

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

The Jungle
by Upton Sinclair

written by Amber Reed

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Chapter One

1. Marija has difficulty directing the coachman because he does not understand her native tongue, Lithuanian. Only when Marija speaks Polish does the coachman understand. Think of a time when you or someone you know had trouble communicating with another person. Write a paragraph describing the event. What was the source of the problem, and how was it resolved?
2. According to tradition, any person who enters the wedding feast is offered food. The family, despite poverty, manages to uphold its tradition and feed the numerous strangers that drift in to the reception. Write a journal entry about one of your family's traditions. The tradition may be a daily occurrence or an annual event. How does the custom affect your family? For example, are family members closer or more functional? Also include how you feel about the tradition.
3. The family is dismayed to find that several wedding guests are leaving the feast without contributing to the wedding purse. Young men, instead of giving a gift to the bride, "would come in crowds and fill themselves with a fine dinner, and then sneak off." Other guests, however, give more money than they can afford. Complete the following conversation by telling a friend about an extremely generous character from a book or movie that sacrifices something to help another person.

Friend: I can't imagine how some of these people gave any money at all to Ona and Jurgis. Aniele, for instance, scrubs clothes for a pittance to support three children, but she gives the couple several months of her salary. I never heard of someone so nice.

You: I've seen the same generosity in...

Response Journal

Chapter Two

4. While in Lithuania, Jurgis travels four hundred miles to work on a railroad in order to earn enough money for passage to America. He struggles with horrid living and work conditions by focusing on his goal of marrying Ona. His determination pays off, and the family departs for America in the summer. Think of a figure that you admire for his or her hard work and determination. The person may be deceased or still living. Write a letter to this person expressing your admiration.
5. Once in America, the family members face one disappointment after another. Items cost more than they had anticipated; con artists take advantage of them; and the living conditions in Packingtown are deplorable. Write a paragraph about a time that you were disappointed or disillusioned. What were the circumstances, and how did you react?
6. The stockyards of Packingtown are described as having dingy sights, disturbing sounds, pungent smells, and crude tastes. As you read, which sensory images do you find the most effective? Which description impacts you the most? Create a short journal entry discussing your reaction to the text.

Chapter Three

7. Jokubas shows his friends around the yards and the production plants. The rendering processes are described in graphic detail, and Upton Sinclair writes, "One could not stand and watch very long without becoming philosophical [. . .]." Write an editorial discussing your reaction after reading about the killing beds. Describe any emotions that you felt while reading. The editorial should be about a page in length.

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Chapter Four

8. Jurgis begins his job at Brown's, which involves sweeping entrails off the floor. He is eager to work despite the heat and overpowering stench. At the end of the day, Jurgis proudly goes home with the dollar and a half that he earned. Write a brief paragraph describing your first job. How did you feel on your first day? If you have not started working, write a paragraph describing where you would like to work.
9. The family cannot decide whether to rent or buy a home. Szedvilas, a friend, warns Jurgis that many poor people are swindled when buying a house. He warns against hidden costs, shoddy building quality, and signing a contract. Szedvilas also admits, however, that paying rent is a rip off. Pretend that you are Jurgis' friend. Write a letter to Jurgis advising him on whether to rent or buy. Provide at least two reasons to support your opinion.

Chapter Five

10. Jurgis' job is physically demanding, but Jurgis feels satisfied when the work is complete. Write a journal entry about a time when you worked hard and felt rewarded for your effort. What was the task, and do you believe that it was worthwhile?
11. The union representative explains to Jurgis that the union is trying to help workers by slowing down the production pace. Jurgis, however, does not sympathize with the workers, insisting that, "if they couldn't do it, let them go somewhere else." Consider Jurgis' point of view, and compose a response in the form of an editorial for your school paper. Do you agree or disagree with Jurgis?

Chapter Six

12. Shortly after buying a house, the family members begin to realize that they have been swindled. The house is not new, as was advertised by the agent. Also, Grandmother Majauszkiene informs them that there are additional costs, such as interest, that they have not taken into account. Think of another character from a book or movie that is conned. Compose a page-long summation of the story, including a description of the character, his or her experience, and how the issue was resolved.
13. The law states that children must be sixteen to work, but people bypass the law by lying about their children's ages. Many people must send their children to work in order to survive. In some instances, the child's income is the only source of money for the family. Unfortunately, dangerous working conditions result in injury or death for many children, some as young as eight years old. Consider the era and the reasons that young children were sent to work, and create a list of ten advantages and disadvantages to child labor. When the list is complete, write a summary paragraph stating whether you ultimately agree or disagree with people in that period allowing their children to work.
14. Grandmother Majauszkiene warns the family that the house is cursed because every previous family that lived there had a member die of consumption. She explains that "there must be something about a house, or the way it was built—some folks said it was because the building had been begun in the dark of the moon." Her superstitious attitude is not uncommon in her community. Are you or someone you know superstitious? Write a brief description about the superstitious beliefs that you or this person exhibits. If you do not know of anyone, write about a fictional character that portrays superstitious qualities.

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Chapter Seven

15. Jurgis' experience in Packingtown has left him extremely bitter:

He had learned the ways of things about him now. It was a war of each against all, and the devil take the hindmost. You did not give feasts to other people, you waited for them to give feasts to you. You went about with your soul full of suspicion and hatred; you understood that you were environed by hostile powers that were trying to get your money, and who used all the virtues to bait their traps with.

Do you feel that Jurgis is justified? Compose a letter to a friend expressing your opinion about Jurgis' cynicism. In the letter, include a description of another person you know or a character from a book who has a similar disposition.

16. Stanislovas develops an extreme fear of the cold after his co-worker loses his ears from frostbite. Stanislovas is unable to conquer his phobia, so he must travel to work with Jurgis everyday. Do you or someone you know have a fear of something, such as heights, spiders, or speaking in public? Create a journal entry about this fear and how it is handled.