accessed on 12/8/15 <http://xroads.virginia.edu/-HYPER/bb/hm/bio.html>

Moby-Dick

Synopsis

ACT ONE

Scenes 1 to 4. Day One: The whaling ship Pequod has been at sea for one week

Captain Ahab stands alone on deck in the hours before dawn. Below deck, while most of the crew sleeps, the harpooneer Queequeg prays and wakes Greenhorn, a loner and newcomer to whaling. Dawn breaks and the call is made for "All Hands!" While the crew is raising the ship's sails, Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask talk about Ahab, whom no one has seen since the ship left Nantucket.

The crew sings of whales, wealth and home when suddenly, Captain Ahab appears. He tells them of Moby-Dick, the white whale that took off one of his legs, then nails a gold doubloon to the mast and promises it to the man who first sights him. This is the real reason they have sailed, he explains: to search the globe to find and destroy this one whale. His rousing call of "Death to Moby-Dick!" excites everyone but the first mate, Starbuck. To no avail, he confronts Ahab about what he sees as a futile and blasphemous mission.

Starbuck instructs Greenhorn about the dangers of whaling. When he ponders never again seeing his wife and son, he is overcome with emotion and orders Queequeg to complete the lesson. Stubb sights a pod of whales, but Ahab will not allow the eager crew to hunt since they have not yet found Moby-Dick. Starbuck orders the crew to sail on and sends Greenhorn up to the lookout on the masthead, joined by Queequeg.

As the sun begins to set, Ahab looks over the wake of the ship and mourns that his obsession deprives him of any enjoyment of beauty. All is anguish to him. At the masthead, Queequeg and Greenhorn look over the world, while Starbuck, on deck, bemoans Ahab's madness.

Scenes 5 to 7. Day Two: Three months later

After three months without a single whale hunt, Stubb jokes with the young cabin boy Pip about the sharks circling the ship. The song ignites a dance for the full crew, but rising tensions take over and a dangerous racial fight erupts. When Greenhorn suddenly sights a pod of whales, Starbuck is at last able to persuade Ahab to let the men hunt. Starbuck and Stubb harpoon whales, but Flask's boat is capsized and Pip is lost at sea.

On board the Pequod, an enormous whale is being butchered and the oil rendered in the burning tryworks. Flask tells Ahab that the search for Pip is under way, but Ahab thinks only of finding Moby-Dick. As they butcher the whale, the crew imagines Pip lost and struggling in the heart of the sea. Flask tells Starbuck that many oil barrels are leaking and he goes below to tell Ahab they must find a port for repairs.

Ahab is unmoved by Starbuck's report, and is concerned only with the white whale. When Starbuck refuses to leave, Ahab grabs a musket and orders him to his knees. From afar, Greenhorn shouts that Pip has been found. Ahab orders Starbuck out of the cabin.

On deck, the crew listens to Greenhorn describe how Queequeg rescued Pip. As the men return to work, Greenhorn pleads with Starbuck to get help for Pip, who has gone mad. But, the first mate ignores him. Greenhorn observes how life really works on the ship and decides to befriend Queequeg.

Starbuck returns to Ahab's cabin, where he finds the captain asleep. He picks up the musket with which Ahab had threatened him and contemplates what he should do. Pull the trigger and he may survive to see his wife and child again. When Ahab cries out in his sleep, Starbuck replaces the musket and leaves the cabin.

ACT TWO

Scenes 1-3. Day Three: One year later

An enormous storm is approaching, but Stubb, Flask and the crew sing a jolly work song. From the mastheads, Greenhorn and Queequeg talk of traveling together to his native island. Greenhorn wants to learn Queequeg's language and write down their adventures. Suddenly, Queequeg collapses. The crew gets him down and Ahab announces he will take the masthead watch himself, as he wants to sight Moby-Dick first.

Below deck, Queequeg tells Greenhorn that he is dying and asks that a coffin be built for him. Pip enters from the shadows and sings a lament, joined by Greenhorn.

The massive storm now surrounds the *Pequod*. As Ahab sings defiantly to the heavens, bolts of lightning engulf the ship and the masts glow with St. Elmo's fire. Ahab demands that the men hold their posts, promising them the white flame is a sign from heaven to guide them to the white whale. The crew is inspired once again by the captain, much to Starbuck's distress.

Scenes 4 to 7. Day Four: The next morning

The ship has made it through the storm. From afar, the voice of Gardiner, captain of the *Rachel*, calls out. He pleads with Ahab to help him search for his 12-year-old son who was lost in the storm, but Ahab refuses. Pip shouts to Gardiner of the *Pequod*'s own lost boy. Pip cuts himself and gets blood on Ahab's clothes. The captain orders the ship to sail on, leaving Gardiner behind. Ahab contemplates the heartless God who devastates so many lives and baptizes his new harpoon with Pip's blood.

Below deck, Greenhorn sees Queequeg's newly built coffin and contemplates the madness that seems to surround him.

On deck, Ahab and Starbuck gaze over the horizon. Ahab describes his forty years at sea and all he has left behind. And why? To what end? He cannot say. But he sees in Starbuck's eye a human soul and it touches him deeply. Starbuck seizes the moment and persuades Ahab that they should return to the wives and sons who wait for them in Nantucket.

Just as Ahab appears to relent, he sights Moby-Dick on the horizon. Great excitement ensues and the whale boats are lowered. Ahab looks again in Starbuck's eye and orders him to stay on board. The crew declares its loyalty to Ahab. During the chase, Moby-Dick destroys two whaleboats in succession, drowning their crews. Then, the *Pequod* is rammed and sunk, killing all aboard. Ahab's boat is then attacked and all but the captain jump or fall off. Finally alone with the white whale, Ahab cries out and stabs at Moby-Dick before being dragged down into the sea.

Epilogue: Many days later

Greenhorn floats on Queequeg's coffin, barely alive, softly singing his lost friend's prayer. Gardiner calls from afar, thinking he has at last found his missing son. Instead, he learns that Ahab and all the crew of the *Pequod* have drowned, except for this one survivor.

Moby-Dick

Our Author, Herman Melville

Herman Melville (Aug. 1, 1819-Sept. 28, 1891)

Family Background

Herman Melville, the third of Allan and Maria Gansevoort Melville's eight children, was born into a socially connected New York family. To his socialite parents, Herman did not seem to fit their mold of a good, God-fearing, noble and refined child.

In 1826 Allan Melville wrote of his son as being “backward in speech and somewhat slow in comprehension...of a docile and amiable disposition.” After the collapse of the family's import business in 1830 and Allan Melville's death in 1832, Herman's oldest brother, Gansevoort, assumed responsibility for the family and took over his father's business. After two years as a bank clerk and some months working on the farm of his uncle, Thomas Melville, Herman joined his brother in the business.

Travels

By the mid-1830s, the young Melville had already begun writing, but continued financial problems for the family forced Herman to focus primarily on work. In 1837, his brother declared bankruptcy and arranged for Herman to ship out as a cabin boy on the *St. Lawrence*, a merchant ship sailing in June 1839 from New York City for Liverpool.

Although he seemed to enjoy the life of sailing, Melville did not dedicate himself to the sea immediately. Instead, he continued to seek out ways of helping his family by taking a series of teaching positions and then following his uncle out west in hopes of finding steady work. He never found the work he sought; so, in January 1841, he returned east and sailed on the whaler *Acushnet* on a voyage to the South Seas.

In June of the following year, the ship anchored in the Marquesas Islands in present-day French Polynesia. Melville's adventures here, somewhat romanticized, became the subject of his first novel, *Typee* (1846). In July, Melville and a companion jumped ship and, according to the novel, spent about four months as guest-captives of the reputedly cannibalistic Typee people. In actuality, in August he was registered in the crew of the Australian whaler *Lucy Ann*. Whatever its precise correspondence with fact, however, *Typee* was faithful to the imaginative impact of the experience on Melville: despite intimations of danger, the exotic valley of the Typees was for Melville an idyllic sanctuary from a hustling, aggressive civilization.

When the *Lucy Ann* reached Tahiti, Melville joined a mutiny led by dissatisfied shipmates who had not been paid. The mutiny landed Melville in a Tahitian jail from which he escaped. On these events and their sequel, Melville based his second book, *Omoo* (1847). Lighthearted in tone, with the mutiny shown as something of a farce, it describes Melville's travels through the islands, accompanied by Long Ghost, formerly the ship's doctor, now turned drifter. The novel revealed Melville's bitterness against what he saw as the debasement of the native Tahitian peoples by so-called “civilizing” forces.

These travels, in fact, occupied less than a month. In November he signed as a harpooner on his last whaler, the *Charles & Henry*, out of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Six months later he disembarked in Hawaii only to sign on as an ordinary seaman on the frigate *United States*, which in October 1844 returned him to Boston.

Mid-Century Popularity

When Melville rejoined his family, he found their fortunes had much improved. Gansevoort, had been appointed James K. Polk's secretary to the U.S. legation in London and was earning political renown. With this family's encouragement, Herman recorded his tales of the South Seas and began to seek out a publisher.

Both *Typee* and *Omoo* provoked a mix of enthusiasm and outrage, but Herman, now left with the responsibility of providing for the family following his oldest brother's sudden death, committed himself to writing for support. In the summer of 1847, Melville added the responsibility of marriage when Elizabeth Shaw, daughter of the chief justice of Massachusetts, agreed to wed. For more steady income, he became a regular contributor of reviews and other pieces to a literary journal. Melville also began a third book in 1847 that would become *Mardi*. Rather self-consciously, Melville conceived of his third book as quite different from both *Typee* and *Omoo*. It began as another Polynesian adventure but quickly set its hero in pursuit of the mysterious Yillah, "all beauty and innocence," a symbolic quest that ends in anguish and disaster. Upon its publication in 1847, public and critics alike received it coolly. Concealing his disappointment at the book's reception, Melville quickly wrote *Redburn* (1849) and *White-Jacket* (1850) in the manner expected of him. The critics acclaimed *White-Jacket* in particular; but both novels, however much they seemed to revive the Melville of *Typee*, revealed Melville's growing melancholy.

Melville had promised his publishers for the autumn of 1850 the novel first entitled *The Whale*, but he delayed delivery of the manuscript that would become *Moby-Dick*. He had formed a friendship with Nathaniel Hawthorne, and their relationship reanimated Melville's creative energies. Though the two men would gradually grow apart, their time as neighbors in 1850, Melville had bought a farm near Hawthorne's in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, helped shape what is widely considered one of the greatest works of American literature.

Moby-Dick was finally published in London in October 1851 and a month later in America, but it brought its author neither acclaim nor reward. Increasingly a recluse to the point that some friends feared for his sanity, Melville embarked almost at once on *Pierre* (1852). When published, it was yet another critical and financial disaster. Only 33 years old, Melville saw his career in ruins. Near breakdown, and having to face in 1853 the disaster of a fire at his New York publishers that destroyed most of his books, Melville persevered with writing. *Israel Potter* was published in 1855, but its modest success, clarity of style, and apparent simplicity of subject did not indicate a decision by Melville to write down to public taste. Rather, his contributions to Putnam's Monthly Magazine, "Bartleby the Scrivener" (1853), "The Encantadas" (1854), and "Benito Cereno" (1855), reflected an increasing despair and contempt for human hypocrisy and materialism.

In 1856 Melville traveled to Europe to renew his spirits. The most powerful passages of the journal he kept are in harmony with his final novel published in his lifetime *The Confidence-Man* (1857), a despairing satire on an America corrupted by the shabby dreams of commerce. Three American lecture tours were followed by his final sea journey, in 1860, when he joined his brother Thomas, captain of the clipper *Meteor*, for a voyage around Cape Horn. He abandoned the trip in San Francisco.

Withdrawal

Melville abandoned genre of the novel in favor of poetry, but the prospects for publication were not favorable. In 1861, with two sons and daughters to support, Melville sought a consular post, but did not receive the appointment. When the Civil War broke out, he volunteered for the Navy, but was again rejected. Melville got a bit of relief from an inheritance upon his father-in-law's death, and by the end of 1863 was living in New York City.

The war was much on Melville's mind and furnished the subject of his first volume of verse, *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (1866). Four months after it appeared, an appointment as a customs inspector on the New York docks finally brought him a secure income.

Despite poor health, Melville began a pattern of writing evenings, weekends, and on vacations. In 1867 his son Malcolm accidentally shot himself after a quarrel with his father the night before his death.

His second son, Stanwix, who had gone to sea in 1869, died in a San Francisco hospital in 1886 after a long illness. Throughout these painful events, and for the whole of his nineteen years in the customs house, Melville's creative pace was understandably slowed.

By the time his second collection of verse, *John Marr*, and *Other Sailors; with Some Sea-Pieces*, appeared in 1888, Melville had been in retirement for three years. His new leisure he devoted, he wrote in 1889, to "certain matters as yet incomplete." Among them was *Timoleon* (1891), a final verse collection. More significant was the return to prose that culminated in his last work, the novel *Billy Budd*, which remained unpublished until 1924. Though the manuscript ends with the date April 19, 1891, merely five months before Melville's death, the work had not been completely edited. Melville's life was one more of valleys than of peaks. By the end of the 1840s he was among the most celebrated of American writers, yet his death evoked but a single obituary notice. After years of neglect, modern criticism had once again secured his reputation with that of the great American writers.

Moby-Dick

Social Studies Activity

Think about what life was like in the mid 1800's. What were some of the major events taking place in the world, in the US, and in Texas at that time? What events had already happened or were developing? Who were the celebrities and famous persons at that time? Imagine that your relative or close friend is on a voyage at sea. Draft a letter to him (or her) telling about recent events and inventions he (or she) may have missed while aboard the whaling ship. You may even suggest the voyage as a possible novel or opera.

Research the time period to gather information about events and inventions. You may choose any location in the world as your home such as Egypt, the U.S., an island in the Pacific, or China. You may even pretend you are the author, Herman Melville. Be sure to mention at least 2 different events and exciting inventions that are taking place at the time of your letter. You may need to do a little research about the original story of *Moby-Dick* and author, Herman Melville, to develop a more detailed letter.

Your Letter

Your drafted letter to your relative must contain the following:

- Date and location
- Greetings
- Mention of your environment and things happening around you
- Mention of a current event in the world
- Mention of a current event in the United States or Texas
- Mention of a new invention or famous person
- Conclusion
- Signature

Complete the activity worksheet to organize your research for your letter.

1. What date will you choose? What is your location when the letter is written?
2. What are some of the major things happening in the world during this time?
 - a. How do you feel about this event?
3. What are some of the major things happening in the United States or Texas at this time?
 - a. How do you feel about this event?
4. What is a newly developed invention? Or an invention that is still receiving a patent?
 - a. How do you feel about this invention? What do you hope will happen?
5. Who is someone you would like to meet and why?

All of this information can be as brief or as detailed as your teacher requests. The information in your letter does not have to be based on exact communication and travel circumstances of your chosen period.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Moby-Dick

Activity Worksheet: Letters from the Librettist

1. What is the date of your letter? What is your location when the letter is written? Why did you choose this location?

2. List a few major or minor world events that took place during that time. How do you feel about the events?

3. List a few major or minor U.S. and/or Texas events that took place at that time. How do you feel about the events?

4. Briefly tell about a new invention or an enhancement to a current invention of the late 19th century. What do you hope will be accomplished through this invention?

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5. Who is someone you would like to meet from this time period? Why? Do you imagine that you have already met this person?

Use the answers to the above questions to draft your letter to your relative or close friend. Be sure to write the letter from the point of view of a poet and/or librettist in the late 19th century. Your status can be authentic or fictional.

Moby-Dick
Letter Example

Date

To my dearest William,

Thank you for your many gifts. The sea shells from the shores of the Congo are astonishing for their beauty and because they are a constant reminder of you, dear cousin. I do hope you receive this letter in lifted spirits. Your fellow sailors are surely lifted of the wretched illness that plagued the ship. It is but a miracle that you remain safe in an ever dangerous state.

Cousin, have you heard of (**Inventor**)'s new invention. It is said that many will find it awfully pleasant. I hope to share one with you upon your return home.

Situations seem to intensify between the northern and southern states of the Americas. Many believe a **war** is on the horizon. Why must we fight so? This is what I asked father, who assured me that man will fight for what he believes in. I believe in peace, dear cousin. Should one fight for peace? (**Civil War**)

Just as so, we have quite a time on our hands now as the (**current event**) has just begun. I hope to meet (**person**) in the aftermath if at all possible. It would surely be a meeting I shall never forget.

I await your next letter in both agony and turmoil, dear cousin. For they are the joy of my days. It is a wonder you have not collected such records of your journeys and bound them as a novel or set them to music. I am sure it will prove enlightening for all who possess the great fortune to witness it.

Your ever loving cousin,

(Name)