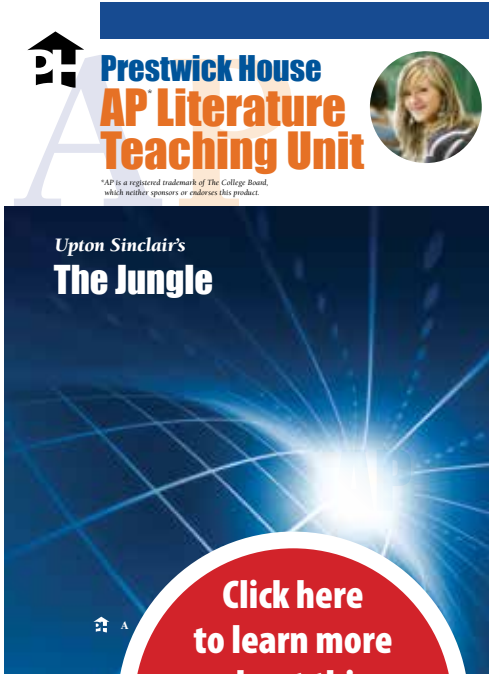




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Teaching Unit

The Jungle

by Upton Sinclair

written by Kay Hampson



Prestwick House

Item No. 303457

The Jungle

Objectives

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

1. identify and interpret the metaphors and similes;
2. explain how the motif of corruption contributes to the development of the theme;
3. examine the symbolism of Packingtown and the stockyards;
4. examine the major themes:
 - capitalism is an evil system fraught with corruption
 - Socialism can overcome the evils of capitalism
 - outside forces beyond one's control determine one's life
5. investigate the various notions of Socialism;
6. investigate the various notions of capitalism;
7. identify the internal changes that take place in Jurgis;
8. understand the difference between muckraking and yellow journalism ;
9. find instances of Sinclair's life reflected in his writing.
10. analyze the structure of the plot and identify examples of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution;
11. analyze Sinclair's mission in writing *The Jungle*;
12. analyze the use and evaluate the effectiveness of allusions to *Pilgrim's Progress*;
13. analyze the author's choice of setting and characters;
14. identify the structural and thematic purposes of the characters;
15. examine instances of social Darwinism in the novel;
16. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition Exam;

Background Lecture

UPTON BEALL SINCLAIR, JR. (1878 – 1968)

Born in Baltimore, Maryland, on September 20, 1878, to Upton Beall Sinclair and Priscilla Harden.

Priscilla's father was a wealthy businessman involved with the Western Maryland Railroad. Upton, Sr.'s, father came from a distinguished line of naval officers, but he himself lacked drive. He was a clothing salesman for a time and then became a seller of liquors.

Upton Beall Sinclair became an alcoholic and moved his wife, Priscilla Harden, and his son to New York City in 1888 to escape the presence of respectable family. While Upton, Jr., was young, the family subsisted in a series of boardinghouses.

Upton Jr., often spent time with his very wealthy grandparents.

Sinclair was a religious boy and a lover of literature. His heroes were Jesus Christ and Percy Bysshe Shelley. One of his favorite books was *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan.

He was an avid learner and, at fourteen years old, entered the New York City College.

By seventeen, Sinclair had published his first story in a national magazine and was writing for newspapers and magazines. He earned enough money to be on his own, about \$40.00 per week.

Sinclair graduated from college in time to take part in the Spanish–American War. He was a patriotic young American and quite proud of his naval heritage.

Sinclair was committed to his being a virgin when he finally married. He threw himself into his interests: studies, violin, writing. Religion was an important factor in his decisions, but the rational powers of analysis and his belief that he was quite capable of spiritual insight kept him from embracing God as preached by the Church.

Henry David Thoreau, one of Sinclair's favorite writers, was a transcendentalist. Thoreau had believed that an ideal spiritual state transcended the physical realm, and that one achieved insight by personal intuition rather than religious doctrine. Sinclair embraced this ideal; it steered the course of his writing.

Sinclair's romance with Meta Fuller, a young girl he had known since he was thirteen, lasted throughout the summer of 1900. Meta's rich southern heritage resembled Sinclair's and, like Sinclair, she had spent much of her life residing in a boardinghouse. Although Sinclair was falling in love, he warned Meta that, as a true artist, he must be a monomaniac, having obsessive zeal for only a single thing: his writing. He said, "I do not believe I am a kind man. I have no patience with human hearts, their suffering and their weakness. There is only one thing that I value and that is my fidelity to my ideal." Later he said, "God made me for an artist and not for a lover!" If he were to marry, he felt it would be to perfect the woman, not to love her.

The use of metaphors is prevalent. Capitalism is compared to a beast that preys upon the innocent; animals and their situations in the slaughterhouse are representative of human conditions, and *vice versa*, stockyard employees and their conditions are likened to the animals. Just as the title suggests the competitive nature of capitalism, society turns into a “jungle” where social Darwinism prevails. Sinclair employs the use of many similes throughout the book. The majority relate to animals or animal behavior in some form or fashion.

The main themes of *The Jungle* can be summed up in two statements: Capitalism is an evil system that abuses and destroys people. Socialism can overcome the evils of capitalism. While these two are the main themes, there are several minor themes: One cannot control the outside forces of life; Willingness to work is not always enough; The American Dream is hollow.

CHARACTER LIST

Jurgis Rudkus – a Lithuanian immigrant, strong physically and determined mentally; he and his fiancé’s family come to America believing in the American dream of self-betterment, but his physical stature and mental fortitude slowly erode because of the abuses of capitalism.

Ona Lukoszaite – Teta Elzbieta’s stepdaughter and Jurgis’s wife; physically and mentally frail, she is quickly destroyed by life in Packingtown. Her boss rapes her, but she does not tell Jurgis. It is what she must endure for the sake of her family.

Teta Elzbieta Lukoszaite – Ona’s stepmother and the mother of six others; although she endures one tragedy after another, her strong will carries her onward. She symbolizes the redemptive power of family.

Marija Berczynskas – Ona’s cousin; Marija travels to America to escape her unkind employer. She is strong and capable and represents the spirit of defiance.

Dede Antanas Rudkus – Jurgis’s proud father; because of his advancing age, Dede is unable to find employment. He agrees to pay an employer a third of his paycheck for the privilege of working in an environment that will eventually kill him.

Phil Connor – Ona’s boss; Connor is responsible for sexually harassing Ona. With connections in politics, business, and organized crime, he singlehandedly has the power to destroy everything in Jurgis’s life.

Antanas Rudkus – son of Jurgis and Ona; named after the fictional character Ernest Poole had once written about, the young child dies after falling into a large mud puddle. His death symbolizes the death of hope in Jurgis’ life.

Grandmother Majauskiene – a Socialist and Lithuanian neighbor who has watched many families fall prey to the deplorable labor practices in Packingtown.

Stanislovas, Kotrina, Vilimas, Nikalojus, Juozapas, Kristoforas – Elzbieta's children; they are examples of the abuses to children during the industrial age. Each meets a premature death or succumbs to some evil of working at a young age.

Jokubas Szedvilas – a Lithuanian who owns a delicatessen and introduces Jurgis and his family to Packingtown; he helps them financially on a few occasions.

Tamoszius Kuszleika – a violinist and a potential suitor for Marija; the marriage, however, never takes place. Tamoszius's violin playing represents the bridge between the old world and the new world. Very early in the story, Sinclair writes: "His notes are never true, and his fiddle buzzes on the low ones and squeaks and scratches on the high; but these things they heed no more than they heed the dirt and noise and squalor about them—it is out of this material that they have to build their lives, with it that they have to utter their souls. And this is their utterance; merry and boisterous, or mournful and wailing, or passionate and rebellious, this music is their music, music of home."

Mike Scully – the Democratic boss of Packingtown, who is indirectly connected with the deaths of both Ona and Antanas; Jurgis, not knowing of his connection, considers Scully to be a powerful friend and ally.

Buck Holloran and Bush Harper – members of Scully's political machine.

Tommy Hinds – the hotelkeeper and Jurgis's final boss; he helps to organize the state's Socialist Party, while his hotel provides the stage for many Socialist discourses.

Lucas – a traveling speaker, who debates and defines Socialism at a dinner with Jurgis in attendance; Sinclair uses Lucas to vocalize his Socialist views.

Nicholas Schliemann – another voice that Sinclair uses to assert that Socialism is the cure for the evils of capitalism.

The Jungle

Chapter I

1. Give a detailed description of the opening setting.

2. Describe the bride and groom.

3. The author says of the music “It stretches out its arms to them...” What rhetorical device does he employ and why?

4. What, if any, significance is there with “five” roses and “eleven” leaves?

5. Who is Tamoszius Kuszleika? What is “special” about him?

6. Why is the *veselija* so important to the community?

Chapter X

1. What are the problems associated with each season?

2. How does Sinclair use authorial voice?

3. What injustices does Marija suffer first in her old job and then in her new?

4. Describe Ona's predicament. What does the statement "...Ona would not have stayed a day, but for starvation..." foreshadow?

Chapter XX

1. After returning to sobriety, what is Jurgis’s response to Ona’s death?

2. In the sentence “Marija said not a word to Jurgis; he crept in like a whipped cur, and went and sat down by the body,” what does the word cur mean?

3. What two primitive creatures is Elzbieta compared to? How do they aptly describe her?

4. How does Elzbieta help Jurgis begin to come out of his despair?

5. Why is Jurgis unable to get work? What is blacklisting?

6. What is deceptive about the advertisements for job openings?

Chapter XXX

1. What might Elzbieta symbolize?

2. Why good luck finally befalls Jurgis?

3. Why does Sinclair choose this setting?

4. Jurgis's securing of a job seems contradictory to Socialist ideals. Why?

5. How does Sinclair convince the reader that Tommy Hinds, the Socialist, is a good man?

6. To what does Hinds attribute his rheumatism and the death of his brother?
