

Worksheet 5. What's in a genre? (teacher version)

You have been assigned a literary genre from *Moby-Dick* to read and analyze. With your group, read your selection from the text aloud and collaborate on the answers to the questions below. (Note to teacher: The suggested answers to the questions below include all three genre types.)

Genre: _____ chapter _____

1. What do you first notice about the structure of the text, just by looking at it? *Answers will vary.*

Sermon: It is a speech delivered by the preacher.

Scientific writing: The piece is clearly one entry in a larger catalogue, as it has a book and chapter number. It is also titled "Sperm Whale."

Drama: The chapter is written with stage directions and characters delivering lines. It has no narration.

2. What is the topic of the selection?

Sermon: Jonah asks to be delivered from the fish's belly.

Scientific writing: A description of the sperm whale, its name in different languages, and its significance in the whaling world.

Drama: The sailors, each identified by his nationality, discuss the "dance" of the sea. They are caught in a terrible storm.

3. Record five phrases or sentences that you think are representative of the piece you've been assigned. Record them in the left column of the chart below. In the right column, write the stylistic feature each exemplifies.

Answers will vary.

Quotation	Features of the Quotation

4. Describe the tone of the piece.

Melville's "Moby-Dick": Shifts in Narrative Voice and Literary Genres

Sermon: The sermon is written in fairly formal language. The preacher is prescriptive in his instructions to the congregation.

Scientific writing: The writing is fairly dry. Melville stresses the majesty and importance of the whale.

Drama: The sailors seem jovial as they carry on and sing in a casual and conversational tone. They are also very determined in their endeavors to chase the whale.

5. Are there any words or techniques that are used throughout the piece?

Sermon: Using very vivid imagery and the language of a morality tale, Jonah is held up as a model of how to repent one's sins and why it is important to preach the truth.

Scientific writing: Many words are used to describe a sperm whale's immense size and its high value to the whaling industry (i.e., "largest," "most formidable," "most majestic" and so on). Using an authoritative tone, statements are given that involve a description of the sperm whale, its name in different languages, and its importance in the whaling world.

Drama: The sailors sing together and shout at each other frequently. There is much physical staging throughout the scene (i.e., dancing, reclining, scattering, and shrinking motions). Each sailor expresses himself in a slightly different style, likely to highlight the differences in their nationalities.

6. If this piece is representative of your genre, what would you expect other works in this genre to look like?

Sermon: Although they are delivered orally, sermons are fairly formal. They use colorful language meant to captivate their audience. They offer advice to a congregation by using stories to convey morals.

Scientific writing: A scientific piece of writing would describe an element of the natural world (a plant or animal) in fairly dry language. It may also make claims about the importance of this element to the world as a whole.

Dramatic writing would have characters delivering lines to mimic speech or song. It would include stage directions to show action. There will be no narrator.

7. Together, using the text as evidence, write a working definition of your genre.

Sermon: A formal speech from a member of the clergy to a congregation that offers moral guidance.

Scientific writing: A type of writing that describes an element of the natural world.

Drama: A description of scenes to be acted out including written lines and stage direction, often intended to be performed with no narration.

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8. Does this definition match your expectations for this genre? Why or why not?

Students will have different expectations when entering the class, so answers will vary. Students may find the sermon more formal than what they were expecting. Students in the science writing group(s) may note that Melville's version of scientific writing is far less specific than they expected.