



STUDENT PACKET

GRADES 9-12

Billy Budd

Herman Melville



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

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Herman Melville

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NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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SAMPLE

Directions: Rate each of the following statements before you read the novel. Discuss your ratings with a partner or in a small group. After you have completed the novel, rate the statements again and discuss how the statements tie in with the story.

1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6
agree strongly disagree strongly

Before After

- | | | |
|---|-------|-------|
| 1. Some people are good and some people are evil. | _____ | _____ |
| 2. A crime is a crime, regardless of intent. | _____ | _____ |
| 3. Bullies seek out unpopular victims. | _____ | _____ |
| 4. Bullies are usually jealous and insecure. | _____ | _____ |
| 5. Grin and bear it; no one likes a whiner. | _____ | _____ |
| 6. What will be, will be. | _____ | _____ |
| 7. Nice things happen to nice people. | _____ | _____ |
| 8. The military couldn't work without unquestioning loyalty. | _____ | _____ |
| 9. Military justice has to be harsher than regular justice. | _____ | _____ |
| 10. Enforced servitude of any sort is wrong. | _____ | _____ |
| 11. "No one likes a cop." | _____ | _____ |
| 12. No one ever confesses to envy. | _____ | _____ |
| 13. Immoral action is usually due to lack of intellect. | _____ | _____ |
| 14. Sailors are a naive bunch, on the whole. | _____ | _____ |
| 15. Try to be more cool-headed than warm-hearted when making decisions. | _____ | _____ |

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Directions: Write a brief answer to each study question as you read the novella at home or in class. Use the questions for review before group discussions, quizzes, and tests.

* = thought question, no right or wrong answer

** = prediction, no right or wrong answer

Chapters 1-2

1. In what year was the narrator supposedly telling this story?
2. How did Billy Budd end up on the warship, the *H.M.S. Indomitable*?
3. Why did Graveling consider Billy Budd a "jewel" (p. 13)?
4. What did Billy do when Red Whiskers gave him a dig in the ribs?
5. What did Billy do that was a "breach of naval decorum" (p. 15)?
6. How did Billy feel about joining the new crew?
7. What did Billy know about his beginnings?
8. What was Billy's one imperfection?
- * 9. Why would or wouldn't Billy be a friend of yours?
- ** 10. **Prediction:** How will Billy's stuttering figure in the story?

Chapters 3-8

1. In what year did the story take place?
2. Why was the Great Mutiny so menacing to England?
3. Why was a star put into the *Victory's* quarter-deck?
4. Why was Captain Vere called "Starry Vere"?
5. List three adjectives or phrases that describe Nelson.
6. Discontent about what survived the two mutinies?
7. List three adjectives or phrases that describe Captain Vere.
8. What was John Claggart's job?
- * 9. How was Claggart able to manipulate his subordinates so totally?
- ** 10. **Prediction:** How will Claggart and Billy get along?

Directions: An **allusion** is a figure of speech that makes brief reference to an historical or literary figure, event, or object. To be effective, an allusion must tap the knowledge of the audience—who, in Melville’s day, could be expected to know something about mythical and biblical stories.

Group Project: Identify the character or situation to which the passage alludes. Cite your reference source. Then paraphrase what the narrator is saying, without using the allusion.

Passage	Source	Allusion	Paraphrase
p. 10: “like Aldebaran”	<i>Random House Dictionary</i>	Aldebaran is a red star in the eye of the constellation Taurus.	Certain remarkable seamen can be seen surrounded by more ordinary sailors.
p. 11 “nautical Murat”			
p. 11 “Alexander curbing the fiery Bucephalus”			
p. 18 “Adam...the urbane Serpent”			
p. 19 “Cain’s city”			
p. 19 “Rome of the Caesars”			
p. 19 “marplot of Eden”			
p. 23 “Benthamites of war”			

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Directions: A symbol is a person, place, event, or object that suggests something beyond the literal significance. For example, the dove is a symbol of peace. In literature, objects, phrases, or characters may be used to represent abstract ideas. Repeated appearances of a particular object or phrase throughout a story such as *Billy Budd* may signal that the object or phrase is being used as a symbol.

I. Answer the questions below.

- A. Billy is repeatedly referred to as the “Handsome Sailor.” Reread page 20. Billy is described as being extremely handsome, innocent, and pure, with “no visible blemish.” He does, however, have a stammer. What might Billy’s beauty—and his speech problem—symbolize?
- B. On page 41, Claggart is described as looking quite different from Billy Budd—his face “lit...from within...from a different source.” What does the contrast between these two men represent?
- C. What parallels might Melville be drawing between the sailors on the *Indomitable*—and mankind in general?
- D. The narrator describes Billy’s hanging on page 83: “Billy ascended...” What is the symbolic meaning of Billy’s hanging?
- E. Later we are told that other sailors considered the spar from which Billy was hanged as a sort of “monument” (p. 90). What might the spar symbolize?

- II. Using colored markers, create a symbol for Claggart and a symbol for Billy Budd. Arrange these symbols in a way that somehow depicts their relationship with each other. On a separate sheet, write a paragraph explaining the relationship—and your choice of symbols to depict it. Use these standards to evaluate your creation: *contrasting colors and shapes are used; “innocence” vs. “malice” is somehow portrayed; interesting use of space; originality.*