

Ishmael's Journey



Ishmael shares a room with Queequeg.

- Preview:**
1. Read the name of the story.
 2. Look at the picture.
 3. Read the sentence under the picture.
 4. Read the first eight paragraphs of the story.
 5. Then answer the following question.

- You learned from your preview that Ishmael and Queequeg
- a. did not get along with each other.
 - b. did not like sharing a room.
 - c. would not talk to each other.
 - d. became best friends.

Turn to the Comprehension Check on page 10 for the right answer.

Now read the story.

Read to find out how Ishmael and Queequeg spent Christmas Day.

Ishmael's Journey

Call me Ishmael.

Many years ago, I had little money and was feeling very low. That's when I decided to explore the watery part of the world.

It was a cold and dreary Saturday in December when I stuffed a shirt or two in my carpet bag and set off for New Bedford. There, I planned to catch a small vessel and travel to Nantucket. I would begin my sea voyage from that well-known whaling port. But when I reached New Bedford, I learned I had missed the vessel to Nantucket. The next vessel would not sail until Monday. So I searched for a place to stay and found the Spouter Inn.

The inn looked rather plain, so I knew it was a place I could afford. Upon entering, I saw a dusty oil painting hanging on one wall. The light was dim, so I had to peer closely to see that it was a picture of a sinking ship with a giant whale nearby. Curious, I thought.

The landlord told me there were no empty rooms. He suggested I share a room with a sailor. I did not like the idea of sharing a room. But, I was in need of a place to sleep and so I agreed.

The landlord showed me to the room, but no one was there. "The sailor is out trying to sell his last head," the landlord explained.

"What! Sell his last head?" Just what sort of man was this sailor? Was the landlord joking with me?

I got ready for bed as quickly as possible, for I was very tired. A few minutes later, a tall man entered the room. He was carrying a harpoon. When he took off his shirt and pants, I was startled to see that his entire body was covered with a wild pattern of tattoos. I stared at the markings on his

arms, hands, chest and legs. Even his face and bald head were decorated with painted shapes. I was amazed at his appearance. But, I knew that he was simply a human being like me. I soon found this stranger, named Queequeg, to be a good and kind person. We quickly became the best of friends.

Queequeg and I agreed to ship on the same whaler. On Monday, we sailed for Nantucket to find a worthy ship. Three ships docked at the pier were preparing to set sail on a whaling voyage. I studied each with great care. I finally settled on an old ship called the *Pequod*. This ship looked as if it had weathered many a storm. I climbed aboard to peer around for someone who might be in charge of signing men for the voyage. I found a man by the name of Captain Peleg. He told me he was one of the owners of the *Pequod*.

"And, who is captain of the *Pequod*, sir?" I asked. I thought it strange that the captain was not on board.

"That would be Captain Ahab," Peleg said.

"I'd like to meet him," I said.

Captain Peleg shook his head. "Ahab's a strange man. He keeps to his house and often will not even talk to me. He has only one leg, you see. He lost his leg to the great white whale. These days, he's often in a dark mood."

I left the *Pequod*, thinking about the mysterious Captain Ahab.

The next day I took Queequeg to the *Pequod* so he could sign on properly as a harpooner. As we left the ship, a man stepped in front of us. He wore a faded jacket and patched trousers. A rag of a black handkerchief was tied around his neck. His face was heavily pock-

marked. The stranger raised his hand and pointed at the *Pequod*.

"Have ye shipped in that ship?" he asked.

"Not yet," I said. "We've just signed the papers."

"Then ye haven't seen Old Thunder yet, have ye?" the stranger asked.

"Who's Old Thunder?" I asked. Why was this ragged sailor bothering us?

"Captain Ahab is called Old Thunder by some of us old sailors. Ye haven't seen him then, have ye?"

"No, we haven't," I told him.

"Do ye know that it was a giant whale that took off his leg?"

I nodded and he chatted on. "So, ye've signed on. What's done is done, then. And, some sailors or other must go with him, I suppose. God pity them!"

I was getting impatient listening to the man's nonsense. "Come on, Queequeg, let's leave this crazy man."

Queequeg and I continued down the street. Once, I glanced back and saw the man watching us. It gave me a strange feeling, but I couldn't say why.

Because it was to be a three-year voyage, it took many days to load the *Pequod* properly. Spare sails and ropes, spare harpoons and lines, spare whaleboats, spare just about everything must be stored aboard. At last, all was ready.

The *Pequod* cast off Nantucket pier on a cold, dreary, Christmas Day. The winter ocean tossed freezing sprays of water against the ship. Pointed spikes of ice dripped from the bows. The scene on the deck was busy and filled with much shouting.

But, still Captain Ahab did not appear.

Ishmael's Journey

COMPREHENSION CHECK

Preview Answer:

d. became best friends.

Choose the best answer.

1. Ishmael began his journey in the month of
 - a. October.
 - b. November.
 - c. December.
 - d. January.
2. When Ishmael learned he had missed the vessel to Nantucket, he found a place to stay at
 - a. the Spouter Inn.
 - b. the Sailors' Inn.
 - c. the Seashore Inn.
 - d. Sandals'.
3. Finding no empty rooms at the inn, Ishmael
 - a. found another place to stay.
 - b. agreed to share a room with another sailor.
 - c. went back home.
 - d. slept in the street.
4. Queequeg had tattoos on his
 - a. arms and legs.
 - b. head.
 - c. face.
 - d. entire body.
5. Ishmael signed on the ship called
 - a. the *Peabody*.
 - b. the *Peril*.
 - c. the *Pequod*.
 - d. the *Poseidon*.
6. To "sign on" a voyage means that you will
 - a. work on the ship.
 - b. take a pleasure cruise.
 - c. have a restful vacation.
 - d. do a lot of deep-sea diving.
7. Who was the captain of the *Pequod*?
 - a. Captain Arab
 - b. Captain Ahab
 - c. Captain Abba
 - d. Captain Abdul
8. Captain Ahab was also called
 - a. Dark Mood.
 - b. Captain One Leg.
 - c. Old Thunder.
 - d. Old Goat.
9. Another name for this story could be
 - a. "Merry Christmas."
 - b. "Off to Sea."
 - c. "The Tattooed Man."
 - d. "The Great White Whale."
10. This story is mainly about
 - a. a man who decides to explore the world by sea.
 - b. a man who lost his leg to a whale.
 - c. a man who loved tattoos.
 - d. a man who found a good friend.

Check your answers with the key on page 67.