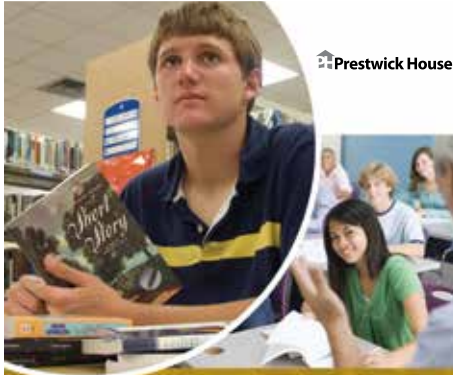




Essential Short Stories
Teaching Unit™

Sample



ESSENTIAL SHORT STORIES TEACHING UNIT
To Build a Fire

Click here
to learn more
about this
title!



Click here
to find more
Reading
Resources!



 **Prestwick House**

More from Prestwick House

Literature

Literary Touchstone Classics
Literature Teaching Units

Grammar and Writing

College and Career Readiness: Writing
Grammar for Writing

Vocabulary

Vocabulary Power Plus
Vocabulary from Latin and Greek Roots

Reading

Reading Informational Texts
Reading Literature

Essential Short Stories

Teaching Unit

To Build a Fire

by Jack London

written by Denise Arnold

Copyright © 2009 by Prestwick House Inc., P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938. 1-800-932-4593.
www.prestwickhouse.com Permission to copy this unit for classroom use is extended to purchaser for his or her
personal use. This material, in whole or part, may not be copied for resale.

ISBN 978-1-60389-462-3

Item No. 303263

To Build a Fire

Biography

John (Jack) Griffith London (1876-1916) was an American author whose writings were heavily influenced by his life experiences and reflected the new respect for science of his day. Born in San Francisco, CA, and raised in Oakland, CA, London's early years were emotionally and financially difficult. His father abandoned the family when London was an infant.

After a series of odd jobs in his teen years and a failed attempt at selling his written work, London worked on commercial fishing vessels and then headed for the Yukon during the famed Gold Rush in the late 1890s. It was there that London amassed an abundance of experience and ideas and came of age as a writer. When he returned to Oakland, he re-launched his career. He became a popular novel and magazine writer and lecturer, but he was criticized for his political and social ideas.

His lecturing often kept him away from his wife and two children. During one of his lectures, he met and fell in love with another woman. Soon after, he divorced his wife to marry her.

London was so struck with life in the Klondike that his experiences there colored much of his work, especially his fiction. His most celebrated novels, *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang* and his most famous short story, "To Build a Fire," reflect a recurring theme in his writing: man is in a constant struggle with himself and nature, guided only by his senses and little knowledge. London's writing style is stark, straightforward, and objective, echoing realism and naturalism, the literary movements of his day. In an attempt to portray life as it actually is, London depicts it as accurately as possible as a detached observer—not involving any of his own biases or emotions.

To Build a Fire

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. determine the mood of the story, and understand how London's vivid description of the setting helps to establish it.
2. discuss the following types of conflict and their importance in the story:
 - man v. himself
 - man v. nature
3. find examples of the protagonist's arrogance and ignorance, and explain how these characteristics contribute to the outcome of the story.
4. identify the point of view from which the story is told and how it influences the reader's opinion of the protagonist.
5. explain how the protagonist and the dog are used to illustrate the juxtaposition between instinct and knowledge.
6. Follow London's use of repetition of the following to highlight the motifs of the story:
 - The extreme cold
 - numbness of the man's limbs
 - the old-timer on Sulfur Creek
7. describe the relationship between the protagonist and the dog.
8. cite examples of the following literary terms and explain their meanings:
 - foreshadowing
 - irony
 - metaphor
 - personification
 - simile
9. identify and discuss the themes and motifs of the story.
10. recognize elements of naturalism "To Build a Fire."

To Build a Fire

Study Guide

1. The story is set in the Klondike region of the Yukon Territory. How does London describe it?

2. How is the day described, and what mood is set by this description?

3. The man's conflict with nature is demonstrated by the challenges and obstacles he encounters and his responses to them. What are some examples of this conflict?

4. The story is told from a third-person omniscient point of view, which gives the reader insight into the characteristics and thoughts of both the man and the dog. The man is revealed to be shallow, overconfident, arrogant, and ignorant. Cite some examples of the narrator's comments that illustrate these traits.

5. How does London use the man and the dog to illustrate the juxtaposition between instinct and knowledge?
