



**ACCESS OPERA
EDUCATOR GUIDE**

JAKE HEGGIE / LIBRETTO BY GENE SCHEER

MOBY-DICK

The Met
ropolitan
Opera

THE WORK

An opera in two acts,
sung in English

Music by Jake Heggie

Libretto by Gene Scheer

Based on the book by
Herman Melville

First performed April 30,
2010, at the Dallas Opera

PRODUCTION

Leonard Foglia
Production

Robert Brill
Set Designer

Jane Greenwood
Costume Designer

Gavan Swift
Lighting Designer

Elaine J. McCarthy
Projection Designer

Keturah Stickann
Movement Director

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An American literary classic takes the operatic stage in this powerful retelling of Herman Melville's famous tale of pursuit, perception, and the existential search for meaning. Streamlining the novel's sprawling 135 chapters, the opera focuses on the intimate world of the whaling ship *Pequod*, its revenge-obsessed captain, and the complex, tender, and destructive relationships that develop while the crew spend more than a year at sea. Melville's characters present a rich variety of personalities and experiences, and their interactions touch on themes of fellowship, inequity, fate, and free will.

Jake Heggie's shimmering and evocative music forms the backdrop. The composer's characteristic style is full of majestic melodies that bring the diversity of the crew, as well as the sea itself, to life. The vivid use of leitmotifs, or individual themes or phrases that represent characters or elements of the story, are part of an operatic composing tradition well-established since the 19th century—the golden age of opera. Each of the story's main characters—Ahab, Starbuck, Queequeg, even the pursuit of Moby Dick—has a unique musical representation. As the characters become increasingly intertwined and their destiny bound to the unpredictable waters they sail, Heggie's rich array of themes blend and combine, shaping and enriching one another. The cinematic score is mirrored in the production's mind-bending projections that suspend belief and transport us aboard the *Pequod*.

This guide is intended to help your students understand the relationship between Heggie's opera and Melville's classic novel, as well as the literary and operatic contexts that give it meaning. The information on the following pages is designed to provide context, deepen background knowledge, and enrich the overall experience of attending a final dress rehearsal at the Metropolitan Opera.



The Metropolitan Opera is a vibrant home for the most creative and talented singers, conductors, composers, musicians, stage directors, designers, visual artists, choreographers, and dancers from around the world. Founded in 1883, the Met first opened in a lavish opera house at Broadway and 39th Street that, while beautiful, had significant practical limitations. Almost from the beginning, it was clear that the stage facilities of the original theater could not meet the Met's technical needs. But it was not until the Met joined with other New York institutions in forming Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts that a new home became possible. The new Metropolitan Opera House, which opened at Lincoln Center in September 1966, was a technical marvel of its day, and has remained an architectural landmark ever since.

Each season, the Met stages more than 200 opera performances in New York, welcoming more than 800,000 attendees. In addition to presenting the indispensable masterpieces of history's great composers, performed by the world's finest singers and directed by visionaries from throughout the theatrical world, the Met is committed to ensuring that opera remains a living art form by commissioning and staging vital new works that tell modern stories and engage with the issues of today. The Met is also a leader in new media distribution initiatives, harnessing state-of-the-art technology to bring performances from the Met's iconic stage to millions of people worldwide.

This guide includes a variety of materials on Heggie's *Moby-Dick*.

The Source, The Story, and Who's Who in *Moby-Dick*

A Timeline: The historical context of the opera's story and composition

Closer Looks: Brief articles highlighting an important aspect of Heggie's *Moby-Dick*

Ten Essential Musical Terms: Musical terminology that will help students analyze and describe Heggie's work

Student Critique: A performance activity highlighting specific aspects of this production and topics for a wrap-up discussion following students' attendance

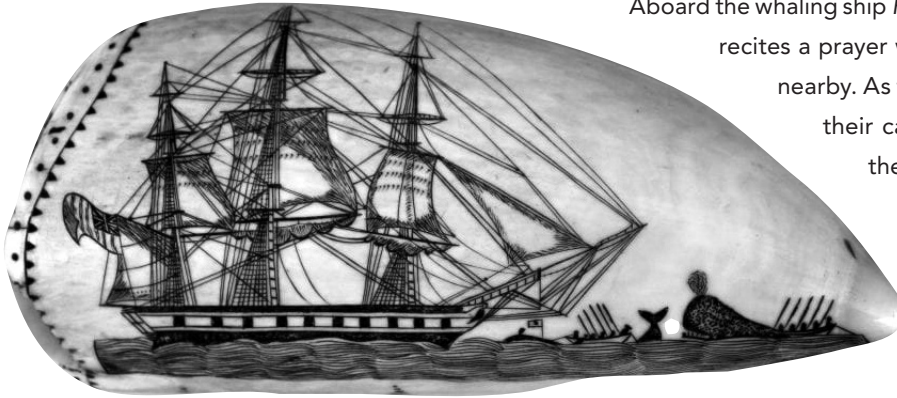
Further Resources: Recommendations for additional study, both online and in print

This guide is intended to cultivate students' interest in *Moby-Dick*, whether they have any prior acquaintance with opera or the performing arts. It includes activities for students with a wide range of musical backgrounds and will encourage them to think about opera—and the performing arts as a whole—as a medium of both entertainment and creative expression.

In particular, this guide offers in-depth introductions to:

- The history of whaling
- Operas set at sea
- Creative choices made by the artists of the Metropolitan Opera for this production
- The opera as a unified work of art, involving the efforts of composer, librettist, and Met artists

Summary



Scrimshaw depiction of a whaling ship
NEW BEDFORD WHALING MUSEUM

Aboard the whaling ship *Pequod*, the Polynesian harpooner Queequeg recites a prayer while the whaling novice, Greenhorn, sleeps nearby. As the sun rises, the crew gathers and discusses their captain, Ahab, whom no one has seen since the ship left port. The men sing of whaling and wealth, when Ahab appears and tells them the story of Moby Dick, the white whale who bit off his leg on an earlier voyage. Determined to exact revenge, he offers the first man to spot the whale a reward. The ship's first mate, Starbuck, is troubled by

this alternate mission, but the crew is inspired by Ahab's passion. Starbuck begins to teach Greenhorn about whaling but is overcome by emotion thinking of his family back on land. The crew spots a pod of whales, but Ahab refuses to let them hunt until Moby Dick has been found. As they sail on, Ahab laments his obsession while Starbuck bemoans Ahab's madness.

After three months at sea without a single hunt, tensions are high amongst the crew. They try to joke about their lot, but a fight with racial undertones breaks out. When Greenhorn spots a pod of whales, Starbuck is finally able to convince Ahab to let the men hunt, but in their enthusiastic pursuit, a boat capsizes, and the cabin boy Pip is lost at sea. The crew butchers their catch while Starbuck tells Ahab that they need to make a stop for repairs. Ahab refuses, threatening Starbuck with a musket. News of Pip's return interrupts their exchange, and all attention shifts to Queequeg as he recounts the rescue. Starbuck returns to Ahab's cabin and, finding him asleep, contemplates killing him to free the crew.

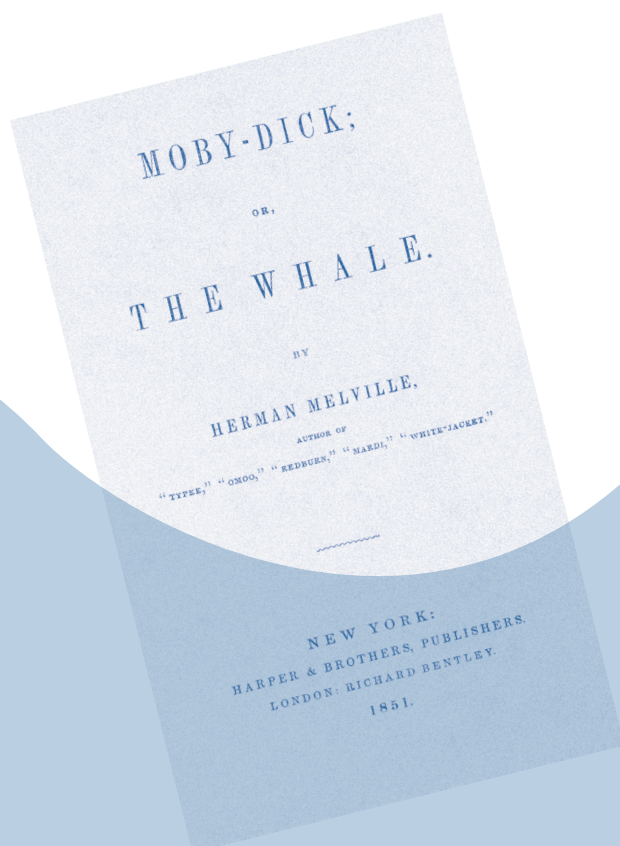
A storm is brewing on the horizon. On deck, Greenhorn and Queequeg are planning a trip to his native island in Polynesia. Suddenly, Queequeg collapses. Below deck, Queequeg reveals to Greenhorn and Pip that he is dying. St. Elmo's fire lights up the masthead, but Ahab manages to convince the crew that it is a good omen from the heavens and to hold their positions. Once again, only Starbuck is troubled. The *Pequod* survives the storm but a nearby ship has suffered casualties. When the captain of the *Rachel* asks Ahab to help him find his son, who is now lost at sea, Ahab refuses in favor of his singular goal. A rare moment of openness between Starbuck and Ahab occurs on deck as the captain tells his first mate of all he's lost in his pursuit of the white whale. Just as Starbuck convinces Ahab to relent, Ahab spots Moby Dick. On his orders, the crew lowers the hunting boats and eagerly attacks, but Moby Dick prevails, and all the boats are destroyed and their crews drowned. Ahab manages to injure the whale but is pulled down into the sea in the process. Only Greenhorn survives the madness. The next day he is rescued by the captain of the *Rachel*, who mistakes Greenhorn for his son.

THE SOURCE: THE NOVEL *MOBY-DICK* BY HERMAN MELVILLE

The opera *Moby-Dick* adapts Herman Melville's classic American novel about purpose and perception. Published in 1851, the story relays the doomed quest of Ahab, the captain of the whaling ship *Pequod*, to seek revenge on the eponymous white whale who took his leg. Ahab's pursuit can be seen as a larger metaphor for man's search for meaning, while the maniacal captain's reckless singleness of purpose offers a commentary on the dangers of tyranny. Although Starbuck, the ship's first mate, sees the risks and futility of Ahab's obsession, he feels bound by his obligation to ship's captain—to the eventual peril of his crew. The tale of the multiracial crew of the *Pequod* further engages themes of racial harmony and discord, claims to ownership, and the politics of colonialism.

Melville based much of the narrative on his own experiences as a sailor between 1842 and 1845, as well as on accounts of the destruction of the whaleship *Essex* by an enraged sperm whale in 1820. His novel takes place in various ports (notably Nantucket) and aboard the *Pequod*. The opera, however, is set entirely at sea.

The idea to adapt Melville's novel into an opera originated with late playwright Terrence McNally, with whom Heggie had worked on previous projects, including his first opera, *Dead Man Walking*. Though at first intimidated by the scope of such a project, Heggie found tremendous power in how the novel moves between the individual and the collective. McNally ultimately handed over the project to librettist Gene Scheer, who realized that the visceral power of Melville's language made it a perfect fit for the stage. For Scheer, the most obvious way to begin distilling a 135-chapter novel into a 60-page libretto was to embrace the juiciest bits of that language, and he estimates that nearly half of the libretto is taken word-for-word from Melville's text.



Synopsis

ACT I Day One: The whaling ship *Pequod* has been at sea for one week. Captain Ahab stands alone on deck in the hours before dawn. Below deck, while most of the crew sleeps, the harpooner Queequeg prays and wakes Greenhorn, a loner and newcomer to whaling. Dawn breaks, and the call is made for "All Hands!" While the crew is raising the ship's sails, Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask talk about Ahab, whom no one has seen since the ship left Nantucket.

The crew sings of whales, wealth, and home when suddenly, Captain Ahab appears. He tells them of Moby Dick, the white whale that took off one of his legs, then nails a gold doubloon to the mast and promises it to the man who first sights him. This is the real reason they have sailed, he explains: to search the globe to find and destroy this one whale. His rousing call of "Death to Moby Dick!" excites everyone but the first mate, Starbuck. To no avail, he confronts Ahab about what he sees as a futile and blasphemous mission.

Starbuck instructs Greenhorn about the dangers of whaling. When he ponders never again seeing his wife and son, he is overcome with emotion and orders Queequeg to complete the lesson. Stubb sights a pod of whales, but Ahab will not allow the eager crew to hunt since they have not yet found Moby Dick. Starbuck orders the crew to sail on and sends Greenhorn up to the lookout on the masthead, joined by Queequeg.

As the sun begins to set, Ahab looks over the wake of the ship and mourns that his obsession deprives him of any enjoyment of beauty. All is anguish to him. At the masthead, Queequeg and Greenhorn look over the world, while Starbuck, on deck, bemoans Ahab's madness.



Day Two: Three months later. After three months without a single whale hunt, Stubb jokes with the young cabin boy Pip about the sharks circling the ship. The song ignites a dance for the full crew, but rising tensions take over and a dangerous racial fight erupts. When Greenhorn suddenly sights a pod of whales, Starbuck is at last able to persuade Ahab to let the men hunt. Starbuck and Stubb harpoon whales, but Flask's boat is capsized, and Pip is lost at sea.

On board the *Pequod*, an enormous whale is being butchered and the oil rendered in the burning tryworks. Flask tells Ahab that the search for Pip is under way, but Ahab thinks only of finding Moby Dick. As they butcher the whale, the crew imagines Pip lost and struggling in the heart of the sea. Flask tells Starbuck that many oil barrels are leaking and he goes below to tell Ahab they must find a port for repairs.

Ahab is unmoved by Starbuck's report, and is concerned only with the white whale. When Starbuck refuses to leave, Ahab grabs a musket and orders him to his knees. From afar, Greenhorn shouts that Pip has been found. Ahab orders Starbuck out of the cabin.

On deck, the crew listens to Greenhorn describe how Queequeg rescued Pip. As the men return to work, Greenhorn pleads with Starbuck to get help for Pip, who has gone mad. But, the first mate ignores him. Greenhorn observes how life really works on the ship and decides to befriend Queequeg.

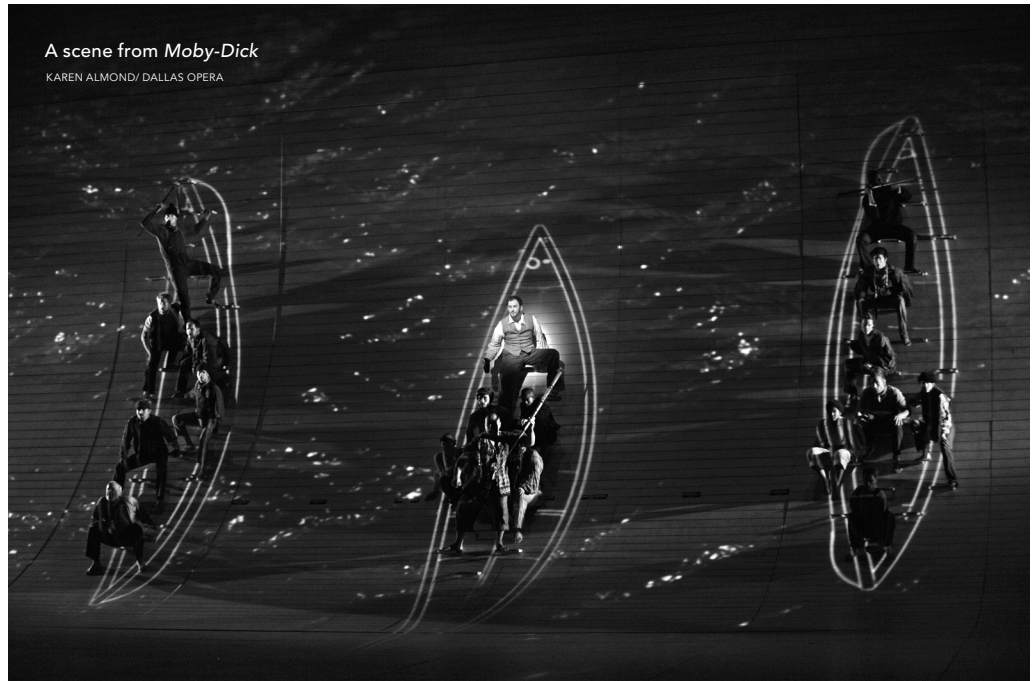
Starbuck returns to Ahab's cabin, where he finds the captain asleep. He picks up the musket with which Ahab had threatened him and contemplates what he should do. Pull the trigger and he may survive to see his wife and child again. When Ahab cries out in his sleep, Starbuck replaces the musket and leaves the cabin.

ACT II *Day Three: One year later.* An enormous storm is approaching, but Stubb, Flask, and the crew sing a jolly work song. From the mastheads, Greenhorn and Queequeg talk of traveling together to his native island. Greenhorn wants to learn Queequeg's language and write down their adventures. Suddenly, Queequeg collapses. The crew gets him down, and Ahab announces he will take the masthead watch himself, as he wants to sight Moby Dick first.

Below deck, Queequeg tells Greenhorn that he is dying and asks that a coffin be built for him. Pip enters from the shadows and sings a lament, joined by Greenhorn.

The massive storm now surrounds the *Pequod*. As Ahab sings defiantly to the heavens, bolts of lightning engulf the ship and the masts glow with St. Elmo's fire. Ahab demands that the men hold their posts, promising them the white flame is a sign from heaven to guide them to the white whale. The crew is inspired once again by the captain, much to Starbuck's distress.

Day Four: The next morning. The ship has made it through the storm. From afar, the voice of Gardiner, captain of the *Rachel*, calls out. He pleads with Ahab to help him search for his 12-year-old son who was lost in the storm, but Ahab refuses. Pip shouts to Gardiner of the *Pequod's* own lost boy. Pip cuts himself and gets blood on Ahab's clothes. The captain orders the ship to sail on, leaving Gardiner behind. Ahab contemplates the heartless God who devastates so many lives



and baptizes his new harpoon with Pip's blood. Below deck, Greenhorn sees Queequeg's newly built coffin and contemplates the madness that seems to surround him.

On deck, Ahab and Starbuck gaze over the horizon. Ahab describes his forty years at sea and all he has left behind. And why? To what end? He cannot say. But he sees in Starbuck's eye a human soul and it touches him deeply. Starbuck seizes the moment and persuades Ahab that they should return to the wives and sons who wait for them in Nantucket.

Just as Ahab appears to relent, he sights Moby Dick on the horizon. Great excitement ensues and the whale boats are lowered. Ahab looks again in Starbuck's eye and orders him to stay on board. The crew declares its loyalty to Ahab. During the chase, Moby Dick destroys two whaleboats in succession, drowning their crews. Then, the Pequod is rammed and sunk, killing all aboard. Ahab's boat is then attacked and all but the captain jump or fall off. Finally alone with the white whale, Ahab cries out and stabs at Moby Dick before being dragged down into the sea.

Epilogue: Many days later. Greenhorn floats on Queequeg's coffin, barely alive, softly singing his lost friend's prayer. Gardiner calls from afar, thinking he has at last found his missing son. Instead, he learns that Ahab and all the crew of the *Pequod* have drowned, except for this one survivor.

WHO'S WHO IN MOBY-DICK

CHARACTER	VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
Captain Ahab Captain of the <i>Pequod</i>	tenor	Having lost his leg during an encounter with the white whale Moby Dick, Ahab is driven mad by his determination for revenge.
Starbuck The ship's first mate	baritone	An honest, philosophical, and pragmatic man informed by his Quaker beliefs, Starbuck tries to persuade Ahab to abandon his deadly quest.
Greenhorn A "green hand" or inexperienced crew member	tenor	A young teacher and member of the merchant service, Greenhorn makes his first whaling voyage aboard the <i>Pequod</i> .
Queequeg A Polynesian harpooner	baritone	Motivated by his desire to "visit Christendom," the tattooed descendant of Polynesian royalty becomes Starbuck's harpooner and Greenhorn's close friend.
Pip A young Black American boy, the ship's cabin boy	soprano	Formerly enslaved, Pip is an innocent youth whose experiences serve as a reminder of the fragility of existence.
Stubb Second mate	baritone and tenor	Members of the <i>Pequod's</i> crew
Flask Third mate		

The Creation of *Moby-Dick*

1819 Herman Melville is born in New York City on August 1.

1839–44 Melville begins working on merchant and whaling ships, inspiring several of his literary works, including *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (1846), *Omoo: A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas* (1847), *Redburn: His First Voyage* (1849), *White-Jacket; or, The World in a Man-of-War* (1850), and “The Encantadas” (1854).

1851 Melville publishes *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale*.

1891 Melville dies and is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx, New York.

1961 Jake Heggie is born on March 31 in West Palm Beach, Florida. He learns piano as a child and starts writing music at age 11 before beginning more serious composition study as a teenager.

1979 Heggie spends two years studying at the American University in Paris.

1984 Heggie graduates from UCLA after spending a gap year studying piano at the American University in Paris. After finishing college, he begins performing recitals with his piano teacher Johana Harris. They continue to tour until focal dystonia in Heggie’s hand forces him to turn his attention to composition.

1987 Heggie wins the Henry Mancini Award.

1993 Heggie moves to San Francisco and takes a job in public relations at San Francisco Opera. He continues to compose music, focusing on art songs.

1995 Heggie wins the G. Schirmer Art Song Competition for his setting of “If you were coming in the fall ...,” a poem by Emily Dickinson.

1998 Heggie is appointed composer-in-residence at San Francisco Opera, where general director Lotfi Mansouri commissions him to work with Terrence McNally on a new opera for the 2000–01 season, *Dead Man Walking*.

1999 Heggie releases his first album of original compositions, *Faces of Love*, featuring songs performed by sopranos Renée Fleming, Kristin Clayton, Nicolle Foland, Sylvia McNair, and Carol Vaness; mezzo-sopranos Zheng Cao, Jennifer Larmore, and Frederica von Stade; and countertenor Brian Asawa.

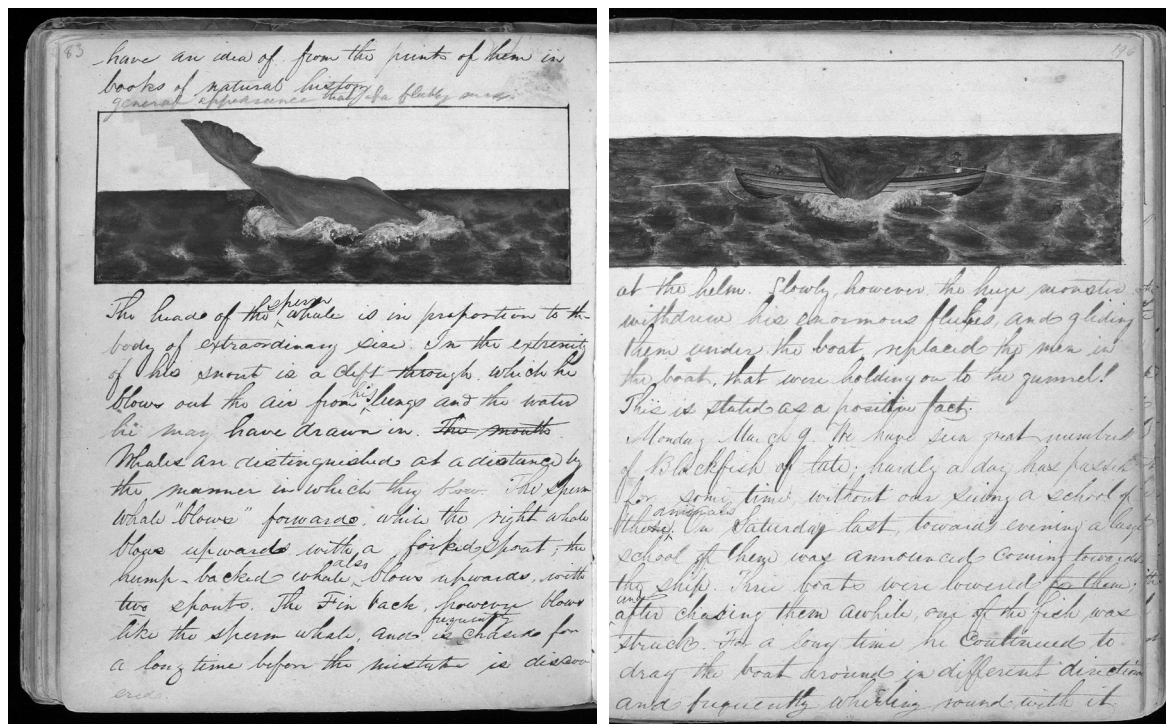
- 2000** Heggie's first opera, *Dead Man Walking*, premieres at San Francisco Opera.
- 2001** Gene Scheer contributes the libretto to Tobias Picker's opera *Thérèse Raquin*, co-commissioned by the Dallas Opera, San Diego Opera, and Montreal Opera.
- 2005** Scheer again works with Picker, this time on an operatic adaptation of Theodore Dreiser's novel *An American Tragedy*, which premieres at the Metropolitan Opera.
- 2006** *Moby-Dick* is commissioned by the Dallas Opera.
- 2007** Heggie composes a chamber opera, *Three Decembers*, with a libretto by Scheer.
- 2008** Heggie and Scheer collaborate on *Last Acts*, an opera based on the play by Terrence McNally, which opens at Houston Grand Opera.
- 2010** *Moby-Dick* has its world premiere at the Dallas Opera in a production directed by Leonard Foglia.
- 2011** *Moby-Dick* premieres at the State Opera of Australia.
- 2012** Foglia's production of *Moby-Dick* premieres at Calgary Opera, San Diego Opera, and San Francisco Opera.
- 2014** *Moby-Dick* premieres at Washington National Opera.
- 2015** *Moby-Dick* premieres at Los Angeles Opera.
- 2025** *Moby-Dick* has its Met premiere.

A Whale of a Time

Jake Heggie's operatic version of *Moby-Dick* takes place entirely on board the *Pequod*, a ship whose crew members make their living by hunting whales. The practice of whaling is ancient, and there is evidence that it can be dated back to prehistoric times; the Bangudae Petroglyphs in Korea depict whale hunters and may date from as early as 6000 BCE. By the 11th century CE, whaling was commonly practiced by Arctic and Inuit communities in Greenland, and whale hunters in the Basque region of France and Spain were the first to hunt whales commercially. By the 18th century, a robust whaling industry could be found worldwide, from Australia to Germany to North America. In 1851, when Melville published his novel, whaling was a common profession in coastal communities of the United States.

Francis Allyn
Olmsted, 1819–44,
two pages from
*Journal of a Voyage
Around Cape Horn,
1839 Oct 11–1841
Feb 5. Incidents of a
Whaling Voyage.*

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UNIVERSITY



The hunting of whales is a result of the variety of resources they can provide. First, these sea mammals, called cetaceans, can offer sustenance in the form of whale meat, which is safe for consumption by both humans and animals. Whalebone, or baleen, is an unusually strong and flexible material and has therefore been historically used in the construction of various items, including carriage springs, fishing poles, baskets, and pieces of clothing, such as corsets and hoop skirts. As with other tusked animals, whale teeth and tusks have also been carved for decoration and used to make small tools and weapons. Finally, whale blubber—or fat—can be rendered down and used as a machine lubricant and a fuel source known as whale oil.

As *Moby-Dick* depicts, whaling involves the use of a barbed, spear-like weapon called a harpoon. Attached to a long rope onboard a whaleship, the harpoon is thrown manually or with the assistance of a projectile into the water to kill or injure and capture whales and other large

Illustration by Boardman
Robinson for the 1943 edition of
Moby-Dick

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fish. All three of the harpooners in *Moby-Dick* are ethnic minorities, a historically accurate detail that also illustrates the contemporary social hierarchies of Melville's day. In the 1850s, a period before the abolition of slavery in the United States, physically demanding and dangerous jobs were often performed by individuals from marginalized backgrounds, and the harpooners of the *Pequod* are the Black, Polynesian, and Native American members of the crew.

Although whaling has a global history, from Iceland to Indonesia, it has become a contentious practice. The International Whaling Commission was established in 1946 to set hunting quotas and monitor whale populations globally, and, in 1982, the commission issued a moratorium on the commercial hunting of 13 species of whales. The discussion to lift or amend that moratorium is ongoing, with the industry's opponents arguing that it is not sustainable and citing cetacean suffering as well as human health risks as reasons to halt the practice permanently.

Sea Major

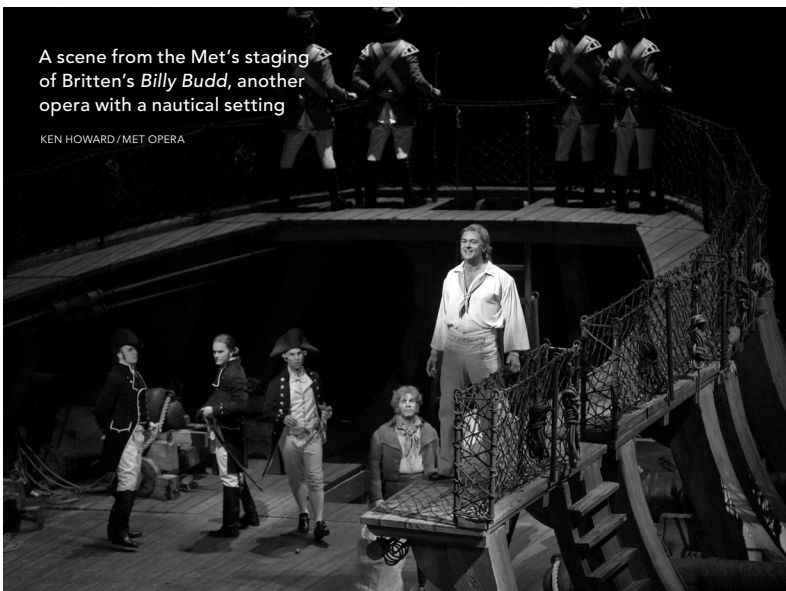
While the open water might not seem the optimal setting for an opera, works with nautical associations and locations abound in the repertory. The most obvious and important progenitor of “operas at sea” is Richard Wagner’s 1843 *Der Fliegende Holländer* (*The Flying Dutchman*), about a legendary ghost ship that is doomed to forever sail the seas, never docking at port. Ships and nautical life also play an important role in Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* (1865), in which the two title

characters fall in love on board Tristan’s ship while enroute to deliver Isolde to her arranged husband, King Marke. The motif of the ocean also plays an important role in the opera *Simon Boccanegra* (1857), by Wagner’s contemporary Giuseppe Verdi. The title character is a former pirate, and water represents both his natural element and his fate.

In the 20th and 21st centuries, Benjamin Britten composed two sea-based operas, *Peter Grimes* in 1945 and his own adaptation of Melville’s novella *Billy Budd* in 1951, and the plot of Thomas Adès’s 2004 operatic setting of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, meanwhile, is set in motion when Prospero causes a shipwreck. Precipitating events involving shipwrecks also appear in much earlier work, such as Mozart’s *Idomeneo* (1781), whose title character washes up on a Cretan island after being saved by Neptune, god

of the sea. Even beyond opera, depictions of water often serve as the subject of musical works, including in Felix Mendelssohn’s *The Hebrides* (1832), Bedřich Smetana’s *The Moldau* (1874), Maurice Ravel’s *Jeux d’Eau* (1901), and Claude Debussy’s *La Mer* (1903–05).

For those seeking drama and emotion, bodies of water offer an unexpected richness. Oceans, rivers, and seas can all be serene and calm, shimmering with ethereal beauty. They can also swell with intensity and enthusiasm. Water’s pulsing movement is ripe for musical interpretation and can appear soothing or surging. If drama is what is needed, a storm on the open water can be one of the most dangerous places on earth, wielding a violent force that has swallowed up many a life. Given the breadth of emotions offered by aquatic landscapes, bodies of water have themselves become sites of music-making, giving birth to various musical traditions. The barcarolle, for example, is a genre developed from the songs of Venetian gondoliers, while the sea shanty is a folk song that originated as an accompaniment to work aboard a ship in the British Isles and among French sailors. In a tribute to this tradition, some of the melodies in *Moby-Dick* even employ the call-and-response form of traditional shanties.



A scene from the Met’s staging of Britten’s *Billy Budd*, another opera with a nautical setting

KEN HOWARD/MET OPERA

**COMMON CORE
STANDARDS AND
MOBY-DICK**

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-12.1d

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

Encouraging Student Response in Attending the Final Dress Rehearsal

Watching and listening to a performance is a unique experience that takes students beyond the printed page to an immersion in images, sound, interpretation, technology, drama, skill, and craft. This performance activity will help students analyze different aspects of the experience, engage critically with the performance, and express their views in a respectful and supported environment.

The enclosed performance activity is called “Opera Review: *Moby-Dick*.” The handout for this activity, available at the back of this guide, will invite students to think of themselves as opera critics, taking notes on what they see and hear during the performance and critiquing each scene on a five-star scale. Students should bring this activity sheet to the final dress rehearsal and fill it out during intermission and/or after the final curtain. When they return to class, students can use their “Opera Review” sheets as they review and discuss their experience.

DISCUSSION

Students will enjoy starting the class with an open discussion of the final dress rehearsal. What did they like? What didn’t they? Did anything surprise them? What would they like to see or hear again? What would they have done differently?

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- How intensely should we pursue something we have identified as our purpose? What should we be willing to sacrifice?
- How does Jake Heggie’s score depict elements of the opera’s story?
- At what point should we stand up to authority to protect the welfare of others?

IN PRINT

Heggie, Jake. "Composing Opera," in Helen M. Greenwald (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Opera*. Oxford: Oxford Handbooks, 2014.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195335538.013.050>

The composer's own reflections on how one writes opera in the 21st century.

Robert K. Wallace, *Heggie and Scheer's Moby-Dick: A Grand Opera for the 21st Century*. Denton: University of North Texas, 2013.

A detailed companion to the opera, including a foreword by the composer and the librettist.

ONLINE

Robert K. Wallace, "The Ache of Longing and the Song of Redemption: An Interview with Jake Heggie, Composer of the Opera *Moby-Dick*." *Leviathan* 13, no. 2 (2011): 66–90.

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/493041>.

An interview with the composer about the premiere of *Moby-Dick* in the Melville journal *Leviathan*.

San Diego Opera and UC San Diego Extension, "Composing *Moby-Dick*: A Conversation with Jake Heggie," February 16, 2012, video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNbqu-snJZk&t=1031s>

Ian Campbell, general and artistic director at San Diego Opera interviews the composer.

UC Berkeley Events, "*Moby-Dick*: The Opera," October 10, 2012, video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PASr2g21ORs>

A panel discussion with composer Jake Heggie and librettist Gene Scheer, hosted by the Department of English at the University of California, Berkeley.

Keegan Morris, "I Like to Take on Projects that Terrify Me': Jake Heggie on Adapting 'Moby-Dick' into an Opera," WFMT, April 22, 2019.

<https://www.wfmt.com/2019/04/22/i-like-to-take-on-projects-that-terrify-me-composer-jake-heggie-on-adapting-moby-dick/>

WFMT interviews the composer ahead of the Chicago Opera Theater's premiere.

Aria

A song for solo voice accompanied by orchestra. In opera, arias mostly appear during a pause in dramatic action when a character is reflecting musically on his or her emotions. Most arias are lyrical, with a tune that can be hummed, and many arias include musical repetition.

Ballad

A type of song, often associated with folk music, that tells a story. Ballads typically feature a strophic structure (i.e., the same melody is sung over and over with changing text) and predominantly syllabic melodies. In addition, ballads are usually sung by a solo performer, even though the text might include quoted speech as well as descriptions of actions and events. Examples of ballads in the Anglophone tradition include "Oh My Darling, Clementine," "Streets of Laredo," and "Barbara Allen."

Chorus

A section of an opera in which a large group of singers performs together, typically with orchestral accompaniment. Most choruses include at least four different vocal lines, in registers from low to high, with multiple singers per part. The singers are typically from a particular group of people who play a certain role on stage—soldiers, peasants, prisoners, and so on. Choruses may offer a moral, comment on the plot, or participate in the dramatic action.

Ensemble

A musical piece for two or more soloists, accompanied by orchestra. Types of ensembles include duets (for two soloists), trios (for three soloists), and quartets (for four soloists). Sometimes singers will respond directly to one another during an ensemble. At other times, singers will each sing to themselves as if the other singers were not on stage. In ensembles, multiple characters may simultaneously express very different emotions from one another.

Libretto

The text of an opera, including all the words that are said or sung by performers. Until the early 18th century, a composer would frequently set music to a preexisting libretto, and any given libretto could thus be set to music multiple times by different composers. During the 18th and 19th centuries, collaboration between the author of the libretto, known as the librettist, and the composer became more frequent. Some opera composers, most notably Richard Wagner, are known for writing their own text.

Melody

A succession of pitches that form an understandable unit. The melody of a piece consists of the tune that a listener can hum or sing. During arias, the singer will usually sing the main melody, though other instruments may play parts of the melody. Sometimes, such as during ensembles, multiple melodies can occur simultaneously.

Orchestration

An aspect of composition, orchestration is the art of choosing which instruments should play each part of a musical work. Successful orchestration requires both practical considerations (e.g., that a given melody is within an instrument's range) and more creative elements (e.g., whether an instrument's unique timbre is suited to the emotions or ideas that a melody needs to express).

Score

The complete musical notation for a piece, the score includes notated lines for all the different instrumental and vocal parts that together constitute a musical composition. In an opera orchestra, the conductor follows the score during rehearsals and performances while each performer follows his or her individual part.

Solo

A piece, musical passage, or line for a lone singer or other performer, with or without instrumental accompaniment. The most common type of solo in opera is the aria, which is composed for a single voice with orchestral accompaniment.

Theme and motive

Themes are the melodic ideas that are musical building blocks for a piece. A theme is often recognizable as a distinct tune and may reappear in its original form or in altered form throughout the piece. A motif (or motive) is a brief musical idea that recurs throughout a musical work. Motives can be based on a melodic, rhythmic, or harmonic component, and their repetition makes them recognizable to the listener. In opera, musical motives are often symbolically associated with specific characters or dramatic ideas.

Moby-Dick

Performance date:

Reviewed by:

Have you ever wanted to be a music and theater critic? Now's your chance!

As you watch *Moby-Dick*, use the space below to keep track of your thoughts and opinions. What did you like about the performance? What didn't you like? If you were in charge, what might you have done differently? Think carefully about the action, music, and stage design. Then, after the opera, share your opinions with your friends, classmates, and anyone else who wants to learn more about the opera and this performance at the Met!

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN / STAGING
The ship's crew raises the sails and talks about their captain, who has not been seen for days.	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:			
Ahab finally joins the crew and tells them the story of Moby Dick.	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:			
Greenhorn learns about whaling from Queequeg and Starbuck.	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:			
Ahab mourns his inability to enjoy life while Moby Dick swims free.	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:			
After a fight fueled by racist tension, Pip is lost at sea during a whale chase.	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:			

THE SHOW, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN / STAGING
Ahab refuses to port the ship to make repairs and threatens Starbuck when he insists. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Queequeg tells of Pip's rescue, and Greenhorn decides to befriend Queequeg. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Starbuck contemplates killing Ahab while he sleeps. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
While making plans to travel to Polynesia with Greenhorn, Queequeg collapses. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Queequeg informs Greenhorn that he is dying; Pip and Greenhorn sing a lament. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
A storm has encircled the ship, but Ahab rallies the crew to soldier on. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
In the aftermath of the storm, the captain of another ship asks Ahab to help find his son—but Ahab refuses. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Ahab spots Moby Dick, and the men attack the whale. The crew members drown, and Ahab is dragged down into the sea. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Another ship finds Greenhorn floating on Queequeg's coffin. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆