

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Jungle

by Upton Sinclair

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Notes

One of Upton Sinclair's purposes in writing this novel was to expose the abuses of the meat packing industry in the early 1900's, which he does in graphic detail. Due to the outrage of the public, which read the book in a serial form, the 1906 Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Acts were established.

In addition to muckraking, *The Jungle* is also an example of naturalistic fiction, a type of literature that describes the often harsh realities of life in an effort to illustrate the naturalistic principle of the survival of the fittest.

Sinclair was also a socialist who believed that the capitalist economic system was responsible for all of the working man's troubles. In *The Jungle*, Sinclair relentlessly points out the flaws in capitalism and brazenly presents socialism as the solution to all of the workers' problems. Some students may be disturbed by a novel that criticizes "the American way," but it is important for students in today's global economy to understand why some people or some cultures might dislike our capitalistic system.

It must be noted that in one small section of this story, Sinclair uses prejudicial language to describe African-Americans, which, unfortunately, was commonly accepted at the time; there are also mentions of prostitutes and prostitution and a few slight uses of profanity. *The Jungle* contains many horrible details depicting the suffering of the immigrant family, which may be disturbing to some readers. The book also served as a vehicle to promote Upton Sinclair's socialist, anti-capitalist beliefs. Numerous questions deal with that type of propagandizing. Students should be aware that Sinclair's views colored his thoughts and writings.

Objectives

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

1. relate significant details from the story illustrating the hardships the men and women endure working in the Chicago stockyards in the early 1900's.
2. define vocabulary words from the text.
3. point out instances of the following literary devices: allusion, flashback, in media res, foreshadowing, and irony.
4. discuss the following themes:
 - People in authority use their positions to take advantage of others.
 - The capitalist economic system promotes economic efficiency at the expense of the health of the people.
 - The capitalist economic system promotes anti-social behavior.
 - There is little justice in a capitalist economic system for the lower class, the unskilled laborer.
 - Those in authority in the capitalist system will take unfair advantage over those less powerful.
 - In a capitalist society, marriage and children severely limit a man's economic prospects.
5. point out instances of the following uses of language: descriptive imagery, personification, simile, metaphor, and repetition.
6. cite incidents from the story to illustrate that Jurgis is an example of the classic literary type, a *naif*.
7. discuss in what sense Sinclair's description of the killing of the hogs is an allegory representing the lives of the unskilled stockyard workers.
8. define "muckraker," and point out details which illustrate *The Jungle* is a muckraking novel; comment on the author's reasons for writing a muckraking novel.
9. discuss the following as possible symbols in the story: the house Jurgis buys, Jurgis' bath in the stream, and Marija.
10. define the following terms associated with the stockyards: pacemakers, speeding up, graft, the War Whoop League, the killing beds, duffers and dope, blacklisted, and scab.
11. understand the differences between a capitalist economic system and a socialist economic system including the definitions of the following terms: competitive wage system, Communism, and proletariat.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Find three vocabulary words for each of the following categories.
 - A. Words describing the work in the packing plants.
 - B. Words describing character traits.
 - C. Words defining political ideas or concepts.
2. Relate an incident from the story describing the ways the capitalist economic system, in Sinclair's view, harms the elderly, the children, and the women in Packingtown.
3. For what reasons does Jurgis embrace the ideas of socialism?
4. Cite incidents from the story to support or refute the following statement: Marriage is not good for a man working in Packingtown.
5. Why does Ona give in to Connor's advances? Why does she hide her problems at work from her husband?
6. Define the "American Dream." What might the house Jurgis buys symbolize or represent in the story? What theme for this novel does this incident illustrate?
7. Cite two incidents from the story to support the following theme: the capitalist economic system promotes economic efficiency at the expense of the health of the people.
8. Describe life in a socialist community as defined by Schliemann. Discuss the merits and the drawbacks of such a system, basing your answer on your own observations, experiences, and opinions.
9. Define the term "muckraker." Find a passage in the text where Sinclair seems to be more interested in muckraking than he is in telling Jurgis' story.
10. Some critics believe Jurgis experiences two turning points in his life. One of these is when little Antanas dies. Which incident do you think is his second turning point?
11. Naturalism is defined as a literary movement that began in the late nineteenth century, which emphasizes that man is as much a prisoner of instinct, environment, and heredity as animals; man has no free will in the theory of naturalism. Novels written in this form often include: people in lower economic classes who must fight against overwhelming odds to survive, an urban rather than a rural setting, a story that describes the harsh realities of life and the unsuccessful attempts that the characters make to change the circumstances of their lives.

Based on this definition, cite incidents from the story to prove that *The Jungle* is an example of naturalistic writing.

The Jungle

Note: All references come from the Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Press Edition of *The Jungle*, published 2005.

Chapter 1

VOCABULARY

acziavimas – a Lithuanian wedding custom in which the men take turns dancing with the bride and leaving money in a hat at the conclusion of each dance

altitudinous – relating to heights

badinage – playful, teasing talk

cortege – a train of attendants, a procession

incommode – to bother, inconvenience

incongruous – lacking harmony or agreement, incompatible

lugubrious – sad or mournful

perforce – through necessity

precipitately – hastily or rashly

promiscuous – consisting of different elements mixed together

seraphically – in a heavenly way

veselija – Lithuanian wedding

- Many interesting and important characters are introduced in this chapter. Briefly describe the following characters. Whenever possible, include in your description each character's occupation, relationship to other characters, age, and personal character traits which seem to separate one character from another.

For example, Marija Berczynskas is described as being exuberant and interested in maintaining the proprieties of a traditional Lithuanian wedding ceremony. As the bride's cousin, she takes charge of the wedding reception.

Ona Lukoszaite

Jurgis Rudkus

Chapter 12

VOCABULARY

penury – lack of money; extreme poverty

- 1. Cite evidence for the fact that Ona does not confide in her husband. Why do you think she fails to do so?

- 2. One of the themes of this novel is that immortality is inevitable in a capitalistic society. Find an incident from this chapter that supports this theme.

- 3. Jonas disappears one day in early spring. Where do you think he is?

Chapter 20

1. Why does Jurgis, who is grieving for Ona, decide to look for work again?

2. What does it mean to a man like Jurgis when he is “blacklisted”?

3. How is the harvester works, where Jurgis finally finds a job, different from the other businesses in Packingtown? In what ways is it the same?
