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The Call of the Wild
BY JACK LONDON


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All references come from the Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Press edition of *The Call of the Wild*, published 2005.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading

Historical Significance

Objective: Recognizing the historical significance of the Klondike Gold Rush to the setting of the story

Activity

In 1867, Secretary of State, William Seward persuaded the United States to purchase Alaska from Russia for \$7,200,000, making Alaska an American Territory. At the time of the purchase, it was well known that Alaska was rich in natural minerals, timber, and fisheries; the discovery of gold in 1897, though, spurred an entrance into the new land of people from all walks of life, who were willing to risk the hardships of the Alaskan wilderness for the promise, usually unfulfilled, of untold riches.

One of the people who joined the Klondike Gold Rush of 1897-1898 was Jack London. He spent a winter in the Canadian North, where, it is rumored, he learned about a mystical wolf which became his model for Buck, the main character in *The Call of the Wild*.

Read the following accounts from men and women who traveled to Alaska during this era. Complete the following chart, noting their impressions of the Alaskan wilderness, the hardships they faced, and the riches to be found.

Excerpt #1:

“I went to Alaska early last summer,” said Mr. McLeod, “with a crowd of miners who came up the Sound from San Francisco. I was out of money and work, or I doubt whether I would have accepted the offer they made me to go along as cook. We reached Cook’s Inlet June 20th, and things looked so discouraging we went back to Juneau. There we bought supplies and started for Dawson City, 750 miles away. We camped there, and I did the cooking for the boys. They did very well, but the gold fever took them farther east, and I remained to cook for another gang of miners. I made good wages, and finally had enough to start a restaurant. In two weeks I sold the place for \$5000, and went placer mining with a half-breed for a partner.

We had good luck from the start, and I would have remained but for a severe attack of inflammatory rheumatism. It would have killed me but for the nursing of my partner. He carried me most of the way to Juneau, where I got passage on a fishing schooner to ‘Frisko. I am satisfied with what I’ve got in money, and hope to get rid of my rheumatism before long. Great fortunes are being found by many men, and no one knows the extent of the gold fields that are constantly developing.” (Pg. 91)

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 1 – End of Book

Anthropomorphism

Objective: Recognizing the author's use of anthropomorphism to add interest to the story and to emphasize the importance of sled dogs to the inhabitants of the Yukon

Activity

Prospectors heading to the Yukon looking for gold usually traveled by dogsled. Horses were not used because they required great amounts of food; a dog could subsist on fish. In addition, horses became stuck in the deep snow and easily succumbed to hypothermia while dogs with thick coats were able to thrive. In the winter of 1897, during the gold rush, Jack London lived in the Klondike region of Alaska, where he witnessed the importance of the dog to the survival of mankind in this wilderness.

Some critics believe that London anthropomorphizes Buck in this story to endow him with the extraordinary qualities he saw in the great working dogs of the Yukon. One example of anthropomorphism is on page 14 in Chapter 1:

There he lay for the remainder of the weary night, nursing his wrath and wounded pride. He could not understand what it all meant. What did they want with him, these strange men? Why were they keeping him pent up in this narrow crate? He did not know why, but he felt oppressed by the vague sense of impending calamity.

In this example Buck is anthropomorphized with the human emotions of oppressiveness, pride, wrath, confusion, and presentiment.

As you read this novel, maintain the following log, noting examples of anthropomorphism in the story. In addition, Note to the Teacher the human emotion, behavior, or quality the passage gives to an animal. Try to find four examples in each chapter.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters 1 and 2

Reading for Details

Objective: Locating geographic areas important to the story

Activity

In the same way a time line is drawn, complete the following Destination Line for Chapters 1 and 2, detailing the places Buck stops at (not passes through) beginning with his kidnapping from San Jose and ending in Dyea Beach. At the top of the Destination Line, include a brief summary of Buck's experiences. The first one is done for you as an example.

DESTINATION LINE

Buck is kidnapped by Manuel				
San Diego				

1. On the following map of the United States and Canada, roughly trace the route Buck takes from his home in the Santa Clara Valley near San Jose to Dyea.
2. Save this map to be included in the survival guide which will be created in a future activity.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters 3, 4, and 5**Mood and Writing**

Objectives: Recognizing how descriptive language can be used to convey a mood and an image
Using descriptive detail to create image and mood

Activity

An author uses words to create visual images. Through the use of specific details, the writer conveys both a mood and an image. For example, in Chapter 3, London describes the hungry dogs who invade the camp:

“Never had Buck seen such dogs. It seemed as though their bones would burst through their skins. They were mere skeletons, draped loosely in draggled hides, with blazing eyes and slavered fangs. But the hunger-madness made them terrifying, irresistible. There was no opposing them.” (Pg. 28)

The mood of this passage is one of fear and tension. The image the reader visualizes from this passage is that of desperate, fierce, starving dogs.

As you read Chapters 3, 4, and 5 complete the following **Mood and Image Chart**. Find two or more passages in each chapter and Note to the Teacher on the chart what the passage conveys. Find passages that convey different moods such as happiness, contentment, fear, loneliness...

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters 6 and 7

Symbolism, Imagery, and Theme

Objective: Recognizing the thematic significance of imagery and symbols in a story

Activity

One of the themes of this novel is how Buck easily adapts to and enjoys the wild life in Alaska. He is getting in touch with his instincts. London seems to be saying that the lure of being wild, of returning to instinctive behavior, is good. Read the following excerpt from Chapter 6.

“He was older than the days he had seen and the breaths he had drawn. He linked the past with the present, and the eternity behind him throbbed through him in a mighty rhythm to which he swayed as the tides and seasons swayed. He sat by John Thornton’s fire, a broad-breasted dog, white-fanged and long-furred; but behind him were the shades of all manner of dogs, half-wolves and wild wolves, urgent and prompting, tasting the savor of the meat he ate, thirsting for the water he drank, scenting the wind with him, listening with him and telling him the sounds made by the wild life in the forest, dictating his moods, directing his actions, lying down to sleep with him when he lay down, and dreaming with him and beyond him and becoming themselves the stuff of his dreams.

So peremptorily did these shades beckon him, that 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 the beaten earth around it, and to plunge into the forest, and on and on, he knew not where or why; nor did he wonder where or why, the call sounding imperiously, deep in the forest. But as often as he gained the soft unbroken earth and the green shade, the love for John Thornton drew him back to the fire again.” (Pgs. 59-60)

Complete the diagram on the next page to show how the imagery and symbols in this passage work together to support the above theme.