

Moby Dick

Herman Melville

What does Ishmael gain by reversing the usual meanings of sanity and insanity?

TOTAL TIME

PASSAGE

30 minutes	Insanity becomes heaven's sense
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FIND THE ANCHOR TEXT

Use the Anchor Text Table of Contents in the Enhanced Reader to open the START anchor. Then use the dropdown to select the END anchor.

SECTION / LOCATION	Chapter XCVI · The Try-Works
START	But it so happened, that those boats, without seeing Pip, suddenly spying whales close to them on one side, turned, and gave chase
END	what like abandonment befell myself.
PASSAGE ID	sec-md-03

THE MOVE

Read a paradox as a challenge to ordinary standards of reason

WHY THIS PASSAGE

Ishmael reverses the ordinary categories of sanity and insanity after an overwhelming vision. The paradox lets him question whether social definitions of reason are adequate for experiences that exceed familiar understanding.

MARK

Underline the ordinary labels of sanity and insanity in the passage. Circle the places Ishmael reverses their value. Star the sentence where what looks mad by human standards becomes meaningful by a larger standard.

NOTICE

- What would conventional judgment call insane in this scene?
- What alternative standard does Ishmael introduce?
- Does the paradox offer a new explanation, or mainly expose the limits of the old one?

THINK

Answer provisionally: What does Ishmael gain by reversing the usual meanings of sanity and insanity? Choose the strongest interpretation you can defend from this passage alone.

WRITE

Write a short evidence-based response to: What does Ishmael gain by reversing the usual meanings of sanity and insanity? Use at least two details from the assigned passage and explain how they support your interpretation.

CLOSE

Name the single detail that most changed or sharpened your interpretation, and explain why.

STRONG ANSWER	By reversing sanity and insanity, Ishmael questions whether ordinary social standards can judge experiences that exceed normal understanding. What looks mad to the crew may contain a larger or different kind of perception.
EVIDENCE	Use Pip's altered state, the crew's judgment, and Ishmael's paradoxical reversal of the labels.
WATCH FOR	Do not say the passage proves madness is wisdom. The paradox destabilizes the categories rather than simply swapping them.
SOLO	Read the exact passage independently.
SUPPORTED	Use narration and sentence highlighting while reading the same passage.
LISTENING	Listen to the exact passage; visual following is optional. Same question and evidence demand.

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What does Ishmael gain by reversing the usual meanings of sanity and insanity?

START ANCHOR	But it so happened, that those boats, without seeing Pip, suddenly spying whales close to them on one side, turned, and gave chase
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OPEN THE MARKED PASSAGE IN TUMBLELIT

SOLO: read independently. SUPPORTED: use narration + highlighting. LISTENING: listen to the exact passage. The question and evidence task stay the same.

1. MARK - Underline the ordinary labels of sanity and insanity in the passage. Circle the places Ishmael reverses their value. Star the sentence where what looks mad by human standards becomes meaningful by a larger standard.
2. NOTICE - What would conventional judgment call insane in this scene? What alternative standard does Ishmael introduce? Does the paradox offer a new explanation, or mainly expose the limits of the old one?
3. THINK - Answer provisionally: What does Ishmael gain by reversing the usual meanings of sanity and insanity?
4. WRITE - Write a short response using at least two pieces of evidence from this passage.

Use evidence from the assigned passage. Show what you noticed and how the text supports your interpretation.