



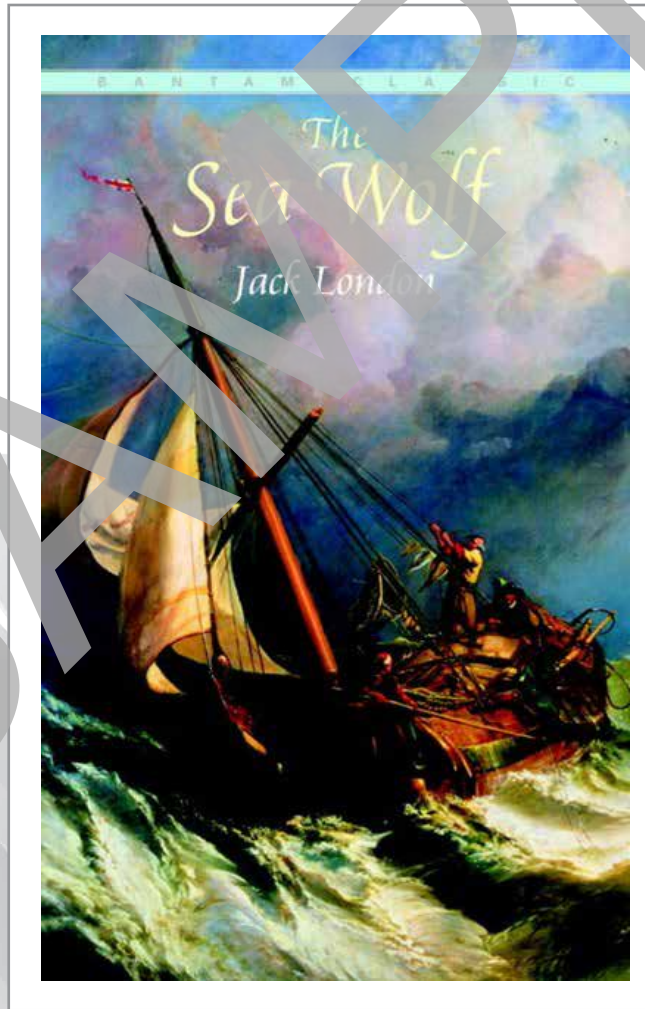
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Sea Wolf

Jack London



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Sea Wolf

Jack London

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Table of Contents

Summary	3
About the Author	3
Characters	4
Initiating Activities.....	4
Vocabulary Activities.....	6
Six Sections	15
Each section contains: Summary, Vocabulary, Discussion Questions, and Supplementary Activities	
Post-reading Discussion Questions	29
Post-reading Extension Activities.....	30
Assessment.....	31
Scoring Rubric.....	32
Glossary.....	33

Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Analysis, evaluation,
prediction, research,
inference

Comprehension

Literary terms and
application

Writing

Description,
compare/contrast, journal,
letter, eulogy, newspaper
article, ending

Listening/Speaking

Personal experience, debate,
discussion, oral presentation

Across the Curriculum

Geography, art, music,
biology, history

Skills

Tying sea knots

Genre: fiction; adventure

Setting: a ship named *Ghost*; the Pacific Ocean

Point of View: first-person participant

Themes: tyranny, inhumanity, savagery, bravery, loyalty, fear as a means of control, good vs. evil, the value of life, survival

Conflict: person vs. person, person vs. nature

Tone: exciting, adventurous, brutal

Date of First Publication: 1904

Summary

The Sea Wolf is an exciting adventure about two vastly different men applying their life values as they try to survive the dangers of the sea. Humphrey Van Weyden, a gentleman living off his father's fortune, is picked up after a ferry-boat accident by Wolf Larsen, the captain of the seal-hunting vessel the *Ghost*. Instead of returning Van Weyden to shore, Larsen takes him on his sea adventure as a worker. Van Weyden experiences the horrors of being under Larsen's command. Wolf Larsen controls his ship with fear and brutality. At his whim, Larsen beats and punishes the men. Some try to escape, but few succeed. Van Weyden eventually becomes Larsen's mate. The *Ghost* crew picks up a woman, Maud Brewster, and several men, adrift from another ship. Van Weyden views himself as the lady's protector. When Wolf Larsen finally attacks Maud, she and Van Weyden escape, ending up on a barren island. The *Ghost* eventually drifts to the island itself with all the men having deserted to Death Larsen's (Wolf's brother's) ship. Wolf Larsen, dying of a brain tumor, is a defiant, cruel man even until the end. Van Weyden and Miss Brewster nurse Larsen until he dies and then bury him at sea. The two have fallen in love over the course of their experiences and are finally rescued.

About the Author

Personal: Jack London was born John Griffith Chaney in 1876. His father left soon after his son's birth, and London's mother, Flora Wellman, remarried a widower, John London. His early life consisted of moving from place to place in California. His schooling was erratic, but he eventually graduated from high school and attended college for a short time. London became a voracious reader at the Oakland Public Library, studying philosophers such as Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, and Thomas Huxley. Eventually he became a member of the Socialist Party and was active in various social movements. As a teenager, London began working on the waterfront and always loved the sea, upon which he spent years sailing in later life. His wanderlust eventually took him as far away as Alaska during the Gold Rush and to the Hawaiian Islands. His many jobs, from oyster pirate to factory worker to prospector, provided a rich pool of experience from which to draw ideas. Jack London married twice and had three daughters; one, Joy, lived only 38 hours. His wealth enabled him to buy a 1,400-acre ranch in California where he became an expert rancher and agriculturalist. His life, although exciting, was plagued by illness, particularly kidney disease. At only 40 years old, Jack London died of uremic poisoning.

Professional: As one of the most prolific writers of late nineteenth-century America, Jack London is still read and loved today. London honed his skill with a strict schedule of writing at least 1,000 words a day. Hundreds of letters, essays, short stories, articles, and books flowed from his pen during his short career as a writer. London began writing with the intention of making a career of it after winning a descriptive essay contest at age 17. In his journalism days, he created detailed eyewitness accounts, such as one describing the great San Francisco earthquake. Based on his vagabond life and adventures, he wrote popular books such as *The Call of the Wild* (1903), *The Sea Wolf* (1904), and *White Fang* (1906). Hundreds of school children read his short stories, such as “To Build a Fire” and “Love of Life,” each year. Because London offered fresh content, brilliant style, and intriguing stories, he became one of the highest paid authors and popular figures of his day. His works are read in many languages around the world. London lived to see some of his books made into movies. Some critics have proclaimed him the greatest American writer. Whether this is true or not, many of his writings were newly published after his untimely death in 1916.

Characters

Humphrey Van Weyden: refined and educated 35-year-old who is scooped out of the sea by Captain Larsen’s crews; made to work as a manual laborer onboard the *Ghost*

Wolf Larsen: tyrannical captain of the *Ghost* who eventually gets a brain disease and dies

Johnson: one of the crewmembers who hates Larsen and is badly beaten, then killed at sea

Thomas Mugridge: the cook and bitter enemy of Larsen and Van Weyden

Johansen: the mate who mysteriously disappears from the ship

George Leach: young man brought onboard to be the cabin-boy who eventually becomes a boat-puller; his hatred for Larsen grows until he attempts murder

Harrison, Standish, Latimer, Smoke, Nilson, Holyoak, Williams, Henderson, Kelly, Kerfoot, Oofy-Oofy, Louis, Parsons, Jock Horner, Black: hunters, boat-pullers, and boat-steerers onboard the *Ghost*

Maud Brewster: refined young woman rescued by the *Ghost* crew; Humphrey Van Weyden falls in love with her and tries to protect and save her from Captain Larsen

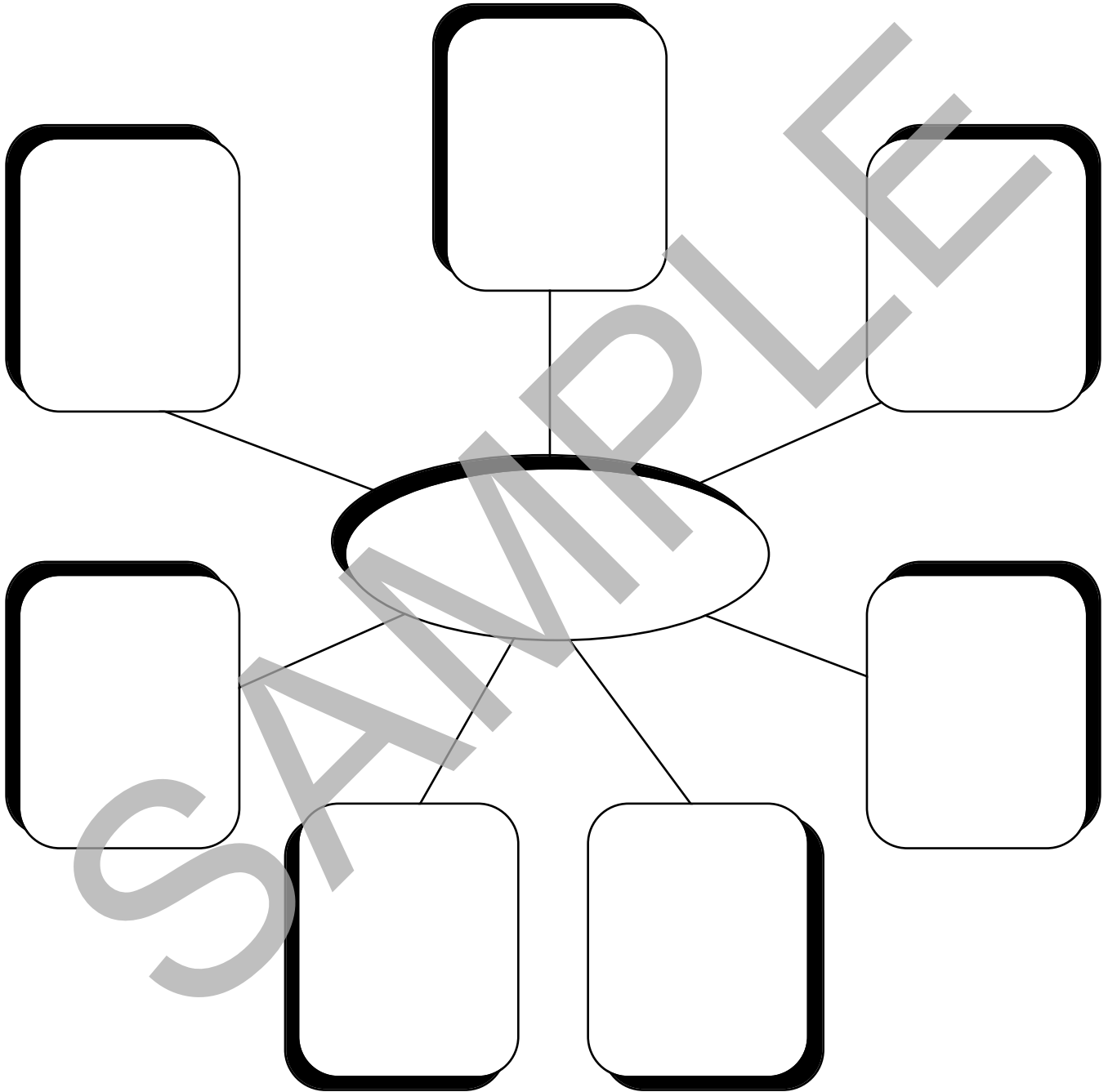
Wainwright and two unnamed men: men taken from the boat with Maud Brewster; Larsen makes them seamen on the *Ghost*; all escape

Initiating Activities

1. **Brainstorming:** After students have completed the Attribute Web on page 7 of this guide, lead a discussion about what London’s occupations would contribute to his writing.
2. **Author’s Style:** Read aloud one of London’s Yukon stories, either “To Build a Fire” or “Love of Life,” or his description of the San Francisco earthquake (http://www.jacklondons.net/Journalism/san_francisco_earthquake.html; London’s Web site; active at time of publication). Engage students in a discussion of London’s writing style.
3. **Vocabulary:** Have students begin a nautical dictionary with these terms from Chapter I, then continue adding to it throughout the reading of the novel: pilot, captain, glass house, pilot-house (p. 1); bell-buoy, ferry-boat, scow schooner (p. 2); steam siren, steam schooner (p. 3); amidships, heeled over (p. 4); tackles, plugs, capsized (p. 6).

Attribute Web

Directions: Write Wolf Larsen in the oval. In each box, write the name of a character and one of Larsen's rash acts toward that person.



“imminent danger of being swamped by the whitecaps”; everything wet; stiff with aching muscles; sleet, snow-squalls, drizzling rain, fog, sleeplessness, days and nights of storm, pp. 179–188)

- Prediction:** What will happen to Van Weyden and Miss Brewster? Will Wolf Larsen reappear?

Supplementary Activities

- Allusion: Explain the following allusions.
 - “...a male Circe and these his swine...” (p. 168)
 - Milton’s Lucifer (p. 172)
 - “Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven” (p. 173).
 - “...as a cloud, a pillar of fire...” (p. 180)
 - “...a Titan’s buffets” (p. 188)
 - Prometheus (p. 193)
- Research: Using print or Internet resources, research seals, seal life, and seal habitats.
- Sea Knowledge/Geography: Discover the wind and weather patterns from Alaska to San Francisco. Draw a map showing the regular wind patterns.
- Literature: Read Nordhoff and Hall’s *Men Against the Sea*, one novel of a trilogy about the men from the *Bounty*.
- Writing: Summarize Van Weyden and Miss Brewster’s seal hunt in a brief essay.
- Critical Thinking: Compare and contrast Miss Brewster and Van Weyden’s life philosophies with Larsen’s life philosophy using the T-Chart on page 11 of this guide.

Vocabulary

clamorous (204)
 garrulously (206)
 profundity (206)
 analogous (208)
 impotent (208)
 inscrutably (209)
 ruse (211)
 solicitude (213)
 apprehension (214)
 indomitable (215)
 uncanny (216)
 philanthropist (220)
 tremulous (230)
 inexplicable (230)
 feigning (233)
 dissolution (234)
 retribution (237)
 insentient (238)
 intermittent (239)
 mausoleum (243)
 sceptical (244)
 infinite (251)

Chapters XXXI–XXXIX, pp. 203–252

After putting a sealskin roof on the hut, Van Weyden and Miss Brewster build a room to store seal meat for the winter and stock it. True to Miss Brewster’s prediction that “something is coming,” Van Weyden discovers the *Ghost* at the beach with only a weakened Wolf Larsen inside. Van Weyden decides to repair the ship in order to get away from the island, but Larsen sabotages his work. Thinking Larsen is deathly ill, Van Weyden tries to help him, but Larsen catches him in his iron grip for a few moments. Gradually, Larsen loses all ability to hear, speak, or move as Van Weyden continues repairing the ship. Larsen dies, and Van Weyden and Miss Brewster, very much in love, are rescued by a steamship.

Discussion Questions

- How does London’s narrative change in this last section? (*There is minimal violence. London describes in more detail Van Weyden’s shipbuilding efforts. He creates sympathy for Larsen through Miss Brewster and his terrible death and adds more extreme physical labor for both main characters. The atmosphere is less intense, the conflicts are not as violent, and finally, there is a happy ending. pp. 202–252*)
- What does the way Captain Larsen treats Van Weyden tell about Larsen’s character even when he is dying? Give examples.