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# *Moby-Dick* Book Club

**Session 3: Tuesday, November17th, 2026, at 5:30pm**
Section to read: Chapter 91 to the Epilogue
Theme: Melville and the Ocean
Featured Guests: Professors Wyn Kelley & Tony McGowan

## Welcome to *Moby-Dick* Book Club!

The New Bedford Whaling Museum *Moby-Dick* Book Club is a virtual series exploring Herman Melville's iconic American novel. Whether you're reading it for the first time or returning to it with fresh eyes, all are welcome to take part in engaging, thought-provoking conversations led by some of the world's leading Melville scholars.

Each session centers on a guiding theme and includes a suggested reading schedule—but participants are encouraged to read at their own pace and join when they can. Bring your thoughts, questions, and interpretations to share with fellow readers and Melville experts alike.

## Reading Guide: Chapters 91–Epilogue

These chapters take us from the capricious emblazonings of the *Pequod*'s tryworks to the vessel's fated end. Readers are plunged further into maritime materiality, ethical quandaries, and endless intertextual allusions. The ocean—and Melville's relationship to it—is just one lens we can use to think about the many ideas the final chapters address. The following are some questions that readers can consider as they read and reflect on the text.

1. In "The Try-Works" (chapter 96), what is the importance of Ishmael's dozing off and being turned around while manning the tiller? How might this chapter represent a turning point in Ishmael's view of Ahab? What is the meaning of the Catskill eagle in the chapter's last paragraph?
2. Consider the various characters' interpretations of the doubloon in "The Doubloon" (chapter 99)? How do their interpretations mirror their characters as presented throughout the text?
3. How do you react to the story of Perth in "The Blacksmith" (chapter 112) and "The Forge" (chapter 113)? How is Perth's woe different from Ahab's?
4. What is the importance of the last three ship encounters: with the *Bachelor* (chapter 115), with the *Rachel* (chapter 128), and with the *Delight* (chapter 131)? How do these other ships both mirror and contrast the *Pequod*?
5. Notice how the three chapters following "The Candles" (chapter 119) echo the four chapters following "The Quarter-Deck" (chapter 36)—why?
6. What do "The Quadrant" (chapter 118), "The Needle" (chapter 124), and "The Log and Line" (chapter 125) all have in common? And what does the loss of so many nautical instruments suggest?

7. Consider the significance of the fact that the last chapter before the three days of the chase is “The Symphony” (chapter 132).
8. In the three “Chase” chapters, the reader finally encounters the white whale after hearing so much about the animal from the crew and officers. Is the whale what you expected?
9. What do you make of the emergence and development of Ahab’s character toward the ending? Does he become more human (as seen in The Symphony)? Is he more mechanical and robotic (as seen in scenes with the carpenter, absorbing nautical instruments into himself)? Can we see him as more tragic (with all his talk of fate)? Or is he less tragic (for example, that he is killed by accident, not by design)?
10. Analyze other characters alongside Ahab’s significance—for example, the changes in Ishmael and Pip toward the end of the book.
11. Why does Ahab’s life end as it does? Why is it described in only one sentence?
12. In the epilogue, Ishmael describes floating on the sea peacefully surrounded by “unharming” sharks and sea hawks. What does this tell us about Ishmael’s relationship to the natural world, especially as it contrasts with Ahab’s? How has this contrast been apparent in other scenes?
13. The main text of *Moby-Dick* begins with the words “Call me Ishmael” and ends, heartbreakingly, with the word “orphan.” What is the relationship between the opening and closing sentences of the book—and between “Loomings” and the epilogue more generally?
14. How did you expect the book to end? How do you think Melville’s readers in 1851 thought it might end?