

And The Ocean Was Our Sky

By Patrick Ness

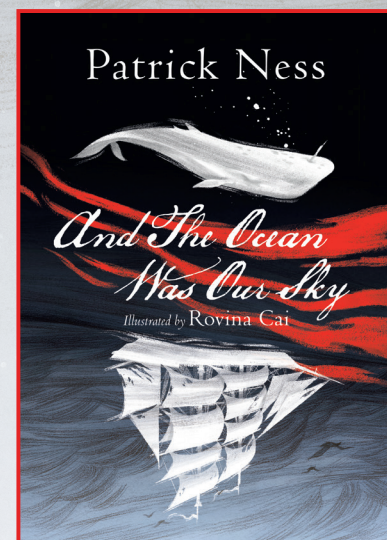
Illustrated by Rovina Cai

DISCUSSION GUIDE

BOOK TALK

“CALL ME
Bathsheba,”

the young whale says simply, as she begins to tell the epic story of her captain Alexandra’s obsessive search for the mythic being they call Toby Wick, the scourge of all whales—and men—whom he kills indiscriminately. Alexandra is determined to find the monster and kill him in retribution but Bathsheba, of all the whales in her pod, refuses to believe that Toby Wick is real. “For who needs devils,” she says, “when you have men?” But then the whales discover Demetrius, a young man who is the only survivor of a ship wrecked by Toby Wick, and Bathsheba begins to change her mind. All the while, the whales appear to be coming closer and closer to Toby Wick, who it turns out does exist and is the all too real embodiment of evil. But “if you fight the devil, you become him,” Demetrius cautions. Will the whales heed his warning and can evil ever be truly destroyed?



Grades 8 and up

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Moby Dick* is the story of the pursuit of the great white whale Moby Dick by Ahab, captain of the whaling ship *Pequod*, who has lost a leg to the whale and is obsessed with finding and killing it. Do you think obsession also plays a part in this novel? If so, how? Who in this novel represents Captain Ahab? Who or what do you think represents Moby Dick? Explain your reasoning.
2. Many observers are saying this novel turns Herman Melville’s classic novel *Moby Dick* on its head. Do you agree and, if so, what are some ways in which this is true?
3. Prophecy plays a significant part in both novels. Two characters in *Moby Dick*—Fedallah and Gabriel—are prophets, for example. The great whale captain Alexandra says, simply, “Everything is prophecy. Every action in life is meant to happen” (p. 118). “Whales and their precious prophecies,” Demetrius says critically, “You relieve yourself of choice” (p. 77). Does this mean everything—for whales and men—is foreordained? How are prophecy and destiny related? Is there no free will? No capacity for choice?
4. In the same vein, Bathsheba argues, “The only prophecy that has any accuracy—any purity—is the one that self-fulfills” (p. 61). Why does she say this and what does she mean? Does the novel prove it to be true? If so, how?
5. Bathsheba says, “Our societies reflected each other;” i.e. ‘men’s and whales’ (p. 15). How so? Do you think she is correct? And how are whales like men and vice versa? How are they different?
6. “Like all whales, I hated men,” says Bathsheba (p. 33). How then do you explain her relationship with Demetrius? Does it change her in any way?
7. Why, at one point, does Bathsheba take Demetrius far into the dark abyss? Does the experience change him?
8. “Toby Wick is a myth,” Bathsheba hotly asserts (p. 49). And “Toby Wick isn’t *real*,” she insists (p. 47). Why does she say this and does she truly believe it?

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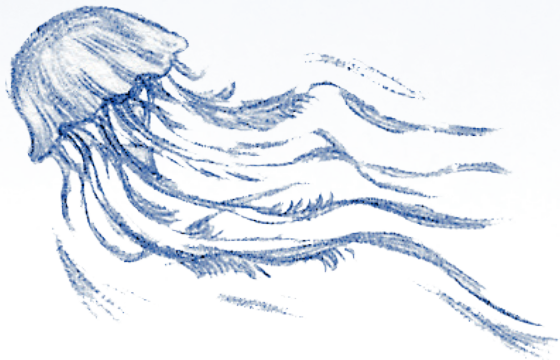
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9. What does Toby Wick represent in this novel? Is it fair to say, as Bathsheba does at one point, “All men are Toby Wick” (p. 59)? And why, in that connection, is Bathsheba at one crucial point drawn to this monster? (“I began to falteringly swim toward [him]”) (p. 153).
10. Toby Wick is represented as being part whale and part man. Why do you think this is?
11. “If you fight the devil, you become him,” Demetrius says on page 99, introducing a major theme. Do you agree? How so? And what does he mean? Is it that we are not supposed to fight evil?
12. If you kill the devil, “You wonder if you would become one yourself,” says the captain on page 101, echoing Demetrius. And yet, in the next breath she says, “No, Bathsheba, that is not why we fight. We fight so that we may *stop* being devils” (p. 102). Is this a contradiction? Are we supposed to infer the whales are devils?
13. At one point Bathsheba—continuing this significant thread—wonders what new devils the whales might create. Does this mean that evil—though in different incarnations—can never die?
14. Bathsheba asks at one point if it is not all about point of view. How would the book be different, would you imagine, if it were told from Demetrius’ point of view?
15. The book is heavily illustrated. Do the images enrich the text or, like poetry, which is deemed best by many critics without pictures, does the book *need* to be illustrated?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Photo by Helen Giles

Patrick Ness is the author of ten novels, including the *New York Times* bestseller *The Rest of Us Just Live Here*, *Release*, the Chaos Walking trilogy, *More Than This*, and the #1 bestseller *A Monster Calls*, which was made into a major motion picture, adapted by Patrick himself. He created and wrote the *Doctor Who* spin-off TV series *Class* for the BBC, and the eagerly awaited blockbuster film of *Chaos Walking*—starring Tom Holland and Daisy Ridley—is scheduled to be released in spring 2019. Born in Virginia, Patrick lives in London.



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