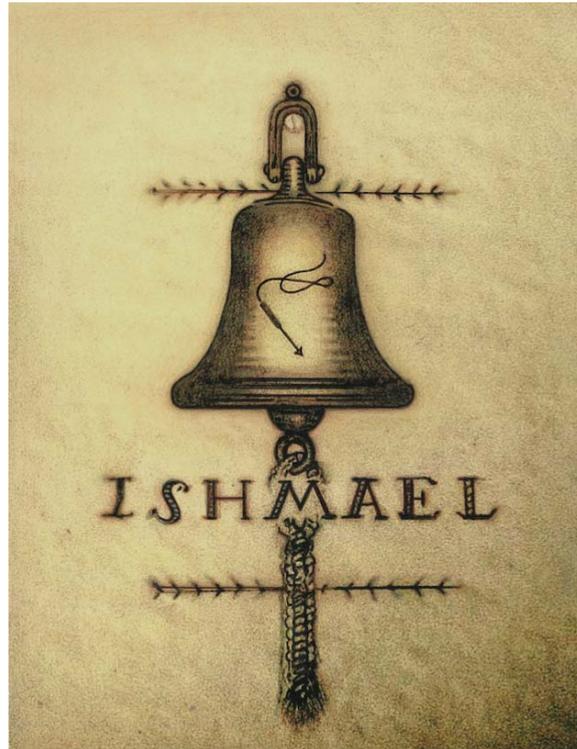




EDUCATION GUIDE



Tuesday, October 8, 2019
1:00pm

Tickets: \$6.00 per person

Recommended for Grades 9+

ABT Student Matinee series sponsored by



Alberta Bair Theater for the Performing Arts
2801 Third Avenue North • Billings, Montana 59101
406-256-8915
www.albertabairtheater.org

ISHMAEL

Study Guide

The Story:

ISHMAEL tells the tale of a restless country schoolteacher who cannot shake the tragic adventure of his youth. He is haunted by a need to tell the story of how he signed onto a three-year whaling voyage with a Captain he'd never met and a mission he could never imagine. Drawing freely from Herman Melville's classic novel, *MOBY DICK*, a single actor conjures a funny, thoughtful, harrowing play about one man's drive to see the world and another man's insatiable quest to destroy it — and the spirit it takes to survive it all.

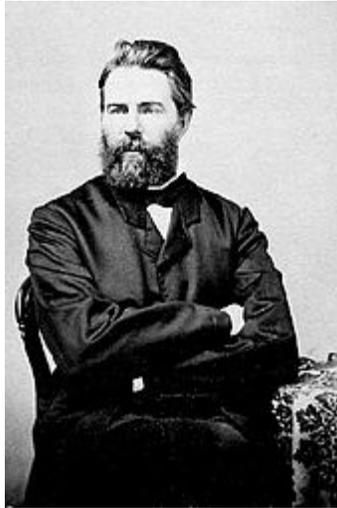
Moving seamlessly from character to character, Jack Weston introduces us to some of the greatest characters in American Literature: Ishmael, Starbuck, Captain Ahab and more!



BEFORE SEEING THE PLAY:

1. Have a discussion about Herman Melville, *MOBY DICK* and their importance to American Literature.
2. Have a discussion about the Whaling Industry and its importance to the the United States and the World.
3. Have a discussion about adapting and condensing 500 pages of classic American Literature to a 90 minute (or less) stage play with one actor.

Herman Melville **Interesting Facts**



- Herman Melville was born in New York City 1819. His two grandfathers were both heroes of the American Revolutionary War. His paternal grandfather, Thomas Melville, took part in the Boston Tea Party.
- As a young man, Herman Melville worked on several whaling ships which provided a great deal of inspiration for his future writing.
- Melville's first two books, *TYPEE* (1846) and its follow-up *OMOO* (1847) were both critical and financial successes. Of his 11 novels, these two were the only ones to achieve success in Melville's lifetime.
- *MOBY DICK*, published in 1851, received poor reviews and sales bombed. In fact, it sold fewer copies than any of his five previous books and was out of print at the time of Melville's death.
- Herman Melville died in 1891. It wasn't until after his death, in the 1920s that the Melville revival began among critics and readers. By the 1940s the genius of Herman Melville and *MOBY DICK* was being recognized and spread throughout the world.
- A survey of 100 authors from 54 countries named *MOBY DICK* as one of the 100 best books of all time.

American Whaling Industry

Interesting Facts



- American Whaling flourished from the late 1700s through the mid 1800s.
- While whalebone and ivory were valuable, a whaler's main profit came from the oil derived from whale blubber and the spermaceti oil contained in the head of a Sperm Whale.
- Candles and oil lamps burning spermaceti oil burned clean and bright with almost no odor or smoke. Spermaceti oil was also used to lubricate fine machinery such as clocks, watches and sewing machines.
- Because of the valuable spermaceti oil and its use in the Industrial Age, Sperm Whales were hunted mercilessly in the mid 1700s and early 1800s. A single, large sperm whale could hold as much as three tons of spermaceti oil, making them an incredibly valuable commodity — and in fact, they became the first of any animal or mineral oil to achieve commercial viability.
- Americans and Europeans started using sperm whale oil to fuel lighthouses, street lamps, and public buildings. Whale oil supplied the fuel for the lamps that illuminated the nights in America and Europe.
- The spermaceti candle became so prevalent that it created a new light standard: the lumen.
- The intense whale hunting drove the number of sperm whales down appreciably. It's estimated that nearly 236,000 whales were killed in the 19th century alone.
- In 1846, the industry reached peak sperm whale oil production. But, it was the invention of a new fuel source that saved the whales.... Kerosene.
- By 1876, the 735-ship fleet of American Whale Ships (three times as many ships as all other countries combined) had sunk to just 39.
- A whaling ship was approximately 150 feet long, 25 feet wide with a crew of up to 30 men. The ship carried 3 or 4 whale boats which would be dropped to sea when a whale was spotted. Each whale boat was 30 feet long and carried 6 men. The whale boats crew would row as near to the whale as possible, then spear the monster with harpoons to kill it.
- A large Sperm Whale could measure over 60 feet in length and weigh over 60 tons. The whale hunt was incredibly dangerous and resulted in the deaths of countless whalers.

ISHMAEL

A One Man Show



- Condensing the Great American Novel, *MOBY DICK*, into a one man stage play required skillful editing on the part of the writer, Leo Geter.
- Step One: Eliminate all characters that are not crucial to the advancement of the story.
- Step Two: Eliminate all expository sections of the book that are not based in action and are not advancing Ishmael's personal story about his whaling experience, e.g., Chapter 32 *Cetology*, Melville's lengthy and methodical chapter regarding the physical properties of whales.
- Story Telling — With the use of simple set pieces and props, let Ishmael tell his fascinating story directly and personally to the audience.



Cast and Creative - Bios

Writer: Leo Geter, adapted from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*

Leo Geter started off in the world of acting, appearing in over 30 film and television series as well as many theater productions. He has directed plays in New York, Los Angeles, Colorado and Minnesota. For the past eight years he has written many teleplays for TNT's "The Closer" and "Major Crimes" where he has also worked as Executive Producer and Director. He holds an MFA in film from the New York University. Special thanks to George Sutton for putting the ISHMAEL team together and taking care of us every step of the way.



Director: Michelle O'Neill



Michelle O'Neill started her career in NYC where she studied at the Juilliard school and worked as a professional appearing on Broadway, television, films and theaters across the country. Michelle moved to the twin cities in the early 2000s and has since acted in over 26 productions at the Guthrie Theater where she also directs, teaches, and creates programs that enrich young people's understanding of theater. As a director, her favorite projects have been *Uncle Vanya*, *A Month in the Country*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Diviners*. Since 2004, Michelle has held the position of an adjunct professor at the university of Minnesota where she directs and teaches students.

Cast: Jack Weston as Ishmael

Twin Cities-based actor/singer/songwriter Jack Weston has been performing professionally since he was 16 years old. Theatrical roles include: Jesse James in *The Story of Jesse James*, Jesus in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Joseph in *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, and Fredrick in *Pirates of Penzance*.

In addition to acting, Jack has released three CDs of jazz standards and original compositions, written commercial jingles, and performed voiceovers for radio. He has performed both as a solo artist and with his band at clubs and small concert venues throughout the Midwest. Jack originated the role of Ishmael in the 2015 Minnesota Fringe Festival production of *White Whale*.

