

**2012 Summer Reading Assignment for Seniors**  
***Journal Questions for In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the  
Whaleship Essex***  
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1. In 1820, Nantucket was a Quaker town. How did their beliefs help Nantucket in becoming the Whaling Capitol of the world? How did their beliefs help them survive the ordeal?
2. Was it hypocritical of a Quaker community to embrace such a violent occupation as whaling? What other decisions were hypocritical to their beliefs?
3. Compare the community (pod) of whales with the community on Nantucket. How was everyone on Nantucket affected by whaling?
4. In chapter three, the Essex caught, killed and processed its first whale. Briefly describe the killing and harvesting process. What was used, what wasn't used and why? What would your feelings have been if you were a member of the crew?
5. Whalers were considered the explorers of the sea. Why? What were some of the dangers associated with seafaring groups in the 1820's and how did this prepare the men of the Essex for their journey after the attack?
6. Describe how navigation (finding latitude, longitude and dead reckoning) occurred in 1820. How have navigational tools evolved since then?
7. Charles Darwin's Evolution ideas centered upon the Galapagos Islands, a provision stop for whalers in the 1800's. Besides depleting the whale population, whalers (including the Essex crew) had a large impact on Galapagos animal and plant life. Briefly discuss this impact making connections to Darwinian ideas. Is it possible that the sperm whale attack (and later shark and killer whale attacks) as well as the men's suffering could be Divine payback?

8. Captain George Pollard and First Mate Owen Chase were instrumental in the decision making for the Essex crew, yet they each had a very different style. As you read through the book make a list of the decisions each made before and after the attack (include each of their views and the decision made if there was disagreement). Do you think differences in decision-making contributed to the demise of the Essex or the eventual loss of life? Explain. Who made the best decisions? Who was a better leader?
9. Put yourself in the role of a crew member. As the crew began to leave Henderson Island several crew members decided to stay on the island rather than continue the tortuous journey at sea. Would you have decided to stay on the island or continue in the lifeboats? Whose lifeboat would you want to be on? Why?
10. Once the lifeboats left the damaged Essex they encountered both obstacles that caused more suffering as well as windfalls that offered forms of salvation. Discuss a few of both and how the crew reacted.
11. The crew of the Essex was made up of Nantucketers and off-islanders (including several African Americans). In what ways did the Nantucketers take care of their own (before and after the attack)? Do you think the analogy made between the hawks and the Tropic Birds in chapter nine is fair? Why or why not?
12. The crew of the Essex traveled over 4,500 miles in unpredictable seas. They suffered from hunger, thirst, disease and fear. Discuss some of their symptoms. How did they deal with their sufferings physically as well as psychologically? What was the greatest asset (strength) possessed by those who survived?
13. Did race have anything to do with who lived or died? Speculate on why the African Americans were the first to die. Under the circumstances was cannibalism acceptable?

14. When the crew was rescued from the lifeboats (and island), what was the general sentiment of their rescuers? How did the people of Nantucket view the crew and Captain Pollard after they returned? How was Pollard viewed by his crew and his family? Do you think they were judged fairly?
15. Why do you think the whale attacked the Essex? In later years, as mentioned in the Epilogue, several more attacks by whales occurred. Sperm whales have the largest brain of any animal on earth. Do you believe they were provoked?
16. In 1869, less than 50 years after the Essex tragedy, the last whaling ship left Nantucket. Once the whaling capitol of the world, the downfall marked the end of an era. What caused the downfall? How has the legacy been remembered in Nantucket? If you were Captain Pollard or a member of the crew, how would you want to be remembered?
17. The Nantucket whaleships had harvested over 225,000 whales. Today it is estimated that there are between 1.5 and 2 million sperm whales (the most abundant of the world's great whales). How have the views of whaling changed in the last 200 hundred years?