



Pushing the Limits of Survival

Suggested Reading and Discussion Questions

This theme explores the fundamental urge to survive and how it has manifested in society in the past and today. Issues to consider in group discussions include the ways in which we strive for the survival of the planet, of our families, and as individuals.

In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex

Nathaniel Philbrick, Non Fiction. The ordeal of the whaleship Essex was an event as mythic in the nineteenth century as the sinking of the Titanic was in the twentieth. In 1819, the Essex left Nantucket for the South Pacific with twenty crew members aboard. In the middle of the South Pacific the ship was rammed and sunk by a sperm whale. The crew drifted for more than ninety days in three tiny whaleboats, succumbing to weather, hunger, disease, and ultimately turning to drastic measures in the fight for survival.

Nathaniel Philbrick uses little-known documents—including a long-lost account written by the ship’s cabin boy—and penetrating details about whaling and the Nantucket community to reveal the chilling events surrounding this epic maritime disaster. An intense and mesmerizing read, *In the Heart of the Sea* is a monumental work of history forever placing the Essex tragedy in the American historical canon. *Nathanielphilbrick.com*

- How do you explain the whalers’ fearlessness in the face of nature? Do we have more information or knowledge about nature in the 21st century that would make them look at the situation and risks differently today?
- Why was the notion of a vengeful whale so terrifying to Owen Chase? Do animals like whales have emotions? Can a whale be “angry”?
- What were the differences in leadership styles of George Pollard and Owen Chase? Did these differences contribute to the demise of the *Essex* or the eventual loss of lives? How so? Who do you think would make a better leader in today’s world? Are some people natural-born leaders?

