

DISCUSSION GUIDE
VOYAGE OF ICE



1. By the early to mid-1900s, entire communities in the northeastern United States were devoted to the whaling industry. Why was that? Why was whaling an important aspect of the American economy? Can you think of things today that are vital to the economy, yet which might have negative effects, either directly or indirectly?
2. Try to imagine yourself having grown up in a whaling community like New Bedford, Massachusetts. How do you think you would have responded to the “whaling life?” What aspects would you have found appealing, and what aspects would you not have liked?
3. Some children, like Elizabeth, were raised aboard ship. Many of them born aboard. They took their first steps on the ship’s decks, weathered the storms, and were homeschooled in the cabin, all the while sailing around the world from port to port. How do you think this kind of life affected Elizabeth? Would you enjoy that lifestyle? Why or why not?
4. Ebenezer Thorndike seemed to take an instant dislike to Nick. Why do you think that was? When and why did Thorndike’s attitude change toward Nick?
5. What about Nick attracted Elizabeth?
6. Why do you think Nick and Dexter responded so differently to the whaling experience? What did Dexter eventually become? What did Nick eventually become?
7. The survival experience in the Alaskan Arctic seemed to affect the characters differently. Compare how Briggs responded to the survival situation, versus how Dexter, Elizabeth, and Nick each responded. If you were in a similar situation, how do you think you would respond?
8. The survivors were eventually rescued by the native Inupiat people. The survivors then lived alongside the Inupiat for the rest of the winter. In what ways do you think Nick was changed by this experience?
9. The Inupiat and other native peoples of Alaska had been subsistence whaling for thousands of years before Yankee whaling ships began hunting the same waters. How do you think the Yankee whale hunts affected the natives? Do you think the effects of Yankee whaling are still felt today, both in the Arctic and worldwide?
10. What can we learn from the history of whaling that will help us better manage our resources today? Are there certain areas of consumption today that are likewise “out of control?” If so, and if that consumption is not brought into balance, what long-term effects do you anticipate? How do you choose to respond to this?