American writer, grandson of 2 genuinely Revolutionary heroes well-known family in Boston, falls on hard times at 20 spends 4 years sailing around world in whaler then in navy story dated 1855 most well-known now for *Moby Dick*

one-word whip – one adj to describe story let’s begin by talking about narr perspective – vs. Frankenstein – frame with 3 nested 1st-person narrators describe narr perspective in this story? omniscient?

This story is rather like a riddle. At what point do you figure out what is going on the Santa Domingo?
1. Through whose eyes do we view the events in the story? Where in the text does Melville shift into Delano's point of view?
2. Why doesn't Melville choose to write the story from Babo's point of view? What might his purpose be in confining us to Delano's and later Benito Cereno's point of view? What limitations does this narrative strategy impose on us as readers?
3. How reliable are Delano's perceptions of reality? What tendencies in particular make him an unreliable interpreter of the behavior he sees aboard the San Dominick?
4. One way of analyzing Delano is to look at the many similes he uses. Point out some examples of these in the text. Do they help us understand Delano's character? His attitudes toward others?

use of double negative expressions, especially early in the narration. For examples: "...had returned, having met with no small success." "But as if not unwilling to let nature make her own case among his suffering charge, or else in despair of restraining it for the time, the Spanish captain..." "...it was not without humane satisfaction that Captain Delano witnessed the steady good conduct of Babo." "Despairing of getting into unembarrassed talk with such a centaur, Captain Delano..."

5. What is Delano's attitude toward slavery? How does his attitude differ from Benito Cereno's? What are Delano's racial attitudes? What are his perceptions of the various Africans on the ship? Find examples.
6. What is Benito Cereno's interpretation of events, as opposed to Delano's initial interpretation? How does he explain the slaves' revolt? (102+)
7. Does the Deposition indirectly provide any alternative explanations of why the blacks may have revolted? What does it tell us about the blacks' actual aims? How do they try to achieve those aims?
8. What is the narrative point of view of the few pages following the Deposition? How do you interpret the dialogue between the two captains? Does it indicate that either Delano or Cereno has undergone any changes in consciousness or achieved a new understanding of slavery as a result of his ordeal?
9. Why is the story told twice? What do these competing narratives (one a "factual" account, another a legal deposition) suggest to us about the nature of narrative and reading?

10. What seems to be the message of the scene with which the story ends? What do you think Melville was trying to convey through the story? How does the story continue to be relevant or prophetic?

- "a dark satyr in a mask, holding his foot on the prostrate neck of a writhing figure, like wise masked." (39) Later, Melville writes that Captain Delano realizes the truth of the ship's mutiny "with scales dropped from his eyes" and "with mask torn away." IF Delano is the masked satyr then who lies under his foot? this image comes back (39)
- p69 – what’s happening here? things almost fall apart completely
- Captain Delano continually compares the slaves to animals. He likens the African women to leopardesses and doves (63), Atufal to a bull, and the African children to a circle of bats. Are these animal references an example of racism or a device to aid imagery. If racism, is it Captain Delano's viewpoint or Melville's? dogs (73), wolves (91)
- is story anti-slavery?
- In Toni Morrison's Playing in the Dark, she argues that American literature consistently reveals the presence of "American Africanism," or the "denotative and connotative blackness that African peoples have come to signify" (6). Close study of this literary "blackness," she continues, reveals the nature of literary "whiteness" (9). Further, she maintains that the construction of an American self is intrinsically linked to the "fabrication of the Africanist persona," which is an "extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious" (17).

Morrison maintains that American Romanticism (which includes Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Whitman) is an exploration of Americans' "fears of being outcast, of failing, of powerlessness; their fear of boundarylessness, of Nature unbridled and crouched for attack; their fear of the absence of so-called civilization; their fear of loneliness, of aggression both external and internal. In short, the terror of human freedom--the thing they coveted most of all. . . "(37). This abiding fear in the American imagination is, of course, best expressed through the metaphor of terrifying "darkness."

Given Morrison's analysis, how does Melville's book construct a racialized Other and what does this construction suggest about Delano himself?

name of ship?
Santo Domingo, 1790s, slaves rebelled and slaughtered 60,000 whites
revolt on Amistad is 1839

Melville’s theory about lit is that a writer writes for *two* audiences, the “mob” and those “eagle-eyed) readers who perceive the true meaning. Does this story hold this theory true?