

Worksheet 3. Ahab's dramatic monologue in chapter 37 (teacher version)

Directions: As you read "Sunset," chapter 37 of *Moby-Dick*, answer the following questions. Be sure to use evidence from the text to support your answers.

1. Below, write four words or phrases that Ahab uses that you find memorable. For each word or phrase you've chosen, write a brief description of the type of language being used.

*Answers will vary.*

2. Look closely at the overall structure and effect of Ahab's language. Do you notice any interesting techniques, patterns, or rhythm in his prose? Describe those below.

Ahab's speech here is in iambic pentameter at times: ten syllable lines made up of alternatingly unstressed and stressed syllables. While students may not identify this meter directly, they should note the following about his language:

- It has a rhythm (daDAdaDAdaDAdaDA). "I leave a white and turbid wake"  
It is literary in style, not like spoken language "all loveliness is anguish to me, since I can ne'er enjoy."
- The speech contains allusions: "The Crown of Lombardy"; "Paradise"; "my one cogged circle fits into all their various wheels."

Students may compare Ahab's language here to Shakespeare's, as Ahab's also exemplifies the dramatic genre.

3. Now that you have looked at specific elements of his speech, describe the language Ahab uses. What effect does this language have on your reading of his monologue?

*Ahab speaks in the cadence of blank verse and rather affected English. Students will likely note that this makes him sound well educated and archaic, perhaps more difficult to understand. " 'Tis iron—that I know—not gold. 'Tis split, too—that I feel; the jagged edge galls me so."*

4. What does Ahab say about the metaphorical crown that he describes?

*Ahab describes a crown that others see as brilliant, but he sees as a burden.*

*"Yet is it bright with many a gem; I the wearer, see not its far flashings; but darkly feel that I wear that, that dazzlingly confounds."*

5. What do you think this crown stands for?

*Answers will vary. You may want to explain the reference to the "Iron Crown of Lombardy," a crown believed to contain a nail from the crucifixion. Students may establish that the crown stands for the burden of his captaincy or his quest. See [the entry](#) in Encyclopedia Britannica for more information.*

6. Describe Ahab's vision of himself.

## Melville's "Moby-Dick": Shifts in Narrative Voice and Literary Genres

*In this chapter, Ahab appears supremely confident about his ability to hunt the whale. He also positions himself as an incredibly determined fisherman, even bordering on madness in his pursuits. "What I've dared, I've willed; and what I've willed, I'll do! They think me mad—Starbuck does; but I'm demoniac, I am madness maddened!" "The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run."*

7. Who does Ahab believe is in control of his destiny? How do you know this?

*Ahab believes he is in control of his own destiny. Ahab makes many references to the inability of others to knock him off his course. "Swerve me? ye cannot swerve me, else ye swerve yourselves! man has ye there. Swerve me? The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run. Over unsounded gorges, through the rifled hearts of mountains, under torrents' beds, unerringly I rush! Naught's an obstacle, naught's an angle to the iron way!"*

*He believes he is the gear that makes the ship work and the match that starts the fire that the entire voyage would sink without him on it. "... my one cogged circle fits into all their various wheels, and they revolve. Or, if you will, like so many ant-hills of powder, they all stand before me; and I their match."*

*He also "laugh[s] and hoot[s]" at the gods.*

8. Write several adjectives that describe Ahab and textual quotes to support those descriptions.

*brash, overconfident, arrogant: "Gifted with the high perception"; "That's more than ye, ye great gods, ever were."*

*negative: "I leave a white and turbid wake; pale waters, paler cheeks, where'er I sail."*

*tormented: "the jagged edge galls me so, my brain seems to beat against the solid metal" "all loveliness is anguish to me"*

*argumentative: "No, ye've knocked me down, and I am up again; but ye have run and hidden. Come forth from behind your cotton bags!"*

*stubborn: "Swerve me? Ye cannot swerve me"*