

## When Whales Lit the World



*Up to the 20th century, men shipped out whaling—risking their lives and spending up to five years at sea per voyage. Why? Because whalers lit the world, providing oil for lamps and for the machines of the industrial revolution—at no small cost to the whale population. Test your whaling knowledge.*

1. Many idioms and words we use today arose from maritime jargon. Which of the following is not true?

- The “slush” in “slush fund” referred to fat scum.
- “Blackstrap” was a sailor’s nickname for tar.
- “A good square meal” came into being due to common use of square plates.
- “Junk” referred to spent rope.

2. There are many whales in the sea, and each had its own peculiarities noted by whalers. Which of the following is not true?

- American whalers sought out the blue whale, as its immense size provided the most blubber, and therefore, profit.
- The name of the *right whale* comes from being considered the best or “right” whale to target for blubber and baleen harvesting.
- Sperm whales were occasionally referred to as “carpenter fish,” as their vocalizations sounded to seamen like hammer blows.
- John Smith was disappointed by his discovery of fin or humpback whales in America, as they did not provide baleen or oil.

3. Among seafaring tales, few are as well known as Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*. Which of the following is not true?

- Moby Dick was likely modeled after a famous mankiller in the early 1800s.
- The chapel in New Bedford, MA, does indeed exist. However, the famed ship-shaped pulpit is not original.
- The name of Ahab’s vessel, the *Pequod*, is taken from a type of indigenous vessel used in Rokovoko, the island from which the character Queequeg came.
- Coffin and Starbuck—names given to book characters—were recognized whaling family surnames.

4. Different groups of people were considered bad luck on ships, and treated with suspicion when on board. Which of the following groups was not considered a risk?

- Finns
- One-eyed men
- Preachers
- Women

5. One final question, a “grab bag” of whaling fact and fiction. Which of the following is not true?

- A sea shanty is a type of dance, akin to a jig, in which the watch would take turns performing.
- Some New England whaling expeditions to the Sub-Arctic purposefully froze their ships into the winter ice.
- The toggle head harpoon was invented in 1848 by Lewis Temple, an ex-slave.
- In the long days at sea, whalers would create works of art known as scrimshaw. These pieces consisted of etchings, filled with ink, scratched into whale bones or teeth.

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