

4 Lesson Plans on American Whaling & Student Project

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**Target: Middle School/High School
(8th - 10th Grades)**

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Introduction

I have been enthralled by whaling since I was in elementary school. I read every book I could find on the subject, and I continue to dip into my whaling “library” that I keep on a prominent bookshelf. My early interest led me to chase down primary sources at a young age, and it shaped my academic focus so that I became a historian and full-time history teacher.

I teach at a poor, rural high school in northern Vermont, not far from the Canadian border. My students have never seen the sea--most have never been farther than 60 miles from home! But they hunt and fish in the vast forest that surrounds them, and are enthralled by stories of early pioneers exploring routes west, trekking through unknown lands. Their test scores may be low and they may never go to college, but they combine the same adventurous spirit and down-to-earth practicality that sent generations of young men to sea to seek their fortunes aboard whaleships. As Nathaniel Philbrick said in the documentary *Into the Deep*, “. . . [whaleships] were the spaceships of their day, where they could travel to unknown worlds. . . .”

American whaling encompasses so many aspects of our national character: our love of hunting, our urge to explore, our desire for wealth, our penchant for violence. My students, living in a remote corner of the country, reflect these same characteristics and, I believe, would have signed up for a whaling voyage in a heartbeat! While the ship *Charles W. Morgan* is an artifact from the past, its 38th Voyage reminds us that our adventurous American character endures.

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Lesson Plan #1: Why Go Whaling?

Time: One 85-minute block

1. Introduction

Discussion with students, answering following questions:

- What is whaling?
- Why do it?
- Can you name any books or movies about whaling?
- Is whaling legal today?

2. Today's Lesson

For 200 years, whaling played an enormous role in American life. Whale oil fueled the industrial revolution, and other whale products like baleen shaped American culture. Whaling also boosted the economy by the building of ships, the construction of barrels, the making of sails and weaving of rope, and the forging of special iron weapons for use on a whaleship.

3. Procedure

A. Distribute **Handout A: America, Whaling & the World** and take turns reading aloud. Discuss questions in pairs, or as a class.

B. Students will take part in a lively discussion/take notes on whale products.
Use **Notes B**.

C. On individual tablets or laptops , students will log onto the following website. They will click through the slideshow and read the captions, then complete **Handout C: Photo Gallery of Early Whaling**.

www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/photo-gallery/whaling-gallery/

D. Introduce project to class, using **Project D: Whaling Journal**. Explain there will be some time to work in class on the project at the end of the unit, but that most will be done at home. Complete the first page in class: Who Are You?

Handout A

America, Whaling & the World

(adapted from Introduction of "Into the Deep: America, Whaling & the World" at *American Experience* at www.pbs.org)

In the early 1600s, the first pilgrims watched from the *Mayflower* as throngs of whales breached the waters off Cape Cod, Massachusetts. Native Americans would soon pass their whaling techniques on to the new American settlers, who would come to dominate the industry for the next two centuries. By the mid 1800s, over two-thirds of the world's 900 whaling ships came from American ports, and American whalers traveled the globe in pursuit of the largest creatures on earth--in particular the sperm whale.

For hundreds of years, the whaling industry was closely bound up with American business and culture through shipbuilding, sailmaking, coopering, blacksmithing, and rope making, and the manufacture of lamp oil, industrial oil, candles, corsets, and perfumes. At whaling's peak, American whale oil helped light the world, illuminating and powering the industrial revolution.

As deep-ocean whaling entered its "golden age" in the mid-1800s, whaling came to grip the imagination of the American people. Great ships sailed on voyages for three to four years at a time. Chasing their prey in 25-foot rowboats, six-man crews would attempt to harpoon whales weighing up to 80 tons. Once the great mammals were stabbed to death, the labor-intensive processing of the whale began. The massive bodies were towed back to the mother ship, cut apart and stripped of blubber, baleen, spermaceti oil, and teeth. On board the ship, the fatty blubber was cooked in vast iron try-pots to boil the oil out of it, and the fires sent acrid plumes of smoke into the sky, lighting up the sails at night with a red glow visible from 30 miles away.

With extraordinary greed, men chased whales to the ends of the earth and to the point of near extinction. With little thought for the consequences, men attacked these enormous mammals for their precious oil, baleen, and teeth. "The poor whale is doomed to utter extermination," one whaler wrote in the mid 1900s, "or at least so near to it that too few will remain....."

(over)

Questions

1. "Throngs of whales breached the waters off Cape Cod... ." What do you think "breached" means? Have you ever seen a whale breaching?

How do you think whaling might have been done by Native Americans, who had no iron technology?

2. What do you think "coopering" is? Look it up. What would this be a crucial item on board a whale ship?

What is a corset? How could whaling be related to corsets?

3. How long were whaling voyages?

What kind of dangers do you predict whalers faced on the open seas?

What kind of dangers do you predict they faced in the small whaleboats?

4. Did the whaler's words come true?

What is the situation for most species of whales today?

Notes B

What's in a Whale?

(adapted from "Whaling and the Industrial Revolution Part I: Why Whales?" at www.rantinandrov.com)

Five valuable products that fueled American industrial revolution & shaped American culture:

1. OIL! Boil blubber chunks to produce oil. Greases gears, machinery for looms, steam engines. One whale = 40-70 barrels of oil (1200+ gallons). Full ship = 2400 barrels, or about 60 whales!
2. SPERMACETI: Very fine, pale oil in head of sperm whale. 6-8 barrels per whale. Made finest, most expensive candles with little smoke.
3. BALEEN: strong, bristly, flexible plates to filter krill in humpback, right, gray whales. Used in corsets, hooped skirts, umbrella ribs, horse whips, hat brims.... (No plastic yet!)
4. AMBERGRIS: dark, waxy substance formed around sharp beaks of giant squids eaten by sperm whales. (Like pearl in oyster...) Very rare, sometimes found in stomach. Helps perfume linger on skin. More valuable than gold!
5. TEETH: sperm whales may have 50 teeth, 8-10 inches long. Often given to crew to carve in spare time - works of art called scrimshaw.

Industries that exploded with the whaling industry: shipbuilding, sailmaking, coopering, blacksmithing, ropemaking.....

Handout C

Name:

Photo Gallery of Early Whaling

We have lots of images of whaling and whaling products, and of its great impact on American culture.

1. Go to this website:

www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/photo-gallery/whaling-gallery/

2. Click through the images and read each caption.

3. Choose 3 that intrigue you:

a. Row # _____ Slide # _____

What does this slide depict?

Why does it interest you?

Question this slide makes you think of:

(over)

b. Row # _____ Slide # _____

What does this slide depict?

Why does it interest you?

Question this slide makes you think of:

c. Row # _____ Slide # _____

What does this slide depict?

Why does it interest you?

Question this slide makes you think of:

Project D

Name: _____

Whaling Journal

Surprise! You are a young man who has been transported back in time to the 1800s. Tired of your life on a small family farm, you run away to sea and join the crew of a whaling ship. You will create an authentic whaling journal that will include not only daily entries but ads from the period, estimated profits, a chart of the journey, an original scrimshaw design, and perhaps even a song.

Who Are You?

1. First, choose a real ship! Go to **library.mysticseaport.org**

On the left, under E-Reference, click on "American Whaling Voyages." Then click on "Vessel Index."

Look at the list of all those whale ships! Pick one from New Bedford, Massachusetts, that sailed in the 1800s: _____ Year Built? _____

Vessel # _____ Fate: _____

2. In the grey box on the left, click "Search." At the bottom, type in your Vessel # and search. This is a list of all the voyages your whale ship made, and the cargo they returned with.

Choose 1 particular voyage # _____ Dates? _____

Destination: _____ Master (Captain) _____

Barrels of Spermaceti Oil: _____ Barrels of Whale Oil: _____

Pounds of Whalebone (Baleen): _____

3. Now you must pick the name of a real crewman on that voyage! Go to **www.whalingmuseum.org/online_exhibits/crewlist/search.php**

Click the "**Vessel**" dot, then type in the name of your ship and press Search. This is the list of all the crewmen who ever served aboard your ship! Choose one **from the year your ship sets sail**. Your name: _____

Click on your name and take down some notes here about your appearance, age, hometown, rank:

Journal Entry #1

To be authentic, you will either handwrite your entry in cursive, or type using a cursive font and 1.15 line spacing. Each entry should be 1 ½ - 2 pages in length.

Part 1: You have just set out on your first whaling voyage! Are you excited? Scared? What will your family feel when they get the letter you have sent them, telling them of your plans? What kinds of supplies did you pack in your seamen's chest? Describe the ship, the captain, and any friends you have made. Are you seasick yet?

Part 2: Since you just left port, there are a few newspapers in the crew quarters. You are proud that you are able to read, and in your spare time you cut out a few ads for whale oil and goods made with whaling products and paste them into your journal.

Use the computer to search for ads from the 1800s. Print them and glue them into your journal, or cut and paste them electronically. Use your notes for reference. Minimum: 3 images.

Journal Entry #2

Part 1: The crew has killed its first whale! It is a sperm whale, and put up quite a fight. Describe the scene: who saw it first? How did you feel getting into a small whaleboat and setting off for the hunt? How did it end? What are your thoughts about the hard work of towing it back and cutting it up?

Part 2: You have a pretty good head for numbers. Calculate the profits on this whale. How many barrels of oil? Spermaceti? Did you find any ambergris? How many pounds? How many teeth were there, and what will you do with those? Make a table listing the products from this first whale. Then do a little research on prices & calculate their worth.

Journal Entry #3

Part 1: It is later . . . much later. You are at the halfway mark now---you have been on this whaleship at least one year! The early excitement of being at sea and hunting whales is fading. What are you particularly tired of? What do you miss the most? Have there been any deaths amongst the crew? List some of the ports you have visited and describe new peoples and sights you have seen.

Part 2: Print out a world map and chart your course! You started in New Bedford, Massachusetts, and now you are . . . where? Mark each spot you have taken a whale, and label each place you had shore leave.

Journal Entry #4

Part 1: At long last, you are headed home! By the time you get there, years will have passed. You can't wait to see your family and the farm again. Now that you will be home in a few weeks, you want to put down on paper the routine of daily life aboard the whale ship when there is no whale in sight--in other words, most of the time! What are the best and worst parts of the day?

Part 2: You have been spending all of your spare time making a present for your sister: an engraving on a sperm whale tooth. Draw the tooth, life size, with your engraving. Is it a whaling scene? A drawing of her? A landscape from one of the exotic places you visited? Something that shows your pride in being an American?

OR

You love to sing, and have spent the voyage learning many a sea chanty that you sailors can sing while you work. You are spending your free hours writing your own! It is to the tune of a traditional song (Yankee Doodle, My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean, etc.) but the lyrics are your own, and reflect life aboard a whale ship.

(over)

Epilogue

At long last, you made it home safely. What happens next?

After your death, your family finds this old journal in the attic. They value it as a record of one of your adventures, and someone adds a short Epilogue at the end that tells the story of the rest of your life.

Do you give up whaling and stay home on the farm? Make whaling a career and become a captain one day? Are you lost at sea? Do you die in bed as an old man? (You can try Googling your crew member's name: Full name + hometown and year of birth.) Give it some thought and be creative.... Figure out a death date as well.

Lesson Plan #2: How Were Whales Hunted?

Time: One 85-minute block

1. Introduction

Discussion with students, answering the following questions:

- Why go whaling? (review)
- How do you think they go after the whales?
- How do you think the whales are killed?
- How do you think they turn the whale into oil?
- What do you think the dangers might be?

2. Today's Lesson

Whale hunting was an epic struggle between men and the largest creatures on earth. It was dangerous, violent, exciting, and profitable! But the battle didn't end once the whale finally expired--first the enormous carcass had to be towed back to the ship, and then dismembered for its valuable parts. Each part of the hunt, and then the cutting in, had its own perils.

3. Procedure

- A. Distribute **Handout E** and take turns reading aloud "How Do You Hunt a Whale?"
- B. Students will take part in a lively discussion/take notes on Hunting. Use **Notes F**.
(First half: The Hunt)
- C. Students will watch a YouTube video as a class narrated by Eric Dolan (author of "Leviathan" from Handout E). Students will see many drawings, paintings and photos of The Hunt and review the importance of whaling to America.
Go to **YouTube.com** and type in "**Leviathan-The History of Whaling in America.**"
(Video is 4:23, but stop at 3:40) Discuss what impressed students.
- D. Turn over **Handout E** and read aloud "Processing a Whale."
- F. Students will take part in a lively discussion/take notes on Cutting In. Use **Notes F**.
(Second Half: Processing a Whale)
- G. Students will examine artifacts from Mystic Seaport using **Handout G**.

Handout E

How Do You Hunt a Whale?

(adapted from Leviathan by Eric Jay Dolin, p. 49-50)

...When a whale came into view, the lookout cried, "Whale off!" or "Whale in the bay..." and the whalers came running. One, two, or sometimes more whaleboats, each with the usual complement of six men, would then shove off, and the men would begin rowing toward deeper water. As the boat approached the whale, the men became silent so as not to startle it and cause it to swim away...Once the boat closed in on the whale, the harpooner grabbed his weapon and stood poised at the bow ready to strike when the time was right. His harpoon was a double-barbed iron dart, with a two-foot shank, mounted on a pole made from a hardwood sapling, up to six feet long. The harpoon...was attached to a rope 100 or more fathoms long [600 feet], which lay coiled in a tub at the bottom of the boat...the goal was to get as close as possible to the whale so that the harpoon could be thrown or thrust with enough force to penetrate the whale's fibrous skin and blubber. If the harpooner had the time and the talent, he would launch a second harpoon into the wounded whale. Despite their considerable size and sharp tips, harpoons were not designed to kill the whale; instead they were meant to hold fast to the whale to keep it from escaping....

The moments after the harpoon found its mark were the most dangerous parts of the hunt. With one flick of its mighty tail flukes, the enraged whale could destroy the boat, flinging the men into the water, possibly injuring or killing a few, and leaving the rest, few of whom could swim, struggling to stay afloat. More commonly the struck whale would take off....

A whale barreling along at the surface would take the men on a "Nantucket sleigh ride," a bone-jarring, terrifying, and at times, no doubt, exhilarating trip over the waves. As soon as the whale tired, the men pulled alongside it--"wood to blackskin"--whereupon one of them grabbed the lance...which was used to finish off the whale. The goal was to strike hard and deep to pierce the lungs, or the "life" of the whale, and then churn the lance to do the most damage. Success would show itself as a geyser of crimson blood gushing from the whale's blowhole....Now came the whale's final flurry, in which it began swimming frantically in ever tighter circles, thrashing its tail, and posing its final danger to the whalers, who backed off their boat to keep it from being damaged by the dying animal's final exertions. When the whale exhaled its last breath, it turned on its side, fin out....One of the men cut a hole in the whale's flukes, into which was inserted a T-shaped wooden toggle attached to a rope, and the crew began the long, wearying tow back....

Handout E (reverse)

Processing a Whale

(adapted from "In the Heart of the Sea" by Nathaniel Philbrick, p. 55-57)

A whaleboat towing a whale could go no faster than one mile per hour. It was often dark by the time the crew reached the ship.

Now it was time to butcher the body. The crew tied the whale to the ship's starboard side....then they lowered the cutting stage--a narrow plank upon which the mates balanced as they cut up the body. The stripping of a whale's blubber has been compared to the peeling of an orange....

First the mate hacked a hole in the whale's side, just above the fin, into which was inserted a giant hook suspended from the mast....Next the mates cut out the start of a five-foot-wide strip of the blubber next to the hook. Pulled by tackle, the strip was gradually torn from the whale's carcass, slowly spinning it around, until a twenty-foot-long strip, dripping with blood and oil, was suspended over the rigging. This "blanket piece" was cut from the whale and lowered into the blubber room below deck to be cut into more manageable pieces. Back at the corpse, the blubber-ripping continued.

Once the whale had been completely stripped of blubber, it was decapitated. A sperm whale's head accounts for close to a third of its length. The upper part of the head contains the case, a space filled with up to 500 gallons of spermaceti, a clear, high-quality oil that partially solidifies on exposure to air. The head was hauled up onto the deck, and the men cut a hole into the top of the case and used buckets to remove the oil. One or two men might then be ordered to climb into the case to make sure they get all the spermaceti. Spilling occurred, and soon the decks were a slippery mess of oil and blood. Before cutting loose the whale's mutilated corpse, the mates probed its intestines with a lance, searching for ambergris, worth more than its weight in gold.

By now the two immense iron try-pots were full of pieces of blubber....chopped into foot-square hunks, then cut through into inch-thick slabs that resembled the fanned pages of a book and were known as bible leaves. A whale's blubber bears no similarity to the fat of terrestrial animals. Rather than soft and flabby, it is tough....requiring the whalers to resharpen their cutting tools constantly.

...Once the boiling process had begun, the crispy pieces of blubber floating on the surface of the pot--known as scraps or cracklings--were skimmed off and tossed into the fire for fuel. The flames that melted down the whale's blubber were thus fed by the whale itself....it produced a thick pall of black smoke with an unforgettable stench.

...Said a crewman, "[there is] something peculiarly wild and savage in it....difficult to describe with anything like accuracy. There is a murderous appearance about the blood-stained decks, and the huge masses of flesh and blubber lying here and there, and a ferocity in the looks of the men, heightened by the red, fierce glare of the fires."

Notes F

The Hunt

1. Whale sighted. 2-3 whaleboats lowered.
2. Row to get close enough to harpoon. Wounded whale takes off, pulling whaleboat.
May crush boat/harm men in struggle.
3. After death, towed back to ship.

Processing a Whale

1. Tie whale to ship.
2. Start by peeling away "blanket piece," 20-foot strip of blubber. Chopped into hunks, boiled in try-pots to remove oil. Poured into barrels and stored belowdecks.
3. Decapitate whale. Remove spermaceti with buckets.
4. Probe stomach with lance for ambergris chunks.
5. Pull out teeth for scrimshaw.

Handout G

Name: _____

Whaling Artifacts

Mystic Seaport in Mystic, Connecticut, is known as “The Museum of America and the Sea.” It is a very special museum that includes ships, boats, artifacts, and exhibits, and offers many hands-on activities. It is also the home of the *Charles W. Morgan*, the world’s last surviving whaleship!

Directions: Go to their website at **www.mysticseaport.org**. Go to LEARN at the top, then to ONLINE RESOURCES at the bottom of the gray screen. Next, click on Resource Sets. Then scroll down to the bottom and click on Whaling.

Activity: Scroll through the images and choose four ARTIFACTS that interest you. (Remember, an artifact is a man-made object! That includes photos.)

Artifact #1

Name: _____ Date: _____

What do you think this artifact was used for?

How does this artifact connect to whaling?

(over)

Artifact #2

Name: _____ Date: _____

What do you think this artifact was used for?

How does this artifact connect to whaling?

Artifact #3

Name: _____ Date: _____

What do you think this artifact was used for?

How does this artifact connect to whaling?

Artifact #4

Name: _____ Date: _____

What do you think this artifact was used for?

How does this artifact connect to whaling?

Lesson Plan #3: Where Did Whaleships Go?

Time: One 85-minute block

1. Introduction

- What valuable products came from whaling? (review)
- How were whales hunted? (review)
- How were the whales processed? (review)
- Why do you think the whaling voyages were so long?
- Think about the first page of your whaling journal, when you chose a ship. Where did whaleships go?
- Why does author Nathaniel Philbrick call whaleships the “spaceships” of their time?

2. Today’s Lesson

Whaling voyages were usually 3-4 years in length, and whaleships traveled tens of thousands of miles in search of their prey. Sailors found themselves in exotic ports all over the world, and also came into contact with lesser-known places and peoples. The result was cultural diffusion: an exchange of goods, knowledge, diseases....

3. Procedure

- A. View, as class, on LCD projector, an 1851 whaling chart and discuss:
www.mapsofantiquity.com/store/World/Whale_Chart_by_M.F._Maury_Print/images/REP269BP.JPG
(blue and green = right whales, pink = sperm whales)
- B. To view a map of whaleship routes and ports of call, students will, on individual Ipads/laptops, go to **www.girlonawhaleship.org**. Complete **Handout H**.
- C. Read aloud, then complete **Handout I: Primary Source--Francis Allyn Olmstead**. Students may work by themselves or in pairs.
- D. We have talked about whaling culture and the culture of new places whaleships visited. Let’s look at the culture of the whales themselves. As a class, watch on LCD projector: **YouTube.com “Jonathan Bird’s Blue World: Sperm Whales.”** (8 min.) Discuss. How are sperm whales viewed in our culture in modern times?

Handout H

Name:

Whaleships around the World

Check out the long journeys whaleships made! No wonder the voyages usually lasted 3-4 years...they went tens of thousands of miles!

1. Go to **www.girlonawhaleship.org**. Click on "Map of Whaling."
All the dots are set to "OFF." Turn "ON" the ship *Roman's* route.

What year did the *Roman* start her journey? _____ What year did she finish? _____

Note that there is no return path back home for the *Roman*.... Google her name/last date and research what happened. Summarize:

2. Turn the *Roman's* dot off, and turn on the next, "Typical Whaling Routes."

Which continents were the whaleships active near? _____

Which ocean were they most active in? _____

3. Keep that dot on, and turn on the next as well, "Ports & Sites."

Why do you think whaleships made brief visits at so many ports?

Name 3 of these ports you have heard of before: _____

Name 3 of these ports you have never heard of before: _____

4. Turn off "Ports & Sites." Turn on "Whaling Grounds." What do you notice about whaling grounds and whaling routes?

Handout I

Primary Source: Francis Allyn Olmstead

(adapted from Incidents of a Whaling Voyage by Francis Allyn Oldmstead)

Olmstead, a college graduate, was a passenger on the whaleship North America in 1840. He published a book based on his careful observations of the hardships of the voyage, the skill of the sailors, the ship's survival of storms and icebergs, and the crew's encounters with native cultures, particularly those in the Sandwich Islands--later named the Hawaiian Islands.

A. The [clothing] of the natives, that is, of the masculine type, is made in rather more of the primitive style than I had expected to see. But a small proportion are to be seen with a pair of pants, except on Sundays and holy days. But most, with a cloth around the waist, or passing over the shoulder, and knotted, they walk off with much dignity and consciousness of superiority.... The native women are dressed in long gowns....with a bright yellow shawl around her waist, a wreath of brilliant feathers or flowers encircling her brow, and a huge comb towering up with masses of dark hair coiled around it, a Hawaiian lady is dressed stylishly. (p. 193)

B. It is customary with the natives, whenever any one dies, for the relatives of the deceased to utter loud cries and wails without ceasing, for several days....When friends meet after a long separation, they touch noses.... (p. 212)

C. The natives of these islands are very much addicted to smoking tobacco. All of both sexes, carry pipes with short stems, and a tinder box for kindling a fire at any moment....Even at night they awake from their slumbers, and kindling a spark in their tobacco pipes, take three or four whiffs, which are blown down through the nostrils, then put up their pipes and go to sleep again....The feather and flower *leis* which are obnoxious to some of the missionaries, are brilliant garlands of feathers and flowers, which which, many of the native women enrich the head and neck, and are very tasteful and pretty ornaments in my opinion, for which they ought to be praised. (p. 232)

D. The most alarming feature in the present aspect of the islands is the depopulation which is steadily taking place from year to year....Before the arrival of ships and missionaries to these islands, there were various causes that lowered the population:

frequent wars, illness, and infanticide; but now the introduction of vile diseases by the ships touching at the islands....The depopulation of these islands is steadily moving forwards, and unless it is speedily arrested, the total extinction of the nation must happen, and these islanders must shrink away before the march of foreign business there.... these islands are growing in importance as their natural resources are becoming more fully developed, and their commercial advantages more generally known.... (p. 261-263)

Assignment (Answer thoughtfully, in complete sentences, on another sheet of paper.)

1. What is the author's background? How will this affect his point of view?
2. When people travel, they tend to bring their own values with them. What are 2 ways this is reflected in Paragraph A?
3. In Paragraph B, which custom is similar to a modern custom? When you meet your friends after a long separation, what is your custom? Would you like to try touching noses? Explain.
4. Tobacco is not native to the Hawaiian Islands. How do you think it got there? What negative effect of tobacco is described in Paragraph C? What other harmful side effects of tobacco were the native islanders exposed to by smoking?
5. In Paragraph C are 2 opinions of a native custom of wearing *leis*. Today, anthropologists who study other cultures are taught not to make judgments about native customs. Why do you think this is?
6. In Paragraph D, what does the author note is happening to the islanders? Why? And why is contact with foreigners likely to continue?

Lesson Plan #4: What Was Life on a Whaleship Like?

Time: One 85-minute block

1. Introduction

- Which oceans/continents/ports did whaleships journey to? (review)
- Why did they have to travel so far? (review)
- What kinds of things were shared between sailors and other cultures? (review)
- We have talked about the actual whale hunt. What do you think whalers did when they weren't hunting--in other words, most of the time?

2. Today's Lesson

Whaleships could go days, even weeks, without sighting a whale. During those stretches, the crew fell back on its daily routine of sleeping, eating, chores, manning the watch, and repairs. Life aboard a whaleship was hard, and the excitement of the hunt was rare compared to the hours of drudgery and loneliness the men faced. Free time was spent reading, writing, singing, and doing scrimshaw.

3. Procedure

- A. As a class, take turns reading aloud **Handout J: Life Aboard a Whaleship**. Discuss.

- B. As a class, listen to that same sea chanty "Weary Whaling Grounds." Play audio at www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/audio/whaling-shanty-wings/

What emotions are displayed here? How does the tune reinforce the words?

- C. Individually or in pairs, complete **Handout K: Explore the Whaling Life!**

- D. As a class, go over Student Project requirements again (**Project D**). Set due date, explain grading expectations/rubric. Get started!

Handout J

Life Aboard a Whaleship

(adapted from "A New Bedford Voyage!" at www.whalingmuseum.org)

Supplies

Before setting sail, the men would have to buy all of the supplies and clothing they would need on the long voyage. They would have a couple of jackets, a waterproof suit made of waxed cloth, pants, shirts, underwear, socks, and leather shoes. All this would be in a canvas dufflebag. Their only other luggage would be a wooden sea chest containing a tin spoon and plate for their meals, needles & thread to repair their clothes, a belt, a razor for shaving, and a knife. They would also have a bedtick (light mattress) and a pillow filled with hay, and a couple of blankets. Since most of the men did not have the money to pay for all their supplies, the ship's owner often covered the cost and then subtracted it from their wages at the end of the voyage.

Food

Most ships carried live pigs, goats and chickens in pens up on the deck--they were eventually butchered and eaten. Fresh fish was sometimes caught and served, but whale meat was considered too tough and unappetizing to eat. Salted pork or beef, stored in casks, could be kept for a long time, and was part of their daily diet. This meat had so much salt in it to preserve it that it was inedible until it had been soaked in water for days to remove much of that salt.

Bread quickly turned stale, grew hard, and became infested with bugs. So a dry biscuit called hardtack--a lot like stiff cardboard--was part of every meal. Fresh fruits and vegetables also rotted quickly, and many whalers came down with a disease called *scurvy*, which is caused by a salty diet that lacks vitamin C. Symptoms include spongy, bleeding gums and weakness. Many older, experienced whalers lost many teeth over the years from a lack of fruits and vegetables.

Pay

Whalers weren't paid very much. In fact, they could easily make more money on shore working as a laborer. Whalers weren't paid by the hour--instead, they signed up for a piece of the ship's total profits at the end of the voyage. This share was known as a "lay." If the voyage was not successful and little oil, spermaceti, or baleen was taken aboard, this system protected the shipowner from having to pay much in wages to the crew!

After a ship came home, the shipowner sold its cargo and took about 60% of the profits. The lay of the captain was usually around 1/15; his first mate was around 1/25; the harpooner around 1/75. The ship's skilled blacksmith might get 1/135. An experienced

whaleman might receive around 1/175. But a new crew member, or “greenhorn,” might only receive 1/350! In fact, there were many times when a crew member might find that for his 3-4 years of hard work, he was only paid \$10. Occasionally a crew member would discover that he actually owed money to the shipowner at the end of the voyage, and wasn’t paid at all!

Free Time

In the early evening or when chores and repairs were done, the crew would gather together to talk, read, mend their clothes, make scrimshaw, tell stories, and sing. Here are some lyrics from a whaling chanty “Weary Whaling Grounds” (Wings of a Gull):

Oh if I had the wings of a gull, me boys, I would spread em and fly home
I would leave old Greenland's icy grounds for of right whales there is none
The weather's rough and the winds do blow, there is little comfort here
I'd rather be snug in a New Bedford pub a-drinking of strong beer

For a man must be mad or wanting money bad for to venture catching whales
For he might be drowned when the fish turns around or his head smashed in by the tail
Though the work seems grand to the young green hand and his heart is high when he goes
In a very short burst you would rather hear the curse than the cry of "Thar she blows!"

Now it's up on deck, and for God's sake, move briskly if you can
And he stumbles on decks so dizzy and so sick, for his life he don't give a damn
High overhead the white flukes spread, and the mate gives the whale the iron
And soon the blood in a purple flood from the spout-hole comes a-flying

These trials we bear for nigh on four years till the flying jib points for home
We're supposed for our toil to get a bonus on the oil, and an equal share of the bone
When we go to the agent to settle for the trip, and there we find cause for repent
For we slaved away four long years of our lives and we not earn one red cent

(www.folkways.si.edu)

The whalemen would often use their free time to make carvings or engravings using the teeth of sperm whales they had killed. These works of art are called *scrimshaw*. Here they let their imaginations run wild, and engraved pictures of whales, hunting scenes, their homes, their families. Often soot or tobacco juice would be rubbed into the images to bring them to life.

Handout K

Explore the Whaling Life!

A. Go to **www.girlonawhaleship.org**. Click on Explore the Ship. Then click or tap on each part of the ship, or on the people, to learn more. Find three that interest you:

1. Name: _____ Two Facts:

2. Name: _____ Two Facts:

3. Name: _____ Two Facts:

B. Go to **www.mysticseaport.org**. At the top, go to RESEARCH, then click on Art & Objects. On the right, click Browse Collection Highlights. Then click on Scrimshaw.

Now you are in their wonderful scrimshaw collection! They have over 1,700 pieces.

There are 104 on display right here!

Scroll through the images and choose **5 carvings or engravings** that appeal to you:

1. Title: _____

Type: _____ Date (if any): _____

Something interesting from the description: _____

2. Title: _____

Type: _____ Date (if any): _____

Something interesting from the description: _____

3. Title: _____

Type: _____ Date (if any): _____

Something interesting from the description: _____

4. Title: _____

Type: _____ Date (if any): _____

Something interesting from the description: _____

5. Title: _____

Type: _____ Date (if any): _____

Something interesting from the description: _____

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