

Itinerary for a Chaperone-Led Tour

Whaling in the Nineteenth Century

How to Use This Guide:

Even though interpreters are present in most exhibits, we recommend that teachers and chaperones employ strategies of “guided exploration” to arrive at conclusions to the questions listed below. By exploring the exhibits and reading labels rather than simply asking for answers from museum staff right away, students tend to interpret the information in a deeper and more integrated way. Some exhibits are quite small. To make the most of your exploration, the exhibits can be visited in any order.

Whaling was an important maritime industry in the 19th century. Learn about life on a whaling ship and why it was particularly harsh. Why was whaling such an important industry? How were whales caught and processed? What were whale products? Discover New England’s rich whaling history while you answer the questions posed in our guide and by exploring suggested exhibits and other activities.

The Enduring Understanding:

Perceptions of whales and whaling have changed over the centuries. During the 19th century, whales were viewed as a valuable and essential commodity source. Whale products fueled a rapidly changing way of life, providing oil to light homes and streets, lubricants for the Industrial Revolution, and flexible baleen (whalebone) to shape fashions of the day, among other uses. Re-invested whaling profits greatly influenced the development of American industries.

Chandlery (Building #20)

- What is a chandlery?

A chandlery is a ship’s outfitters where provisions for voyages could be bought.

- What is needed to “outfit” a ship like the *Charles W. Morgan* for a voyage that might last several years?

Lots of non-perishable food (salt pork/beef, hardtack, rice, etc.), water, sails/canvas, rope, clothes and shoes for the captain’s slop chest, metal instruments...

- Do you see a sea chest? Your personal belongings would have to fit inside.
- What would you pack for three years?

A set of clothes or two, perhaps a book, pictures from home if you had them, scrimshaw tools, a plate, cup and utensils, a blanket, pillow, musical instruments...

- Why are the lantern globes different colors?

To indicate the different sides of the ship: port (left) is red, the starboard (right) is green.

- How much – and when – would whalemens get paid?

Whalemens were paid according to the lay system, which was akin to a big pie chart. An average sailor like an able-body or ordinary seaman would receive 1/175 to 1/185 of the ship’s profits; this was if they were not in debt to the captain, which happened fairly frequently. Whalemens only got paid at the end of a voyage and if they were in debt were usually signed on for another voyage to pay it off.

Shipsmith Shop (#22)

- Why is the craftsman in this shop not called a blacksmith?

He makes tools and implements for ships!

- Look up at the bellows and figure out how it effects the heat on the forge.
The bellows blows air up through the bottom of the fire pit, which brings more oxygen to the fire and makes it much hotter.
- Find three different tools that were essential for nineteenth century whalers.
Harpoons, killing lances, flensing irons, spades, skimmers, oarlocks, dippers...

Nautical Instrument Shop (#23)

- How did officers on a ship figure out where they were in the huge ocean and how did they find their way to their destination?
Officers were trained in navigation and used nautical instruments to help determine longitude and latitude.
- Locate three different navigational instruments.
Sextant, compass, chronometer, parallel rulers...
- One instrument is mounted on the ceiling. Why?
The compass is on the ceiling to replicate ones that were installed over the captain's bunk. This way he could keep track of the ship's course even while lying down.
- Find a bottle of whale oil. Why is it there?
Whale oil was often used as a lubricant for high-quality or delicate machinery like watches and navigational instruments.

Whaleboat Exhibit (#34)

Visit the Whaleboat Exhibit before going to the shipyard to board the *Charles W.*

Morgan. Photographs and artifacts will tell you a great deal about the process of 19th century whaling.

- How many men were in each whaleboat?
Six.
- Why were whales not hunted from the whaling ship?
Too dangerous and big, ponderous whaling ships couldn't get close enough to a whale to harpoon it with much accuracy.

Charles W. Morgan (#33)

- How old is the *Charles W. Morgan*?
She was built in 1841.
- Look around carefully. What are some of the things that distinguish a whaling ship from other vessels?
Davits for whaleboats, tryworks, a cutting-in stage, and, below decks, the blubber room!
- The number of bunks 'fore and aft give you a clue as to the number of men in the crew. How many were there?
The crew averaged about 33 men per voyage, with up to 24 of them stuffed into the fo'c'sle!
- Are whales still hunted? Why or why not?
In America whaling is illegal except for cultural purposes (and on a very small scale) by Inuits and Native Americans. A few other countries around the world still whale, notably Japan. Thanks to the use of fossil fuels like petroleum, whale oil's main purpose as a lubricant and light source is obsolete. Plastics have replaced flexible baleen as well.
- Do you think there were ever women on a ship like this?
Female crew members were not a part of Yankee whaling, but occasionally a captain brought his wife and/or daughter(s) aboard.

Cooperage (#29)

- Why was the cooper so important to seafaring?
In an age before plastic containers, casks could and did store almost anything: food, water, alcohol, liquids, dry goods and more.
- You will find barrels, hogsheads and casks in the shop. What do these terms mean?
A cask is the proper term for the wooden container commonly referred to as a barrel. A barrel is actually a specific term of measurement: a cask which holds 31.5 gallons. A hogshead is double the size of a barrel: 63 gallons.
- How were empty casks stored?
Empty casks were disassembled and rolled up into a bundle called a shook. These took up less space than an assembled, empty cask.
- Why would a cooper have been part of the crew on a whaling ship?
A cooper would be responsible for maintaining and creating casks for storage, especially whale oil storage. On voyages without a carpenter on board, the cooper, also a skilled woodworker, would have even more to do.

Voyaging in the Wake of the Whalers Exhibit (#46)

- What is scrimshaw? Why did sailors make these pieces?
Scrimshaw is art made by engraving pictures into ivory or, especially, whale teeth or baleen. Sailors scrimshawed to pass time or create gifts for those back at home/trade items.
- What tools were used to carve and decorate the art work?
Though some sailors had specialized scrimshaw tool kits, all that was really needed was a cloth and some sand to polish the tooth, a needle or knife to make the carvings, and some ink or even soot to give the lines color.
- Can we still buy original whalebone or ivory scrimshaw?
Yes, but with a lot of restrictions. The Endangered Species Act and Marine Mammal Protection Act endeavor to protect living mammals from being exploited for their ivory.

Questions to Consider

- What products replaced whale oil?
Petroleum and other fossil fuels and plastic.
- Was the meat of the whale ever used?
Although Native Americans and some Asian cultures ate (and still eat) whale meat, most Yankee whalers did not use or eat whale meat.
- Did whaling methods and technology change over the years?
19th century whaling is vastly different from the large scale commercial whalers used in the 20th century and into today. Explosive harpoons, sophisticated sonar, spotting planes and helicopters and enormous ships have brought mechanization to whaling.
- Who were some of the people who made up the crews on ships like the *C. W. Morgan*?
The Morgan was home to over 1,000 whalemens in her lifetime, some of whom hailed from as far away as New Zealand and Cape Verde.

Related Demonstrations

See "Today's Activities" sheet for times and locations of demonstrations related to Whaling in the Nineteenth Century.

Vocabulary

Baleen flexible substance found in upper jaw of most great whales

Blubber	a thick layer of fatty tissue between skin and muscle of whales
Cutting in	removing blubber from a whale
Trying out	to render whale blubber resulting in oil
Try works	large brick structure on deck used to render whale oil
Fo'c's'le	the crew's living quarter in the forward part of the ship

Further Reading

Eyewitness Books. *The Whalers*.

Holling, C. *Seabird*.

Lawrence, Mary Chipman. *The Captain's Best Mate*.

Papastavrou, Vassili. *DK Eyewitness Books: Whale*.