

Individual Learning Packet

**Teaching Unit**

**The Call of the Wild**

by Jack London

Copyright © 1990 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. Revised August, 2005.

**ISBN 978-1-60389-724-2**

Item No. 200917

# The Call of the Wild

## Introductory Lecture

Jack London (1876 – 1916) had little formal education but was a self-educated man who is said to have read up to nineteen hours a day. He lived an adventurous life, and as a young man, he went to the Yukon and experienced the harshness of the Arctic first-hand.

This novel is sometimes pointed out as an example of that form of naturalism, which adopted and emphasized Darwin's idea of "the survival of the fittest." As you read this novel, see if you spot where this concept appears.

Note: All quotations and page references come from the Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Press edition of *The Call of the Wild*, published 2005.

# The Call of the Wild

## Objectives

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

1. write an essay that explains the significance of the title and show why the title represents the story's main theme.
2. explain why the novel is a good example of naturalistic writing.
3. define the following terms and cite examples from the story:
  - personification
  - naturalism
  - symbolism
  - point of view
  - foreshadowing
  - anthropomorphism
  - metaphor
  - hyperbole
  - narrator
  - irony
  - episodic novel
4. draw inferences about plot and characters.
5. list the major incidents in the plot and explain why it is considered episodic.
6. comment on Jack London's style of writing.
7. discuss the themes below that appear in the story:
  - Life in the Yukon is a constant struggle for survival and dominance.
  - In some creatures, like Buck, the primitive lies just below the surface and, given the right conditions, will easily come forth.
  - Life is a struggle against a harsh environment.
  - The call (both a "lure" and a "sound") of wilderness represents adventure, strength, hardship, and Buck himself.
8. understand and find examples of anthropomorphism in general, and as it applies to Buck.

# The Call of the Wild

## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. There are two basic settings in this story, the Southland and the Northland. Show how a contrast of these two settings illustrates the theme of a return to and preference for the primitive.
2. Trace throughout the novel and cite those comments and incidents that support the following thesis: A major theme in *The Call of the Wild* is that a domesticated creature can be drawn back to its primitive roots.
3. Show how this novel illustrates and promotes Darwin's theory of "the survival of the fittest," and indicate how this theory relates to the literary movement known as "naturalism."
4. Write a page on the symbolism found in this novel. Be sure to mention the four major symbols and what they symbolize.
5. Write a paragraph or two on the use of foreshadowing in this novel.
6. Define the following terms and illustrate them by citing examples from the story:
  - personification
  - naturalism
  - symbolism
  - anthropomorphism
  - foreshadowing
  - inference
  - metaphor
  - hyperbole
  - narrator
  - irony
  - episodic novel
7. Comment on the following ideas:
  - The survival of the fittest is still operating in our society.
  - Within every creature, including man, there are still primitive urges that come to the surface.
  - It is both human and animal nature to seek power and dominance over others.
8. Describe Jack London's style of writing.

# The Call of the Wild

## Chapter One: Into the Primitive

### Vocabulary

**boded ill** – was a sign of bad things in the future  
**demesne** – an area under one’s control; domain  
**egotistical** – thinking only of one’s self  
**impending calamity** – coming disaster  
**insular** – cut off from, isolated  
**intimated** – hinted, suggested  
**lacerated** – cut, torn  
**metamorphosed** – changed into  
**morose** – sad  
**obscure** – hidden  
**populous** – population, number  
**primitive** – an early stage; simple; crude  
**progeny** – children  
**recesses** – alcoves, hiding places  
**unwonted** – unusual  
**veranda** – a wide porch  
**weazened** – wrinkled with age

1. From whose perspective is part of this chapter told? Why is this view point a little unusual?

---

---

---

---

2. In what type of narration is the story told?

---

---

---

---

3. What has created the demand for large, strong dogs?

---

---

---

---

9. Buck learns how to work in the harness from Dave and Sol-leks, and he learns much by observing others, but what does the narrator say he learned from instinct?

---

---

---

---

---

10. On page 24 the narrator says, “This first theft marked Buck as fit to survive in the hostile Northland environment.” What point is London making in the quotation?

---

---

---

---

---

11. What does London mean when he says, “His development (or retrogression) was rapid”? (Pg. 24)

---

---

---

---

---

12. What is implied about Buck in the last paragraph of this story? Relate it to the title.

---

---

---

---

---

## Chapter Five: The Toil of Trace and Trail

### Vocabulary

**abide** – to remain, stay  
**amenities** – courteous acts of polite behavior  
**averred** – stated positively  
**cajole** – coax  
**callowness** – immaturity  
**congested** – crowded  
**copious** – full, plenty  
**evinced** – showed  
**formidable** – inspiring fear, dread, or alarm  
**importuned** – pleaded, urged  
**inevitable** – not capable of being avoided or prevented  
**innocuously** – harmlessly, innocently  
**manifestly** – completely  
**perambulating** – walking about  
**Q.E.D. (Latin)** – therefore  
**remonstrance** – a strong objection  
**salient** – standing out; attracting attention  
**slipshod** – poorly maintained  
**slovenly** – sloppily  
**superfluous** – unnecessary; beyond what is required  
**terse** – short, brief  
**voracious** – greedy  
**zeal** – eagerness and enthusiasm

1. Identify the literary term in the following quotation:

“The congested mail was taking on Alpine proportions.” (Pg. 46)

---

---

---

---

---

---