

Worksheet 1. Call him Ishmael, and what else? (teacher version)

Instructions:

Use the chart below to analyze key phrases and allusions from "Loomings," chapter 1 of *Moby-Dick* as Melville introduces his reader to Ishmael. First, record the literal meaning of these phrases. Next, interpret the impact these phrases have on your impression of Melville's characterization of Ishmael. Be sure to use the sentences around these phrases to help you understand their context.

Phrase or Allusion	Literal meaning	Impact on Characterization
"Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth ..."	<i>When I find myself getting depressed</i>	<i>Ishmael might be a sad character, or at least he is sometimes sad</i>
"With a philosophical flourish Cato* throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship." *(Cato was a Roman philosopher who killed himself rather than live under Caesar's rule)	<i>With the mindset that Cato killed himself, Ishmael goes to sea.</i>	<i>Going to sea saves Ishmael from suicide (an idea several other sentences in the chapter suggest as well).</i>
"... meditation and water are wedded for ever."	<i>Being on the ocean can be peaceful.</i>	<i>Ishmael hopes to use water to find peace.</i>
"... and this is the key to it all."	<i>The sea is the fundamental basis of life.</i>	<i>Ishmael believes the sea is essential.</i>
"For to go as a passenger you must needs have a purse."	<i>You have to be rich to be a passenger on a ship.</i>	<i>Ishmael is not rich, so he has to find another means of passage.</i>
"For my part, I abominate all honourable respectable toils, trials, and tribulations of every kind whatsoever."	<i>I hate respectable jobs.</i>	<i>Ishmael does not like to hold jobs with responsibility because he has enough trouble taking care of himself.</i>
"... in the scales of the New Testament?"	<i>Am I judged by the Christian religion?</i>	<i>Is Ishmael following orders against Christianity?</i>
"Who ain't a slave? Tell me that."	<i>Everyone has to answer to and/or provide service to someone.</i>	<i>Ishmael does not believe any man is fully independent.</i>
"... on no account can a monied man enter heaven ..."	<i>Rich men cannot get to heaven. ("It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.")</i>	<i>Ishmael would rather be poor than rich.</i>
"... the commonality lead their leaders in many other things."	<i>The common man (ordinary people) direct their leaders in many ways.</i>	<i>Ishmael believes in the power of the common man rather than investing it in authority figures.</i>

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

"... formed part of the grand programme of Providence that was drawn up a long time ago."	<i>This voyage is part of a pre-determined play or entertainment by some entity who controls Fate.</i>	<i>Ishmael does not believe he has control over the story that he tells (or his own destiny).</i>
"Such a portentous and mysterious monster roused all my curiosity..."	<i>I'm interested in whales because they are mysterious, and something important is likely to happen.</i>	<i>Ishmael likes to solve mysteries and be a part of momentous events.</i>
"I am tormented with an everlasting itch for things remote."	<i>I like to do things few other men have done.</i>	<i>Ishmael is a risk-taker who seeks adventure.</i>
"Not ignoring what is good ..."	<i>I find the bright side to things.</i>	<i>Ishmael can be a positive, optimistic person.</i>

1. List some adjectives and nouns you would use to complete the sentence "Call him \_\_\_\_\_" based on your analysis of Ishmael in the chart above.

*Answers will vary. Students may use words like "complicated" or "confused." Press them to make defensible choices about whether Ishmael is inherently more positive or negative, happy or sad, peaceful or conflicted, independent or resigned. Make sure students give specific reasons for their answers.*

2. How could the descriptors of Ishmael listed above impact the way he tells a story?

*Since students are likely to know that Moby-Dick is a tale of a whaling voyage at sea, they may recognize that Ishmael's personal desire for peace could impact the novel's larger quest for the White Whale. If Ishmael believes that the Fates govern everything he does, he is merely watching a story that he cannot influence. If he is an overly sad character, he will put a more negative spin on the events that occur before him.*