

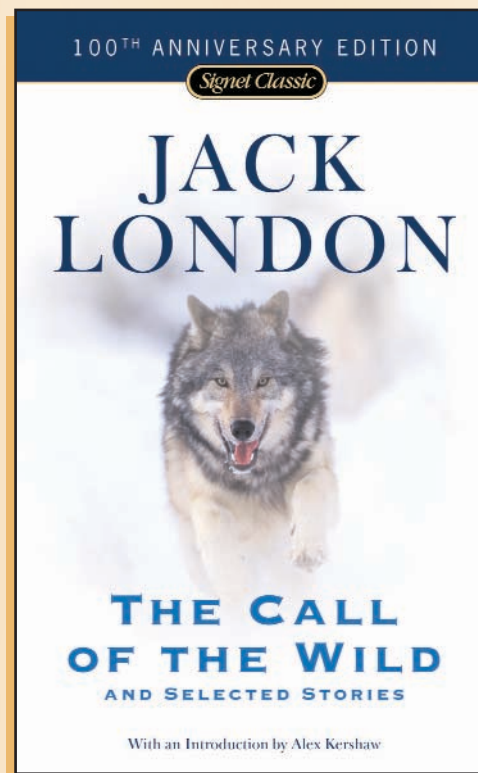


A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE SIGNET CLASSIC EDITION OF

JACK LONDON'S

THE CALL OF THE WILD

BY JIM COPE and WENDY COPE



S E R I E S E D I T O R S :

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INTRODUCTION

Before there was Hemingway, Steinbeck, Kerouac, and Mailer, there was Jack London. Perhaps no other American writer led a life as exciting as that described in his fiction. Born in San Francisco to an unwed mother from a wealthy background, London grew up with his mother and stepfather in a working class neighborhood in Oakland. After leaving school in the eighth grade, he held a series of hard scrabble jobs including oyster pirate, fish patrol member, sailor on a sealing ship, and cross-country hobo before he returned to attend high school at age 19. The combination of his travels, many low paying jobs, and vast reading turned the young London into a fiery socialist who built his world view from the writings of Charles Darwin, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Herbert Spencer. These experiences, self-education, and great personal discipline turned London into a fine writer. But no other experience influenced his writing more than his participation in the Klondike gold rush from 1897 to 1899.

A great journal writer, London recorded his adventures in the “Northland” including the countless stories he heard from fellow travelers while stranded in an abandoned trappers’ cabin for his first long winter in the Yukon. The following spring London continued his travels in the north, and for the next two years he found little actual gold, but collected a “gold mine” of stories and memories. These memories and stories turned into a series of short stories about the Northland that earned him his early literary success. Readers fell in love with his action packed adventures. “As Frank Munsey of Munsey’s magazine explained: ‘Good easy reading for the people—no frills, no fine finishes, always action’” (Kershaw xi).

This “no frills” writing style falls into the Naturalistic style also used by Stephan Crane. Both Crane and London wrote about conflicts of man versus nature and man versus himself. Spencer’s philosophy of “the survival of the fittest” is seen throughout London’s writings and demonstrates London’s belief in Social Darwinism. After he had written several stories based on his Yukon experiences, London moved to England in 1902. It was at this time that he researched and wrote his critically acclaimed study of London’s East-End poor, *The People of the Abyss*. Upon returning to California, London decided to write one more story about the Northland despite stating earlier that he was tired of writing about the north (Kershaw xi).

This “last” story grew into his masterpiece, *The Call of the Wild*. Published in *The Saturday Evening Post* June 20-July 18, 1903, the story of Buck, the Southland dog that must use long buried instincts to survive in the cruel Northland, received critical acclaim and made London a writer of renown at age 27. The novel showcases London’s Naturalistic style while providing plenty of action. Today, on its one hundredth anniversary, it remains among the most widely read American classics, appealing to children and adults alike.

London’s style and his rousing abilities as a storyteller make *The Call of the Wild and Selected Stories* accessible to students as early as the middle grades. Younger students can read the work as an adventure story while older students can use it as a stepping stone to more complex works. Older students can easily move beyond the straightforward plot to undertake a more advanced analysis of theme and style without being tripped up by unfamiliar language or complex plot. Because of the great volume of biographical, traditional, and modern criticism on London’s works, *The Call of the Wild and Selected Stories* is an excellent starting point for teaching older students literary criticism.

ABOUT THIS TEACHER’S GUIDE

This guide contains four sections: Pre-reading Activities, Summaries and Teaching Suggestions, After Reading the Novel, and Extended Learning. The “Pre-reading Activities” involve and engage students, preparing them to read this story. The “Summaries and Teaching Suggestions” section guides students during their reading. Organized by chapters, it provides questions, vocabulary study, quotations, and assorted activities. Numbers in parentheses refer to the page number in the Signet Classic edition of *The Call of the Wild and Selected Stories*.

Questions are useful for class discussion, individual writing, or group activities. Vocabulary is listed with the page number of its first use in the text. When possible, students should ascertain meaning through context. Less able students may benefit from a review of these words prior to their reading of the respective chapters, while more able readers may be able to handle them when encountered in context.

Quotations can be discussed by the class or in small groups. Students can respond to them individually in journal entries.

The teacher or students may select activities, since completing all the activities would be too time-consuming. Some may be delayed for use as part of the post-reading experiences.

The section called “After Reading the Novel” provides questions and suggests activities that pull together reading experiences through an examination of themes. Finally, the “Extended Learning” section assists those who wish to pursue individual interests.

PREREADING ACTIVITIES

- Select one of the following items for research:
 - Jack London's life
 - Klondike Gold Rush and/or the California Gold Rush (compare and contrast)
 - Dog breeds: Scotch Shepherds and St. Bernards. What other breeds would fare well in the Arctic Circle?
 - Alaska: its people and climate
 - The Iditarod and sled racing
 - Geography: Create a map of the west coast, from the Yukon Territory to San Diego (1), and mark places along the path mentioned in the novel.
 - Wolves and dogs: behaviors and pack mentality
- Jack London writes about his main character Buck as if he were a person. This literary technique is called "anthropomorphism," or giving human qualities to nonhumans. By using anthropomorphism, London helps readers identify with Buck.
 - Write a journal entry about pets or animals you have known that behave almost as if they were people. Detail events and expressions that helped you discover what that animal was thinking.
 - Photo journaling: Using lots of pictures of dogs, write a journal entry about what each dog is thinking. What clues give you an indication of the dog's thoughts?
- Create a running journal of Buck's character and degree of "wildness" throughout the novel. Document each situation that changes him and tell how he changes or adapts.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Buck: Part Scotch shepherd, part St. Bernard; main character in the novel

Judge: Buck's original owner; gives Buck the domesticated life he thinks he loves

Perrault: French Canadian who buys Buck first; "a little weazend man who spat broken English and many strange and uncouth exclamations which Buck could not understand." (8-9)

François: Swarthy French Canadian who teams with Perrault

Curly: Good-natured Newfoundland bought by Perrault

Spitz: Treacherously friendly, underhanded (-pawed) white dog

Dave: Experienced dog that primarily eats and sleeps and just wants to be left alone

Sol-leks: The Angry One, blind in one eye, also wants to be left alone

Hal: A callow nineteen/twenty-year old with revolver and belt with many cartridges on it.

Charles: Middle-aged, light-colored man with weak eyes and moustache that covers a drooping lip

Mercedes: Charles' wife and Hal's sister

John Thornton: Owner of a camp at the base of the White River; saves Buck from being killed when Buck refuses to pull Hal's sled

Skeet: Irish Setter at John Thornton's camp who tends to Buck's injuries

Nig: Good-natured half-Bloodhound, half-deerhound at Thornton's camp

"Black" Burton: "Evil-tempered and malicious" man, attacked by Buck when Thornton is hit while trying to break up a fight

SYNOPSIS OF THE NOVEL AND TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

CHAPTER I. INTO THE PRIMITIVE (1–10)

Buck, a Saint Bernard-Scotch shepherd mix, lived the good life on Judge Miller's ranch in the Santa Clara Valley until he was kidnapped by Manuel, a gardener's assistant with a gambling problem. Manuel shipped Buck north to become a sled dog in the Yukon Territories. In Seattle Buck was broken by a man with a club, providing him with his initiation into his savage new life. There he and Curly, a good-natured Newfoundland, were purchased by Perrault and François who were couriers for the Canadian Government. On board the *Narwhal*, Buck and Curly joined Spitz and Dave, two other dogs, for the journey north. Arriving in the Yukon, Buck experiences snow for the first time.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In the beginning of Chapter I, how is Buck described? Based on this description, how do you think he will deal with the hardships of the Yukon Territory? Which of his traits will serve him well in his new life? Which will he have to abandon to survive?
2. What important lesson did Buck learn from the man with the club? What is meant by the line, "It was his introduction to the reign of primitive law, and he met the introduction halfway."?
3. How did François begin to earn Buck's respect? From the description of this incident, predict what Buck's relationship will be with "a big, snowy-white fellow from Spitzbergen."
4. What is the significance of the title of this chapter?

VOCABULARY

demesne (1): domain
populous (2): with many people; well-populated
imperiously (2): like a king
sated (2): filled up; full
insular (2): protected; inexperienced
progeny (3): children; offspring
deft (3): skilled
futilely (3): unsuccessfully
vilely (3): rudely
hydrophobia (4): rabies
impending (5): soon to happen
calamity (5): disaster
surcharged (7): charged over normal price
slaver (7): saliva; slobber
primitive (8): early, not sophisticated, raw, uncivilized
dormant (8): hidden, buried, sleeping
cunning (8): wisdom, experienced; wily

ACTIVITIES

1. Read the beginning quotation (also known as an epigraph) that prefaces this novel. (1) Draw a picture that represents the conflict.
 2. In a reflective journal, tell about a time you felt nervous or scared of a situation or person. Were your instincts correct? Explain.
 3. Write a definition of "being good" as pertains to your life at school or at home. What actions does that include? What behaviors does it exclude? How does school "good behavior" differ from home "good behavior"?
 4. Is there "primitive law" (8) in your life? Create a collage that shows what primitive law entails.
 5. Recall your first time at the beach or your first snowfall, or another experience that was completely foreign to you. What were your reactions? Sensations? Fears? Feelings? Write a jot list of your memories and select the most vivid to turn into a poem.
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QUOTATIONS (NUMBERS IN PARENTHESES INDICATE PAGE NUMBERS.)

"He did not know why, but he felt oppressed by the vague sense of impending calamity." (5)

"And Buck was truly a red-eyed devil, as he drew himself together for the spring, hair bristling, mouth foaming, a mad glitter in his bloodshot eyes." (6)

"In midair, just as his jaws were about to close on the man, he received a shock that checked his body and brought his teeth together with an agonizing clip." (7)

"That club was a revelation. It was his introduction to the reign of primitive law, and he met the introduction halfway." (8)

"Perrault knew dogs, and when he looked at Buck he knew that he was one in a thousand." (9)

"He was friendly, in a treacherous sort of way, smiling into one's face the while he meditated some underhanded trick, as, for instance, when he stole from Buck's food at the first meal." (9)

"It bit like fire, and the next instant was gone." (10)

CHAPTER II. THE LAW OF CLUB AND FANG (11-19)

During his first few days in the Yukon, Buck had to learn many lessons to survive under the frigid north's unwritten "law of club and fang." He learned from watching Curley's violent death that the husky dogs of the north fought like wolves and that to be knocked off your feet in a fight was a death sentence.

He learned how to pull a sled after François harnessed him between Dave and Spitz (the lead dog) who were seasoned sled dogs. François, Dave, and Spitz were stern teachers who taught Buck by punishing his mistakes with fangs and whip.

When Perrault added three more dogs to the team, Buck learned by watching how they got along with the other dogs. Billie and Joe were brothers. Billie was good-natured and was quickly bullied by Spitz. Joe met Spitz's aggression with snarls and growls so terrible that Spitz left him alone. The third dog, Sol-leks (the angry one) was a grizzled veteran who only wanted to be left alone to do his job. Buck learned the hard way not to approach Sol-leks on his blind side.

From Billie, Buck learned how to build a warm nest in the snow to survive the frigid nights.

In the next few days, the team traveled forty miles per day. Harnessed between Dave and Sol-leks, Buck learned even more about being a sled dog when they rewarded his every mistake with snarls and bites.

Buck's final lesson moved him another step from his previous "civilized" life. He learned to guard his food fiercely and to eat it quickly before other dogs could steal it. The "law of club and fang" also taught him to become an accomplished thief who would steal food from human or dog with no remorse.

As much as he learned from watching, Buck's survival was aided by an awakening of "instincts long dead." Quickly he became more and more like his wild ancestors.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the "laws of club and fang" that Buck learned in chapter II? How are these laws different from what Buck was used to?
 2. What is the one thing that Dave and Sol-leks live for? Why do you think they are like this? How do you think they got this way? Can you think of examples of other animals or humans that show these traits? What does this tell you about animal and human nature?
 3. If you were Buck, which of the other sled dogs would you chose to be your teacher and why? How is this dog like or unlike François as a teacher?
 4. What trait insures that Buck will survive in the north? How is this aspect of his character shown in the story? How would this trait be accepted in his former life? What does this say about the differences in the two worlds?
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5. Explain the meaning of the following quotation from page 18:

And not only did he learn by experience, but instincts long dead became alive again. The domesticated generations fell from him. In vague ways he remembered back to the youth of the breed, to the time the wild dogs ranged in packs through the primeval forest and killed their meat as they ran it down. . . . Thus, as token of what a puppet thing life is, the ancient song surged through him and he came into his own again.

6. In adapting to his new world, has Buck developed or retrogressed? Defend your answer.

VOCABULARY

primordial (10): ancient, prehistoric
reproof (12): blame, criticism
tuition (12): instruction; teaching
appeasingly (12): in an attempt to please
diabolically (13): with evil intent
disconsolate (13): unhappy, gloomy
gee (16): right
haw (17): left

ACTIVITIES

1. Write about a time you were in a completely new situation. How did you feel? Did you become more comfortable over time? If so, how? If not, why not?
 2. Describe an unforgettable lesson you learned.
 3. Rewrite Curly's death as if the characters were human. How would the scene change?
 4. Draw a picture of Spitz as a person. How would his "personality" translate into human behavior?
 5. Perrault's accent is captured in dialect on page 12, where he describes Buck's "personality." Using a dialect style, write Perrault's description of one of the other dogs on the sled team.
 6. Illustrate the sled team as described in Chapter 2, paying close attention to the order of the dogs in relationship to the sled and each other.
 7. Research the scientific principles of heat retention to find out why burrowing in the snow would keep the dogs warm during the night, as opposed to sleeping in the open.
 8. On your map of the west coast, locate and mark Dyea Canyon, Sheep Camp, the Scales, and Chilkot Divide.
 9. How fair is the division of food among the dogs? Argue for the plan or for an alternate method, giving reasons for your argument.
 10. Add to your journal of Buck's changes in character.
 11. What qualifies as "moral" or "immoral" in Buck's new world? Create a collage that represents the "more fundamental and primitive code" (17) and contrast it with the moral code of the Judge.
 12. Looking at the titles of the first three chapters, make predictions about what will happen to Buck in the rest of the novel.
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QUOTATIONS

"All was confusion and action, and every moment life and limb were in peril. There was imperative need to be constantly alert; for these dogs and men were not town dogs and men. They were savages, all of them, who knew no law but the law of club and fang." (11)

"No fair play. Once down, that was the end of you." (11)

"The snow walls pressed him on every side, and a great surge of fear swept through him—the fear of the wild thing for the trap." (14)

"He did not steal for joy of it, but because of the clamor of his stomach." (17)

"Thus, as token of what a puppet thing life is, the ancient song surged through him and he came into his own again; and he came because men had found a yellow metal in the North, and because Manuel was a gardener's helper whose wages did not lap over the needs of his wife and divers small copies of himself." (18-19)

CHAPTER III. THE DOMINANT PRIMORDIAL BEAST (19-31)

As their journey north proceeded, Buck became stronger and wiser. Because of this wisdom, he ignored Spitz's bullying, knowing that he wasn't ready to fight Spitz. This wisdom failed him when Spitz stole his warm nest one especially frigid night. Buck and Spitz were poised to fight to the death when the camp was over-run by ravenous wild dogs from a nearby Indian village. The nine team dogs were all injured in the attack and barely escaped with their lives after fighting their way into the forest to hide.

With four miles left to Dawson City, the team faced the hardest part of the trip in terrible condition. During this period, Buck learned new respect for Perrault and François. Even though they pushed the dogs to make time, they often put the dogs' welfare before their own. Several days into their nightmare journey, François saved Buck by killing Dolly, one of the team that had caught hydrophobia and chased Buck for miles trying to attack him. François again saved Buck from Spitz's attack after Buck collapsed in exhaustion following his escape from Dolly.

The climax of the chapter comes when Buck and Spitz finally fight. Relying on fierceness and cunning that came from all that he had learned in the north, as well as his reawakened instincts, Buck killed Spitz as a ring of savage huskies looked on.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe Spitz's character using examples from the chapter to support your answer.
2. How do François and Perrault display their true natures in this chapter? Give specific examples to support your answer.
3. How does Buck begin to undermine Spitz's authority in this chapter? What were the effects of Buck's actions? What does this say about Buck's transformation from a "southland dog?"
4. In the following quotation what does London mean by "the dominant primordial beast" ?

A pause seemed to fall. Every animal was motionless as though turned to stone. Only Spitz quivered and bristled as he staggered back and forth, snarling with horrible menace, as though to frighten off impending death. Then Buck sprang in and out; but while he was in, shoulder had at last squarely met shoulder. The dark circle became a dot on the moon-flooded snow as Spitz disappeared from view. Buck stood and looked on, the successful champion, the dominant primordial beast who had made his kill and found it good. (31)

5. What traits have helped Buck thrive in his new world? Of them, which do you think is the most important? Why?
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VOCABULARY

malingerer (21): time waster; shirker

marauders (21): raiders, intruders

covert (26): hidden

insidious (27): sinister, dangerous

travail (27): work

placatingly (28): so as to calm down

inexorable (31): unstoppable, relentless

ACTIVITIES

1. Write a journal entry about a bully you've known. How is your bully similar to Spitz?
2. Write a dramatic scene in which Buck confronts Spitz. Create human dialogue for each of the characters showing their emotional and mental states.
3. Draw the fight between the two dogs showing features illustrating their characters.
4. Create an illustration contrasting Buck and the pack animals as described on page 20.
5. Research the symptoms of rabies and the disease's treatment during the time of the Yukon Gold Rush. What would an outbreak of rabies mean to the dogs? The trappers?
6. Mark the mouth of the Talkeetna River and Dawson on your map of the west coast.
7. Write a poem reflecting the compassion the drivers have for their dogs.
8. Create a poem entitled "Patience is Primitive."
9. Research temperature, weather conditions, and the aurora borealis in the Northwest.
10. In your journal tell about a time you felt most alive?
11. Compose a song describing Buck's and Spitz's death battle. (30)

QUOTATIONS

"Then he was a masterful dog, and what made him dangerous was the fact that the club of the man in the red sweater had knocked all blind puck and rashness out of his desire for mastery." (25)

"All that stirring of old instincts which at stated periods drives men out from the sounding cities to forest and plain to kill things by chemically propelled leaden pellets, the blood lust, the joy to kill—all this was Buck's, only it was infinitely more intimate. He was ranging at the head of the pack, running the wild thing down, the living meat, to kill with his own teeth and wash his muzzle to the eyes in warm blood." (28-29)

"There is an ecstasy that marks the summit of life, and beyond which life cannot rise. And such is the paradox of living, this ecstasy comes when one is most alive, and it comes as a complete forgetfulness that one is alive." (29)

CHAPTER IV. WHO HAS WON THE MASTERSHIP (31–40)

The next day Perrault and François deciphered what happened to Spitz from Buck's fresh wounds. They decided to make Sol-leks lead dog because of his experience and were shocked when Buck attacked the older dog demanding to take Spitz's place. For the rest of the morning, the men tried to force Buck back into his place in line to no avail. Aware that they were falling behind schedule, they gave in and put Buck as lead dog. The men were delighted to find that Buck was an outstanding leader. He made quick, sure decisions and soon forced the rest of the team to do their best. He even succeeded in bullying the fierce Joe into shape, something Spitz had never been able to do. The team finished the run in record time and then was sold by a tearful Perrault and François to a "Scotch-half breed." Under his direction, the team pulled a heavy load of mail back down the trail they had just traveled. Along the way, Dave became ill. His condition worsened until the drivers unharnessed him so that he could run along with the team without pulling the heavy load. But, Dave's pride as a sled dog would not accept his new role. He forced the drivers to let him serve in the traces until he could no longer go on. At that point the driver had to shoot him. This was another lesson for Buck.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe Buck's qualities as the new team leader. How is he similar to Spitz? How is he different?
2. Describe the man in Buck's dreams. What is the significance of these dreams? What is London trying to show us with these dreams?
3. What is the significance of Dave's death? Does it remind you of any other work you've read or of any event from your life?

VOCABULARY

obdurate (32): stubborn
celerity (34): speed
lugubriously (38): sadly, gloomily
convulsive (39): producing upheaval, shaking

ACTIVITIES

1. Write a conversation you might have with a friend about a fight you witnessed in school. Then, using the dialect found in Chapter 4 as a model, "translate" your conversation into French Canadian dialect. Share your results out loud with a small group or your class.
2. Create a poem, rap, or song detailing the qualities of a true leader.
3. Write a journal entry telling about a time you had to get control over or lead a group. Tell what you did to take control. Had you intended to be the leader? If not, why did you take charge? How did others react to your actions?
4. On your map of the West Coast, mark Lake Laberge, Whitehouse Rapids, Across Marsh, Tagish, and Bennett. Since the dogs head for Dawson with the mail train, mark it and note the distance the dogs must travel.
5. Write a journal entry or a letter from Buck to the Judge telling about his experiences and the changes they have brought him. (36)
6. Paint a picture showing the relationship of prehistoric man to early dog.
7. Research "collective memory." Do you believe humans have this type of memory? Why or why not?

QUOTATIONS

"But it was in giving the law and making his mates live up to it that Buck excelled." (33)

"Dave had bitten through both of Sol-lek's traces, and was standing directly in front of the sled in his proper place." (39)

CHAPTER V: THE TOIL OF TRACE AND TRAIL (40–53)

After a month on the trail, Buck and the rest of the team were exhausted. But, instead of receiving the rest they needed and deserved, they were sold to greenhorns from the United States. Hal, Charles, and Mercedes were weak, inexperienced, and foolish. They did not listen to the experienced drivers but left town with the team still weak and exhausted. Early in the trip they overfed the dogs to try to strengthen them. This resulted in their having to underfeed the dogs later in the trip. Several of the new team dogs starved and the experienced dogs suffered horribly under the men's callous care. When they reached John Thornton's camp, the dogs were near the end of their stamina and the trail was deteriorating. Ignoring Thornton's advice not to go on, they prepared to head out onto treacherous ice. Buck refused to go any farther due to exhaustion and a feeling of "impending doom." Hal whipped and beat Buck nearly to death until John Thornton saved him. Watching together, Thornton and Buck witnessed the remaining members of the team and their foolish human drivers disappear into the black water as the ice gave way.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Reread London's first description of Hal and Charles. (41) What do you think will happen to them based on this initial description?
2. What was Mercedes' reaction when experienced men went through her belongs to lighten the load? What does this say about her and about her relationship with her husband and brother?
3. Compare Charles, Hal, and Mercedes to any other characters you've met in other books, movies, plays, television shows, or real life. What traits did Buck have that allowed him to adapt to the north that they lacked?
4. Why do you think London included these three characters in the book? What do they represent?
5. Why did Buck refuse to rise and lead the team? What did he have that his masters lacked?

VOCABULARY

salient (41): important
callow (41): inexperienced, immature
chaffering (41): discussion; bickering
apprehensively (41): with nervousness and fear
remonstrance (42): argument; objection
averred (44): claimed; avowed
jaded (45): dulled, satiated
voracious (46): extremely powerful
cajole (46): convince
innocuously (51): harmlessly
terse (51): concise, brief
inarticulate (52): tongue-tied

ACTIVITIES:

1. Write a poem detailing what it feels like to be "dead tired." (40)
 2. Draw a picture of Hal and Charles' camp based on the description on page 41. Draw another picture of what you imagine François and Perrault's camp would have looked like. Explain what the manner in which the camps are kept tells about the people who own them.
 3. Write a journal entry about a time you didn't listen to someone with more experience than you. What happened? What did you learn?
 4. Imagine you are one of Buck's owners: François, Perrault, the Scotch half-breed, Hal, Charles, or Mercedes. Write a letter home to a friend telling about your experience in the Yukon. Be sure your letter reflects the personality of the character you have chosen.
 5. Write a dialogue between the Insiders and the Outsiders regarding their situations.
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6. Choose one of the survivors (50) and write a monologue detailing his perspective. Be sure to maintain the dog's character throughout the monologue.
7. Research the idea of "civil disobedience." How is Buck exhibiting this principle? (52)
8. Read your local paper's obituary section, and then write an obituary for Hal, Charles, or Mercedes as it might have appeared in their hometown newspaper.

QUOTATIONS

"The two mongrels were without spirit at all; bones were the only things breakable about them." (45)

"In the nature of Artic travel, there was a reason why no fourteen dogs could not drag one sled, and that was that one sled could not carry the food for fourteen dogs." (45)

"Not only did they not know how to work dogs, but also they did not know how to work themselves." (47)

"The wonderful patience of the trail that comes to men who toil hard and suffer sore, and remain sweet of speech and kindly, did not come to these two men and the woman." (47)

"Thornton went on whittling. It was idle, he knew, to get between a fool and his folly; while two or three fools more or less would not alter the scheme of things." (51)

"They saw Charles turn and make one step to run back, and then a whole section of ice give way and dogs and humans disappear. A yawning hole was all that was to be seen. The bottom had dropped out of the trail." (53)

CHAPTER VI: FOR THE LOVE OF A MAN (53–66)

Under Thornton's loving care, Buck regained his strength. For the first time in his life, Buck experienced "love, genuine passionate love." Buck more than rewarded Thornton's care by saving his life on several occasions. The first came in Circle City when "Black" Burton attacked Thornton. Buck nearly killed Burton and was saved from death when the local jury ruled that he was only defending his master. The second time came when Thornton was thrown overboard into treacherous rapids. Thornton's partners, Pete and Hans, tied a rope around Buck and he swam to Thornton who was then pulled to safety with his arms wrapped tightly around Buck's neck. The last incident happened that winter in Dawson. Thornton foolishly bet all of his and his friends' money that Buck could break from the ice and pull a sled carrying a thousand pounds for a hundred yards. With his love for Thornton driving him, Buck was able to complete this seemingly impossible task.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did Buck's relationship with John Thornton differ from his relationships with his previous masters? How does London illustrate Buck's intense feelings for Thornton? How is this in keeping with his new, more primitive self? How does Buck balance his love for Thornton with his more primitive self?
2. What does London mean by the following quotation:

"He was older than the days he had seen and the breaths he had drawn." (57)
3. How does Buck's love for Thornton compare to Dave's love of toiling in the traces?
4. Explain the meaning of the following quotation:

[Each] day mankind and the claims of mankind slipped farther from him. Deep in the forest a call was sounding, and as often as he heard this call, mysteriously thrilling and luring, he felt compelled to turn his back upon the fire, and to plunge into the forest ... But as often as he gained the soft unbroken earth and the green shade, the love of John Thornton drew him back to the fire again. (57)

VOCABULARY

eloquent (55): expressive
nudge (55): push or prod
reverently (55): respectfully, as if something were holy
feigned (55): pretended
transient (56): not permanent; traveling
aroused (56): awakened
tenderfoot (58): one new at something
contagion (63): spreadable disease
conjunction (64): something created by magic

ACTIVITIES

1. List Buck's similarities with John Thornton.
2. Create a collage or photomontage of the pets you have owned or would like to own. Be sure to include what qualities you have that make you (or would make you) a good pet owner.
3. Research animal rescue organizations and the behaviors of abused animals. How would Buck's relationship with John Thornton fit into a behavior pattern of an abused dog?
4. Using video clips from nature programs, create a montage representing the law of the wilderness as detailed on page 56.
5. Describe how Thornton exploits Buck's love for him and why Buck continues to perform seemingly impossible, yet unnecessary tasks for his master.

QUOTATIONS

"Buck had a trick of love expression that was akin to hurt. He would often seize Thornton's hand in his mouth and close so fiercely that the flesh bore the impress of his teeth for some time afterward. And as Buck understood the oaths to be love words, so the man understood this feigned bite for a caress." (55)

"Faithfulness and devotion, things born of fire and roof, were his; yet he retained his wildness and wiliness." (56)

"He must master or be mastered; while to show mercy was a weakness. Mercy did not exist in the primordial life. It was misunderstood for fear, and such misunderstandings made for death. Kill or be killed, eat or be eaten, was the law; and this mandate, down out of the depths of Time, he obeyed." (56)

CHAPTER VII: THE SOUNDING OF THE CALL (66–81)

With the money they won betting on Buck, Thornton and his partners traveled deep into the wilderness to search for a fabled lost mine. Buck enjoyed the hunting and fishing that went along with their travels. The men found a great gold strike and toiled night and day. This left Buck to wander the wilderness until he met a timber wolf. Responding to the call, he traveled with the wolf for miles. Buck then felt the pull of his master and returned to Thornton's camp where he didn't leave his master's sight for two days before he felt the call of the wild wolf again. Soon Buck was again wandering the wilderness. He grew in strength and cunning over the months. He was at his peak when, during one of his wanderings, he attacked and killed a giant bull moose by himself. After this he felt the call of his master and returned to camp. As he approached camp, he found Nig, one of Thornton's other dogs dead from a Yeehat arrow. Hurrying into camp he found that the Yeehats had massacred Thornton, Pete, Hans, and all of the dogs. Driven into a murderous rage at the death of his master, Buck killed several of the Yeehat party until they sought refuge in the forest. With his master dead, Buck was free to fully answer the call of the wild. Joining the wolf pack, he quickly became their leader, and for many years afterward, the Yeehats would tell stories of the giant wolf-like creature that ruled a hidden valley that they were afraid to enter.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. London describes Buck's dreams of the primitive man: "The salient thing of this other world seemed fear." (68) What does he mean by this? Why would that be true? Why isn't Thornton's world filled with fear?
2. Why is Buck intent on befriending the wolf? What makes him break off their travels to return to camp? What does this say about Buck's place in the world?
3. What does Buck's fight with the bear and the moose display about his embrace of the call? Why do you think London included them in the story? What predictions can you make about Buck's future?
4. What does Buck learn from his slaughter of the Yeehats? Does this make his answering of the call harder or easier? Explain.
5. Does the book have a happy or sad ending? Explain your answer. What do you think London would say?

VOCABULARY

ramshackle (66): run-down
formidable (73): frightening; imposing
sequential (73): in order
simultaneous (73): at the same time
calamity (76): disaster
discomfited (80): ill at ease
muses (81): reflects, thinks

ACTIVITIES

1. Collect all the episodes of Buck's dreams of the "hairy man." Create your own diorama of one of these episodes that shows how the wildness of man relates to the wildness of beasts.
2. Write a description of the calling you hear in your own life. When do you hear it? How does it speak to you? What senses (sounds, smells, tastes, feelings, sights) do you connect to your call? How is that call different from the life you are living right now?
3. Create a collage showing the conflict between the allure of the wild and Buck's adoration for John Thornton.
4. With physical movement, demonstrate the difference in Buck's movements in the camp and out of the camp as described on page 73.
5. In an essay, examine how Buck's acts of violence change throughout the novel, from his fight with Spitz to the killing of the Yeehats' chief. How do the acts represent the changes that are happening to Buck throughout the novel?
6. Create your own "song of the pack" based on what you know about Buck's new wolf brothers.

QUOTATIONS

"John Thornton asked little of man or nature. He was unafraid of the wild. With a handful of salt and a rifle he could plunge into the wilderness and fare wherever he pleased and as long as he pleased." (66)

"Like giants they toiled, days flashing on the heels of days like dreams as they heaped the treasure up." (66)

"[The call] filled him with a great unrest and strange desires. It caused him to feel a vague, sweet gladness, and he was aware of wild yearnings and stirring for he knew not what." (69)

"He knew he was at last answering the call, running by the side of his wood brother toward the place from where the call surely came." (71)

"He had killed man, the noblest game of all, and he had killed in the face of the law of club and fang." (78)

"The last tie was broken. Man and the claims of man no longer bound him." (79)

QUESTIONS

1. Who is wild and who is civilized in the story? Explain your answer with specific examples.
2. Do you think Buck would be able to rejoin man at some point in his future? Explain.
3. Compare and contrast all of Buck's masters. What did he learn from each? Which lesson or lessons were most important to his survival? His happiness?
4. Critics write that London was heavily influenced by Darwin's idea of survival of the fittest. Give examples from the novel to support this position.

ACTIVITIES

1. Research Jack London's life, then research and compare it to that of contemporary author Gary Paulsen. How are their lives similar? Different? How is Gary Paulsen influenced by Jack London's work?
2. Collect poetic lines from the novel to create your own poem entitled "The Call of the Wild."
3. Write an alternative ending to the novel telling what would have happened if John Thornton had not died.
4. Look back at the epigraph (lines of poetry at the beginning of the novel). Write an essay explaining how the epigraph serves to highlight the themes and spirit of this novel. How does Buck's journey reflect these words?
5. Write an essay comparing London's tale with one or more works by Gary Paulsen.

EXTENDED LEARNING**STUDY GUIDE TO "TO BUILD A FIRE" (139–155)**

A man is hiking thirty miles through the Canadian wilderness to get to a camp where his friends are working. He has ignored the advice of more experienced men and is traveling alone with only a dog despite the -75 degree temperatures. Along the way he steps through the surface snow into a spring and wets his feet. He has to stop to build a fire to dry his footgear or his feet will freeze and he will die. He successfully gets a fire started, but has foolishly built it under a spruce tree where fuel for the fire was plentiful. As the fire gets going, his movements dump snow collected on the tree onto his fire, snuffing it out. He is panicked now knowing that even if he is able to start another fire, he will lose some of his toes to frostbite. If he cannot start another fire, he knows he will die. In his panic, he lights all of his matches at once, but is not able to start another fire. As the cold begins to affect him, he thinks about killing the dog so that he can cut it open and use its entrails for warmth. The dog, sensing his intent, runs away leaving him there to freeze to death. The man's last thoughts are of the old-timer on Sulpher Creek who had warned him about traveling alone in such cold. The man's last words are, "You were right, old hoss; you were right."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does the man's reaction to the old timer's advice tell us about him? What does his reaction foreshadow?
 2. Describe the relationship between the man and the dog. Compare and contrast this relationship with that of the usual human/pet relationship.
 3. Compare and contrast the man's interaction with and attitudes toward nature to those of the dog's interaction with and attitudes toward nature. What is London telling us about man's relationship with nature versus that of animals'?
 4. What is London's message to readers about man's relationship with nature?
-

VOCABULARY

exceedingly (139): extremely
intangible (139): indefinable
pall (139): paleness
undulations (139): wave-like motions
conjectural (140): guessing
frailty (140): weakness
speculatively (140): as if testing out a theory
protruding (140): sticking out
reiterated (142): repeated
imperceptible (148): barely noticeable

ACTIVITIES

1. Research the Yukon: its climate, geography, and people. Create a landscape (2 or 3-dimensional) that shows your understanding of the place.
2. Write about the coldest you've ever been. How does that compare with the climate of "To Build a Fire"?
3. Examine types of conflict found in literature, movies, television, and plays. Create a collage or chart to demonstrate the types of conflict found in "To Build a Fire."
4. Research wind chill and how quickly exposed skin freezes in sub-zero temperatures.
5. Write an original short story in which your main character faces danger. Show how that character's choices could free him/her from that peril.
6. Imagine that you are the best friend of the main character and have been asked to write the man's obituary for the newspaper, *The Yukon Times*. Research obituaries in a newspaper, making a list of the characteristics of obituary writing, then write your own based on your knowledge of the story.

QUOTATIONS

"It did not lead him to meditate upon his frailty as a creature of temperature, and upon man's frailty in general, able only to live within certain narrow limits of heat and cold; and from there on it did not lead him to the conjectural field of immortality and man's place in the universe." (140)

"He had forgotten to build a fire and thaw out. He chuckled at his foolishness and as he chuckled he noted the numbness creeping into the exposed fingers." (145)

"When it is seventy-five below zero, a man must not fail in his first attempt to build a fire—that is, if his feet are wet." (147)

"The blood was alive, like the dog, and like the dog it wanted to hide away and cover itself up from the fearful cold." (147)

"The dead fingers could neither touch nor clutch." (150)

"A little longer it delayed, howling under the stars that leaped and danced and shone brightly in the cold sky. Then it turned and trotted up the trail in the direction of the camp it knew, where were the other food providers and fire providers." (155)

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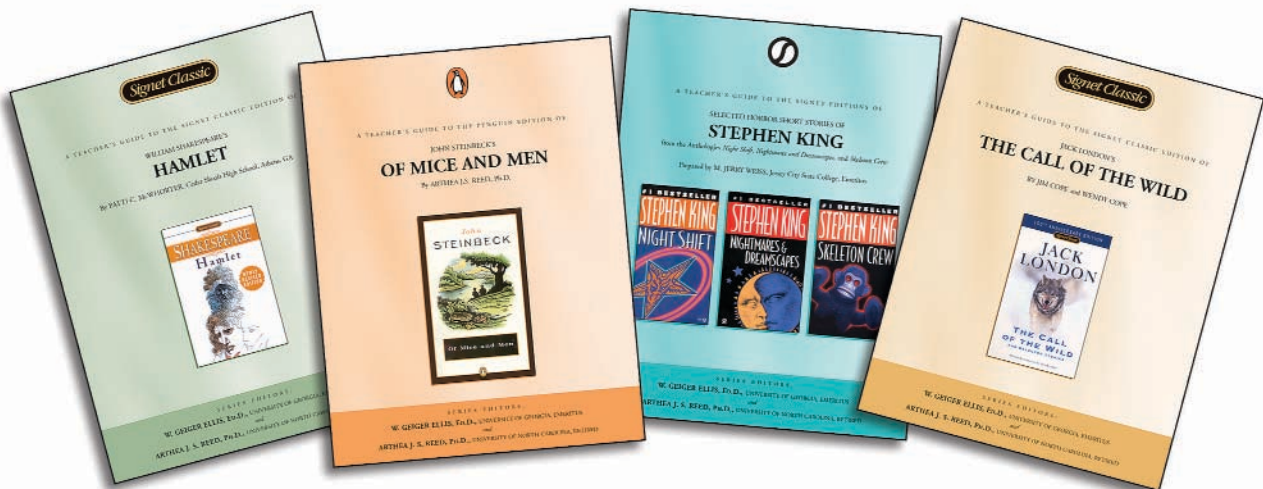
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