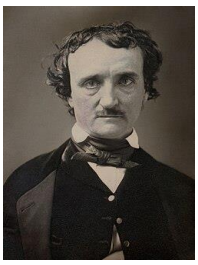
HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
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The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket (1838)

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)

OVERVIEW



Writer Born on January 19, 1809, in Boston, Massachusetts, Poe's life was fraught with tragedy. Only a year after his birth, his father abandoned the family, and a year after that, his mother passed from pulmonary tuberculosis. He was taken in by the wealthy Richmond merchant John Allan—from whom he received his middle name—though he was never formally adopted. In 1815, the family sailed to the United Kingdom, where Poe attended grammar school in Scotland. Five years later, the family made their way back to Richmond, and the next year Poe was engaged to Sara Elmira Royster before entering the University of Virginia to study languages. Drinking and gambling had an effect on his life, estranging him from both his fiancée and his surrogate father as his debts mounted. It was during this period that he moved to Boston and began writing under the pseudonym Henri Le Rennet in newspapers. Poe enlisted in the army in May of 1827 in order to support himself, publishing his first book of poetry later that year, though only fifty copies were produced. Two years later, after earning the highest rank he could without an officer's education, he sought an honorable discharge, but after learning of his surrogate mother's death, John Allan supported Poe's plan to go to West Point. In 1829, an influential poetry critic gave Poe a positive review, prompting Poe to dedicate a poem to John Neal in his second book of poetry published in 1829. More family trouble followed Poe to West Point, and he was court-martialed for gross neglect of duty and disobedience. In 1831, he published his third book of poems. After his brother's death, in part due to alcoholism, Poe redoubled his efforts to earn a living as a writer. Although he struggled, Poe was one of the first American authors to make ends meet with writing alone. Virgina Clemm, Poe's cousin, and Poe were married in 1835. The 1830s saw Poe being recognized with many reviews written about his short stories, allowing him to relocate to Philadelphia in 1838. Two years later, Poe found a position as co-editor at Graham's Magazine, and in 1841, Poe tried to secure a position in John Tyler's administration. In 1842, Virginia showed symptoms of tuberculosis, deepening Poe's alcoholism as he tried to escape his worries. Poe's most famous poem, "The Raven," was published in 1845. Poe made only $9 for its publication in the *Evening Mirror*. Seeking better medical care for Virginia, Poe moved to the Bronx, New York, but Virginia passed soon thereafter on January 30, 1847. Poe's drinking and insatiability escalated as he reached out to several women, seeking another wife, though none would have him. Poe's death is still a matter of debate to this day. He was found semiconscious in clothes that were not his own on the streets of Baltimore. Poe was taken to the Washington Medical College, where he died in painful delirium, shouting out the name "Reynolds" and claiming to see spirits. The lack of information about his movements in his final days has led to rampant speculation about what killed him, ranging from common medical ailments to carbon monoxide poisoning to a form of potentially violent electoral fraud known as 'cooping.' It wasn't long after his death that Rufus Wilmot Griswold, a literary rival, published a lengthy and slanderous obituary under a pseudonym in which he depicted Poe as a drug-addled madman, including excerpts from some of Poe's letters as proof of this. In spite of the letters being proven forgeries, the obituary was frequently republished in the latter half of the 1800s and still complicates the study of Poe's life and works to this day.


THE NARRATIVE
OF
ARTHUR GORDON PYM.
OF NANTUCKET.
NEW-YORK:
HARPER & BROTHERS, 82 CLIFF ST.
1838.

Novel Written and published in 1838, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* is a sea survival tale about a young man who stows away on a whaling vessel. Based in part on contemporary travel journals—such as J. N. Reynolds' collection of correspondence from his time exploring the South Pacific—Poe attempts to create a realistic narrative, though he is influenced by popular survival literature like *Robinson Crusoe* and faulty theories around the idea of the hollow Earth. Originally, Poe had intended to publish a series of short works, but his editor sent him a letter saying that the journals and publishers were more interested in longer works. The publisher

Harper & Brothers suggested that a two-volume novel would be in high demand if Poe would deign to write one. Losing his job at the *Southern Literary Messenger*—where he had been publishing a serialized version of the narrative—led to Poe abandoning the novel for a time, and when it was completed, Harper & Brothers delayed publication until the following year due to the Panic of 1837. Most contemporary reviewers hated the novel, but modern reviewers heap praise upon *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, being more able to respect it as a work of fiction instead of an attempt at mimicking the writing of true survival stories. The novel would go on to inspire the likes of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, the stories of *Jules Verne*, and Jorge Luis Borges.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Arthur Gordon Pym – The main character who tells a story of his adventures in the South Seas.
Augustus - Arthur Gordon Pym's childhood friend and the son of a sea captain
Dirk Peters - A shipman aboard the *Grampus*
Captain Barnard - Augustus's father and a whaling ship captain who is hired to sail the Grampus
Captain Guy - Captain of the ship *Jane Guy*
Nu-Nu - A hostage taken by Arthur Gordon Pym and Dirk Peters
Richard Parker - The only mutineer still alive after the Grampus is reclaimed.
Too-wit - The chief of the tribe of natives who live in the village of Klock-klock on a tropical island
Tiger - A Newfoundland dog that belongs to Arthur Gordon Pym

SYNOPSIS

A short preface where Arthur Gordon Pym introduces himself, his story, and the background of its publication begins the novel. The story begins with Arthur and his friend Augustus drinking together, where they decide to go on a pleasure cruise. Still drunk, Augustus takes the helm of Arthur's sloop, the *Ariel*, and pilots them out to sea, but he soon passes out, leaving inexperienced Arthur in charge, resulting in a collision with a whaling ship, which saves the young men and returns them to Nantucket in time for breakfast. After surviving this ordeal, Augustus cooks up a plan to conceal Arthur in the hold of a whaling ship his father will be captaining so Arthur can gain more experience. Arthur nearly dies in the hold from exposure, fumes, and dehydration, and he is saved by Augustus only to be told of a mutiny. They use Arthur's being smuggled aboard to their advantage by keeping him concealed so he can help reverse the mutiny. Joined by Dirk Peters, the three young men retake the *Grampus*, sparing only a single mutineer. A storm breaks out, and the stores of food and water are lost beneath the seas, leading the surviving crewmen to cannibalize the last mutineer. Suffering from a festering wound acquired when fighting the mutineers, Arthur drifts in and out of consciousness. Eventually, the floundering ship encounters the *Jane Guy,* and the remaining crewmen are rescued.

Captain Guy is leading an exploratory mission, heading further south than any ship has sailed before. They pass the Antarctic Circle, where they stop to hunt seals, and they are attacked by a polar bear. Strangely, as the *Jane Guy* continues South, the weather becomes warmer, and the ship encounters an island filled with natives. The crewmen trade with them and help them to construct sturdier homes, and the leader of these people, Too-wit, insists on honoring them with a ceremony before they leave. As the sailors walk through a narrow gorge, the natives trigger an avalanche, killing all but Arthur and Dirk Peters. Arthur and Peters hide for a while before taking a hostage, Nu-Nu, when they steal a canoe and travel further southward. As they approach a large hole in the bottom of the world, a figure emerges. Nu-Nu dies of fright, and the sailors face the huge, white figure as the narrative suddenly comes to an end.

PLOT

Preface – A short letter leads the narrative. In this, Arthur Gordon Pym introduces himself as a naval adventurer who just returned from the South Seas. Several gentlemen in his home of Virginia asked him to publish tales of his exploits, and though he was unwilling at first, he has relented. With the help of Mr. Poe, the editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, he is revealing his stories to the world. It is through Mr. Poe's expert prose that we will learn of the exploits of Arthur Gordon Pym.

Chapter 1**: A drunken joyride** – Arthur introduces himself again and runs down his family history in Nantucket. He then talks about his friend Augustus and his family. Augustus would often regale Arthur with tales of sea adventure, and—having recently purchased a sloop to begin trading routes—Arthur decides they should go look over the ship. At the dock, Augustus suggests they take a little cruise around the bay. He and Arthur, however, are quite drunk. While a seasoned sailor and the son of a captain, Augustus soon passes out from overindulgence. Arthur has no experience at the helm, let alone tacking the rigging, leaving the boat at the fate of the winds and currents. He just begins to feel he's getting the hang of things when he hears "a loud and long scream or yell, as if from the throats of a thousand demons." This frightens him, and he passes out on top of Augustus. When he comes to, he and his friend are aboard a whaling ship, the *Penguin*, that struck and sank the *Ariel*: the demonic sounds Arthur heard the night before were the whalers shouting out warnings in the dark. While thoroughly embarrassed, Arthur and Augustus make it back to town about an hour later no worse for wear. Pretending as if nothing happened, Arthur and Augustus go to Augustus' father's house for breakfast.

Chapter 2**: A plan to gain sailing experience** – While embarrassing and perilous, Arthur's passion for sailing has been stoked. Augustus tries to warn him away with warnings of the "terrible moments of suffering and despair" each sailor inevitably faces. Arthur assumes Augustus is simply gloomy by nature and dismisses the warning. A year and a half later, Mr. Barnard—Augustus' father—is selected to captain a whaling expedition aboard the *Grampus*, an old, dilapidated brig, and Augustus is going with him. Arthur expresses his interest in joining the expedition, but he lacks experience, so Augustus hatches a plan, believing his relation to the captain will make Arthur's stowing away seem a joke. Arthur makes his way to the docks in disguise, where Augustus has prepared a box with a mattress and supplies. Arthur need only remain still and quiet inside the box, and he'll be loaded onto the ship quickly. Inside the box, Arthur struggles to breathe and remain conscious. Three days after the voyage begins, Augustus visits Arthur with news. For an indeterminate amount of time, Arthur stays in the box, unable to see the watch Augustus left him to keep time and his supplies going rancid or running out. In a stupor brought on by oxygen deprivation and exposure to all sorts of fumes, he dreams of being attacked by a lion. He wakes up and he leaves the box. Trying to find the trap door to Augustus' quarters, Arthur finds that the cargo has shifted and has trapped him in the hold. Fearing discovery, he makes his way back to the box to hide where he finds his dog, a big Newfoundland named Tiger. Crying tears of joy and examining his dog for any sign of injury, Arthur finds a note.

Chapter 3**: The note** – Assuming the note is from Augustus, Arthur is frantic to read it, but he has no source of light in the dark brig. The supply of candles and matches left for him have been gnawed to bits by Tiger or rats. Finally managing to create some light with the remainder of the matches, Arthur is enraged to find the note blank, tearing it to shreds. After realizing that the other side may have contained the message, he chastises himself for his haste and anger. With Tiger's help, he is able to collect the scraps and reassemble the note, but he only has enough light to read the words, "blood—your life depends upon lying close." He also notes the color of the ink; a dark red. Arthur had originally planned to get a crewman's attention as a contingency, but Augustus' note makes it clear this is not an option. Tiger and Arthur suffer from malnutrition and dehydration in the dark of the hold. Thinking he is near death, Arthur downs the last of his liquor and throws the bottle against the floor. As he collapses, his knife falls from his belt and makes a loud clattering that sounds like Arthur's name. This is no hallucination, however, as Augustus appears with a lantern and necessities.

Chapter 4**: "The cause of his protracted absence"** – Sometime later, Augustus explains why Arthur was stuck in the hold for so long. He had first checked on Arthur four days after the ship left the harbor and found him sleeping. Because of this, Augustus had assumed he was doing well. Upon his return to the upper decks, he was attacked by mutineers. Twenty-two of the twenty-seven men not involved in the mutiny were killed one by one. A half-Indian man named Dirk Peters stops the ship's cook—the mutiny's leader—from killing the final few by encouraging him to drink heavily before making a quick decision. Captain Barnard and three others are lowered in a rowboat and abandoned on the open ocean somewhere near Bermuda. Augustus managed to free himself from his imprisonment in another part of the hold and came down to Arthur with food.

Chapter 5**: The rest of Augustus' story** – In this chapter, Augustus expands on his individual struggle after being detained, detailing how he escaped from his handcuffs, how he found supplies to write a note, and how he used Tiger to get it to him. He tells Arthur the full contents of the note: "I have scrawled this with blood—your life depends upon lying close." Soon after sending Tiger away, Dirk Peters returned to his impromptu prison with potatoes and water. To Augustus' surprise, Peters speaks freely about the mutiny. Squirreling away some supplies for Arthur over a few days in a hole he opened in the wall of steerage, he was about to make his way down to the hold with food and water when he heard the liquor bottle shatter.

Chapter 6**: Plan to retake the Grampus** – Augustus says he has to rush back to his quarters, and Arthur demands to come with him, saying he and Tiger will hide in the wall. The dog is unconscious and very large. It takes the two of them to drag and carry him into steerage and into the wall. Augustus has just enough time to put his bindings back on before Peters comes back with more food and water. The narrative takes the form of a rough journal. Nearly a week passes with Arthur and Tiger sleeping silently in the wall, but at least here they are fed and have good air to breathe. In this time, the mutineers begin to quarrel with one another, and Peters asks Augustus for help taking the ship from the drunken cook. Augustus agrees.

Chapter 7**: Walking corpse** – The final journal entry begins on July tenth. Arthur speaks of a suspected poisoning of one of the mutineers. Peters moves forward on his attempt to seize power from the cook, and Augustus reveals Arthur's presence to his co-conspirator. As the three of them begin to think about strategy for the upcoming fight, a cry comes from the top deck: "All hands take in sail!" The drunken mutineers are very few and struggle to maintain the ship's course into a squall. Peters takes the distraction of the others to continue making plans with Augustus and Arthur. Because he is an unknown quantity, they disguise Arthur as the corpse of a dead man whose body still lies on deck. They make preparations for some traps and move to alter Arthur's appearance. After stealing the dead man's shirt, they throw the corpse overboard and begin using chalk, blood, and offal to make him appear dead and bloated, Peters using some of his own blood in the costume.

Chapter 8**: Plan in action** – Arthur, looking in a piece of mirror by lantern light, is disturbed by his own visage, and he heads toward the forward cabins to enact their plan of scaring the first mate. The other two men listen in on the mutineers' conversation, learning that Peters is the next to be rubbed out for being too close to the "captain's brat," Augustus. He dashes back to his post, where he begins to drink rum with some of the men, talking about spirits and superstition. The horrible state of the body on the deck comes up, and Arthur takes this as his cue, stepping into the room. The first mate is so frightened that he falls dead. The others are distracted long enough for Augustus and Peters to kill a few of them. The remaining three begin to fight back when Tiger rushes to his master's aid and kills one of the mutineers. The last mutineer alive is named Richard Parker, and he is spared and imprisoned, though he is quickly freed when another squall blows in and grows into a storm. All hands are needed as the *Grampus* takes on more and more water. They manage to bring the ship under control when a rogue wave dashes the ship.

Chapter 9**: Out of the frying pan, into the fire** – Having lashed themselves to the deck, the remaining sailors manage to survive the night. Augustus has the most trouble, suffering from several stab wounds sustained while fighting the mutineers. Bruised, bloody, and exhausted, the sailors are finally able to get up after the storm subsides. They can barely move. After regaining some of their willpower, the men begin to scour the ship for supplies, leading Arthur to find the body of Tiger below decks in the brig. With Augustus fading in and out of consciousness, Peters takes charge, leading the attempt to fetch barrels of food and water from the flooded stowage, but he is unsuccessful.

Chapter 10**: Ghost ship** – Augustus is getting worse, his skin pale and lips quivering. Arthur comes to tend to him and finds his friend unresponsive, looking astern. Following Augustus' gaze, Arthur sees a ghostly ship filled with sailors they believe at first to be from Holland, but when the ship draws nearer their starboard bow, they see a couple dozen bodies, some female, all rotting. Gulls are devouring them. One flies over the *Grampus*, dropping a piece of flesh to the deck below. Arthur thinks about eating it for a

moment but decides against it. Drunkenly, the ghost ship careens toward them, close enough for the men to board it, but they're all so shocked and disgusted by the scene they remain motionless until it passes.

Chapter 11**: Fading fast** – The survivors on the *Grampus* watch the ghost ship fade over the horizon. The sea now eerily calm, they redouble their efforts to reach the flooded storeroom for some supplies. Peters and Parker exhaust themselves, and Arthur takes a turn, using chains. Peters set up to guide the divers, but all he finds is a bottle of wine. Everything else is soaked through and inedible, or products such as razors and shirts. The wine gives them life-saving liquid, but it also causes a delirium among the men. Arthur himself begins to go mad with hunger, trying to eat leather and paper to stave off the pain. Emaciated and close to death, the men lie on the deck where they see a ship on the horizon, though it doesn't draw any closer. Parker soon suggests that one man should die so the others may live.

Chapter 12**: A macabre lottery** – Arthur has already considered cannibalism and considers it a bridge too far. Parker listens to his arguments respectfully, but he cannot be swayed, and after more arguments from Arthur, he tries and fails to stab him. Augustus and Peters approach to find out why the others are fighting, and they both agree with Parker that cannibalism is necessary for their survival. Arthur asks that they wait an hour for a fog to pass in case the nearby ship sees them, but the ship they saw before is gone by the time the fog fades, and the survivors set about drawing lots using splinters of wood as straws. Parker pulls the shortest, and Peters is quick in killing him. The men dispose of the hands, feet, head, and entrails by throwing them into the sea, eating the rest of the body over a period of days. Arthur spares us the details, focusing on the next few days instead. A rainstorm gives them some fresh water, and the discovery of an axe allows them to access the storage rooms from the topmost decks, and finally they find food and wine as well as a Galapagos tortoise from which they are able to extract more water from sacks in its neck.

Chapter 13**: Fitful survival** – The narrative returns to the diary style, detailing the survivor's actions between the 24th of July and the 7th of August. For the first few days, their spirits and strength rise, but things turn sour when another storm blows in, washing some of their supplies overboard. In the high swells, a shark is washed aboard deck and strikes Peters with its tail. The men lament not being able to capture another source of food. Augustus' wounds have begun to fester, and Arthur tries without success to treat the infection with vinegar from their preserved olives. On the 31st, they finally slaughter and eat the tortoise, using its shell as a basin to collect rainwater, which they give to Augustus, whose arm has turned black due to sepsis. He dies from his condition the next day and is given an unceremonious burial at sea. Sharks eat the body before it can sink. Another storm blows up and drives more water into the hull. The next day, the *Grampus* capsizes, leaving Arthur and Peters clinging to the underside, where they try to eat the barnacles. After a few days on the capsized bow, the two survivors are picked up by a passing sealing ship, the *Jane Guy*.

Chapter 14**: The *Jane Guy*** – The first few paragraphs note the status of the *Jane Guy* and her captain, Captain Guy, who had a long history of exploration and trade in the South Seas. It's also here that Arthur notes the *Grampus* had drifted *"not less than five-and-twenty degrees*," or nearly 1,750 miles from its intended course. The crew of the *Jane Guy* are kind and understanding of Arthur and Peters. The voyage further south is uneventful, and they reach a chain of islands where the men disembark to hunt seal. Arthur notes the species of birds flying overhead while musing about the resilience of the human mind. The hunters return three weeks later without much success.

Chapter 15**: Finding the Auroras** – Leaving Christmas Island on the 12th of September, Captain Guy intends to sail further south to clear up a dispute about the existence of a chain of islands known as the Auroras, which Spanish sailors claim to not exist. Arthur details the supposed longitude and latitude of their goal as well as the past explorers who have attempted to locate them.

Chapter 16**: Failure, and a new mission** – When the *Jane Guy* cannot locate the Auroras, Captain Guy foregoes his original plan to sail through the Strait of Magellan and up toward Patagonia and turns Southward instead, seeking yet another rumored chain of islands. They set out on the 12th of December. Again, Arthur details coordinates and nearly a half-century of exploration in the area, Mr. Poe adding some details from modern travel logs about some of them. Captain Guy is gunning to outdo them all.

Chapter 17**: Icebound** – Still continuing the ship's log-style narrative, Arthur reports that on January 1st, the ship was overcome by sea ice, hemmed in on all sides, but the following day a gale blows in, allowing the *Jane Guy* to break through. For the next week or so, they travel without incident, but on the 10th, they lose a man overboard. Ice continues to plague their plotted course until the 17th, when a large flock of birds hints at land nearby. Captain Guy asks for volunteers to pilot a rowboat out to a floe where a large animal has been spotted, selecting Arthur and Peters among a few others. The men find a polar bear and fire upon it, but they either miss or their musket shot only serves to anger it. Peters saves them all by leaping upon the beast's back and stabbing it with his knife. They barely have the bear back aboard when a call of "*land on the starboard bow"* echoes over the deck. After checking the charts and compass, Captain Guy finds that they have traveled eight degrees farther South than any previous expedition, and preparations are made to explore the island.

Chapter 18**: The island natives** – Over January 18th and 19th, the *Jane Guy* treads steadily southward, and as they move, the air grows warmer. Arthur notes the warm air, the constant sunlight, and the darkness of the water (which denotes great depth). Again, an island was spotted from the masthead, and the ship pivots toward it. Arthur and some others accompany Captain Guy in a rowboat to explore the island, and four long canoes from the island coast out to meet them. The dark-skinned men aboard shout and wave their large clubs or spears. A man who appears to be their leader is rowed toward the rowboat, and when he reaches it, he hops aboard and sits next to Captain Guy before gesturing toward the *Jane Guy* and speaking his language. Aboard ship, the native contingent reacts to the various goods. Arthur makes some observations of their apparent belief in animism: they treat the ship as if it were a living animal. Finding the natives friendly enough, Captain Guy decides to stay and rest for a week before heading further south. Arthur takes to calling the native leader "Too-wit." On the island, Arthur describes the strange purple fresh water on the island.

Chapter 19**: Too-wit's village** – After a bit of time, a sort of understanding forms between the crew of the *Jane Guy* and the islanders. Arthur takes a moment to describe their general appearance and dress (which is sparse if existent). A large group of natives gathers and beckons the men from the *Jane Guy* to follow them. They lead the men to their village in the middle of the island, a place transliterated as "Klock-klock." Too-wit gives a speech before inviting the men of the *Jane Guy* to eat the still-moving entrails of an animal unknown to the explorers. The sailors politely decline. After dinner, Too-wit shows the men to a bay where they can catch a great number of sea cucumbers to stock up for their journey. The native leader then promises to deliver stores of duck and tortoise to the ship the following morning.

Chapter 20**: "Where all were brothers"** – The men set to work harvesting and preparing sea cucumbers for storage—Arthur expounding at length about the creatures. Too-wit makes good on his promise along with some vegetables and something the crew calls "scurvy grass." In exchange, the *Jane Guy* gives the islanders a number of goods, including beads, cloth, nails, and knives. The day before their departure, the men of the *Jane Guy* are invited to a ceremony by the islanders, and they leave only six to secure the ship. They are led toward a narrow gorge, forcing them to file five abreast. Their guides soon leave them behind when Arthur is distracted by a filbert nut bush. Peters and another man follow when suddenly they are all knocked unconscious.

Chapter 21**: Entombed** – Arthur comes to, finding himself nearly suffocated, but he finds room to stand. Nearby, Peters groans, and Arthur scrambles to help dislodge him from a pile of rock and dirt. After a while regaining their senses, they decide to try and dig themselves out, Arthur noticing a small spot of sunlight above them. Finding themselves close to breaking through, Peters decides to go back for the other man, finding only his cold, dead foot. Back on the surface, Peters suggests they fire their guns to alert the rest of the crew, but Arthur stops him, suspecting the islanders had planned to kill them. After an hour's rest, they hear a calamity and decide to move away from it. It's then that they realize the entire side of the ravine was sheered off purposefully, and Arthur and Peters fear they are the lone survivors of the *Jane Guy* on the island.

Chapter 22**: Help from the *Jane Guy*** – "Our situation," Arthur begins, "was scarcely less dreadful than when we had conceived ourselves entombed forever." Realizing they couldn't fight the islanders on their own and being unable to hide away forever, he and Peters decide to make for the ship. The island

swarms with warriors, and they barely make it back to the bay where the canoes are. Hundreds of islanders are attempting to board the *Jane Guy* with rafts and canoes, and the big guns begin to bark aboard the ship. Dozens of natives are killed, frightening many of the attackers back to land, but the few men remaining aboard ship are soon overwhelmed by warriors from the starboard side. The islanders then descend on the ship and begin to drag it ashore while pulling it to pieces. Arthur and Peters then find a hiding spot to plan their next move as the islanders set what remains of the ship alight. The ammunition store goes off, killing an animal the islanders take as a portent of doom, and they leave the beach.

Chapter 23**: Biding time** – Peters and Arthur manage to conceal their hiding spot well enough to light a small fire. They remain there for a week, slowly eating and drinking through their supplies. Then they make some small expeditions into the surrounding areas, finding a few fowl to eat and a musket, but more importantly that there is no safe way off the mountain. In their searches, they find some strange markings in a cave left by the islanders that are illustrated in the text. Unable to decipher them and finding no way out of the caves, they return to their hiding spot.

Chapter 24**: Mountaineering** – It can no longer be avoided: the only way down from their hiding spot is to cut steps into the limestone with their tools. Peters makes makeshift capons from wooden pegs, and Arthur lowers him down using shirts and kerchiefs as a makeshift rope. When it's Arthur's turn to descend, he struggles with fear and vertigo, hallucinating a death bell ringing and nearly passing out, though Peters catches him and lowers him gently with the help of the makeshift rope. Hungry and thirsty, the men quickly find and attack a tortoise, but this action puts them in the path of a group of islanders, who knock Peters to the ground. Arthur kills two with his pistol, allowing Peters to get back up and fight off the remaining three with one of the fallen islander's clubs. One of the men Arthur shot moves, so Peters and Arthur take him as a hostage and narrowly escape in a nearby canoe.

Chapter 25**: A strange figure** – Alone on the open ocean, the three men manage to navigate the canoe further south. The journal format returns, telling us of the many strange phenomena the men in the canoe experience between March 1st and March 22nd. They use their shirts to make sails and rigging, strengthening the canoe with the extra oars, and they also have a few tortoises aboard for food and water. As they continue southward, the ocean becomes milky and opaque. Ashy material falls from the sky. Their captive, Nu-Nu, becomes so frightened he does nothing more than lie in the canoe. A flock of large white birds fly past, and a glare can be seen nearby. Nu-Nu dies from fright as a chasm or portal opens in the ocean before the canoe. A gigantic, shrouded human figure emerges and looks at the little boat, its skin as white as fresh snow and glowing. Here, the narrative suddenly ends.

Final note – Mr. Poe includes a final note, lamenting that Mr. Pym passed away without providing any more of the narrative. Dirk Peters is said to be alive somewhere in Illinois, and the US government prepares further expeditions to the Antarctic to verify Arthur's findings. After a note about the strange figure and Nu-Nu's death, Mr. Poe speaks for a moment about the language of the islanders, making comparisons to Ethiopian, Arabic, and Egyptian scripts, claiming the islanders must be descendants of Africans and the text Arthur described translates to "white" and "Region to the South." He also alludes to a battle between darkness and light represented in Arthur's time on the island.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Arthur Gordon Pym

Arthur Gordon Pym is a native of Nantucket. He feels emasculated by his lack of sailing experience and dreams of adventure on the sea. When his friend, Augustus, helps him to stow away on a whaling ship, Arthur soon gets more—and worse—than he wished for.

Inexperienced The whole reason Arthur is at sea is because of his lack of experience. He smuggles himself aboard the *Grampus* to gain some experience sailing so he can live the adventurous life he dreams. Because of his inexperience, he is often less-than-useful in any given situation. He does best when he can stay put out of the way. Arthur often has preconceptions of things that are dashed by reality, such as his romantic notions of life at sea. When his expectations are subverted, Arthur is caught on the

back foot, making him a bit of a bumbler. As he gains experience through hardship, however, he hardens quickly, though he never stops being shaky on his sea legs, as seen when he passes out during his cliff-side descent.

Strong/Survivor Arthur is a very strong individual, both physically and mentally. He endures every challenge set to him, from nearly dying inside the *Grampus*' hold to surviving on the keel of an overturned ship to escaping from Too-wit's island. Many times, his willpower and physical limits are put to the test, and each time he comes out the other end. His lack of experience leads him to occasional fearfulness, but he is always able to overcome whatever challenges he faces. He also makes hard decisions, such as when Arthur joins in cannibalizing Parker after the ship is swept off course. While not always the most forward-thinking or intelligent, Arthur is able to get by with what is on hand, usually in the nick of time.

Augustus

Augustus is Arthur's longtime friend. He is slated to go on a whaling expedition with his father, a sea captain. Wanting to help Arthur gain experience as a sailor, he plans a way to help Arthur stow away on the expedition, but events unfold that derail everything.

Brave Augustus shows himself to be quite brave throughout the first half of the novel. Even though he is drunk, he takes the helm of a ship during a squall with only one other very inexperienced hand on deck. This is foolish, but such foolishness requires a degree of bravery. When the mutiny begins, Augustus does his best to hide away so he can attack the mutiny's leader. When he moves to Arthur the first moment he can, risking detection to make sure his friend and Tiger can stay alive for a few more days. Hiding Arthur in the wall of his makeshift prison takes a nerve of solid steel, and similarly, taking the risk to show Arthur to Peters, even after making plans to attack the mutiny leader, also takes grit. Augustus takes several serious wounds in the fighting afterward, and though he succumbs to his wounds, he does so with a strange dignity, portraying Augustus as brave until the very end.

Foolish While the narrative doesn't dwell on this trait, it's clear that Augustus is a bit foolish. His first act in the book is to go on a drunken joy ride in Arthur's new sloop. This results in both of them being in a sailing accident and the loss of the ship. Immediately after this, Arthur wishes to gain experience as a sailor. Even thought Augustus fears his friend is glamorizing life at sea, he agrees to a convoluted scheme to help Arthur stow away aboard the *Grampus*. He reasons that he'll be able to play this obvious breech of security and authority off as a prank. We never get to see if his plan will succeed or fail, because a mutiny breaks out and leaves Arthur and Tiger trapped in the hold for over a week, where they nearly die from thirst and exposure to fumes. Even in his attempt to retake the *Grampus*, there is an edge of foolishness: there are not enough hands to keep the ship under control in the open ocean, especially after they kill the last few mutineers. The fighting results in Augustus' long and painful death due to sepsis and exposure.

Dirk Peters

Peters is a sailor aboard the *Grampus*. He is one of the mutineers, but he finds the behavior of the others erratic and reprehensible, plotting with Augustus and Arthur to retake the ship. Peters is the only other survivor of the ill-fated whaling expedition alongside Arthur.

Determined Sheer determination often drives Peters' actions. He pushes himself beyond exhaustion several times throughout the narrative, all because he is determined to keep on living. This extends to some vile acts, including cannibalism. But it also shows up in some more virtuous ways, such as when the cruel and unjust actions of the other mutineers lead Peters to retake the ship with Augustus' and Arthur's help. At many points that the average character would have given up and laid down to die, Peters takes command and makes life-saving decisions.

Skilled Peters is one of the most skilled characters in the story. It's because of his efforts on the *Grampus* that Arthur is able to find the wine that gives them a few more days and the axe that allows them to

access the hold. He is also a capable fighter, as proved during the fight with the mutineers, his fight with the islanders, and even how quickly he kills Parker after they draw lots. It's Peters' skill at climbing and working that allows Arthur to safely descend the cliffside on the island near the South Pole. In many ways, the only reason Arthur lives to the end of the narrative is because of Peters' skill.

THEMES

Society

Myth – Sailing stories are a central part of early American coastal communities. They relied on sailing for trade and extractive industries like sealing to keep their small towns supplied and connected. Of course this would lead to some idealization around working on ships, and these ideals persist in some coastal towns to this day. It is from the death of sailing myths that Poe pulls Arthur's desire to be a sailor. Often the romantic myths cannot compare to brutal reality, and this is the basis of the drama in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. Arthur naïvely accepts the romantic myths of life at sea despite warnings from his friends and family, and because of this, he is thrown into a nightmarish survival scenario from his first moments stowing away on the *Grampus*. His situation fails to improve after fighting off the mutineers, being left with too few men and too little supply to control the ship. Even after being rescued by the *Jane Guy*, Arthur soon finds himself in another survival scenario with no good way to get out when the islanders of Klock-klock kill the crew of the *Jane Guy*. The interplay of myth and reality is what makes this novel so compelling.

Race – Race plays a minor theme in the first half of the novel but falls into focus in the latter half. Most racial observations during the journey on the *Grampus* come in descriptions of two individuals, the cook who leads the mutiny and Dirk Peters. The cook is described in coarse terms, Poe showing us some of the typical ideas about Black people at the time, especially in Virginia, where he was raised. Nothing about him is positive, soft, or civilized in this portrayal, and Poe blames his actions in part on the "savagery" of his race. Likewise, Dirk Peters is a mixed race man of Apsáalooke (Crow) descent, and Poe also describes him as savage, dark, and fearsome, though "less bloodthirsty" than the Black cook. Poe's descriptions of the islanders of Klock-klock are dismissive and racially charged, as seen in similar sea story novels of the time. His focus on the color of their skin, their nudity, and crafting a language based on North African scripts is an interesting glimpse into racial norms and stereotypes of the 1830s as well as the advances being made in archaeology at the time.

Science/Technology – As stated above, the early 1800s were an interesting time of scientific and technological advance. Materials science, industry, preservation, and exploration were all booming and changing rapidly, giving Poe plenty of source material to discuss in his novel. He often takes long asides to discuss how ships are built, how traversing across the oceans is charted using the latest tools, and interesting facts about animals like recently discovered Galapagos tortoises or locations the characters pass. Throughout the narrative, advancing technology like guns, matches, and cartography play central roles in the character's survival.

Justice

Violence – *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* is a very violent novel. While its descriptions are often brief and vague, people seem to be constantly killing one another in this story. They fight for power, for wealth, and for unknown reasons—as we see in the islanders. Violence is sometimes wrought by nature, such as the storms that force the survivors of the *Grampus* to cannibalize one of the mutineers, but more often it is up close and personal. People are stabbed, clubbed, and shot at close range throughout most of the novel. The least personal attack comes from the guards on the *Jane Guy* when the islanders first attempt to take it. From a distance, they kill several dozen islanders with their cannons. Every other death in the book comes from close combat. Poe does a good job of portraying the swiftness and brutality of such combat throughout the story. While it is seen as necessary at times, it is also shown as a frightening and damaging thing, ending Augustus's life after much suffering when gangrene turns to sepsis from some stab wounds.

Crime: *Mutiny* **–** Only one major crime happens in the course of the novel, and that is the mutiny on the *Grampus*. We never learn why this mutiny started, especially so quickly into a voyage. Poe's insistence on the bloodthirstiness of the cook should be dismissed as simple racial slander, as it simply seems that Poe wanted a mutiny in his narrative but didn't understand the politics and psychology of such an act. With that aside, we can look at how the mutineers acted after seizing the ship. They compound their crime by torturing and killing those last crew members still loyal to the captain. Only Dirk Peters has any issue with this, and he works against the other mutineers to spare the few men left before working with Augustus to kill the cook and usurp the mutiny.

Politics

Leadership – While under-explored, the idea of leadership comes up several times throughout the story. We first see Augustus's father being overthrown by mutineers. We can assume that his leadership style was either so strict or so lax that it caused his men to revolt after a few paltry days out from harbor. He is unable to maintain his authority and eventually flees to save his and his last few loyal sailors' lives. Captain Guy of the *Jane Guy* is a strong authority, however. Arthur seems to idolize him as an ideal captain. He is always concerned with the safety of his men and his ship, showing his compassion for those under his command and the seriousness with which he approaches his duties. He never misses a chance to restock their stores and is willing to commune and trade with any natives they find in their explorations. Leadership emerges again as Dirk Peters takes command after he and Arthur are the last survivors of the landslide. The narrative suddenly ends after this part of the story, but we're given some condensed information about Peters' skill and leadership ability as the two men and their captive take a canoe out onto the open sea.

Relationship

Friendship – Friendship plays a major role in the beginning of the novel, but quickly disappears. This is a symptom of both the brutality of the narrative and the gothic writing that influenced Poe. Arthur and Augustus are both long-time friends, but their plan for adventure ends with Augustus' death and Arthur's prolonged suffering. Similarly, we see Augustus smuggle Arthur's dog, Tiger, aboard. Arthur is happy to have his furry friend aboard, but they are both in grave danger of starvation and suffocation in the unstowed hold. Tiger, too, eventually dies because of the cruel realities of life at sea.

Betrayal – Betrayal shows up at two key points in the narrative. We see it first with the mutiny. A lack of loyalty to the captain leads to the death of many hands when the mutiny's leader decides to act on bloodthirsty impulses. Peters betrays the mutineers after their cruelty is made apparent, and he overcomes them with Augustus' and Arthur's help. The second act of betrayal comes at the end of the novel when the islanders loose a mountainside on the crew of the *Jane Guy* for a reason that's never clearly explained or explored. After stocking their large ship and communing with the sailors for almost a month, the islanders' actions toward the end of the book make no sense unless one believes the racist notions of dark-skinned "savagery" Poe describes.

Psychology

Isolation – Part of the terror of these survival stories is the total isolation. For hundreds, maybe thousands of miles, our characters are the only people, and they are in trouble. Not having assistance when one's life is on the line is a special psychological hell, and the fact that Arthur doesn't go mad after his first trial in the hold of the *Grampus* is a testament to his strength of will. Again and again, he, Peters, and others are thrown into situations that remove them from society in general. It's their isolation on the ocean that leads to some of the most gruesome moments in the novel, such as the cruel behavior of the mutineers and the cannibalizing of Parker.

Appearance: *Perception* – Perception in several forms is a key theme in this narrative. We see Arthur's perception of the sea as a romantic place of adventure dashed upon the rocks of harsh reality. We also see delusion and hallucination emerge at several points of the story, including when Arthur is trapped in

the storage room and the several times he and the others are starving. The perception of the islanders as backwards and servile leads to the death of all aboard the *Jane Guy* save Peters and Arthur.

Survival: *Cannibalism* **–** As a survival story, it's clear that survival is a theme, so I'm going to focus instead on a more unique sub-theme: cannibalism. About midway through the story, Arthur and the survivors of the *Grampus* draw lots to see who will be sacrificed so the others may live. Parker, the last mutineer, draws the shortest straw, and the crew dispatches and prepares him. Arthur notes that the head, hands, and feet are thrown overboard. This is because they are the parts that are undeniably human in form. A leg or a rib can be likened to that of a pig or a cow, especially when it is stripped of its flesh, but a finger is a finger. This seeming waste in a survival scenario makes it more psychologically comfortable for the characters to engage in a cultural taboo like cannibalism and is well documented both in real journals and other survival stories depicting survival cannibalism.

<u>Quest</u>

Exploration – Exploration comes to the fore in the second half of the novel. It's after being picked up by the *Jane Guy* that Arthur really begins charting unknown waters. The story often takes the form of a ship's log in these sections. There we can see degrees, minutes, and seconds charting the *Jane Guy's* progress south across the globe. They reach further South than previously recorded, and at this point, Poe begins taking liberties, saying the world begins to warm before they find a tropical island just a few more degrees South. On this island, Arthur becomes quite the amateur ethnographer and archaeologist. He does his best to describe the culture of the people there and documents examples of their language.

Adventure – While it tends to subvert the typical adventure narrative, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* is an adventure novel. It's obvious that adventure is one of the themes. Where in some other titles in the genre, adventure is romanticized and central, Poe subverts reader expectations with a dose of cruel realism. He focuses on the suffering of sea survival instead of glossing over it. He examines the hard choices and inhumane actions that keep these men alive time and time again. Drawing from gothic writers, Poe attempts to de-glamorize sailing and ocean survival stories.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways could this novel be described as early science fiction? List at least two examples.

2. How does race impact the narrative? Would you describe the characterizations of the islanders and other radicalized people in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* to be racist? Explain.

3. Compare and contrast this novel to other exploration novels such as *Treasure Island* and *Robinson Crusoe*. In what ways is *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* the same, and in what ways does it stand out?

4. Poe strove for great realism in most of the elements of this survival story. Would you say that he succeeded or failed? Explain.