

READING

Herman Melville

Herman Melville is one of the most famous American writers. He is best known for his novels of the sea. Melville was born in New York City in 1819. His father was a successful businessman but later he had some problems and Herman had to work as a bank clerk. During the 1830s, Melville studied classic literature and began writing poems, essays and short stories. In 1837, he worked for a short time as a teacher in Massachusetts but he didn't like the work and soon returned to New York.

In 1839, Melville started working as a sailor. In 1841, he was hired to work on a whaling ship which sailed to the South Seas. He used his experiences from this journey in his stories, for example in his first novel called *Typee*. In August 1847, Melville married Elizabeth Shaw and in the summer of 1850 he bought a farm which he named "Arrowhead".

Melville's most famous novel is *Moby-Dick*. It was first published in London in October 1851 as *The Whale* and a month later in America as *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*. It is the story of Captain Ahab who wants to kill a white whale called Moby-Dick because it destroyed his ship. The book didn't sell very well but today it is considered to be his masterpiece and one of the greatest American novels.

Melville's next book, *Pierre*, was also financially unsuccessful. He wrote a few more novels and then started writing poetry. In 1867, Melville's son Malcolm shot himself. His second son, Stanwix, died in a San Francisco hospital in 1886 after a long illness.

Herman Melville died on September 28, 1891. When he died, Melville was neither rich nor famous. However, by the early 1920s Melville had become a well-known figure among readers and critics alike. His last novel, *Billy Budd, Sailor*, was published in 1924. In 1956, *Moby-Dick* was made into a movie.

1 Read the text and answer the following questions.

- 1 What did Herman Melville study during the 1830s? _____
- 2 Where did Herman Melville work as a teacher? _____
- 3 What is the name of Melville's first novel? _____
- 4 Where was *Moby-Dick* published for the first time? _____
- 5 Why does Captain Ahab want to kill Moby-Dick? _____
- 6 How did Melville's son Malcolm die? _____
- 7 What is the name of Melville's last novel? _____

2 Are these sentences true (T) or false (F)?

- 1 Herman Melville's father was a teacher. _____
- 2 Herman Melville sailed to the South Seas in 1839. _____
- 3 Herman Melville had a farm called Arrowhead. _____
- 4 *Moby-Dick* wasn't very successful financially. _____
- 5 Herman Melville wrote poetry as well as novels. _____
- 6 Melville's son Stanwix killed himself. _____
- 7 A film based on Melville's *Moby Dick* was made in the 1950s. _____

SOURCES: <https://www.biography.com/people/herman-melville-9405239>,
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Herman-Melville>

KEY

1 Read the text and answer the following questions.

- 1 What did Herman Melville study during the 1830s? **classic literature**
- 2 Where did Herman Melville work as a teacher? **in Massachusetts**
- 3 What is the name of Melville's first novel? **Typee**
- 4 Where was *Moby-Dick* published for the first time? **in London**
- 5 Why does Captain Ahab want to kill Moby-Dick? **because Moby-Dick destroyed his ship**
- 6 How did Melville's son Malcolm die? **he shot himself**
- 7 What is the name of Melville's last novel? **Billy Budd, Sailor**

2 Are these sentences true (T) or false (F)?

- 1 Herman Melville's father was a teacher. **F (he was a businessman)**
- 2 Herman Melville sailed to the South Seas in 1839. **F (he sailed to the South Seas in 1841)**
- 3 Herman Melville had a farm called Arrowhead. **T**
- 4 *Moby-Dick* wasn't very successful financially. **T (it didn't sell very well)**
- 5 Herman Melville wrote poetry as well as novels. **T**
- 6 Melville's son Stanwix killed himself. **F (he died after a long illness)**
- 7 A film based on Melville's *Moby Dick* was made in the 1950s. **T**