

# History in a Nutshell

## The Golden Age of Yankee Whaling

Grade Level: 3-5

### Learning Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Identify the variety of individuals who worked onboard whaling vessels and explain how they worked together to meet their goals. (Connecticut Social Studies Frameworks HIST 3.3-5, 4.4-5, 5.4-5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.6, 5.6; SL.3.1-3, 4.1-4, 5.1-4)
- Explain the economic motivation of 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century whalers and identify examples of the resources they sought through the harvesting of whales. (Connecticut Social Studies Frameworks ECO 3.2-3, 4.2-3, 5.2-3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1-4, 4.1-4, 5.1-4)
- Use maps to explain New England's connection to the sea and investigate the journeys taken by whalers during the Golden Age of Yankee Whaling. (Connecticut Social Studies Frameworks GEO 3.1-3, 4.1-3, 5.1-3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1-4, 4.1-4, 5.1-4)

### Program Framework:

1. Introductory video
2. Close-looking activity
3. Independent practice

**Teacher Background:** In this program students will learn about the role and importance of the whaling industry in New England's history. Students will explore the Golden Age of Yankee Whaling through investigating the resources that whales provided, exploring what life was like for a sailor aboard a whaling vessel, and discovering where the voyages took these whalemens.

**Materials:** introductory video, images for close-looking activity, reproducibles for independent practice

### I. Introductory Video

Images Shown

1. Clip from [“Old Whaling Film aboard The Viola 1916 Part 1 of 2,”](#) M.L. Baron Historic Archives, November 25, 2012. YouTube video.
2. [Map illustrative of the currents and whaling grounds by the U.S. Ex. Ex.,](#) Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1845. Engraving. 1999.0145.398, National Museum of American History. Digital Public Library of America.

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3. [No. 8. Physeter Macrocephalus](#), printed by Elijah Chapman Kellogg, 1851-1853. Lithography, black and blue printer's ink on wove paper. Gift of Samuel St. John Morgan, 1948.4.8, The Connecticut Historical Society.
4. [Mirror - W.A. Robinson & Co.](#), c. 1914. Ferrous metal, glass, paper, cellulose. 1977.53, New Bedford Whaling Museum.
5. [Baleen](#), John Holden, 2019. Photograph. Flickr.
6. [Whale Oil Lamp](#), made by Fuller & Smith, about 1850. Spun Britannia metal. 1950.383.0, The Connecticut Historical Society.
7. [Corset](#), Royal Worcester, about 1892. Machine-stitched silk, with silk tapes, machine-made cotton lace, steel boning and hooks, and baleen boning. Gift of Adelaide Clark, 1964.76.3, The Connecticut Historical Society.
8. [Parasol](#), Dupuy, about 1870-1885. Ivory handle, handmade linen bobbin lace, hand-stitched silk cover, brass ferule; ribs are not visible, but are probably baleen and steel. Gift of Mary Means Huber. 2002.92.7, The Connecticut Historical Society.
9. [Taking a Whale/Shooting a Whale with a Shoulder Gun](#), Robert Walter Weir, Jr., c. 1855-1866. Watercolor on paper. 2001.100.4715, New Bedford Whaling Museum.
10. [Lawrence Wharf, New London, Connecticut](#), Thomas Petersen, 1924. Oil painting. 1939.1549, Mystic Seaport Museum.
11. [Untitled](#), Pardon B. Gifford, 1917. Negative, glass, dry plate. G-323, New Bedford Whaling Museum.
12. [Captain Edward S. Davoll](#), c. 1850. Daguerreotype, cased. 2000.100.109, New Bedford Whaling Museum.
13. [John R. Manta's whaleboat, crew at oars](#), Captain Henry Mandly and Albert Cook Church, 1906. Negative, nitrate. 2000.100.86.306.1, New Bedford Whaling Museum.
14. [Untitled](#), Albert Cook Church. Negative, glass, dry plate. 2000.100.86.240, New Bedford Whaling Museum.
15. [Dinner time on John R. Manta](#), Albert Cook Church, 1906. Negative, nitrate. 2000.100.86.254, New Bedford Whaling Museum.
16. [Lively fish on Natalie](#), Albert Cook Church. Negative, nitrate. 2000.100.86.654, New Bedford Whaling Museum.
17. [Untitled](#), Pardon B. Gifford, 1906. Negative, glass, dry plate. G-329, New Bedford Whaling Museum.
18. [Untitled](#), Pardon B. Gifford, August 1906. Negative, glass, dry plate. G-330, New Bedford Whaling Museum.
19. [Scrimshaw](#), Carol Paltrineri, Sandwich, Massachusetts, September 20, 2012. Photograph. Flickr.

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20. [Susan's Tooth](#), Frederick Myrick, c. 1829. Whale ivory. 1993.54.4, New Bedford Whaling Museum.
21. [Scrimshaw](#), Michael Kasperek, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, November 5, 2005. Photograph. Flickr.
22. [Norwegian whaler striking his fish \[sic\] in the Varanger Fjord, July 1882, witnessed from the deck of the S.S. yacht "Pandora,"](#) George Earl, 1882. Oil on canvas. 2001.100.4774, New Bedford Whaling Museum.
23. [American Whaler](#), printed by Elijah Chapman Kellogg, 1850-1851. Lithography; printer's ink and watercolor on wove paper. Kellogg Brothers Lithographs, 2003.259.0, The Connecticut Historical Society.
24. [Harpooning a Whale](#), Anton Otto Fischer, 1925. Oil on canvas. 2001.100.4443, New Bedford Whaling Museum.
25. [The Chase of the Bowhead Whale](#), Clifford Warren Ashley, 1909. Oil on canvas. 1982.3, New Bedford Whaling Museum.
26. Clip from ["Down to the Sea in Ships 1922 CLARA BOW Elmer Clifton,"](#) Silent Dreamlands, May 25, 2019. YouTube video.
27. [Harpooning the Whale](#), William Heysman Overend, c. 1868. Oil on canvas. 2001.100.4322, New Bedford Whaling Museum.
28. [Cutting in a sperm whale](#), H.S. Hutchinson & Co., c. 1903. Photograph. Prints and Photographs Division, 2013648093, Library of Congress.
29. [Bertha's oil casks](#), Albert Cook Church. Negative, nitrate. 2000.100.86.334, New Bedford Whaling Museum.
30. [Source of the world's most gigantic fortunes-- pumping wells in the oil country-- western Pennsylvania](#), Underwood & Underwood, c. 1903. Photograph, print on card mount. Prints and Photographs Division, 2015646647, Library of Congress.
31. [Whaling Vessels at New Bedford, MA](#). Photograph. 1949.1773, Mystic Seaport Museum.
32. [Two Whaleboats Alongside Whaling Schooner MARGARETT, 1914](#), New Bedford, Massachusetts. Photograph. 1973.899.147, Mystic Seaport Museum.
33. [New London Whale Tail](#), Connecticut Office of Tourism, May 24, 2015. CTVisit.com.

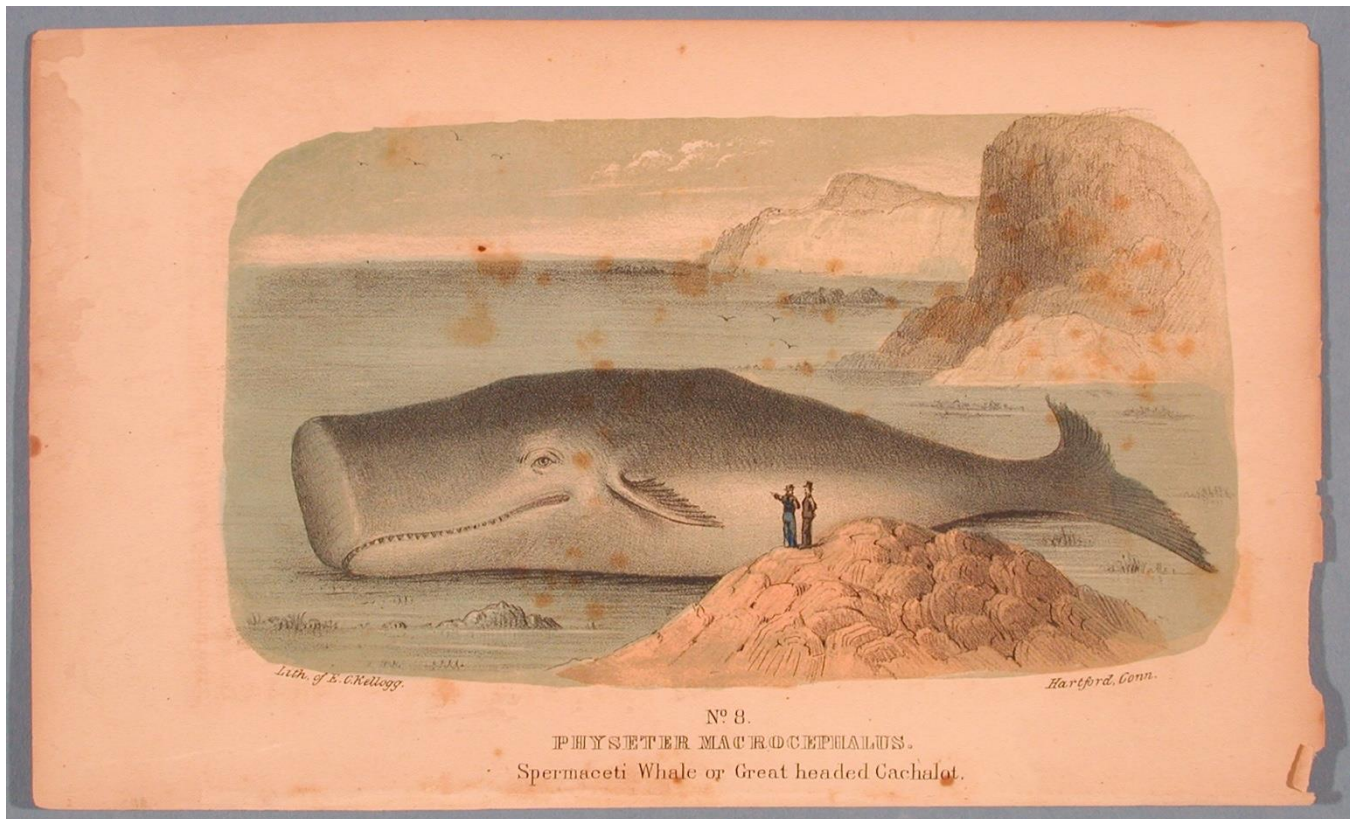
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### II. Close-Looking Activities

#### 1. Images Tell a Story

- Study the image below and then answer the following questions:
  - What is going on in this image? Describe what you see.
  - What do you notice about the people in this image? Who do you think they are? How do you think they are feeling? What might they be thinking?
  - What does this image tell you about the time when it was created (the 1850s)?
- After answering the questions create a “living image.” Think of yourself as an actor who is playing the role of one of the people in the image and recreate the scene. Think about the physical positions, gestures, and facial expressions of one of the figures in the image. Then write or tell a short story to go along with this image.



[No. 8. Physeter Macrocephalus](#), printed by Elijah Chapman Kellogg, 1851-1853. Lithography, black and blue printer's ink on wove paper. Gift of Samuel St. John Morgan, 1948.4.8, The Connecticut Historical Society.

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2. Compare and contrast whale-human interaction in the 1800s and today.
  - Look at the image below and then answer the following questions:
    - What is going on in this painting?
    - What are the men doing? What makes you say that?
    - Do the colors in the painting set a mood? What do you think the artist is trying to convey?



[Harpooning the Whale](#), William Heysman Overend, c. 1868. Oil on canvas. 2001.100.4322, New Bedford Whaling Museum.

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- Now consider the image below.
  - How do the two images compare?
  - How were whales used by humans in the past? How are they used today?



[Whale Watch Tour Boston, 4 Hours](#). Adrenaline.

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#### III. Independent Practice

1. In the hallway or on the playground, help students measure the average lengths of the selected whales from the chart below. Compare the whale lengths to the length of your classroom, gym, lunchroom, or hallway or to the length of a car, truck, or school bus.

Type of whale	Length
Pilot whale	20 feet
Gray whale	40 feet
Humpback whale	50 feet
Sperm whale	55 feet
Right whale	55 feet
Finback whale	70 feet
Blue whale	100 feet

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2. Use the map below to locate whaling grounds in the Pacific. Estimate the distance whalers traveled from New England to those whaling grounds. Then use an atlas to find the actual distance.



[Map illustrative of the currents and whaling grounds by the U.S. Ex. Ex.](#), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1845. Engraving. 1999.0145.398, National Museum of American History. Digital Public Library of America.

3. Other questions to consider:
  - How have Connecticut's whaling resources influenced the development of our state and its contribution to American history?
  - How did Connecticut whaling contribute to America's story and the growth of the Industrial Revolution?
  - Historically, what goods made in Connecticut have we traded elsewhere?



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#### Additional Information:

Whaling in America began with the colonists in the 1600s. Native Americans and colonists would hunt for whales by “shore-whaling.” This is when small boats are launched into the surf after whales are sighted offshore. By the beginning of the 1700s there was a noticeable decline in whales swimming close to the shore, so the whalers began to outfit single-masted sailing vessels called “sloops” to pursue the animals into deeper water. These voyages led the whalers farther and farther out to sea. By the 1800s we had reached the Golden Age of Yankee Whaling and New Englanders were hunting for whales in large vessels as far as away the Pacific Ocean. At this time the three major American whaling ports were New Bedford, MA; Nantucket, MA; and New London, CT!

When a vessel set sail from one of the New England ports, their journey would take them all around the world. Many American whaleships had “rounded the Horn” (the southernmost tip of South America) and pursued whales in the Pacific Ocean. As sperm whales became scarcer, whale ships sailed further north in the Pacific. Eventually they would hunt for whales as far as the Arctic.

After the whale hunt, the whale was brought alongside the ship and the captain and mate stripped the blubber from the whale's body. This was called flensing. Strips of blubber were cut around the whale's body. These strips, known as blankets, were cut into sections and used for the process of trying out the oil. Fires were lit in the try pots and sections of blubber were lowered inside. The fatty blubber boiled and turned into oil which was then poured into barrels. A successful trip would produce about 70,000 gallons of whale oil and 30,000 pounds of baleen.

Was whaling a lucrative industry? For the vessel owners, a fortune was made. For the captain and the crew, each man received a “lay,” or percentage of the profits, depending upon their status. The captain earned the largest share, perhaps 1/8th, and a green hand the least, as little as 1/350th. An ordinary crewman might earn only \$25.00 for several years of work.

Whale oil was a crucial and versatile resource that played a huge role in powering the Industrial Revolution of the 1800s. It was vital to the success of factory machinery. New London owed much of its early prosperity to the success of its whaling fleet: it was once the third-largest whaling port in the world. In 1850, when Connecticut's whaling industry was approaching its peak, over \$1 million worth of whale oil and baleen passed through the port of New London in a single year. Between 1803 and 1879, over 2500 voyages to foreign ports sailed from New London, Connecticut. New London vessels hold records for the most successful voyage, the first steam powered whaling vessel, the largest whaleship, and the longest voyage.

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The longest whaling voyage in world history was made by the crew of the *Nile* who set sail from New London in 1858 and returned in 1869. That's 11 years of whaling! The *Nile* is known to have had five different masters, including Asa W. Fish. Fish was captain in 1864, when the Confederate ship *Shenandoah* attacked and burned many Union whale ships. Captain Fish was captured, and the *Nile* was ransomed rather than burned and then used to transport 121 captured men and officers to San Francisco. Then in 1865, the *Nile* was refitted as a bark and sent back out from Honolulu to winter in the whaling grounds.

Whales have been known to ram whaling vessels; this not a "whale of a tale!" Have you ever heard of Mocha Dick? This famous whale lived in the Pacific Ocean and was known to ram and attack whaling vessels. Mocha Dick swam the Pacific waters surrounding Mocha Island. Mocha Dick, named after the island, was famous among New England whalers. The enormous, albino sperm whale was actually quite docile, sometimes swimming alongside the very ships that were hunting whales. But once attacked, Mocha Dick would turn violent and retaliate with such aggression that many whaling ships and boats were lost to his attacks. In 28 years, Mocha Dick had, by some accounts, over one hundred encounters with whaling ships, killed over thirty men, and attacked, damaged, or sunk close to twenty whaleboats.

To learn even more about American Whaling, visit:

[Mystic Seaport Museum](#)

[New Bedford Whaling Museum](#)

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#### Glossary:

**Baleen:** plates that grow in the mouths of some whales; they filter the krill and small fish that whales feed on

**Blubber:** a layer of fatty skin that protects animals like whales and seals from cold weather

**Boatheader:** one who is in charge of a whaleboat; an officer who stands in the stern of a whaleboat and manipulates the steering oar and lances the harpooned whale

**Bow:** the front of a boat

**Corset:** a type of stiff underclothing worn by a woman to change the shape of her body

**Gally:** to frighten or scare

**Harpoon:** a barbed spear or javelin used especially in hunting large fish or whales

**Lampblack:** a fine black colored powder made of soot from the smoke of burning oil or gas

**Salthorse:** meat that has been preserved or cured with salt

**Sea chest:** a sailor's storage chest for personal property

**Ship's hold:** the space used for carrying cargo below the deck of a ship

**Sound:** To dive down suddenly

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### Additional Whaling Resources for Educators:

Peter Cook, *You Wouldn't Want to Sail on a 19th Century Whaling Ship*, The Salariya Book Company

<http://atlanticseafoodmarket.com/2013/10/rich-whaling-history-connecticut/>

<https://www.nlchs.org/online-exhibits/whaling-out-of-new-london/>

<https://www.theday.com/article/20200912/NWS01/200919787>

[https://educators.mysticseaport.org/artifacts/nile\\_oil\\_painting/](https://educators.mysticseaport.org/artifacts/nile_oil_painting/)

<https://www.provlib.org/research-collections/special-collections/nicholson-whaling-collection/>

<https://todayinhistory.com/2019/09/24/september-24-connecticuts-last-whaling-voyage-2/>

<https://www.amusingplanet.com/2019/06/mocha-dick-whale-that-inspired-moby-dick.html>

<https://www.whalingmuseum.org/learn/research-topics/overview-of-north-american-whaling/life-aboard>

<https://www.whalingmuseum.org/learn/research-topics/overview-of-north-american-whaling/whales-hunting>

<https://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/document.php?id=cqresrre1985092700>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2012/02/the-spectacular-rise-and-fall-of-us-whaling-an-innovation-story/253355/>



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