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PREVIEW

ELEMENTS OF FICTION

LESSON 1: **Characters:** *Moby Dick*

LESSON 2: **Setting:** *Dracula*

LESSON 3: **Plot:** *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

LESSON 4: **Dialogue:** *The Count of Monte Cristo*

When you complete this unit, you will be able to answer questions like these:

- *In Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, what two forces are in conflict?*
- *What do we call the character who tells the story in his or her own words?*
- *In what three ways can dialogue be used to tell a story?*
- *How important is setting in the novel, Dracula?*

PRETEST

Write **T** or **F** to show whether you think each statement is *true* or *false*.

1. _____ *Characters* are the fictional people who play a part in a novel.
2. _____ A novel's *setting* is the sequence of events that make up the story.
3. _____ The words spoken by story characters are called *dialogue*.
4. _____ A novel's *plot* is the time and place the story events take place.
5. _____ The *narrator* of a novel tells the story from his or her own point of view.
6. _____ A story's *plot* always centers on a conflict between opposing characters or forces.

Pretest answers: 1. T 2. F 3. T 4. F 5. T 6. T

CHARACTERS

Before reading . . .

Authors describe their characters in several ways. Sometimes they *directly* describe characters' traits. At other times, they describe *indirectly* through the characters' thoughts, words, and actions. This lesson presents an adapted excerpt from *Moby Dick*, Herman Melville's greatest novel. It is the story of an obsessed man's pursuit of a great white whale. Notice the two ways that Melville describes Captain Ahab. First, Ahab is directly described by Ishmael, the novel's narrator. Then Ahab is described indirectly—through his own words and actions.



MOBY DICK

It was one of those gray and gloomy days. As I mounted to the deck, foreboding shivers ran over me. There on the deck stood Captain Ahab. I saw no sign of bodily illness about him, nor of the recovery from any. His high, broad form seemed to be made of solid bronze. Running down one side of his tawny, scorched face and neck was a long white scar. It resembled the groove in the trunk of a great tree that has been struck by lightning. Had he been born with that mark? Or was the scar left by some wound? No one could say. None of the crew dared to speak of it.

Ahab's grim appearance affected me strongly. At first I hardly noticed its cause—the barbaric white leg upon which he partly stood. I had heard about this ivory leg. Some said it had been fashioned at sea from the polished bone of the sperm whale's jaw. Captain Ahab stood erect, looking straight out at the sea with a fixed and fearless gaze. Not a word did he speak, nor did his officers say anything to him. Moody Ahab stood his ground, in all the dignity of some mighty woe.

* * *

One morning shortly after breakfast, Captain Ahab called the crew to the deck. As the men gathered, all eyes were on Ahab. To the crew, he looked like the weather horizon when a storm is coming up. “You’ve all heard me give orders about a white whale. Do you see this?” said Ahab, holding up a shiny gold coin. “Whoever spots the whale gets this sixteen-dollar gold piece! Skin your eyes for him, men. Look sharp for white water. If you see but a bubble, sing out!”

“Captain Ahab,” said Starbuck, the first mate. “I have heard of a white whale called Moby Dick. But was it not Moby Dick that took off your leg?”

“Who told you that?” cried Ahab. “Aye, Mr. Starbuck, it was Moby Dick that dismasted me. Yes, it was Moby Dick that brought me to this dead stump I stand on now. Aye, aye!” he shouted with a loud, animal sound. It was like the sob of a heart-stricken moose. Then, tossing both arms and cursing, he shouted out again, “Aye! And I’ll chase him ’round the Cape of Good Hope, and ’round the Horn. I’ll chase him to Norway and beyond to the land of flames before I give him up! And this is what you have shipped for, men! To chase that white whale on both sides of land, and over all sides of earth. There is to be no rest until he spouts black blood and rolls fin over. What say you, men—will you shake hands on it, now? I think you do look brave.”

“Aye, aye!” shouted the harpooners and seamen, running closer to the excited old man. “A sharp eye for the white whale! A sharp eye for Moby Dick!” they shouted.



COMPREHENSION

Write your answers on the lines.

1. What causes the “foreboding shivers” the narrator feels as he climbs to the deck of the ship? _____
2. What is the main thing the narrator notices about Captain Ahab’s grim appearance? _____
3. According to Ahab, what is to be the crew’s main goal?

4. How far is Ahab prepared to sail in pursuit of the whale?

5. Why is Captain Ahab so eager to go after the white whale?

6. What does Ahab plan to do to Moby Dick if and when he catches up with him? _____
7. How does Ahab motivate the crew to search for the whale?

8. How does the crew respond to Ahab’s request for their support?

CHARACTER STUDY

The following sentences describe characters in the story. Put a checkmark (✓) next to each *true* statement.

1. ____ Captain Ahab seemed to be a pleasant, mild-mannered person.
2. ____ Starbuck, the first mate, liked to argue.