

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

The Call of the Wild

by Jack London

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I Into the Primitive

1. The main character in *The Call of the Wild* is a dog named Buck. He is given the qualities of a human being by the author, Jack London. Unlike a real dog, Buck experiences all the emotions of a person. Buck lives on the rich estate of Judge Miller in Northern California in the late 1800s, a time of the discovery of gold in the Northwest. Compare some of the activities in Buck's daily life with those you think a dog living in an inner city would have.
2. Manuel is a gardener on Judge Miller's estate. He is in debt because of his gambling losses. To get money to pay these debts, Manuel steals and sells Buck to a stranger, who beats him cruelly. What punishment do you feel Manuel should be given if he is found out to have sold Buck? Give your reasons for your answer.
3. Buck has never been ill-treated in his life until now. He does not understand what is happening to him. Relate an incident in your life when something (not necessarily something bad) has happened to either you or someone you know that you could not understand.
4. It is written about Buck that, "He is beaten (he knew that); but he is not broken." Write a dialogue you might have with a friend about what that sentence means. In the dialogue, your friend may or may not agree with you.

You: I don't think the word "beaten" here means an actual beating by one of the men. I think it means...

Friend:

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5. Buck is finally sold to Perrault, a man representing the Canadian government. Buck is then put on a ship, the Narwhal. He is laughed at by the crew when he licks up snow to try to understand what it is. Being publicly laughed at is embarrassing and Buck feels ashamed. Recall an incident of feeling publicly embarrassed that you remember from real life, or which has remained in your memory from something you have seen in the media.
6. The author of *The Call of the Wild* makes it seem that Buck, though a dog, is human. He is said to “trust in men he knew,” and “Buck wondered where they went,” which are two things a dog cannot really do. Other books, films, and television programs have also had animals as central characters who are filled with human qualities. Recall one of these animal characters with which you are familiar, and write an article about it for an imaginary school newspaper.
7. The actions of the men who do not give Buck food or water, who choke and beat him, are unspeakably cruel. Suppose the men have been found guilty of cruelty to an animal in court. And suppose you are the judge who is handing down their sentences. What sentence would you give them? What would you say to these men about their cruel acts to a helpless creature?
8. By the end of this chapter, it seems that Buck will never again see his home in the Santa Clara Valley. Do you think his owner, Judge Miller, is missing him? Write an advertisement Judge Miller might have placed in a newspaper saying that his dog is missing. Describe Buck as Judge Miller would have and offer a reward for Buck’s safe return.
9. We read a description of how Buck and some other dogs are all on deck together. All things considered, do you feel that Buck finds comfort in being with other dogs on the ship? Give reasons for your answer.

II The Law of Club and Fang

10. London writes that, “these dogs and men are not town dogs and men. They are savages, all of them...” A civilized life where law prevailed is what Buck experienced while living with Judge Miller. He is now, to his shock and surprise, thrown among men who respect no laws. The animals who live among the men are wild also, and fighting to the death is a way of life. Suppose you are a newly appointed sheriff to the area where Buck and the men are. Make a list of the immediate actions you would take to stop the injuries and killings.
11. The author writes about how problems and finding their solutions teach Buck lessons. Buck, looking for a warm sleeping place, goes into the men’s tent, but quickly retreats when things are thrown at him. He is fearful outside when he feels something wriggling under his paws, but he learns to sleep out in the cold, anyway. Relate a fearful or painful experience you or someone you know has had while trying to solve a problem, but from which a lesson was learned.
12. Using dialect is a way an author emphasizes the country or place from which a character comes. In this chapter, you will find sentences which are written in the French-Canadian dialect. Copy each dialect sentence exactly, and below it, write a new sentence as it would be written in standard English. Write whether or not you like to read dialogue which is written in dialect and why.
13. Though the team of dogs are working very hard, they are described as “anxious that the work should go well.” Seemingly, they are finding working as a team enjoyable and satisfying. Human beings also usually find working as part of a group meaningful. Recall an experience when you did something as part of a group or team. Describe what that experience was and what you liked best and least about it.

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14. London is saying that in the area where Buck has lived, “it is all well enough...under the law of love and fellowship, to respect private property and feelings,” but where Buck is, it is “the law of club and fang.” Explain this situation in a dialogue with a friend, giving your opinion of why this should not be so, or why you feel that the situation Buck now finds himself in cannot be changed.

You: It seems to me that the place where Buck has been taken is...

Friend:

15. As Buck descends from being a civilized California dog to a wild one in the North, he has changed. List the specific ways you think that Buck has changed from the sweet dog he is in Chapter I to how he is described in Chapter II.
16. Manuel, Judge Miller’s gardener, is mentioned again at the end of this chapter. Write a scene about what might have happened to him. It could be that he has stopped gambling on his own. Possibly, because he is so guilt-ridden, he confesses to his priest that he stole Buck. Maybe Manuel has become so fearful of being caught for stealing Buck that he has run away to Mexico. The choice of these or any other possibilities is yours.
17. Mention is made of “yellow metal in the North,” which, of course, is gold. This novel takes place during the rush to find gold in Alaska in the 1890’s. Heavy, strong dogs are needed to pull sleds to get to where the gold is because of the rough terrain. Look up “Alaskan Gold Rush” in an encyclopedia and write down ten facts about this period in our history.
18. The author brings life to the imaginary dogs in this novel by describing not only their physical characteristics, but also their personalities. Recall an animal which at some time has been part of your life or you know about. Relate a conversation with a classmate in which you tell him or her how you came to know that animal. Describe what kind of personality it has, what it looked like, and any little stories about its behavior.

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19. By the end of this chapter, Buck seems to have returned to a state of existence summed up in the sentence, “It’s a dog eat dog world.” Do you suppose that Buck can now ever return to being the kind of dog he was on Judge Miller’s estate? Write a paragraph telling why you think this is or is not possible.
20. Jack London describes the many ways in which Buck is showing “the completeness of his decivilization.” Write three things from that paragraph which shows this. Compare Buck’s nature now to that of any dog you know in your own life.

III The Dominant Primordial Beast

21. The “dominant primordial beast” in Buck is shown sharply in this chapter. When it comes down to saving himself, Buck does not hesitate to fight to the death with another animal. Human beings have other choices when in any kind of danger. Suppose you felt threatened by a menacing dog as you walked alone through a park. Describe what choices you would have for getting out of danger. Then write what you think you would actually do.
22. The scene of the starving, fighting dogs is a terrible one. Francois and Perrault seem even to be encouraging the dogs to fight and be injured. Write a letter to a friend which describes your feelings about Francois and Perrault for allowing and even encouraging this cruelty. Also describe in the letter what you would do if you were a law enforcement officer and came upon the scene.
23. The description of the experience of the dogs nearly drowning while being made to cross The Thirty-Mile River is another example of the cruelty of Perrault. That evening, though, Francois shows kindness to Buck by making little moccasins for his injured paws. What do you think this reveals about Francois?