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Jack London

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ISBN 978-1-60389-518-7

Item No. 201574

Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

The Call of the Wild

I Into the Primitive

1. The main character in *The Call of the Wild* is a dog named Buck. He is given the qualities of a human being by the author, Jack London. Unlike a real dog, Buck experiences all the emotions of a person. Buck lives on the rich estate of Judge Miller in Northern California in the late 1800s, a time of the discovery of gold in the Northwest. Compare some of the activities in Buck's daily life with those you think a dog living in an inner city would have.
2. Manuel is a gardener on Judge Miller's estate. He is in debt because of his gambling losses. To get money to pay these debts, Manuel steals and sells Buck to a stranger, who beats him cruelly. What punishment do you feel Manuel should be given if he is found out to have sold Buck? Give your reasons for your answer.
3. Buck has never been ill-treated in his life until now. He does not understand what is happening to him. Relate an incident in your life when something (not necessarily something bad) has happened to either you or someone you know that you could not understand.
4. It is written about Buck that, "He is beaten (he knew that); but he is not broken." Write a dialogue you might have with a friend about what that sentence means. In the dialogue, your friend may or may not agree with you.

You: I don't think the word "beaten" here means an actual beating by one of the men. I think it means...

Friend:

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14. London is saying that in the area where Buck has lived, “it is all well enough...under the law of love and fellowship, to respect private property and feelings,” but where Buck is, it is “the law of club and fang.” Explain this situation in a dialogue with a friend, giving your opinion of why this should not be so, or why you feel that the situation Buck now finds himself in cannot be changed.

You: It seems to me that the place where Buck has been taken is...

Friend:

15. As Buck descends from being a civilized California dog to a wild one in the North, he has changed. List the specific ways you think that Buck has changed from the sweet dog he is in Chapter I to how he is described in Chapter II.
16. Manuel, Judge Miller’s gardener, is mentioned again at the end of this chapter. Write a scene about what might have happened to him. It could be that he has stopped gambling on his own. Possibly, because he is so guilt-ridden, he confesses to his priest that he stole Buck. Maybe Manuel has become so fearful of being caught for stealing Buck that he has run away to Mexico. The choice of these or any other possibilities is yours.
17. Mention is made of “yellow metal in the North,” which, of course, is gold. This novel takes place during the rush to find gold in Alaska in the 1890’s. Heavy, strong dogs are needed to pull sleds to get to where the gold is because of the rough terrain. Look up “Alaskan Gold Rush” in an encyclopedia and write down ten facts about this period in our history.
18. The author brings life to the imaginary dogs in this novel by describing not only their physical characteristics, but also their personalities. Recall an animal which at some time has been part of your life or you know about. Relate a conversation with a classmate in which you tell him or her how you came to know that animal. Describe what kind of personality it has, what it looked like, and any little stories about its behavior.

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40. Weather and temperature conditions play a large part in this novel. Below-freezing, severe temperatures and snow make life very difficult for man and dog alike. In this chapter, for instance, there is a description of the beating inflicted on the dogs because the runners of the sled “had been frozen to the snow.” Write an diary entry about a time when some type of severe weather caused difficulty for you or someone you know.
41. Charles and Hal do not know how to manage a dog team. Their mistakes are many, from the worst of mistreating the dogs, to not knowing how to arrange for the food supply. Suppose you are hired to manage a dog sled team in severe weather conditions. Write a letter to your best friend telling him about the problems of running a dog sled team and how you are handling it.
42. It seems that Hal, Charles, and Mercedes are always fighting among themselves. The author writes about a variety of things they quarrel about. Their gripes range from who is doing most of the work, to who should chop the wood, Hal’s thoughts about art, and Mercedes’ gossiping. Choose one of these gripes about which they argue. In a dialogue between any two, or all three, of these characters, write how their argument begins and ends. The following are examples of beginnings you might use:

Hal: I’m sick and tired of having to lug that dog food out of the pack every night, Charles. When are you going to begin to do your share of the work around here?

Or: **Charles:** I’ve been chopping sticks for the fire every day now for a week. I don’t care if you are a woman,
Mercedes. It wouldn’t hurt you to chop a few little twigs. Why don’t *you* do it for once?

Or: **Mercedes:** You wouldn’t know a good picture from chicken scratching, Hal. Why do you always take on airs and pretenses that you know more than you do?

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63. This adventure novel has only one female character. Do you think this limits the reading enjoyment and involvement of female readers of *The Call of the Wild*? Give reasons for your answer.
64. *The Call of the Wild* has many scenes of violence in it, as has been mentioned before. Young people today are faced with the possibility of violent confrontations in their everyday lives also. What advice would you give to a friend whom you know has a secret fear of modern day violence?
65. The author, Jack London, seems to understand and have feelings for animals. Write about *your* feelings for animals and all the other non-human creatures who share the earth with us.