***Moby Dick***

***Chapter 16 –The Ship***

***Summary:***

* That night in bed, Queequeg tells Ishmael that he’s been talking to the little black statue of his god (which, we learn, is named Yojo), and Yojo wants Ishmael to choose the ship that the two of them will sail with.
* Ishmael’s pretty nervous about this responsibility. He was hoping Queequeg’s experience with whaling ships would help find the right one.
* But Queequeg insists that Yojo has already found the right ship and that he’ll help Ishmael choose it.
* The next morning, Ishmael goes out on his own.
* It seems to be some kind of religious holiday for Queequeg, who stays at the inn fasting, smoking, and offering a sacrifice of biscuit to Yojo.
* Ishmael finds out that there are three ships about to sail for three-year voyages: the Devil-Dam, the Tit-Bit, and the Pequod. He chooses the Pequod.
* The Pequod is an older ship that has already been on a lot of whaling voyages. It has a lot of character, and is decorated with sea-ivory—whalebone and teeth.
* On board the Pequod, Ishmael looks around for someone in charge. He sees a strange teepee-like tent made of whalebone on the deck and enters it, where he finds a "brown and brawny" old seaman who seems to have some authority.
* Ishmael tells the old seaman that he wants to join the Pequod’s whaling expedition, and explains that he doesn’t have any specific whaling experience, but he has been in the merchant service before.
* The old man scoffs—merchant service! The idea!—and asks why Ishmael wants to go whaling.
* Ishmael says that he wants "to see what whaling is" and "to see the world" (16.18).
* The old man asks Ishmael if he’s met Captain Ahab.
* Ishmael is confused. He thought the old man was the captain of the Pequod.
* The man explains that he is Captain Peleg, and that he and Captain Bildad, who are both retired, own the ship and are outfitting it with men and supplies. (It’s like their investment plan for retirement.)
* Captain Ahab will actually be in charge of the ship on its voyage.
* Captain Peleg tells Ishmael that Captain Ahab lost a leg to a whale, and asks if he’s still willing to go on a whaling voyage. Ishmael says that he is.
* Ishmael’s formal manner of speaking rubs Captain Peleg the wrong way, and the Captain wonders if Ishmael is tough enough for a whaling voyage.
* Captain Peleg asks Ishmael if he would throw a harpoon down a whale’s throat and jump after it. Ishmael says he would if it was absolutely necessary, but he thinks it could probably be avoided. This is, apparently, the right answer, which is good to know, for those of you planning to hunt the wily sperm whale.
* Next, Captain Peleg takes on Ishmael’s desire to "see the world." He asks Ishmael to look across the bow of the ship and tell him what’s there: it’s nothing but water. Captain Peleg tells Ishmael that’s the only world he’d see on a whaling voyage.
* Ishmael’s a little shaken by this, but remains firm on the whaling thing.
* Captain Peleg takes him below decks to sign a contract, where Ishmael meets Captain Bildad.
* Ishmael explains that both Peleg and Bildad are Quakers, but they’re "fighting Quakers" who have been adapted by their circumstances to be bloodthirsty seamen. (This is a little joke from Melville, because Quakers are famous for being pacifists and conscientious objectors.)
* Captain Bildad, according to Ishmael, has stricter Quaker principles and is more obsessed with his religious foundation than Captain Peleg.
* Ishmael thinks Captain Bildad is a little bit hypocritical, because he won’t shed the blood of men on land, but he’s slaughtered lots of whales on the sea.
* Captain Bildad also has a reputation for working his men incredibly hard. His own body is lean and clean-shaven—there’s nothing extra or superfluous to him.
* When Ishmael and Captain Peleg approach Captain Bildad, Bildad is sitting stiffly upright reading the Bible.
* Peleg asks Bildad if Ishmael is an appropriate sailor for the Pequod, and Bildad gives him the okay.
* Captain Peleg takes out a copy of the ship’s articles (the contract between the owners of the Pequod and its sailors) and a pen and starts to add Ishmael to the contract.
* Ishmael tells the reader that he already knows a little bit about how whaling works: seamen aren’t paid wages, but they get a certain percentage of the net profits of the voyage. Ishmael has no whaling experience, but he has been to sea before, and he’s decided that he should be offered what’s called the 275th lay—at least 1/275 of the net profits. He thinks he might get something as good as the 200th lay.
* Ishmael’s a little suspicious at this point, because he’s heard that Peleg and Bildad can be stingy, especially Bildad.
* Peleg asks Bildad what lay Ishmael should get, and Bildad suggests the 777th lay. (This is another in-joke: 777 is a Biblical number, and Bildad is reading Matthew 6:19, which advises people not to lay up treasure on the earth.)
* Peleg says that the 777th lay would be swindling Ishmael and suggests the 300th lay.
* Bildad reminds Peleg that some of the investors in the Pequod are widows and orphans, and that giving Ishmael too large a share in the profits would be swindling these unfortunates.
* Peleg and Bildad keep arguing over Ishmael’s lay, and finally Peleg seems to get so angry that he rushes at Bildad as though he’s going to attack him.
* Ishmael is almost ready to leave and forget about whaling completely, but suddenly Bildad and Peleg both settle down and Peleg puts Ishmael down on the ship’s articles for the 300th lay.
* Ishmael tells Peleg that he has a friend with whaling experience who also wants to voyage on the Pequod, and Peleg tells him to bring the friend (Queequeg, we miss you!) the next day.
* Ishmael leaves, feeling pretty good about his decision—but then he realizes he’s still never met or even seen Captain Ahab.
* He goes back and asks Captain Peleg where Captain Ahab is.
* Peleg tells Ishmael that he can’t see Ahab at this point because Ahab has been shutting himself up alone in his house.
* Peleg tries to describe Ahab’s virtues to reassure Ishmael, but Ahab sounds really strange and alarming: Peleg calls him "a grand, ungodly, god-like man" (16.79).
* Ishmael suggests that the name "Ahab" has disturbing Biblical connotations. (You might want to read the story about Ahab and Naboth’s vineyard in [**1 Kings 21**](https://www.shmoop.com/1-kings/chapter-21-summary.html).)
* Captain Peleg gets angry and reminds Ishmael that Ahab didn’t choose his name... but then admits that a Native American seer said that Ahab’s name would be prophetic in some way.
* Peleg admits that Ahab has been "moody" and "savage" since he lost his leg fighting a whale, but tells Ishmael that Ahab is still a good captain, even if he is depressed and angry (16.81).
* Ishmael leaves, feeling sorry for captain Ahab but also afraid of him. Then he forgets all about him for the time being.

***Brief Analysis:***

Charged by Yojo, Queequeg’s wooden idol, to seek a ship for the two men, Ishmael lights upon the *Pequod,* a ship “with an old fashioned claw-footed look about her” and “apparelled like any barbaric Ethiopian emperor, his neck heavy with pendants of polished ivory.” Ishmael also calls the *Pequod* a “cannibal of a craft” because it is bejeweled with whale parts. On board, he makes a deal with Peleg and Bildad, the ship’s Quaker owners, who are characterized as conniving cheapskates and bitter taskmasters. Although Quakers are generally pacifists, these two have dedicated their life to the bloody slaughter of whales. Evaluating what lay Ishmael should receive (his portion of the ship’s profits and his only wages), Peleg finally gives him the 300th lay. At this time, Ishmael also learns that the ship’s captain is the mysterious Ahab, named after a wicked biblical king. Although Ahab has been moody and secretive since losing his leg in an encounter with the great white whale Moby Dick, Bildad and Peleg believe in his competence and they believe him harmless, since he has a young wife and an infant child waiting for him at home.

***Analysis:***

On Tuesday morning, Queequeg has a surprise for Ishmael. The harpooner says that his little black idol, Yojo, has informed him that Ishmael is to choose the whaling ship on which they will sail. After considering several vessels, the narrator selects the *Pequod* and negotiates with two of its owners, Captain Peleg and Captain Bildad, regarding enlistment and pay. The owners settle with Ishmael but are more enthusiastic about hiring Queequeg because he is an accomplished harpooner. Ahab, the ship's captain for the voyage, is not available but is briefly described.

Although *Moby-Dick* is sometimes thought of as a deep, dark, serious novel, there are moments of delightful humor and even satire. This chapter is an example. Ishmael justifiably feels inadequate to the task of selecting a ship because it is Queequeg who has the whaling experience, but he rather comically accepts Yojo's authority and heads for the docks. He chooses the smallish *Pequod* (named after an extinct Massachusetts Indian tribe) because it is quaint, noble, even melancholy, all of which are virtues to Ishmael.

Melville has fun with the negotiations regarding Ishmael's pay. There is no set salary for the journey; each man is signed on for a fraction of the ship's profits, called a "lay." Although this is the narrator's first venture on a whaling ship, he has been to sea four times in the merchant service and anticipates a share of 1/275 — about enough, he figures, to pay for his clothing — plus food and lodging aboard the ship. Bildad, a hypocritical Quaker, figures a 1/777 lay is plenty, reminding Ishmael of the biblical passage (Matthew 6: 19-21) warning those who *lay* up treasures for themselves on earth. With Peleg's intervention, they settle on 1/300. The elaborate satire of the hypocrite, Bildad, is consistent with Melville's ambiguous view of Christianity, which he respects when it is practiced sincerely but criticizes when it is not. Bildad pretends to be very concerned about Ishmael's soul and wouldn't want him corrupted by filthy old money, but he doesn't mind laying up treasures for himself!

The mysterious aura surrounding Ahab is suggested by his absence and increases with a brief description. He is, according to Peleg, "a grand, ungodly, god-like man," a man of few words but deep meaning who has "been in colleges, as well as @'mong the cannibals." He lost a leg to an "accursed whale" on his most recent voyage. A reference to the biblical Ahab (1 Kings 16:33), who "did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him," foreshadows a serious spiritual or *cosmic* struggle for it was *that* Ahab who denounced Jehovah (God) for the false god, Baal. All this is developed as the novel progresses.

Glossary

**XXXIX Articles**the Articles of Faith of the Church of England.

**venerable**worthy of respect or reverence by reason of age and dignity or character.

**transom**here, a horizontal beam in the stern (rear) of the ship used as a seat.

**anomalous**deviating from the regular arrangement or general rule, abnormal.

**heterogeneous**opposite, dissimilar, incongruous.

**incorrigible**that cannot be corrected or improved.

**celerity**swiftness, speed.

***Significance:***

Queequeg had been diligently consulting Yojo, the name of his black little god, in preparation for selecting their craft. There are three ships up for three-year voyages: the Devil-Dam, the Tit-bit, and the Pequod. The Pequod is named after a celebrated tribe of Massachusetts Indians. The Pequod is a ship of the old school, rather small and with an old fashioned claw-footed look. The Captain was once [Peleg](https://www.gradesaver.com/moby-dick/study-guide/character-list#peleg), now retired after many years. Ishmael introduces himself to Peleg, who is suspicious because Ishmael has no whaling experience. Peleg tells Ishmael that Ahab is now captain of the ship, and he has only one leg, for the other was lost by a whale. Peleg and [Bildad](https://www.gradesaver.com/moby-dick/study-guide/character-list#bildad), both Quakers, are owners of the boat, and are "fighting Quakers." Bildad and Peleg look over Ishmael. Bildad is the "queerest old Quaker" he ever saw. Peleg and Bildad negotiate the lay (share of the profits) for the voyage, and Ishmael demands the three-hundredth lay. Peleg and Bildad argue with one another about how much of the lay they should offer, and their argument nearly leads to violence between the two. After Bildad leaves, Ishmael signs the paper and asks to see Captain Ahab. Peleg describes him as a queer man, but a good one, "grand, ungodly, god-like." Peleg compares him to the Ahab of old, who was crowned king, but a vile one. Before even meeting Ahab, Ishmael feels a sympathy and a sorrow for him.

The most significant aspect of this chapter is the introduction of Ahab, who is the central character and the primary focus of the novel, despite his mysterious and long-delayed appearance. Long before Ahab actually interacts with Ishmael and the other characters, Melville establishes him as an imposing and tragic figure, deserving of sympathy and sorrow. Most of the details surrounding Ahab contain some element of legend, such as the story that he lost one of his legs, and Melville further creates a tension between Ahab's supposed grandeur and his more fearsome qualities. Peleg describes him as simultaneously ungodly and godlike, thus suggesting that the dynamic between these sides of Ahab's personality will form the primary internal struggle of Moby Dick. Melville additionally continues the Biblical allusions that dominate the character names; here the name Ahab describes a king who turns vile, suggesting that the Ahab of this novel will be a similarly conflicted leader.

While Ahab is the central character of the novel, Melville introduces in this chapter several minor characters who add shading to the novel. The "fighting Quakers" Bildad and Peleg continue the relationship between whaling and religion, incorporating their religious tradition into their merchant work ethic. Yet, as Queequeg's consultation of his god demonstrates, this relationship between religion and whaling is not specifically Christian; the relationship is more general and related to basic spirituality than to any particular sect.

***Critical Study:***

“The Ship” is one of the funniest chapters in all of *Moby-Dick*, largely due to the Punch and Judy show between Captains Bildad and Pelig, but also because of a funny bit in the opening paragraph about Queequeg’s god, Yojo. Ishmael’s presentation of Queequeg and Yojo throughout the book (not to mention Melville’s choice of the name Yojo, which has a sort of mumbo-jumbo ring to it) seems problematic to say the least, and it’s not even a tired old argument about judging history from modern values that gets either Ishmael or Melville out of the water on this one. Rather, Ishmael’s tone in speaking about other religions saves him any charge of ethnocentrism/bigotry. Ishmael sees (literally and figuratively) all religion as entirely negotiable and, as such, somewhat bizarre and silly.

Take for instance the aforementioned Punch and Judy between Bildad and Pelig. Both are, as most Nantucketers of the time, Quakers. Quakers are fundamentally pacifists. To give an idea of the intensity of this pacifism, according to Eric Jay Dolin’s *Leviathan: The History of Whaling in America*, during the revolutionary war a prominent Nantucket Quaker, also among Nantucket’s most successful whalers, faced criminal trial for throwing a boatload of personally owned bayonets into the ocean rather than giving them to the continental army for the purpose of killing human beings. The Quaker felt that giving the bayonets over to kill men was tantamount to killing the men himself. So, why then, both Dolin and Ishmael ask, do these Quakers daily participate in such a bloody and murderous trade? In Ishmael’s words, Bildad probably “. . . had long since come to the sage and sensible conclusion that a man’s religion is one thing, and this practical world quite another. This world pays dividends.”

Time and again, the religious rituals and beliefs of men in *Moby-Dick* are presented as peculiarities or idiosyncrasies, from Queequeg’s sacrificial biscuits to Bildad’s muttering of scripture. It’s not condescending, it’s not dismissive, but it’s honest. Religious beliefs are plucked from the ether and returned to sender without the bat of an eyelash. If only we all could have such a sense of humor about ourselves and the silliness of our beliefs, we could see that at heart our values are similar, and there is not such a wide gulf between men after all.

***Critical Analysis:***

Yojo instructs Queequeg that rather than choosing the boat together, it should be entirely Ishmael’s responsibility—Yojo is to Queequeg (and to Ishmael, too, no? [#idolator?](https://chasingflukes.com/reading_guide-overview/chapter_summaries-home/chapter-summaries-part1/#bosom-friend)) as the magic conch is to Spongebob and Patrick—Ishmael takes seriously the task of choosing the boat, while Queequeg holds up with Yojo observing “some sort of Lent or Ramadan”—“a ship of the old school, rather small if anything, with an old fashioned claw footed look about her,” the Pequod, is Ishmael’s choice—she has seen many seas and storms—she boasts characteristics from almost every ocean-bordering land—Captain Peleg is the first person that Ishmael meets aboard, and he’s posted in “a strange sort of tent, or wigwam, pitched a little behind the main-mast”—Peleg gives Ishmael a hard time about being the right young man to board a whaleship—”Marchant service indeed!”—Peleg tells Ishmael to look in front of his face to see the world and continues to quiz him about his intention to go whaling—Finally convinced, Peleg leads Ishmael below deck to sign the papers—enter Captain Bildad—Peleg, Bildad, and Ahab too, “[They are fighting Quakers; they are Quakers with a vengeance.](https://chasingflukes.com/reading_guide-overview/glossary/16quakers-with-a-vengeance/)“—Ishmael goes into Bildad’s history a bit: has the reputation as a “hard-hearted” captain and task master; makes one “go to work like mad”—presently Bildad is an older man hunched over his Bible—“He says he’s our man, Bildad”… “Dost thee?”… “I dost.”—Ishmael expects to be receive the 225-250th lay (share of the ship’s profits) but is initially offered the 777th and ends up receiving the 275th—Peleg and Bildad’s bickering erupts into a more physical confrontation—Ishmael asks (only now?) about whether or not it’s okay to bring a friend along, and Peleg and Bildad seem warm to it when they hear how many whales Queequeg’s bagged—Ishmael hangs back a bit to ask about the elusive Captain Ahab—doesn’t get much from Peleg: “‘He’s a grand, ungodly, god-like man, Captain Ahab.'”—It is revealed that he lost his leg but is not directly explained how—Peleg vaguely recounts the affair—“'[H]e was a little out of his mind for a spell’”—oh, Ahab is married… what?!—Peleg talks him up: [“‘Ahab of old, thou knowest, was a crowned king!'”](https://chasingflukes.com/reading_guide-overview/glossary/16ahab-of-old/)—Ishmael has misgivings about the history of Ahab’s name, and leaves soon after “full of thoughtfulness” and “a certain wild vagueness of painfulness concerning [Captain Ahab].”  
***Notes:***

# **“THEY ARE FIGHTING QUAKERS; THEY ARE QUAKERS WITH A VENGEANCE.”**

The term “Quakers” refers to members of a Protestant Christian sect, The Religious Society of Friends, founded by George Fox in 17th-century England. They received the name Quakers because they “tremble at the name of the Lord.” As very religious individuals that have direct communion with the Lord, they live by strict statutes involving dress, speech, and behavior. After suffering religious persecution in England, they were among the first groups to cross the Atlantic and settle in New England (for instance, in Nantucket). Unfortunately, in the new world, the Quakers were met with persecution, especially at the hands of the Puritans; however, they were also met with increased tolerance in places like the Rhode Island colony.

After they immigrated to North America, some Quakers broke with traditional standards by assimilating with whaling culture, which resulted in changes in speech and behavior. They began to “talk shark a bit” and curse using a mixture of archaic language and whaling/sailing lingo. For example: “‘Out of the cabin, ye canting, drab-coloured son of a wooden gun—a straight wake with ye!‘” (That’s Captain Peleg, from Chapter 16 of *Moby-Dick*.) Melville describes this new breed of Quaker as comprised of “men anomalously modified [unusually altered] by things altogether alien and heterogeneous.” They had become living, breathing, swearing and praying oxymorons. Their great religious fervor morphed into a fiery passion for whaling, its affairs and industry. These pacifists-of-the-land turned warriors-of-the-sea were “fighting Quakers.” The whaling industry also inexorably led the Quakers into a preoccupation with money, business, material property and wealth: all contrary to their doctrine about refraining from storing up treasures on earth, based on the book of Matthew (which Captain Bildad quotes under his breath even as he offers the smallest portion of profit, or lay, possible to Ishmael). Essentially, “Quakers with a vengeance” (Those character in Moby-Dick which we must count among them include Peleg, Bildad, and Ahab.) are fiery little bundles of contradiction.

# **“‘AND AHAB OF OLD, THOU KNOWEST, WAS A CROWNED KING!’”**

[](http://commons.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ahab_rex.jpg)

*English: Ahab was king of Israel and the son and successor of Omri (1 Kings 16:29-34). (Photo credit: Wikipedia)*

In 1 Kings 16-22 in the Old Testament, it is told how King Ahab ruled over the northern kingdoms of Israel and was renowned as the wickedest king ever to have ruled, for he committed major sins in the eyes of God. Son of Omri, King Ahab married Jezebel and under her influence began to worship Baal (1 Kings 16:31). Worshipping a pagan deity was bad enough, but King Ahab also violated other strictures of the one true God. The Prophet Elijah warned Ahab that if the false idols were not torn down then “there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at [Elijah’s] word” (1 Kings 17:1). After three years and no rain, Elijah came back to Ahab in the midst of battle and offered the Lord’s assistance (1 Kings 20:13). After the armies of Aram Damascus (modern Syria) and their leader Ben-hadad were defeated, Ahab did not take the life of Ben-hadad, as he was instructed to do by the prophet of God, Elijah; instead he made a treaty with Ben-hadad and restored to him the lands that his own father had seized from Aram (1 Kings 20:34). A prophet who is unnamed tells King Ahab, “This is what the Lord says ‘You have set free a man that I had determined should die. Therefore it is your life for his life, your people for his’” (1 Kings 20:42). King Ahab’s final sin occurred when he sought a property that did not belong to him but a fellow Israelite, Naboth. Since Naboth would not sell his vineyard, Jezebel deceitfully used her husband’s name and seal to conspire against Naboth, which eventually led to his death (1 Kings 21:11-13). After Naboth’s death sentence was carried out, Ahab seized his lands. For this last sin, the Prophet Elijah came to Ahab with the Lord’s words: “in the place where dogs licked up Naboth’s blood, dogs will lick up your blood, yes yours” (1 Kings 21:19). Ahab was killed in battle against the Arameans and his entire family was killed by the Jehu overthrow some years later.

In *Moby-Dick*, the mention of “‘Ahab of old’” occurs in Chapter 16, “The Ship,” after Ishmael signs the articles to join the *Pequod’s* crew. Ishmael notes the absence of Captain Ahab and questions Peleg about him. Peleg describes Captain Ahab as a “‘grand, ungodly, god-like man,’” who has occupied the most prestigious places and the most cannibalistic regions of the world. Peleg characterizes Captain Ahab just the way a royal subject would speak of his king. In awe, he explicitly makes the connection between Ahab’s name and that of a once-crowned King. Ishmael questions the stigma of “‘Ahab of old’” in the Bible and asks, “‘[W]hen that wicked king was slain, the dogs, did they not lick up his blood?’” Peleg defends Captain Ahab against these parallels that Ishmael is drawing between the two Ahabs. He explains how Ahab’s ignorant, widowed mother had bequeathed the name to him and how, after she died, the “‘old squaw Tistig…said that the name would somehow prove prophetic.’” Even though Peleg’s defense is well meant, he is drawing even more parallels between the two Ahabs. After Captain Ahab lost his leg to Moby Dick, he became a “‘kind of moody,—desperate moody and savage at times.” King Ahab had these same issues throughout his life, as he worshipped false idols, just like Captain Ahab is obsessed with hunting the White Whale. In both King Ahab’s story and that of Captain Ahab, there are people that warn against the consequences of blasphemous action. Elijah and Starbuck play similar roles in that they foretell that Ahab’s pursuits will end in nothing but tragic loss. While Elijah is the Prophet of God, Starbuck is the voice of reason during Ahab’s rampages, as he rallies his crew to assist him in avenging himself against Moby Dick. The question, at this stage in the book, is this: will their fates be the same? Will God strike down the great Captain like he did the wicked King?

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

That next morning, **[Queequeg](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/queequeg)** informs [**Ishmael**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ishmael) that his little wooden god, named **[Yojo](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters)**, has told him that Ishmael is to select the sailing vessel on which they will voyage, and that, furthermore, Ishmael is to do this according to his own free will and inclination. Although Ishmael wants Queequeg’s advice in choosing the ship, he acquiesces and goes out to find a boat. Ishmael isolates three possibilities: the Devil-dam, the Tit-bit, and the Pequod, the last named for an “extinct tribe of Massachusetts Indians.” Ishmael’s inclinations guide him to the last ship, and so he chooses it.

***Analysis Part 1:***

A good example of the interplay of fate and free will in the novel. On the one hand, Yojo and Queequeg both want Ishmael to choose the ship on which they will sail. Therefore, they trust implicitly in Ishmael’s judgment. But they also believe it is preordained that Ishmael’s good judgment will result in . . . their fate, meaning that whatever their future is, it will come about according to Ishmael’s wishes. In some sense, too, Ahab’s quest for Moby Dick is both self-initiated and (he believes) beyond his immediate control.

***Summary Part 2:***

[**Ishmael**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ishmael) looks over the Pequod, and finds it to be an old and beautiful ship, adorned, as he would later find out, by its owner and former captain, [**Peleg**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters), with a great deal of carving and a dark stain of paint—all of which indicate its many voyages around the world. Ishmael goes up to the decks and sees a teepee-like structure pitched there. Going inside, he finds an old sailor and asks if that man is the captain of the boat, and announces that he, Ishmael, would very much like to serve as a sailor on the Pequod.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Melville knows that, in order to “build up” the character of Ahab, he must first provide the reader with several “false starts” in that direction. He therefore makes it seem that Peleg might be the captain of the vessel—until, that is, Peleg admits that the ship’s captain is an even more mysterious man, one who very rarely shows his face above-decks.

***Summary Part 3:***

This old sailor asks whether [**Ishmael**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ishmael) has any experience on boats, and when Ishmael says he has been on merchant ships, the old man becomes enraged, saying that sailing on a whaling vessel is different, and far more difficult, than sailing on a merchant ship. The old sailor then asks if Ishmael is trustworthy, and tells him to look at Captain [**Ahab**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ahab) before he decides to sail on the Pequod. Ishmael is surprised, thinking that the old man is the captain of the boat, but the man introduces himself as [**Peleg**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters), part owner of the boat along with another man named [**Bildad**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters). Peleg tells Ishmael that Ahab lost his leg to a whale—and not just any whale, but the “monstrousest parmacetty [Spermaceti] that ever chipped a boat.”

***Analysis Part 3:***

The first introduction of Ahab’s disability—the loss of his leg. Peleg makes it seem that, in some sense, Ahab’s quest is understandable—that any man who has been “dismasted” might reasonably hold a grudge against the whale who ate his leg. But other characters in the novel, notably Starbuck and, later, Boomer, say it is wrong to impute human motives to Moby Dick—that he is, instead, simply an animal, and a ferocious one, and that one cannot exact revenge against a “dumb brute.”

***Summary Part 4:***

[**Peleg**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters) pushes [**Ishmael**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ishmael) further, asking if Ishmael is willing to throw a harpoon down a “whale’s throat,” and whether Ishmael can’t “see the world,” as many potential whalemen wish, by just standing on the docks and looking at the ocean, instead of putting himself in danger on the high seas. But Ishmael insists that he is up to the challenge and ready to be a whaler, and at this, Peleg tells him to go below-decks, talk to [**Bildad**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters), and sign up for the next voyage.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Ishmael places special importance on the notion of sailing on a whaling ship, rather than on any merchant vessel. As will be revealed later on, Ishmael believes that whaling itself is a noble calling, prefigured in history, with a vast number of literary, philosophical, and religious dimensions unknown to common fishing ships.

***Summary Part 5:***

[**Ishmael**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ishmael) writes that both [**Peleg**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters) and [**Bildad**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters) were Nantucket Quakers, but are hardly peaceful for that—though they speak the odd Quaker vernacular, which sounds like the language of the Bible, they are angry men with a fighting spirit. Ishmael says that Peleg is a “blusterer,” a talkative and somewhat hypocritical man, and that Bildad is “more pious,” more like a typical Quaker, though he also works his men hard and gives them very little in the way of rations or money. Ishmael believes his pay should be the 275th lay, or 1/275 of the ship’s profits at the end of whaling. But Ishmael is shocked to learn that Bildad and Peleg will offer him only 1/777 of the profits, known in the industry as a “long lay.”

***Analysis Part 5:***

In the novel, characters tend to be caricatures, in a positive sense of the word—they are often defined by a few strong characteristics, and might be interpreted as embodiments of a given set of values. Thus, Peleg believes religiosity isn’t important in a sailor; Bildad does. Peleg freely takes the name of the Lord in vain; Bildad would never do so. The way pay on a whaling ship works is important: the men do not make a salary. The make a percentage of the profits of the ship. Speaking in modern language, every sailor has "equity" in the voyage. They make their fortune—literally and figuratively—through the luck and skill of their collective effort.

***Summary Part 6:Limits of Knowledge Theme Icon***

Fate and Free Will Theme Icon

Race, Fellowship, and Enslavement Theme Icon

Religion Theme Icon

[**Ishmael**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ishmael) is offended at this paltry offer, but believing this is the ship for him, and not caring too much for the pay, he signs anyway, and asks if he can bring his friend **[Queequeg](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/queequeg)** along the next day. [**Peleg**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters) and [**Bildad**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters) agree. As Ishmael is walking back to Queequeg, however, Ishmael asks Peleg if he can meet Ahab, now that he is signed on for the voyage. But Peleg says that Ahab is out of sorts, not taking visitors at the moment. And when Ishmael asks if Ahab isn’t the name of a Biblical king so wicked that, when he was killed, “dogs wouldn’t lick his blood,” Peleg warns Ishmael not to bring up this story around Ahab.

***Analysis Part 6:***

The Biblical tales told in Moby Dick, including the references to Rachel and her orphans, to Ahab, and to Jonah, are typically stories of discomfort, sadness, and cruelty. Although the story of Jonah has a positive ending, the stories of Ahab and Rachel do not, and Melville appears especially awed by the overwhelming power and mystery of these stories—by the idea that God, rather than being just a source of infinite goodness, is also a force of “fate,” or apparently indiscriminate cruelty to men.

***Summary Part 7:Nature and Man Theme Icon***

Madness Theme Icon

Religion Theme Icon

Before [**Ishmael**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ishmael) leaves, [**Peleg**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters) tells him that [**Ahab**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/moby-dick/characters/ahab) was a little “out of his head” after his leg was bitten off by a certain whale, and that Ahab is somewhat “moody,” but he is a good captain, and he has a young wife and child living in Nantucket. Ishmael thinks a little on the idea of Ahab as he walks back to the Try Pots, but says that other ideas and excitement about the voyage began to preoccupy him, and so he forgets Ahab for the time being.

***Analysis Part 7:***

This is the first explicit reference to the fact that Ahab might not be entirely of sound mind. It is not clear, as the novel progresses, to what extent Ahab is “insane,” and to what extent his pride, drive, and anger have simply taken control of his life. Ahab does appear, at best, to have a total disregard for anything except his personal whale-hunt.