

Dr. Becky Jo Gesteland

Class meetings: T 5:30-8:10 pm (online)

Office hour: T 4:30-5:30 pm (online)

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Course description

Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*; or, *The Whale* was a colossal failure when it was first published in 1851. Contemporary critics called it "an ill-compounded mixture of romance and matter-of-fact" (*London Athenaeum*), "not worth the money asked for it" (*Boston Post*), "too much for our money" (*New York Parker's Journal*), and "sufficiently absurd" (*Edinburgh Evening Courant*). Now hailed as "the greatest American novel of all time" (Philbrick), *Moby-Dick* began its resurgence in the 1920s and has continued to captivate, possess, intimidate, overwhelm, and exhaust readers around the world. What about this book compels us?

Course objective

In this class, you will engage in a kind of textual archaeology as you attempt to answer this question. We'll take our cue from Nathaniel Philbrick, who claims that

For me, *Moby-Dick* is more than the greatest American novel ever written; it is a metaphysical survival manual—the best guidebook there is for a literate man or woman facing an impenetrable unknown: the future of civilization in this storm-tossed 21st century.

You will approach *Moby-Dick* from numerous directions and view it through various lenses. You will delve deep into its literary, political, social, historical, and cultural contexts; navigate its author's tormented life; and track the text's journey from obscurity and financial disaster to notorious literary classic. Moreover, you will explore the incarnations of "Moby Dick" today—in movies, music, videos, and so on. Our goal is a new exegesis, a "thick description" (Geertz), a thorough excavation of this text that has grown beyond its pages to inhabit our cultural consciousness.

Learning outcomes

The Literature Emphasis of the MA Program is dedicated to helping students master the following four outcomes. At the end of the semester, students will demonstrate...

1. The ability to gather, analyze, and communicate information and insights critically.
2. The ability to closely read and analyze texts within historical contexts and critical frameworks.
3. The ability to apply current scholarship, practices, and/or theoretical and critical perspectives in their own writings.
4. The ability to use discipline-specific terminology and conventions in their written, oral, and/or multimodal presentations.

Primary texts

Chase, Owen. *Wreck of the Whale Ship Essex: The Complete Illustrated Edition*. Quarto Publishing, 2015. ISBN 9781950435968 → Wildcat Store

Melville, Herman. *Moby-Dick, Or, The Whale*. Norton & Co, 2023. ISBN 9780393870794 → Wildcat Store

Reynolds, J. N. Reynolds. [Mocha Dick: Or the White Whale of the Pacific](#). *The Knickerbocker, or New-York Monthly Magazine*. 13 (5, 1839): 377-392. → online

Secondary texts

Hoare, Philip. "What 'Moby-Dick' Means to Me." *The New Yorker*. 11/03/2011. → Canvas

"Into the Deep: America, Whaling, and the World." *This American Life*, PBS. 2010. → Canvas

Lepore, Jill. "Herman Melville at Home." *The New Yorker*. 07/22/2019. → Canvas

Philbrick, Nathaniel. *Why Read Moby-Dick?* Penguin, 2011. ISBN 9780143123972 → Wildcat Store

Assignments

All due dates and times are posted in Canvas. See brief assignment descriptions below.

Graded assignments	Points possible	Learning outcomes
Annotated bibliography	100	1, 2, 3, 4
Discussion lead	100	1, 4
Literature review	100	1, 2, 3, 4
Position papers (10 @ 20 points each)	200	1, 2, 3
Presentation	100	1, 4
Proposal	100	1, 4
Research paper	300	1, 2, 3, 4

Grading scale

Specific criteria will be provided for each assignment. At the end of the semester, I will add up the points you've received on the above assignments and convert them to a letter grade based on the following scale.

A = 94-100	B = 84-86	C = 74-76	D = 64-66
A- = 90-93	B- = 80-83	C- = 70-73	D- = 61-63
B+ = 87-89	C+ = 77-79	D+ = 67-69	E = 0-60

Absence policy

Since this is a graduate class, your attendance is extremely important. You will lead discussions, present your research, and provide feedback on classmates' work in every class. Any absences will decrease your grade substantially.

Academic dishonesty (cheating and plagiarism)

As part of the Student Code ([PPM 6-22](#), 6.4.2), you are expected to be academically honest and ethical. Academic dishonesty includes: cheating; plagiarizing; colluding with others to be dishonest; falsifying information; giving, selling, or receiving unauthorized course or test information; using a tool or other aid not explicitly permitted by your instructor like generative AI (e.g. ChatGPT) to complete assignments or exams; or infringing on others' copyrights and intellectual property. Academic dishonesty can have serious consequences in the class and/or at WSU. Be sure, if you borrow an idea, to express it in language entirely your own and let the reader know the idea's source in a citation note.

ADA note

If you require accommodations or services due to a disability you *must* contact [Services for Students with Disabilities \(SSD\)](#) in room 181 of the Student Services Center. SSD can also arrange to provide course materials (including the syllabus) in alternative formats if necessary. For more information about the SSD, contact them at 801-626-6413 or ssd@weber.edu.

Core beliefs

According to PPM 6-22 IV, students are to "[d]etermine, before the last day to drop courses without penalty, when course requirements conflict with a student's core beliefs. If there is such a conflict, the student should consider dropping the class. A student who finds this solution impracticable may request a resolution from the instructor. This policy does not oblige the instructor to grant the request, except in those cases when a denial would be arbitrary and capricious or illegal. This request must be made to the instructor in writing and the student must deliver a copy of the request to the office of the department head. The student's request must articulate the burden the requirement would place on the student's beliefs."

Emergency closure

If for any reason the university is forced to close for an extended period of time, we will conduct our class via WSU Online. Look for announcements through the class website and your Weber email account.

Technical support

All assignments must be submitted to [Canvas](#). If you have any technical difficulties, please consult the experts. For

- Technical assistance, contact the IT Help desk 801-626-7777 or csupport@weber.edu
- Canvas-related issues, contact WSU Online Help desk 801-626-6499 or wsuonline@weber.edu

Workload

You should expect to dedicate 3-4 hours outside of class for each hour in class. That means ~18-24 TOTAL hours per week.

Annotated bibliography ~1000 words or 3-4 pages double-spaced

Identify at least 8 sources you’ve encountered in your research and provide a full citation and annotation for each source.

Discussion lead ~20 minutes

You will lead one class discussion on reading/research you’re doing for your paper.

Literature review

Write a review of the “literature”—or research—you conducted for the annotated bibliography. The literature review familiarizes your reader with the depth, breadth, and scope of your research topic as it combines or synthesizes the research you've done.

Position papers ~500 words or 2-3 pages double-spaced (each)

A position paper is a short, one-page analysis/close reading/argument that responds to a prompt.

Presentation ~20 minutes

In preparation for your research paper, you will present your research to the class. You’ll describe your research and explain the purpose of your paper.

Proposal ~1000 words or 3-4 pages double-spaced

Propose your intended plan for your research paper. Basically, you’ll answer the “why, what, how, and when” of your project.

Research paper ~3000-4000 words or 12-16 pages

The topic of your research paper is up to you but must make a compelling argument about *Moby-Dick*.

Schedule

Please note that the most recent schedule is on [Canvas](#).

Date	Details
Tue Jan 9, 2024	Assignment Chase (all)
Fri Jan 12, 2024	Calendar Event Into the Deep - video Discussion Topic Position paper #1 - Wreck of the Whaleship Essex
Mon Jan 15, 2024	Calendar Event MLK HOLIDAY
Tue Jan 16, 2024	Assignment Melville (Intro-Ch.20)
Fri Jan 19, 2024	Discussion Topic Position paper #2 - Moby-Dick
Tue Jan 23, 2024	Assignment Melville (Ch.21-43)
Fri Jan 26, 2024	Discussion Topic Position paper #3 - Moby-Dick
Tue Jan 30, 2024	Assignment Melville (Ch.44-66)
Fri Feb 2, 2024	Discussion Topic Position paper #4 - Moby-Dick
Tue Feb 6, 2024	Assignment Melville (Ch.67-89)
Fri Feb 9, 2024	Discussion Topic Position paper #5 - Moby-Dick
Tue Feb 13, 2024	Assignment Melville (Ch.90-112)
Fri Feb 16, 2024	Discussion Topic Position paper #6 - Moby-Dick
Mon Feb 19, 2024	Calendar Event PRESIDENTS' DAY

Date	Details
Tue Feb 20, 2024	Assignment Melville (Ch.113-Epilogue)
Fri Feb 23, 2024	Discussion Topic Position paper #7 - Moby-Dick
Tue Feb 27, 2024	Assignment Reynolds (all)
Fri Mar 1, 2024	Discussion Topic Position paper #8 - Mocha Dick Assignment Proposal
Mon Mar 4, 2024	Calendar Event SPRING BREAK
Tue Mar 5, 2024	Calendar Event SPRING BREAK
Wed Mar 6, 2024	Calendar Event SPRING BREAK
Thu Mar 7, 2024	Calendar Event SPRING BREAK
Fri Mar 8, 2024	Calendar Event SPRING BREAK
Tue Mar 12, 2024	Assignment Philbrick (all)
Fri Mar 15, 2024	Discussion Topic Position paper #9 - Why Read Moby-Dick?
Tue Mar 19, 2024	Calendar Event PROF AT A CONFERENCE Assignment Hoare + Lepore
Fri Mar 22, 2024	Assignment Annotated bibliography Discussion Topic Position paper #10 - Hoare + Lepore

Date	Details
Tue Mar 26, 2024	Calendar Event discussion lead: TBD
Tue Apr 2, 2024	Calendar Event discussion lead: TBD
Fri Apr 5, 2024	Assignment Literature review
Tue Apr 9, 2024	Calendar Event discussion lead: TBD
Tue Apr 16, 2024	Assignment Presentation
Fri Apr 19, 2024	Assignment Research paper
Tue Apr 23, 2024	Calendar Event FINALS
Wed Apr 24, 2024	Calendar Event FINALS
Thu Apr 25, 2024	Calendar Event FINALS
Fri Apr 26, 2024	Calendar Event GRADUATION