



MVM@Homeschool

Thar She Blows!

Whaling on Martha's Vineyard

Grade Levels Included: 2-5

Ages: 7-11

MA Curriculum Frameworks:

HSS.2.T5

RI.2.T1-3

W.2.T3

HSS.3.T5.5

RI.3.T1-3, 7

W.3.T2

HSS.4.T4a.4-5

RI.4.T1-3

W.4.T3

HSS.5.T4.4

Why was the whaling industry so important to Martha's Vineyard?

Background:

From the mid-18th century to the 1920s, whaling was one of the most important - and profitable - industries in North America. Whaling ports like Edgartown, Nantucket, and New Bedford sent thousands of ships to sea in search of whales to harvest for blubber, baleen, and bone. Vineyard men of all backgrounds joined the whaling workforce by the hundreds, particularly in the 1800s. Some got rich; some never made it home. This MVM@Homeschool unit covers the history of whaling on Martha's Vineyard and the industry's lasting social, economic, and cultural influence on the Island.

Learning Objective:

Students will consider whaling and its impact on Martha's Vineyard through several lines of inquiry:

- Why did people from Martha's Vineyard hunt whales?
- Who became a whaler, and why?
- What was it like to go on a whaling voyage?

In This Package:

- Teacher's Guide & Lesson Plan
- MVM@Homeschool Artifact Display
- Read All About It!
- Writing Activity
- Hands-On Activity Guides
- Field Trip Guide: *Visit Laura Jernegan's Childhood Home (Edgartown)*

Teacher's Guide & Lesson Plan

Welcome to MVM@Homeschool! We hope your students will enjoy this opportunity to experience a little bit of the MV Museum in their home classroom. This package includes photographs of Museum artifacts, copies of documents from our archives, oral histories, and activity guides to enhance student learning. MVM Education staff are available to answer any questions you might have while presenting this lesson; please email education@mvmuseum.org if you need us!

MVM@Homeschool Learning Kits are designed with flexibility in mind for anyone teaching and learning at home. All of the content and activities can be presented in a single day or spread out over several classes, depending on your needs and preferences.

This lesson packet draws heavily on the website [Girl on a Whaleship](#), produced in partnership with the MV Museum in 2010. We recommend exploring the website with your students throughout this lesson plan.

Contents of This Kit

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- Section II:** MVM@Homeschool Artifact Display: *Whaling and Life at Sea*
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 - Cook Sea Rations*
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- Section VII:** Additional Materials and Further Reading

Section I: “W” Is for “Whaling”

Background for Teachers

Whaling was an industry. It was dangerous, dirty work. It relied heavily on cheap labor, often provided by very young men or new immigrants. It may have taken place on the high seas instead of behind factory walls, but whaling was every bit as industrial in form and function as the work done in the cotton mills or the coal mines.

Unlike other industries, whaling has been deeply romanticized over time. It conjures images of lonely wives pacing so-called “widow’s walks” and scanning the horizon, of neatly clapboarded white houses with black shutters facing the sea, of iron-jawed men risking life and limb in pursuit of the leviathan. Edgartown, like Nantucket and New Bedford, was among the whaling capitals of the world. The whaling industry drew hundreds of Vineyard men to sea and paid them their due, leaving an indelible mark on the Island’s culture for more than a hundred years - and a lasting legacy we can still see today.

But what was it really like to be aboard a whaleship?

Logbooks kept by whaling masters and officers are helpful to historians searching for a record of the work performed at sea and in port. Chandlery accounts tell us about food and provisions bought for the ships bound on whaling voyages. Sea shanties and scrimshaw give us some insight into the lives of the men who did the work. Most other industries on the Island did not create the body of artifacts that the whaling industry left us.

While it is not particularly detailed or artistic, Laura Jernegan’s journal is invaluable to historians and researchers wanting to get a first-person account of the activities aboard a whaleship toward the end of the industry’s heyday. It is extremely unique because six-year-old girls did not generally go to sea, and even fewer of those who did kept journals that survived long enough to enter a museum’s collection.

Lesson Plan

Words highlighted in red are defined on the vocabulary sheet. Words highlighted in green are job titles aboard a whaleship with full descriptions of the work associated with the positions. These supplements are in Section VII (begins on page 28).

Ask the Big Question: Why was the whaling industry so important to Martha's Vineyard?

A. Background: Why Whales?

1. Types of Whales

2. Whale Products

- a) Different whales provided different useful products:
 - (1) Sperm whales were hunted primarily for the spermaceti made from the oil found inside their heads.
 - (a) Spermaceti was used for making the finest candles and best whale oil for lamps.
 - (b) Sperm whale teeth were often carved into scrimshaw. Teeth were also used to make piano keys, chess pieces, and handles for walking sticks.
 - (c) Ambergris, a waxy solid found in the sperm whale's intestines, made a very good fixative for perfumes.
 - (2) Right whales were considered the "right" whales to hunt because of the large quantity of blubber found on each animal.
 - (a) Blubber was boiled in trypots to produce oil for lamps.
 - (3) Whalers harvested the baleen from whales to use in women's corsets, umbrellas, and other flexible boned items.

3. Brief History of Whaling

B. Investigate!

1. What Is Whaling?

- a) Whaling is the practice or industry of hunting and killing whales for their oil, meat, or bone.

2. Who Went Whaling?

- a) Hundreds of Vineyard men and boys found work on whaleships between 1700 and 1920.
 - (1) Whaling was considered a meritocracy. Men were hired for their abilities to perform the work without the same constraints of race, ethnicity, or religion that existed in many other fields.
 - (2) Wampanoag men were often considered by ships' captains to be the best harpooners.
 - (a) The Wampanoag had been practicing "drift whaling," or catching whales that swam close to shore/washed up on the beach, for thousands of years. They did not conduct whale hunts on an industrial scale, but rather took them occasionally and used the entire animal for meat and bone very quickly.

- (3) By the late 19th century, many ships' crews were predominantly men of color, including formerly-enslaved men, free Blacks, and Cape Verdean immigrants.
 - (a) We know that at least 64 Black men became whaling captains, including William Martin of Chappaquiddick.
 - b) Women were occasionally passengers on whaleships. Most commonly, they were the wives of the captains or officers. They were not members of the crew.
 - c) Children of both sexes might go to sea as passengers if their father was the captain or an officer.
- 3. Where Did They Go?
 - a) The earliest whaling voyages stayed close to the Island, then expanded throughout the Atlantic Ocean.
 - b) As more and more whalers took whales from the Atlantic, voyages got longer and went farther from home. Many vessels sailed to the Pacific Ocean on voyages that lasted up to five years.
 - (1) Whaling ships often stopped in the Azores, Cape Verde, and at Caribbean ports to hire more crew and lay in more supplies, including livestock and fresh food.
 - (2) Hawaii was also a very popular port for whalers. Some ships' captains rented houses for their families on the Hawaiian islands; the Jernegans resided in Honolulu for a time during the voyage Laura documents in her journal.
- 4. When Did This Happen?
 - a) People have hunted whales for thousands of years, but the whaling *industry* began around 1712.
 - b) In 1857, the entire American whaling **fleet** numbered 593 **vessels**.
 - (1) Between 1816 and 1894, Edgartown sent 59 vessels on 178 whaling voyages. Other voyages started in Edgartown but officially departed from nearby New Bedford. Edgartown ranked 9th-busiest whaling port by vessel count and 10th-busiest by number of voyages during this period.
 - (2) Between 1816 and 1862, Holmes' Hole (Vineyard Haven) sent 12 vessels on 35 whaling voyages.
 - c) Whaling continued on a huge scale, making it the fifth-largest industry in the United States from the mid-1800s until 1924.
- 5. How Did They Do It?
 - a) The Whale Hunt (adapted from New Bedford Whaling Museum materials)
 - (1) The Search
 - (a) Each **foremast hand** took a two-hour turn in the **hoops (crosstrees)** scanning for spouts, formed by the whale's breath.
 - (b) Under ideal conditions, a whale might be seen from 8 miles away; spouts varied by species.
 - (c) "There she blows!"
 - i) Questions and answers were exchanged to determine the whale's position.

- ii) All hands launched the **whaleboats**.
 - iii) The **cooper, blacksmith, carpenter, cook, and steward** remained aboard to handle the ship during the pursuit.
- (2) The Pursuit
 - (a) Whaleboats raced one another toward the whale.
 - (b) It was important to approach as quietly as possible so as not to frighten the whale off.
- (3) The Throw
 - (a) **Harpoons** or “whale irons” were used to attach the whale to the whaleboat, not strike a killing blow.
 - i) A four-year voyage would go equipped with 150-200 harpoons.
 - ii) The best hand-darted harpoon, the toggle iron, was designed by African-American blacksmith Lewis Temple in New Bedford.
 - (b) “Give it to him” was the command when the boat was close enough.
 - i) The **harpooner** threw his harpoon to attach the whale to the whaleboat by a length of rope anchored on the boat’s **loggerhead**.
 - (c) “Stern all! Stern all, for your lives!”
 - i) The injured (and angry) whale would then try to swim or dive away from its predator, dragging the whaleboat along on what was colloquially called a “Nantucket Sleighride.” The crew would let out the line attached to the harpoon and hold on until the whale died.
 - ii) This was the moment of greatest danger for the men on the whaleboat.
- (4) The Kill
 - (a) When the whale tired, the **boatheader** and harpooner changed places and the boatheader plunged a **lance** into a vulnerable spot on the whale.
 - (b) The whale would eventually come to float on its side when dead.
- (5) Retrieving the Prize
 - (a) The whaleboat would tow the 50-ton animal back to the ship or the ship might sail close to the kill site.
- (6) Processing the Whale
 - (a) The crew worked 24 hours a day in six-hour shifts to fully process their kill.
 - (b) They stripped the blubber, cut it into “blanket pieces,” cut those into “horse pieces” and “Bible leaves,” then boiled or “tried out” in try pots aboard ship.
 - (c) The resulting oil was stored in barrels, which contained 31 ½ gallons each.
 - (d) In sperm whales, the most valuable oil was inside the animal’s head.
 - i) Spermaceti was worth three to five times more than other whale-oil.
 - (e) Bones and teeth were saved for scrimshaw.

- (f) Baleen was removed to be used in corsets, fishing rods, hoops, umbrellas, etc.

(7) Cleanup and Start Over

C. Visit the MVM@Homeschool Artifact Display

1. Look at the pictures of model ships, whaling tools, whale products, and whalers in the MVM's collection (see pages 8-12).
2. Color your own copy of the MVM's portrait of Alonzo Belain and Francis Peters, Wampanoag whalers from Aquinnah (print page 34).

D. Read All About It!

1. Read the story of Laura Jernegan's voyage to the Pacific Ocean (begins on page 14).
2. Study the excerpts from Laura Jernegan's journal (pages 16-19).
3. Discuss: What do you notice about Laura's journal entries? What does she write about most often?

E. Keep a Ship's Log or a Journal Like Laura's

1. Fold several pieces of blank paper in half widthwise to create a journal. You can use construction paper or patterned/colorful paper for the cover if you have any.
2. Using the logbook of the *Pavilion* online (see page 13) for inspiration, design your own record of your daily activities. What elements should you include every day?
 - a) Suggestions: The day of the week and date, the weather, something interesting or unusual that happened...
 - b) Whaling logbooks used stamps to indicate the species of whale(s) they caught. You might want to illustrate your logbook if something special happens.

F. Hands-On Activities

1. Sing a Sea Shanty
2. Make Soap Scrimshaw
3. Cook Sea Rations
4. Design a Log Cabin Quilt Square

G. Field Trip: Laura Jernegan's Childhood Home (Edgartown)

Section II:
MVM@Homeschool Artifact Display



Model of the bark *Roman*, c. 1900-1930 - Object 1994.034



Model of a whaleboat, c. 1900-1974 - Object 1974.010A



Toggle harpoon, 19th century - Object
2013.006.1618



Lance, 19th century - Object 1979.050.024



Cutting spade, 19th century - Object 1923.114



"Harpoon In," Ray Ellis, 1980 - Object 1993.009.006



Baleen, 19th or early 20th century - Object 1955.015.006



Scrimshaw whale tooth, 19th century - Object 1923.144.003



Stays, late 18th century - Object 1924.029.001



Baleen "bones" for a woman's stays or corset, probably 19th century - Object 1941.024.007



Coopered barrel, 19th century - Object 2013.006.397a



Trypot aboard the *Mattapoisett*, docked at Edgartown, c. 1885



Oil lamp, 19th century - Object 2013.006.1171a



Tintype of Francis Peters and Alonzo Belain, Wampanoag Harpooners, before 1878 - Object Z0477

MVM@Homeschool: More to Learn

Watch!

[A "Nantucket Sleighride"](#)

Video Courtesy of the New Bedford Whaling Museum

Listen!

[Alice Cleveland: Vineyard Women & Whaling](#)

Oral History from the MVM Collection

Explore!

[The Logbook of the Pavilion](#)

Brig of Holmes Hole
Mayhew Adams, Master
1858-1860

Section III: ***Read All About It!***

Over one hundred fifty years ago, six-year-old Laura Jernegan lived in Edgartown, Massachusetts, with her family. They lived in a fashionable white house on Summer Street, not far from the harbor. Like many of their neighbors, they were a **seafaring** family - but in Laura's case, it wasn't just her father who went to sea!

Captain Jared Jernegan, Laura's father, was the captain of a **bark** called the *Roman*. He was an accomplished ship's **master** who had sailed the seas hunting whales. Whale oil had become very valuable as a source of light, so much so that nearby New Bedford - the most important whaling port in the world - was nicknamed the "City That Lit the World." Some men who went whaling became very rich.

Laura's mother, Helen McClellan Clark Jernegan, had been a school teacher at the North Primary School in Edgartown before she married Laura's father. Mrs. Jernegan had to give up teaching in order to marry. That was the law in Massachusetts in the 1850s! Mrs. Jernegan had given many future **navigators** their first arithmetic lessons while she was their teacher.

Perhaps because he missed his family while he was away on his long voyages, Captain Jernegan decided to bring his wife and children along when he sailed again in October 1868. The *Roman* carried a **crew** of thirty-one men, plus Mrs. Jernegan, Laura, and two-year-old Prescott, bound for the Pacific Ocean and the whale-hunting grounds.

It was very unusual for women and children to go on such long, dangerous voyages. Whaling expeditions could last months, or sometimes *years!* The ship was fitted out with a little "house" at the **stern** where the family could work, learn, and play safely. Below decks, Laura and Prescott shared special bunk beds that were built with a **lattice** wall so they wouldn't fall out of bed when the ship **pitched** and **rolled** in heavy seas. Even with these modifications, the *Roman* wasn't a very comfortable place for anyone - crew or passenger.

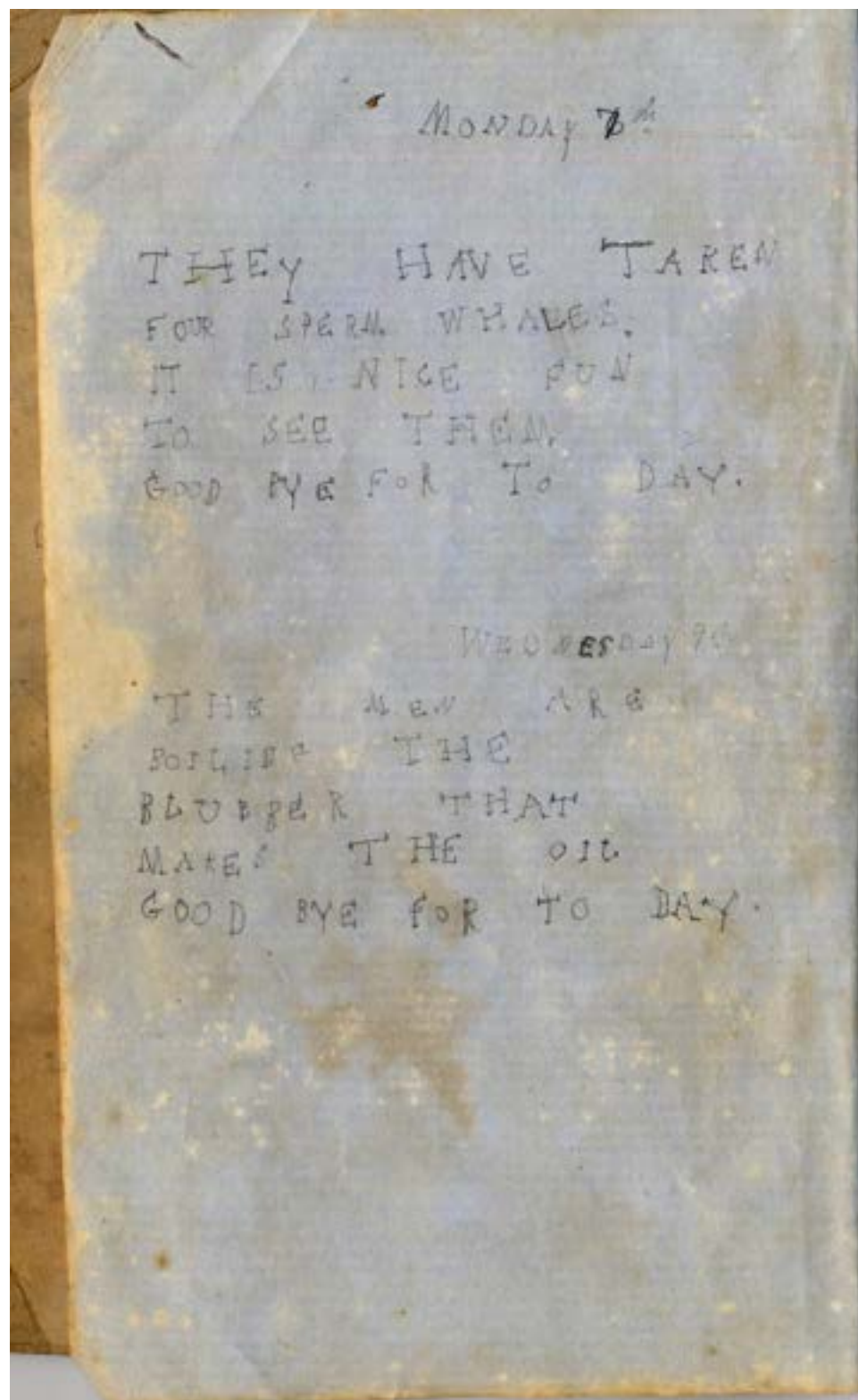
Mrs. Jernegan tried to make the ship homey for her family while they sailed from New Bedford to Hawaii. They brought chickens for fresh eggs, goats for fresh milk, and a kitten for Prescott to play with. Laura painted, knit, and learned needlework - when she wasn't doing her lessons or writing in her journal!

Laura's journal is one of the reasons we know about life at sea on long voyages in the 1860s. She dated her entries, wrote about the weather, and recorded things that she did and saw - including what the sailors were doing.

Many of her journal entries sound the same because the days were...the same. But sometimes, something exciting would happen. When the men sighted a whale, there was much activity as they lowered the whaleboats and chased it with harpoons. If they killed it, they would cut up the carcass and boil the blubber in try pots on the main deck. Laura often mentions how terrible the smell of boiling blubber was.

One of the more memorable events in Laura's journey was when another ship appeared on the horizon...and then alongside the *Roman*! Captain Jernegan had arranged a gam with his brother, Captain Nathan Jernegan of the *Splendid*. Laura's family visited with him and with crew from the other ship, listening to songs and news from afar and watching the men dance.

It took the *Roman* five months to sail from New Bedford to Honolulu. When they reached the island, Mrs. Jernegan rented a small house for herself and her two children to live in while Captain Jernegan continued on his whaling voyage to the Arctic Circle. The Jernegans lived in Honolulu for several years - until the *Roman* was crushed in ice in 1871 and the whole family returned to Martha's Vineyard.



Laura's first journal entry, December 7, 1868

✓ MONDAY 14th

IT IS A CALM DAY. AND VERY PLEASANT. MAMA IS MAKING PATCHWORK. GOOD BY FOR TO DAY.

TUESDAY 15th

THERE IS NO WIND TO DAY. THE MEN ARE STOWING THE GIL DOWN. WE HAVE 4 DUCKS ON BOARD OF OUR SHIP. GOOD BY FOR TO DAY.

FRIDAY 18th

THE WIND BLOWS VERY HARD. WE HAD DUCKS FOR DINNER. I STUDY MY LESSONS EVERY DAY. MAMA HAS GIVEN ME SOME WOOL AND I AM MAKING A TOILET CUSHION. GOOD BY FOR TO DAY.

February 1st 1869

MONDAY 1

IT IS A CALM DAY AND
VERY PLEASANT.

PAPA HAS MADE TWO BOAT
SAILS. GOOD BY FOR THE DAY.
I HAVE MADE EIGHT BABIES

WEDNESDAY 3

IT RAINED A LITTLE THIS
MORNING. PAPA IS NAILING BOARDS
ON THE DECK. PRESCOTT HAS
GOT SOME NAILS AND POUNDING
THEM IN A BOARD. GOOD BY
FOR THE DAY.

THURSDAY 4.

MAMA IS MAKING A
TOILET CUSHION. IT IS MADE OF
RED AND GREEN WOOL. PAPA
HAS MADE PRESCOTT A
HAT OUT OF MY SHAKER.
WE HAVE FAIR WIND NOW.
WE HAD GREEN PEAS FOR DINNER.
GOOD BY FOR THE DAY.

Honolulu sept. 1870

Monday 26

it has blown real
hard for ~~two~~ days.

Prescott cut his ~~foot~~
foot last night it
bleed. I am in

Honolulu. it is a
real pretty place.

Mama is making
a dress for me.

Papa is up north
where it is cold.

he will come back
pretty soon. I have

~~two~~ kittens ~~here~~
and one aboard

the ship. good by
for today.

Section IV: Writing Activity Worksheet

Keep a Ship's Log or a Journal Like Laura's

Ships' logs were very important on long voyages. Every day, the captain or first mate recorded the date, the weather, and the ship's location. If the crew killed a whale, they wrote that down, too, and included details about what kind of whale it was and how much oil they got from it.

Laura Jernegan kept her journal for a few reasons. It was a way for her to pass the long hours on the voyage while practicing her writing, which her mother taught her aboard the *Roman*.

While you probably aren't going on a long whaling voyage, you can use a ship's log as inspiration for your own logbook using things you might already have at home.

Take a few pieces of blank paper and fold them in half to make a booklet. You might want to use colorful, patterned, or construction paper to make the cover, or you can decorate plain paper.

Inside, keep a record of your modern daily life. You might include the day, date, and weather, plus any interesting (or boring!) things that happen.

Section V: Hands-On Activity Guides

Activity 1: Sing a Sea Shanty

Sea shanties are a type of folk song that sailors sang while working at sea. They were typically rhythmic and were meant to keep the men all together as they did something repetitive, like hauling on a line to raise the sails or as they pushed the bars of the capstan (a type of winch) to hoist the anchor.

One sea shanty became very popular on social media during the pandemic: “Wellerman”. Just like all the sea shanties ever written, that one helped alleviate the boredom we were all feeling during lockdown!

There weren’t strict rules around singing shanties at sea, but most sailors only sang songs about going home when they were on the “return leg” of the voyage.

Haul on the Bowline

Sea Shanty

Haul on the bow - lin', the bul - ly ship's a - rol - lin',

Refrain
Haul on the bow - lin', the bow - lin' haul!

bethsnotes.com

Haul on the bowlin', Kitty is me darlin'. *Refrain*

Haul on the bowlin', Kitty comes from Liverpool. *Refrain*

Haul on the bowlin' so early in the mornin'. *Refrain*

Haul on the bowlin', the old man's a-growlin'. *Refrain*

Haul on the bowlin', it's a far cry to payday. *Refrain*

[from the site Beth's Notes: Supporting and Inspiring Musical Educators](https://bethsnotes.com/)

Activity 2: Make Soap Scrimshaw (adapted from a [National Museum of the American Sailor](#) activity)

Sailors used whale teeth and bones as canvas for their own unique art form: scrimshaw. The designs were carved into the bone and then inked to make them stand out against the ivory. You can create your own scrimshaw using soap, toothpicks, and paint!

Supplies:

- A bar of soap (such as Ivory)
- Toothpicks
- Black paint
- A fine-tipped paintbrush
- Damp paper towels
- Newspaper
- White drawing paper
- Black marker, colored pencil, or crayon



Instructions

1. Cover your work surface with newspaper.
2. Create a design! We recommend practicing in black marker on a piece of white paper before you begin to carve your design in soap. You might choose a ship, an anchor, a mermaid, or any other creative idea you have!
3. On the plain side of the soap bar, carefully carve your design using a toothpick. We recommend carving lightly when you start, then making the carving deeper when you're happy with your design.
4. Use a damp paper towel to remove shavings and polish the bar. Be sure to remove all of the soap shavings before you begin painting.
5. Apply black paint to the carved design using the paintbrush. Use the damp paper towel to remove excess paint.
6. With your adult's permission, share your scrimshaw art with us online! Tag us with @mvmuseum.

Activity 3: Cook Sea Rations

An Original Recipe: “To stew old Peas”

(from *The Good Housekeeper*, Sarah Josepha Hale, 1841)

Put into a sauce-pan a pint of water, a slice of ham, a quart of old peas and a tea-spoonful of white sugar. Cover the pan closely, and let them stew two hours, or till tender. Take out the ham, and add a bit of butter rolled in flour.

This recipe doesn’t look like one you’d find in a modern cookbook, does it? Until the 20th century, most recipe books were vague. They didn’t always include precise measurements for ingredients or cooking times. Also, hearths, wood-burning stoves, and wood-fired ovens were not standardized, so there were a lot of variables in cooking temperatures!

Dried and salted foods, like dried peas and salt pork, were very common on ships because they didn’t spoil quickly. Instead of fresh bread, ships’ rations included biscuit (sometimes called “hard tack”), a twice-baked cracker that was so hard you could break a tooth on it if you tried to just bite in! Biscuit was usually soaked in beer, grog, or broth to soften it before eating.

To make this version of peas pottage, ask your adult to help you in the kitchen and use this modernized recipe:

Ingredients

2 cups of water
1 small ham steak
4 ½ cups dried green peas, rinsed
1 teaspoon sugar
1 tablespoon salted butter, softened
A little all-purpose flour

Method

1. Gather all of your ingredients.
2. Combine all of the ingredients *except the butter and flour* in a saucepan. Put it on the stove, uncovered, and turn on the burner to medium-high.
3. When the mixture comes to a rolling boil, turn down the burner to the low or simmer setting.

4. Cook for approximately two hours, until the peas are very soft. Most of the water will be absorbed.
5. Using a long-handled fork or tongs, carefully remove the ham steak and set aside.
6. Roll the butter around in a little bit of flour. Add the butter-flour lump to the peas and stir well.
7. Let sit until thickened. Serve still-warm with ham steak.



Stewed old peas...

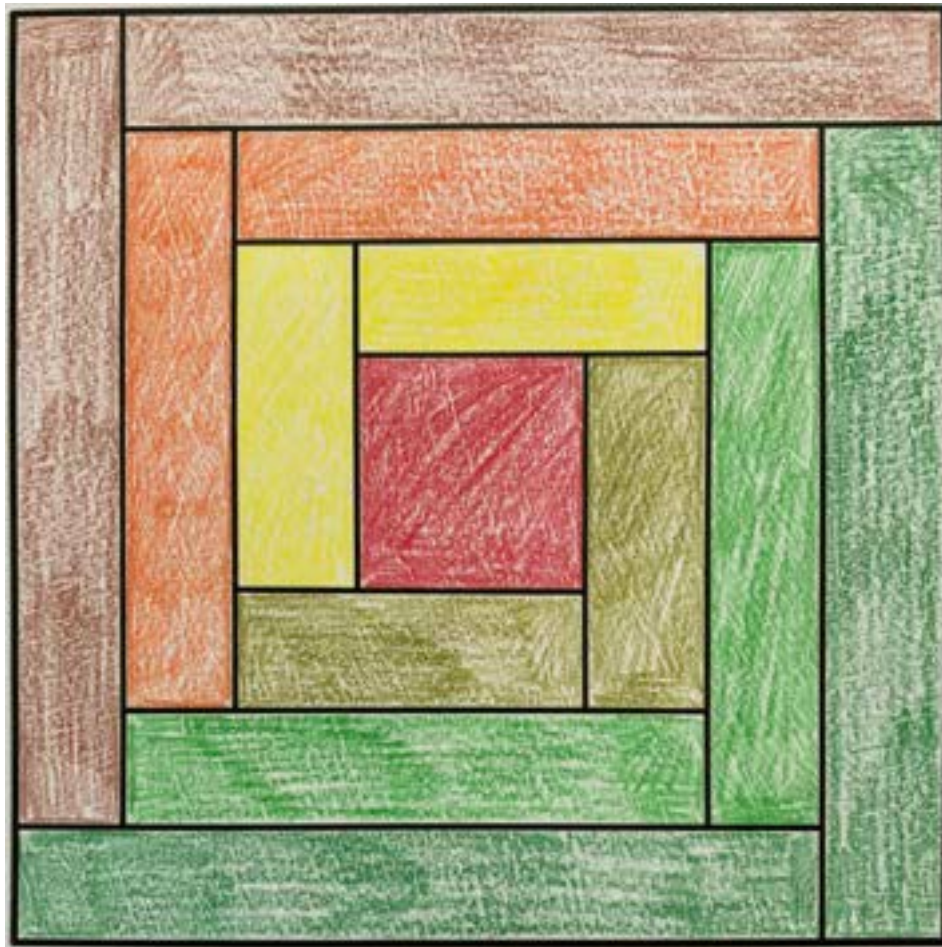


...and ship's biscuits.

Activity 4: Color a Log Cabin Quilt Square

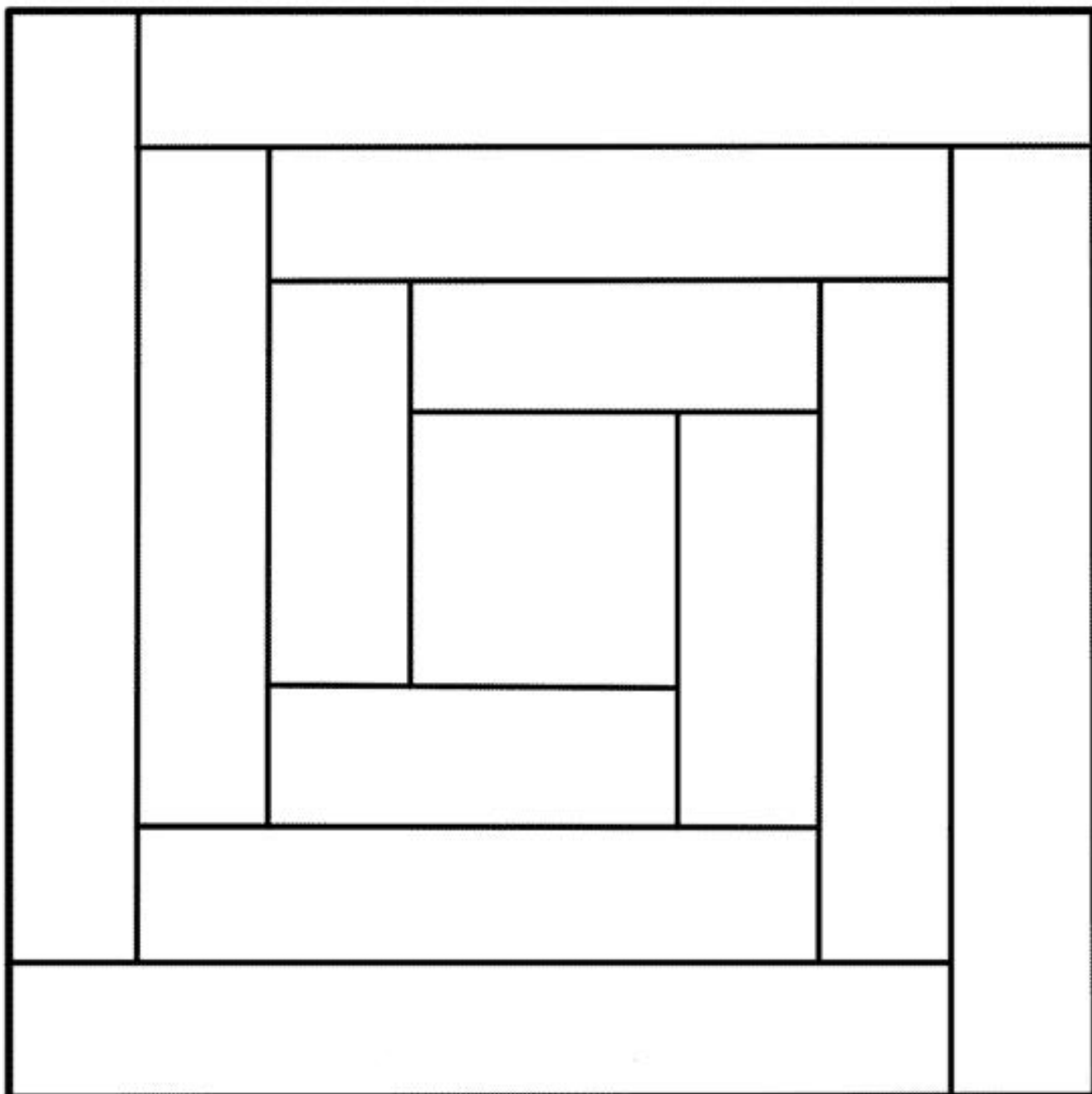
Among the things Mrs. Jernegan did aboard the *Roman*, besides giving lessons to Laura, was quilting. Making piecework quilts was a fashionable pastime in the 1860s, and the Log Cabin pattern was very popular. Some textile historians think that the pattern was inspired by the log cabin where President Abraham Lincoln was born!

Print out the blank template on the next page and design your own Log Cabin quilt square.



Sample Color Pattern: "Sunshine and Shadow"

My Log Cabin Quilt Square



Section VI: Field Trip Guide

Visit Laura Jernegan's Childhood Home!

33 South Summer Street
Edgartown, MA 02539

The house where Laura Jernegan grew up is still standing in Edgartown. While you can't go inside, you can see it from the outside and then go explore the town where so many whalers lived!

Suggested Stops in Edgartown:

- See the Old Whaling Church (89 Main Street)
 - Whaling Note: This church got its name because the building was funded by many whaling captains and their families.
- Explore the Harbor (Dock Street)
 - Whaling Note: This is where whale ships were outfitted and repaired, and where whale oil was refined.
- Walk Along North Water Street
 - Whaling Note: Like the street where the Jernegans lived, this was a fashionable place for rich whalers to build their houses.
- Visit the Edgartown Harbor Light
 - Whaling Note: Although this lighthouse isn't the original, the first lighthouse in Edgartown was built in 1828 and was an important beacon guiding whaleships into the harbor! It was also once lit by whale oil.
- Visit the Cooke House & Legacy Gardens (51 School Street)
 - Whaling Note: You can see an artist's impression of what Edgartown Harbor looked like in the 1700s and a map of Edgartown in 1850. Laura grew up just around the corner!



Look & Learn!

As you look around Edgartown, imagine you're visiting Laura in 1868, just before her family set sail for the Pacific.

- The harbor is full of boats and ships! Do you think the boats you'd see with Laura are for work or for fun?
- The houses around you are all very new in 1868. What do you notice about them?
- The shops along the waterfront sell useful things, like food and tools, to fishermen, whalers, and people living in town. What would you buy if you were going with Laura?



Edgartown Harbor in the 1870s



My Sketch of Edgartown

Section VII: Additional Materials

Whales & Whaling Vocabulary

ambergris: a waxy substance that originates as a secretion in the intestines of the sperm whale, found floating in tropical seas and used in perfume manufacture

bark (or barque): a sailing ship, typically with three masts, in which the foremast and mainmast are square-rigged and the mizzenmast is rigged fore-and-aft

baleen: whalebone found in the mouth of baleen whales

biscuit: a very hard, coarse kind of biscuit formerly taken on sea voyages. Also called ship's biscuit and hard tack.

blubber: the fat of sea mammals, especially whales and seals

boned: (of a garment) stiffened with strips of plastic, steel, or whalebone to give shape to the figure or the garment

capstan: a broad revolving cylinder with a vertical axis used for winding a rope or cable, powered by a motor or pushed around by levers; a type of winch system used aboard sailing vessels

carcass: the dead body of an animal

crew: a group of people who work on and operate a ship, boat, aircraft, spacecraft, or train

crosstrees: a pair of horizontal struts attached to a sailing ship's mast to spread the rigging, especially at the head of a topmast. Aboard whaling vessels, a hoop might be added above to offer a bit of protection from falls to the man sitting in them watching for whales. (They look a bit like this: #)

fleet: a group of ships sailing together, engaged in the same activity, or under the same ownership

gam: a social meeting or informal conversation (originally one among whalers at sea)

harpoon: a barbed missile resembling a spear that is attached to a long rope and thrown by hand or fired from a gun, used for catching whales and other large sea creatures. Also called "whale irons" or "harping irons."

industry: economic activity concerned with the processing of raw materials and manufacture of goods in factories

lance: a long weapon for thrusting, having a wooden shaft and a pointed steel head, formerly used by a horseman in charging

lattice: a structure consisting of strips of wood or metal crossed and fastened together with square or diamond-shaped spaces left between, used as a screen or fence or as a support for climbing plants

lines: lengths of cords, ropes, wires, or other material serving a particular purpose; aboard sailing vessels, usually referring to the cordage used in rigging

loggerhead: a sturdy block mounted on a whaleboat, used to secure the line attached to the harpoon thrown at a whale

meritocracy: government or the holding of power selected on the basis of their ability

navigator: a person who directs the route or course of a ship, aircraft, or other form of transportation, especially by using instruments and maps

pitch: (of a moving ship, aircraft, or vehicle) rock or oscillate around a lateral axis, so that the front and the back move up and down

provisions: supplies of food, drink, or equipment, especially for a journey

roll: (of a moving ship, aircraft, or vehicle) rock or oscillate around an axis parallel to the direction of motion [side to side]

spermaceti: a white waxy substance produced by the sperm whale, formerly used in candles and ointments. It is present in a rounded organ in the head, where it focuses acoustic signals and aids in the control of buoyancy.

scrimshaw: whalebone, ivory, or shells adorned with carved or colored designs

seafaring: (of a person) traveling by sea, especially regularly

stern: the rearmost part of a ship or boat

trypot: a very large cast-iron pot carried aboard whale ships, in which pieces of blubber would be boiled, or “tried out,” to make oil. Several together were called a *tryworks*.

vessel: a ship or large boat

whaleboat: a long rowboat with a bow at either end for easy maneuverability, formerly used in whaling

Whaling Shipboard Jobs & Descriptions In Order of Rank

(From the New Bedford Whaling Museum)

Captain, Master

The captain was the final decision maker, navigator, businessman, administrator, disciplinarian, and doctor. The captain is responsible for the safe and efficient operation of the ship - including its seaworthiness, safety and security, cargo operations, navigation, crew management, and legal compliance - and for the persons and cargo on board.

1. A captain's first responsibility was to the ship's owners. In order to provide incentive, 19th-century ship owners expected the captain to purchase at least a one-eighth share of the ship. This was worth a few thousand dollars at a time when a large house was valued at \$4,000.
2. His second responsibility was to the cargo. If the captain lost some of the cargo, he had to submit a *protest* to prove he had done everything possible to save it.
3. His final responsibility was to the crew.

Mates/Officers

These numbered three or four men in descending order. Each commanded his own whaleboat and acted as the captain's direct supervisors for the rest of the crew.

Boatsteerers/Harpooners

Three to five crew members rowed the whaleboat and one threw the harpoon; they enjoyed more liberties than the average crew member

Mechanics

Including blacksmiths, coopers, carpenters, steward, and cook; higher-ranked and performed specialized jobs.

Foremast Hands/Crewmen

Daily duties included cleaning the vessel and taking a watch. They rowed the whaleboats.

Greenhands

First-time crew members; lowest rank.

The Mechanics

Boatswain (Bosun, Bo'sn)

The boatswain (or bosun) was in charge of maintaining the sails and rigging onboard. He was sometimes also the third mate. The boatswain monitored the condition of the hull and rigging. He led work such as painting, repairing, replacing, or splicing **lines**, making sure shackles were in good shape, and maintaining mechanical equipment such as the **capstan**. He also kept track of maintenance supplies in the bosun's locker. He supervised

supplies, inspected the ship every morning and reported the ship's condition to the captain. He supervised deck activities, including the handling of the sails and the weighing and dropping of the anchor.

Blacksmith

The blacksmith repaired iron tools and ship parts.

Carpenter (Ship's Carpenter, Shipwright)

The carpenter was in charge of maintaining all wooden structures, including the ship's boat(s). He was a petty officer responsible for the maintenance of all the ship's boats, masts, spars, hull, and fixed rigging; he was also responsible for plugging any shot holes with special wooden plugs. The ship's carpenter was often nicknamed "Chips." A carpenter of this type might also work in a shipyard, building and repairing vessels on shore.

Cook

The cook was paid more than most crew members, but had a very long day of work - from about 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning until around 8:00 in the evening. He prepared food and hot coffee for the two watches of the crew, in addition to feeding the captain (and family, if any) and officers. The cook also helped out when needed in ship operations, though he did not stand a watch. He used the dried and salted **provisions** in his cooking: mostly salt beef, salt pork, and salt fish, dried peas, wheat, and oats, cheese, ale, and **biscuit**.

Cooper

A cooper was a tradesman who made and repaired wooden casks of various sizes, as well as buckets, tubs, vats, and other similar containers from timber *staves* that were heated or steamed to make them pliable. Coopers onboard ship were especially important on whaling ships.

Steward

The steward was in charge of the captain's cabin and managing provisions. On a large ship, he oversaw the cook's work. If the captain's family was aboard, there might also be a stewardess - occasionally, she was the steward's wife. The steward was often from China or India.

For Further Reading:

Ages 7 and Up

- *A Whaling Captain's Daughter: The Diary of Laura Jernegan, 1868-1871*, Laura Jernegan and Megan Ann O'Hara
- *Whaling Days*, Carol Carrick
- *You Wouldn't Want to Sail on a 19th-Century Whaling Ship!*, Peter Cook and David Antram
 - A Note from MVMEd: This book is very accurate and detailed, but does depict the entire whale hunt, including the kill and processing, with hand-drawn illustrations that might disquiet some readers (of any age!). As it documents the voyage of the *Essex*, there is also mention of the extremes suffered by the crew to survive, including cannibalism.

Ages 10 and Up

- *Black Hands, White Sails: The Story of African-American Whalers*, Patricia C. McKissack & Fredrick L. McKissack
- *Cooking on Nineteenth-Century Whaling Ships*, Charla L. Draper
- *Story of Yankee Whaling*, American Heritage Junior Library
- *Gone A-Whaling: The Lure of the Sea and the Hunt for the Great Whale*, Jim Murphy

Francis Peters

Alonzo Belain

