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Study Guide

for

**The Call of
the Wild**

by Jack London



**Glencoe
McGraw-Hill**

New York, New York Columbus, Ohio Woodland Hills, California Peoria, Illinois

Meet Jack London



*Because men, groping in the Arctic darkness,
had found a yellow metal, and because steamship
and transportation companies were booming the
find, thousands of men were rushing
into the Northland.*

—Jack London, in the opening paragraph of
The Call of the Wild

Jack London not only wrote adventure stories, he lived them. He was one of thousands of men who went to Canada during the 1890s to prospect for gold, and he once traveled hundreds of miles across the United States by hopping freight trains.

The author-adventurer was born John Griffith Chaney on January 12, 1876. Shortly thereafter, the boy took his stepfather's last name, London. The family lived in Oakland, California.

London quit school when he was fourteen and alternately worked and traveled for several years. For awhile, he made a living stealing oysters. Then he switched jobs and worked on a government patrol to prevent people from stealing oysters. He also went to Japan, working as a sailor.

When London was nineteen, he returned to school. He completed a four-year high school curriculum in one year and entered

the University of California. After a year at the university, he couldn't resist the lure of the Klondike gold rush in Canada. He never returned to college, but he also never got rich from his trip to the goldfields.

London came home from Canada not with gold, but with ideas. Becoming a writer was one way to escape what he felt would be a dreary existence as a laborer. He trained himself by studying other writers' works. He began submitting jokes, stories, and poems to magazines and received many rejection letters. Gradually, however, success came. His first book, *The Son of the Wolf*, was well received when it was published in 1900. *The Call of the Wild*, published three years later, brought London lasting fame.

London was a popular figure. He used his position to win support for certain causes in which he believed, such as socialism, women's suffrage, and prohibition. He also endorsed, or recommended for use, certain commercial products, making him one of the first celebrity spokespersons.

Even after London achieved success as a writer, he continued to be well disciplined about his work. He completed fifty books—including novels and short story collections—during his seventeen-year writing career. At the time, he was the highest paid writer in the United States.

London was married twice. He and his first wife had two daughters. In 1905 he bought a ranch in Glen Ellen, California. There, he practiced agricultural techniques he had learned in Japan.

Though the circumstances of London's death are somewhat controversial, he probably died from kidney disease. He was only forty years old when he died, but he had achieved a great deal in his lifetime. Translations of his works are still widely read all over the world.

Introducing the Novel

Mere escape novels do not become classics—and The Call of the Wild has become one of the great books in world literature, published in hundreds of editions in more than fifty languages.

—Earle Labor, in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*

The Call of the Wild could be called an entertaining tale about a dog, but it is much more to its readers. London explores basic questions about a person's relationship to him or herself, to others, and to the natural world.

The story appeals to many different types of readers. Anyone who has known the loyalty of a dog can understand how some of Buck's masters feel. Adventurers and risk-takers will see themselves in the sled drivers as they travel across the frozen expanses of the Yukon.

The detail of the story is rich because London wrote about subjects with which he was familiar. He had been in the Yukon Territory during the gold rush, had felt the cold, heard the dog fights, and seen the many different kinds of people who were there. He weaves his story of Buck so carefully that readers, too, can be in the Yukon.

THE TIME AND PLACE

George Washington Carmack, Tagish Charlie, and Skookum Jim made a discovery that brought tens of thousands of people streaming into the northwestern part of Canada. They discovered gold in Bonanza Creek, a tributary of the Klondike River, in August 1896. This was not the first time gold

Did You Know?

Inuit, a native people of North America, were the first to use dogs to pull sleds over the snow and ice of Canada and Alaska. Dogsleds were practical for transporting supplies such as firewood or freshly killed meat. Some people still use dogsleds for work and transport. However, airplanes and snowmobiles have mostly replaced the dogsleds as a means of transportation. Dogsledding has become a popular hobby and sport in some areas.

Modern dogsleds are still made of wood, like the early Inuit sleds, but the runners are covered with aluminum or steel. Lightweight ash wood is used to make racing sleds.

Dogs are especially trained for sled racing. Breeds such as Eskimos, Siberian huskies, Samoyeds, and malamutes are best suited to the task because of their strength, coats, and disposition. Most dog teams include odd numbers of dogs—usually five,

seven, or nine. The method of hitching the dogs to the sled, called a gang hitch, requires an odd number. A single dog leads, with the other dogs hitched in pairs behind. The dogs respond to voice commands from the driver, or musher. Average races are twelve- to thirty-miles long. Drivers and their teams race against time.

Perhaps the most famous dogsled racing event is Alaska's Iditarod Trail race. The race's fame stems from its length—over 1,150 miles. The route follows a mail route that was established in 1910 between Knik, a city near Anchorage, and Nome. At that time, dogsleds carrying mail regularly covered the distance. The race, as it is today, began in 1973 and is run in March each year. The 1973 winner took about twenty days to complete the course. In the 1990s, the winners were finishing in about eleven days.

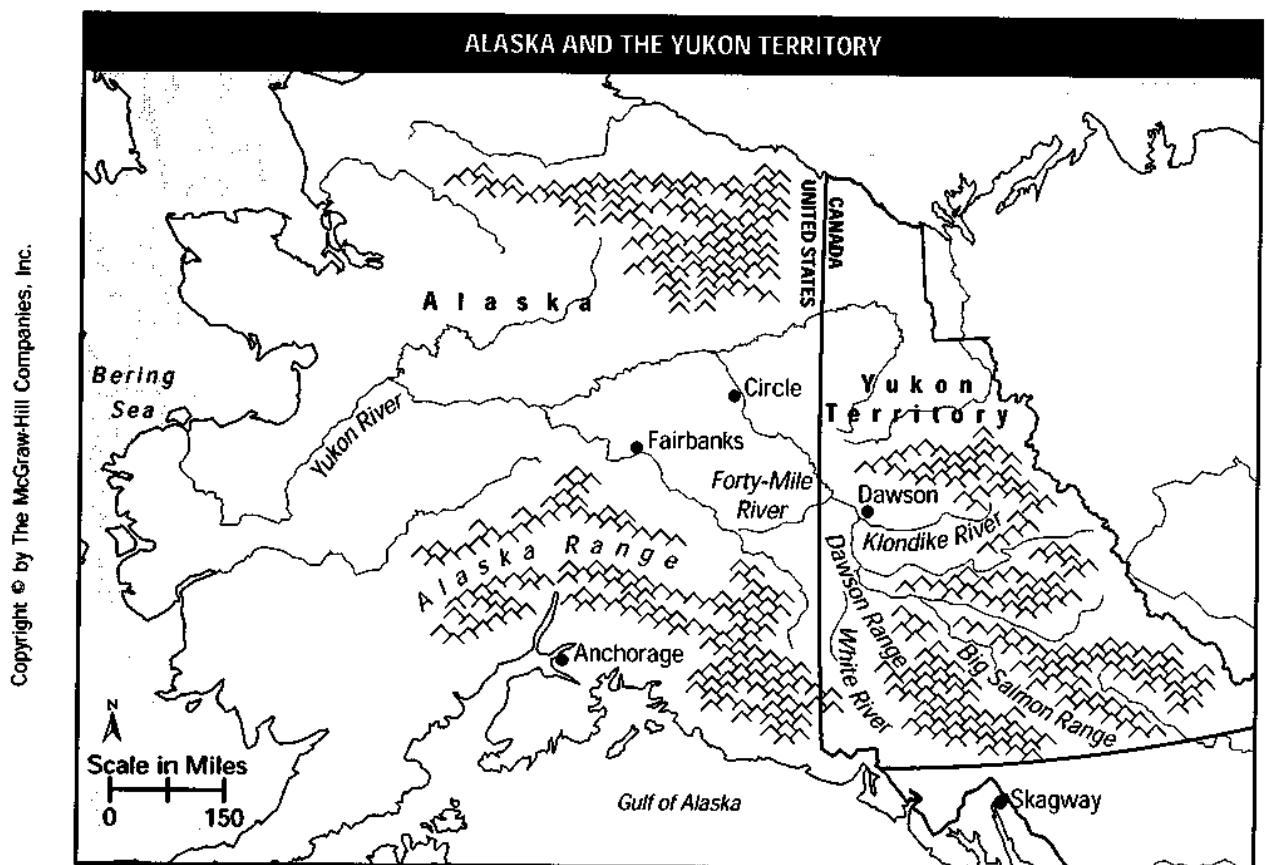
had been found in that region of the world. Prospectors had been working in and around the Klondike and Yukon rivers for several decades. But the find on Bonanza Creek was notable for two reasons. First, the quantity of the gold in the stream was remarkable. Second, much of the gold was easy to get using simple mining techniques.

The Klondike gold rush, as it came to be called, attracted thousands of hopeful miners. Many came by ship to Skagway, Alaska, where they purchased supplies at inflated prices and outfitted themselves for the trip north. Winter was the easiest season during which to travel because the rivers were frozen, but winter temperatures regularly registered 50 degrees below zero. During the

summer, humans and animals were attacked by swarms of mosquitoes and flies.

Few miners came away wealthy. Many who actually did find gold spent it all while celebrating in boomtowns such as Dawson City. Merchants and opportunists were all too ready to accept gold dust and nuggets from miners who were happy to show off their good fortune. Miners were often the target of lawless men who were willing to rob or murder to get a share of the riches.

In addition to the hazards of boomtowns were the dangers of wilderness travel. The elements claimed many victims as inexperienced prospectors froze, starved, or got lost in the forests and snowfields. The territory's rushing rivers also claimed many victims.



Before You Read

The Call of the Wild Chapters 1–3

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Book and chapter titles provide clues to content, hinting at actions to come. What does the title *The Call of the Wild* suggest that the book will be about? What do the titles of the first three chapters suggest?

Think–Pair–Share

Pair up with a classmate and, based on the titles, predict what will happen to Buck the dog. Make note of your predictions so that you can check them later.

Setting a Purpose

Read to discover how Buck is used to living and what changes he must endure.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

In *The Call of the Wild*, Jack London writes about his main character, the dog Buck, as if the dog were human. The formal name for giving human qualities to animals is **anthropomorphism**. This word comes from the Greek words for “human” and “form.” To anthropomorphize something is to give it human form, or human characteristics. London doesn’t have Buck speak or walk upright, but he does give the dog human thoughts and emotions. As humans, we relate to those thoughts and emotions and accept them. As readers, we identify closely with Buck because we feel the same anger, the same surprise, and the same fear.

The End of the Nineteenth Century

In the novel, the nineteenth century is nearly over. As thousands of people head for the goldfields in Canada and Alaska, what are other Americans doing and thinking about? The final decades of the nineteenth century are considered a time of growth and change. The population of the United States increased by more than fifty percent from 1880 to 1900. Much of this increase was due to immigration. People from Europe came to the United States in record numbers.

During this period, Americans began to use machines to do their work. Industrialization spread quickly. Ways of doing things changed. Small factories became larger and produced more goods, creating more jobs for people. At home, machines also helped with everyday tasks.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

auspiciously [ôz pish’əs lē] *adv.* in a way that suggests a positive outcome; favorably

cowed [koud] *adj.* intimidated

discomfiture [dis kum’fi chər] *n.* uneasiness; discomfort

divers [dī’vərz] *adj.* several; various

insular [in’sə lər] *adj.* isolated

latent [lāt’ənt] *adj.* hidden

malignant [mə lig’nənt] *adj.* causing or intending harm

primordial [prī mōr’dē əl] *adj.* relating to the earliest ages; primitive

score [skôr] *n.* twenty

unwonted [un wôn’tid] *adj.* unusual; out of the ordinary

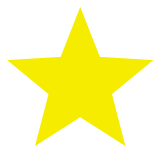


Active Reading

The Call of the Wild Chapters 1-3

Buck has many new experiences in the opening chapters of the novel. In each case, he is able to adapt. Use the diagram on this page to record each new situation Buck experiences and how it changes him.

Situation	How Buck Changes or Adapts
Manuel betrays Buck.	Buck begins to be mistrustful of men.



Responding

The Call of the Wild Chapters 1–3

Personal Response

How did you feel when Manuel sold Buck to the man in the red sweater? Why?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What is Buck's life like at Judge Miller's place? Why does Buck assume he is simply out for a stroll with Manuel?

2. What does the man in the red sweater teach Buck? Why was this an important lesson for Buck to learn?

3. What do François and Perrault expect of their dogs? Why do they admire Buck?



Responding

The Call of the Wild Chapters 1–3

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. The story is mainly told from Buck's point of view. How does this perspective influence how you feel about Buck? How might the story change if it were told from the dog trainer's point of view?

5. Does the story—a gold rush and a kidnapped dog—seem true to life? Explain.

Literature and Writing

Character Development

In many stories and novels, the goal of the main character is to improve himself or herself in some way. In *The Call of the Wild*, the narrator points out that once Buck learns to steal food, his moral decay has begun. He then says that this is vital, or absolutely necessary, for Buck's survival. In one or two paragraphs, explain what this means. Do you agree with the narrator's statement? Why or why not?

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

In your group, share the predictions you made in the **Focus Activity** on page 12 and see which ones are correct. Then, together skim the titles of Chapters 4 and 5 and predict what will happen next in the novel.

Geology Connection

The days when prospectors can find gold sparkling in the bottom of a creek bed are probably gone. Find out why gold used to be found in river beds. In addition, find out where most of the world's gold mines are. What geographic or geologic characteristics do these areas have in common? Create a map that shows the world's major gold-producing regions. Display your map as you report on the common characteristics of these regions.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

The Call of the Wild Chapters 4 and 5

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Have you ever had to get control of or lead a group? How did you do it?

Quickwrite

Jot down brief notes about the situation and what you did to gain control. How did you communicate to the group that you intended to be the leader? Were others trying to lead the group as well?

Setting a Purpose

Read about Buck's struggle for mastery and how he resolves the conflict.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Northern regions that are far inland have colder winters than the areas that are closer to the ocean. The interior plains of northwestern Canada are characterized by short summers and long, cold winters. In *The Call of the Wild*, the dogs and drivers travel "comfortably" on days that are -50°F. That is far colder than most of us could stand. At that temperature, exposed flesh freezes in a manner of minutes. The drivers would have been wrapped and bundled from head to toe.

Yukon Territory

Prior to 1898, the area where the Yukon and Klondike rivers flow was part of Canada's vast sparsely populated Northwest Territories. With the discovery of gold in the region, the population grew quickly. In 1898 the Canadian Parliament separated the most northwest portion of the region into its own territory. No one yet realized that the population growth of this new Yukon Territory would be only temporary. By 1899 the Klondike gold rush was almost over. Gold had been discovered in Alaska and many Yukon prospectors packed up and headed to the west.

The area we know as Alaska had been purchased from Russia in 1867. The U.S. official who pushed for the purchase was William Seward. Many Americans opposed Seward's idea. What good could come from owning all that land? It wasn't even connected to the other states. They labeled Alaska "Seward's Folly," or foolish act. How pleased those same Americans were when gold was discovered in Alaska not many years later.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

callowness [kal'ō nəs] *n.* immaturity

inexorable [i nek'sər ə bəl] *adj.* relentless; not to be persuaded

manifested [man'ə fest əd] *v.* made evident or obvious

obdurate [ob'dər it] *adj.* resistant to persuasion; inflexible

perambulating [pər am'byə lāt'ing] *v.* traveling on foot

plaint [plānt] *n.* plea

prerogative [pri rog'ə tiv] *n.* a special right

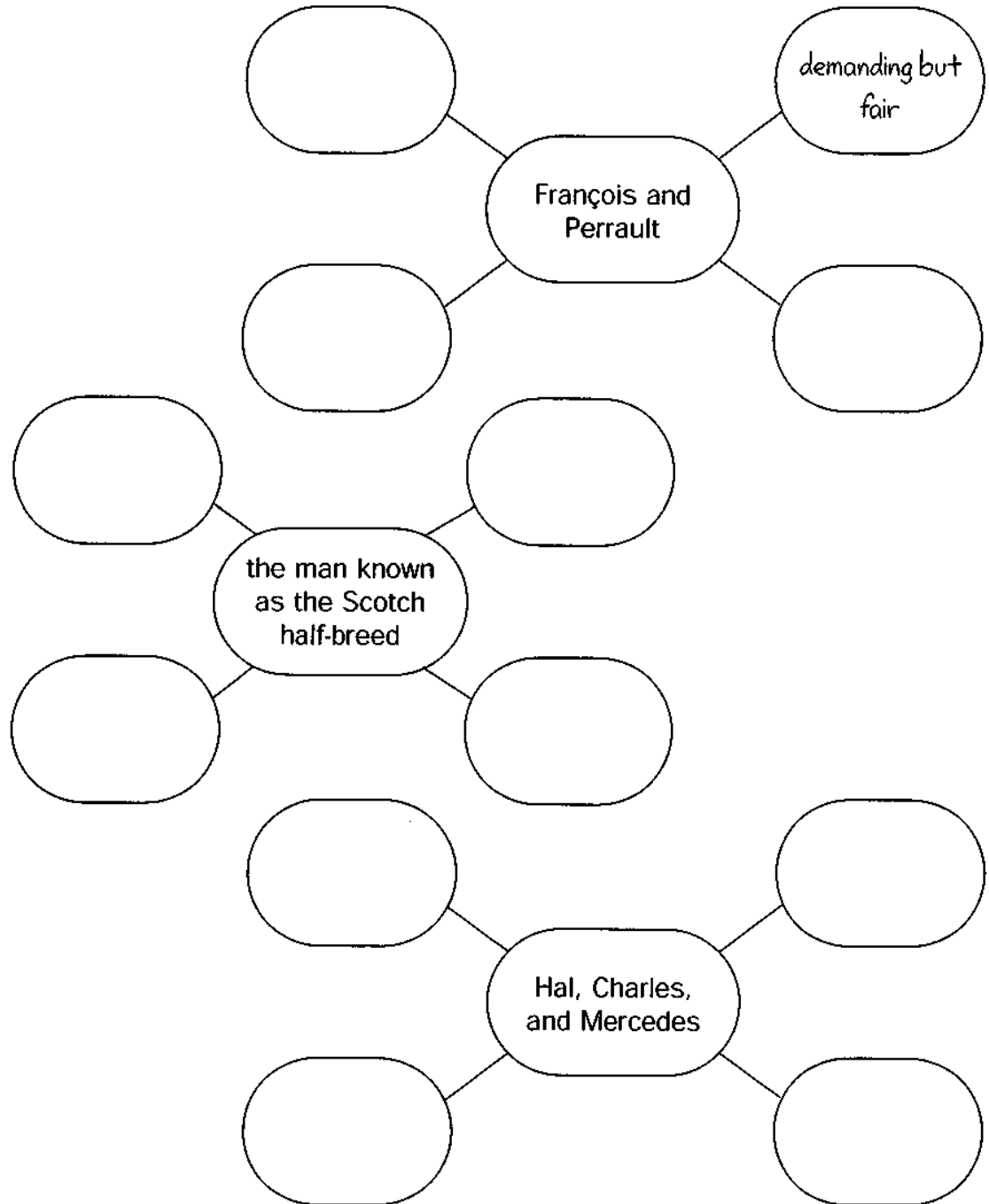
rend [rend] *v.* tear

salient [sāl'yənt] *adj.* noticeable; prominent

Active Reading

***The Call of the Wild* Chapters 4 and 5**

For each set of owners Buck has in this section, write words and phrases in the web diagram that describe the people, how they treat the dogs in general, and what the dogs experience.





Responding

The Call of the Wild Chapters 4 and 5

Personal Response

If you were able, what would you say to the people who owned Buck?

François and Perrault

the man known as the Scotch half-breed

Hal, Charles, and Mercedes

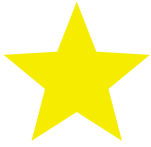
Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. How do François and Perrault respond when they discover that Buck has killed Spitz? Why had the dog team become unruly?

2. How are the dogs treated by the Scotch half-breed? How does this become important to Buck's future?

3. What does Mercedes do to "help" the dogs that only ends up harming them? What do her actions allow you to conclude about her, Hal, and Charles?



Responding

The Call of the Wild Chapters 4 and 5

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. How does reading about these three different kinds of owners—one after the other—affect your response to each owner?

5. Do you think that Hal, Charles, and Mercedes are realistic characters? Or do you think that London has exaggerated to make a point? Explain.

Literature and Writing

Letter Home

Suppose you are one of Buck's owners—François; the man known as the Scotch half-breed; or Hal, Charles, or Mercedes. Write a letter to someone back home about your experience in the Yukon. Tell about the travel conditions, your travel companions, and the dog team. Remember to write from the point of view of the character you've chosen. Borrow details from the story to add specifics to your letter.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Review the notes you wrote in the **Focus Activity** on page 16. Summarize the situation for the members of your group. Talk about the techniques you used to lead the group. Did you exercise authority? Were you conclusive? Were you willing to take responsibility for the group's decisions? In your discussion, include any techniques you used that did not work. Have a group member keep a list of effective and ineffective techniques mentioned in the discussion.

Math Connection

In this section, the dogs make the trip from Skagway to Dawson in the Yukon Territory. Locate those towns in an atlas. Use the scale of miles to determine the distance between the towns. Knowing that the trip took thirty days, make rough calculations about the speed at which the dogsled was traveling.



Save your work for your portfolio.