

Call of the Wild

Grades 7-8

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Illustrated by Laurie Stevens**

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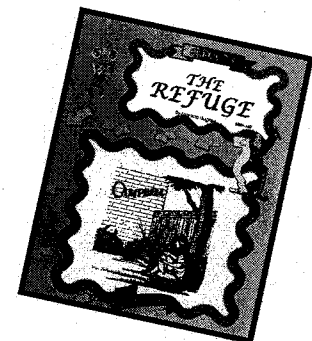
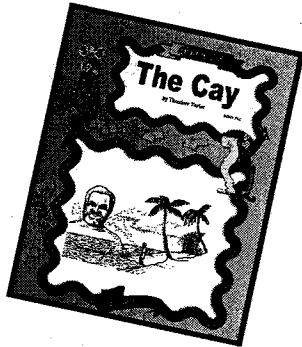
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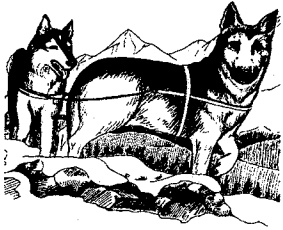
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The Call of the Wild

By Jack London

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The Call of the Wild

By Jack London

Expectations

1. To introduce students to the literary genre of the author Jack London.
2. To demonstrate the bond, respect and friendship that can be obtained between a man and an animal.
3. To show how one can endure and overcome cruel and difficult adversities in one's life.
4. To make students more aware of the climate, location and geographical aspects of the Yukon, a territory found in Canada.
5. To acquaint students with the hardships, dangers met and lifestyles of people during the Gold Rush on the Klondike River in the Yukon.

Synopsis of the Story

The Call of the Wild

"The Call of the Wild" follows the life of a domestic dog who is taken from his comfortable home to become a sled dog in the wilds of the Yukon Territory. This is the time of the Klondike Gold Rush and heavy, strong dogs are in demand. Buck has reigned supreme at Judge Miller's place in Santa Clara Valley for the past four years. His father was a St. Bernard, his mother a Scotch Shepherd. At 140 pounds, Buck is fit from hunting and cold-tubbing races. Manuel, Judge Miller's gardener, is short of money, so he dog-naps Buck and sells him. Now Buck's life has changed forever. He finds himself on a train bound for San Francisco where the "dog-breaker" clubs him into submission. This vicious treatment introduces Buck to "the reign of primitive law". Buck now has a different perspective on life and the "latent cunning of his nature" is aroused. He recognizes that "a man with a club was a lawgiver, a master to be obeyed, but not necessarily conciliated." Buck is put aboard the Narwhal bound for the Klondike. En route he is purchased by a French Canadian, Perrault. On arrival, he has his first puzzling experience with snow.

Buck now begins his training as a sled dog and quickly learns to meet the expectations of his team. He learns how to survive through cunning, opportunism and "an internal and external economy." Buck soon adapts to the law of club and fang and becomes skilled at the wolf-like manner of fighting. This harsh environment brings to life the "wilder instincts" within him and Buck begins his response to the "call of the wild".



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Buck suffers a series of hardships as a sled dog at the mercy of both fair and cruel masters. Finally, he is rescued from near death by John Thornton, a man Buck comes to love with a passionate loyalty. Buck proves his love for Thornton again and again as they share a number of intense experiences. But, even though he is happy with his life with Thornton, he never forgets his "wilder nature" and is beckoned by a parallel world of wolves and the collective memories of his ancestors.

When Thornton is killed by the Yeehats, the final tie to a domestic existence is broken and Buck's answer to the "Call" becomes complete. Buck becomes the feared "ghost dog" of the valley and assumes his rightful role as leader of the wolf pack.

Author Biography

Jack London

Jack London was not only a writer, he was also an adventurer. He was born in San Francisco in 1876, but grew up in Oakland, California. His family was very poor and when he was a child he helped support them by selling newspapers. At seventeen, he went to sea as a sailor. When he returned he entered a writing contest. His experiences at sea and his talent for writing vivid descriptions enabled him to win first prize. This gave him the confidence to continue writing.

For the next few years he traveled around the United States and Canada. It was at this point that London realized he did not have a direction in his life. So he went back to school and completed his high school courses and one year at the University of California.

When he was twenty-one he spent a year in the Klondike, searching for gold and good stories. It was this experience that provided the motivation for writing "The Call of the Wild" and "White Fang".

During the war between Japan and Russia, London was asked to become a war correspondent. He also reported on the activities of the bandit, Pancho Villa in Mexico. His keen observation skills were of value in both non-fictional and fictional writing.

London never lost his love of the sea, and in 1906 he and his wife sailed around the world in a schooner that he had designed himself. When he returned, he continued writing. Some of the books he wrote were about himself, such as "Martin Eden"; others were about the struggles of the poor, something he knew about firsthand, such as "Iron Heel". His books have been translated into many different languages. In his lifetime he wrote forty-eight books. He died in 1916 at the age of forty.



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Teacher Planning Guide

1. The Chapter Analysis Questions may be completed as a whole or small group activity. Alternatively, you may wish to have students read and work on the Chapter Questions and follow-up activities at their own pace.
2. Answers to the Chapter Questions may be compiled into a student response booklet along with the follow up activities for evaluation.
3. Distribute copies of the Chapter Summary Chart to students and instruct them that they are to complete the chart in point form as they read each chapter under the headings Chapter __, Characters (we meet in this chapter), Events (in order), and the results of these Events.
4. Set up a display area for other books by Jack London, such as "White Fang" and "Sea Wolf". Have students research further details of his biography and discuss what motive he might have gained from his experiences to write "Call of the Wild".
5. Enlist the help of the teacher-librarian to provide materials on the Klondike Gold Rush, Yukon Territory, wolves, moose, Early Man (prehistoric), Native Peoples of the Yukon and the history of the domestication of dogs. Each of these could provide possible research topics for group or independent research.
6. Display a map of the Yukon and use markers, such as small flags to trace the routes Buck covered as a sled dog and later in his adventures with Thornton.
7. Invite a dog trainer or someone who has experience with sled dogs to make a presentation to the class.
8. If this unit is taught in the winter, have a snow fest, with "human" sled races.
9. Show your class a video on dog sled racing, the Yukon, the History of the Klondike Gold Rush or life in Canada at this time.
10. Discuss the topics "instincts" and "emotions". List human and "other animal" instincts and emotions. Compare the positive and negative consequences of these two elements in the story.
11. Encourage a healthy respect for nature. Brainstorm with students and list the natural beauties and dangers in the area where you live.
12. To develop vocabulary in a cooperative learning activity, have small groups of students work on a particular chapter list. Students will research the definition of each word and then illustrate its meaning in a sentence. These may be recorded in chart form and displayed for class reference.