

Teacher Backgrounder

Title: Making Meaning from Text: Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*

Grades: 9–12

Context:

Author Herman Melville is best known for his masterpiece *Moby-Dick*. However, Melville had a fascinating life, full of varied experiences, that influenced his writing, which included many novels, short stories, and collections of poetry. No doubt, Melville's life influenced many of the complex themes he wrote about from race and class, to society and nature, to good versus evil. He focused on man's sense of morality and duty, isolation and alienation. Melville is known for his compelling narrations that have an authentic and realist point of view. His style is full of symbolism and peppered with grim humor and irony.

As your students dive into great American literature, close reading can help them make meaning of individual passages and move beyond simply summarizing the plot. Use works of art inspired by quotations from *Moby-Dick* to challenge students to use close reading to help them better understand the complexities of Melville's words and ideas.

Learning Objectives:

Students will be able to ...

1. Describe the life of Herman Melville and how his experiences are reflected in his writings.
2. Analyze original artwork and evaluate its depiction of the meaning of text from *Moby-Dick*.
3. Create a work of art inspired by a close read of Herman Melville's words.

Materials & Preparation

INVESTIGATE

The slides are designed for you to use with your whole class or to share directly with individual students. Review the slides and prepare to present or share the link with individual students.

INQUIRE

Make copies of the corresponding handouts (one per student) or share the editable PDFs digitally.

IMAGINE

Review the Activity Guide. Students will need access to art materials to create their own printed or digital version of a work of art inspired by text. For more information about close reading: <https://youtu.be/J2KHXIPm5co>

Cross-curricular Connections:

- ☒ Social Studies
- ☒ Language Arts
- ☐ Science
- ☐ Math
- ☒ Arts

Tech It Up:

- Share lesson materials via GOOGLE CLASSROOM or LMS
- Play the suggested videos
- Use the editable handouts
- Devote time to exploring the recommended resources online

NAME: _____

MIXED MEDIA

Directions:

Take a look at one of the seven Robert Del Tredici's prints. Choose one to analyze.

In general, what were your first impressions of Del Tredici's work?

How does the image connect to the quotation from *Moby-Dick*?

How does the image impact your understanding of Melville's words?

What other details might you have added if you were the artist?

Which chapter of *Moby-Dick* would you like to see Del Tredici represent?

Activity Guide: Art from Text

Your Challenge

Be inspired by artists like Robert Del Tredici, Rockwell Kent, and Matt Kish who have created works of art related to quotations or events from Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*.

Select a chapter or passage from the book or another novel. Use the steps below to engage in a close read of the text. Then use the quotation to create a visual image on paper or a screen.

Materials

- Text of *Moby-Dick* or another novel
- Art-making materials, like paper, pencils, paint, markers, scratchboard, or a digital device

Time to Create

STEP 1: CLOSE READ

- Choose a passage from the text that stuck out to you or grabbed your attention.
- Read the text and make observations.
 - Highlight key ideas and underline important words.
 - Circle unfamiliar words or confusing passages.
 - Write questions, notes, and ideas in the margins.
- Read the text again and make more observations.

STEP 2: SYNTHESIZE

- Consider the meaning of the text.
 - Look for patterns or connections about the characters, setting, and mood.
 - What new ideas do you have about the text?
 - What images does the text bring to mind?
- Use your observations to deepen your understanding of the text.

STEP 3: CREATE

- Use an artistic medium of your choosing to create a work of art inspired by the text.
- Copy the quotation onto paper or a screen and illustrate or react to the words.
- Share your work with others to compare artistic choices.
- How does the image help you make meaning of the text?