

***Offline* Reader Guide for Melville Courses**

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To the Instructor

If you are including “Bartleby the Scrivener” in your Melville curriculum, consider adding *Offline* to your reading list. *Offline* not only sets “Bartleby the Scrivener” in the modern business world, it changes a number of the parameters in the story:

- What if Bartleby’s boss handled him differently?
- What if Bartleby’s boss was a woman instead of a man?
- How would a modern corporation respond to Bartleby’s behavior?

Just as “Bartleby the Scrivener” described the mid-nineteenth century workplace, *Offline* describes the modern workplace with the impact of corporate mergers and downsizing, office romances, and organizational politics.

This guide provides you with discussion topics (which can be used as essay questions) that you can incorporate into your curriculum. You are free to use and customize the materials in this guide as you wish.

Before you use this material, I recommend that you read *Offline* yourself to become familiar with the book.

How to Use *Offline* in Your Course

1. Review the other reference material on the *Offline* Web site (www.matthewarnoldstern.com/offline) in the Reader Guides and Links sections. I add new material periodically, so visit often.
2. If you provide books for your class, purchase enough copies of *Offline* for your students. Volume discounts for copies of *Offline* are available from the publisher (www.lulu.com/mastern) or contact your local bookseller.

If students buy their own texts, have your school’s bookstore purchase copies of *Offline* for resale. Information for bookstore and institutional purchases is available on the *Offline* Web site (www.matthewarnoldstern.com/offline).

3. Have your students read “Bartleby the Scrivener”. This story is available in a number of literature textbooks and online at sites such as Bartleby.com.

For more information about *Offline*,
visit www.matthewarnoldstern.com/offline

4. Allow at least a week before class for your students to read *Offline*. Although *Offline* is short (approximately 200 pages) and is written in contemporary style, you'll want to give your students sufficient time to reread or take notes.
5. Choose any combination of the following discussion/essay topics or research projects to use in your curriculum.

Discussion/Essay Topics

1. Besides the obvious differences in technology, how is the workplace in "Bartleby the Scrivener" different from the one in *Offline*? How is it the same?
2. The Narrator in "Bartleby the Scrivener" and Lucy in *Offline* treat Bartleby in different ways. Why do you think Bartleby winds up meeting the same fate?
3. Why does the Narrator say at the end of the original story, "Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!" Why does Lucy say it at the end of *Offline*? Describe what "humanity" means to both of these characters.
4. Both "Bartleby the Scrivener" and *Offline* have the scriptural passage "A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." What does this passage mean to the Narrator in "Bartleby" and Lucy in *Offline*? How does it affect the way they treat people in their respective stories?
5. Compare how the Narrator treats his subordinates in "Bartleby" and how Lucy treats hers in *Offline*.
6. Describe the progression of how the Narrator treats Bartleby in the original story. Compare it to how Lucy treats Bartleby in *Offline*.
7. What role do the other workers (Turkey, Nippers, and Ginger Nut) play in "Bartleby"? Compare to the role the rest of Lucy's staff (Peter, Martha, Tina, Garrett, and Siouxsie) plays in *Offline*.
8. Which of Bartleby's attributes frightened the Narrator the most? Compare this to Lucy's feelings about Bartleby.
9. In addition to *Offline*, there were several movie adaptations of "Bartleby". Why do you think Melville's story appeals to people today?
10. What does Bartleby represent in "Bartleby the Scrivener"? What does he represents in *Offline*?
11. Bartleby's tag line in both stories is "I would prefer not to." What do you think he prefers to do in each story?

Research Projects

1. What were the attitudes of the general public towards business in the mid-nineteenth century? How do these attitudes appear in “Bartleby the Scrivener”? How do they compare with attitudes towards business today?
2. Examine the treatment of religion in other Melville works and “Bartleby”. What does Melville seem to say about religion? How does it compare to the role religion plays in *Offline*?
3. Describe the relationship between employers and employees in the mid-nineteenth century in “Bartleby” and in other works and news reports of the period. How does the employer-employee relationship then compare with today’s?
4. Describe the development of workplace technology from the quills of Bartleby’s time to the computers and e-mail of today. How has the change in technology affected the workplace environment?
5. Where did “Bartleby the Scrivener” fit in Melville’s literary career? Did it help or hurt him at the time? How did it figure into the renewed interest in Melville in the twentieth century?

Easter Eggs!

“Bartleby the Scrivener” isn’t the only Melville work referenced in *Offline*. Throughout the book, there are “Easter eggs,” subtle references to other Melville works and his life. (Here is your first hint: Look at the model numbers of the routers.) How many Melville Easter eggs can you find in *Offline*?

Questions

If you have questions about using *Offline* in your training course, contact me at matthew@matthewarnoldstern.com. Put READER GUIDE in your subject line.