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CLASSIC MIDDLE SCHOOL LITERATURE

ADVENTURE

STUDY UNITS

Nancy Roberts Garrity

THE
CALL OF
THE WILD

The
Story-Teller

Rikki-tikki-tavi

The
Ransom
of Red Chief

The
Adventure
of the
Speckled Band



GOOD YEAR BOOKS

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all the students at St. John Fisher School; your enthusiasm is a constant inspiration to me. I am also grateful to the talented students who have granted me permission for their very creative artwork to be used as reference for this book.

GOOD YEAR BOOKS

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CONTENTS



Introduction	iv
------------------------	----

UNIT 1: NOVEL STUDY

<i>The Call of the Wild</i> —by Jack London.	2
--	---

UNIT 2: SHORT-STORY STUDIES

“The Story-Teller”—by H. H. Munro (“Saki”)	65
--	----

“Rikki-tikki-tavi”—by Rudyard Kipling	80
---	----

“The Ransom of Red Chief”—by William Sydney Porter (“O. Henry”)	97
---	----

“The Adventure of the Speckled Band”—by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle	114
--	-----

Reproducible Vocabulary Previews.	130
---	-----

Vocabulary Glossary	134
-------------------------------	-----

Glossary of Literary Elements	140
---	-----

Terminology for Understanding Plot	143
--	-----

Development of Plot in Fiction.	145
---	-----

Development of Plot in <i>The Call of the Wild</i>	147
--	-----

Analysis of Plot in <i>The Call of the Wild</i>	149
---	-----

ANSWER KEY	151
-----------------------------	-----

UNIT 1:

Novel Study

THE CALL OF THE WILD

(CHAPTERS 1 & 2)

The Call of the Wild, first published in book form by Macmillan in 1903, was one of fifty books written by Jack London. Other well-known books by London include *White Fang*, *The Sea Wolf*, *South Sea Tales*, and *Martin Eden*, his autobiographical novel.

THE AUTHOR

JACK GRIFFITH LONDON
(1876–1916)

Although Jack London lived in poverty for the early part of his life, he rose to become one of America's most popular authors. His stepfather's lack of success as a San Francisco truck farmer forced him to find various odd jobs to earn a living at the age of ten. As his family's financial problems continued, he quit school at the age of fourteen to support himself and to seek adventure. After several years of wandering, London returned to San Francisco to complete high school. Because of his desire to write, he enrolled at the University of California. Unfortunately, in 1897 he was forced to leave college because of lack of funds. Its being the time of the Yukon gold rush, London decided to seek riches in the Canadian wilderness.

Even though he was unsuccessful at gold mining, his experiences in the Klondike wilderness and his association with the prospectors and trappers of the Yukon territory gave him a wealth of materials for the stories he would later write. By the age of twenty-three, London had worked as a seaman, an oysterman, and a seal hunter. He finally settled in San Francisco. There he supported himself and his family by working at odd jobs, while writing and studying in his spare time. By 1913, London had become one of the best-known and financially successful American writers. His numerous books, many of which bring to life his own experiences in the Canadian wilderness, are still widely read.

INTRODUCTORY INFORMATION

READING A NOVEL: A novel is a long fictitious prose narrative dealing with characters, situations, and scenes that often reflect human experience through a connected sequence of events. Most novels follow a particular pattern as the plot develops. Although this pattern will sometimes vary, it is usually possible to identify the pattern as the story unfolds. One of the important parts of our study of *The Call of the Wild* will be the analysis of the development of its plot. Information about the elements of plot will be provided in the study of each chapter. (*At the back of this book, you will find information about the development of plot in fiction generally and in The Call of the Wild in particular.*)

CHARACTERS: Although you'll encounter some human characters in *The Call of the Wild*, the main character is Buck, a magnificent 140-pound dog. As you read, you'll follow Buck as he's suddenly taken from the comforts of home and forced to live and work in a dangerous, untamed environment. Although this story is fictitious, it's filled with believable characters and realistic settings because Jack London drew on his own experiences to write this classic novel. (*Share the author information with the class.*)

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: By the fall of 1897, the Klondike gold strike had dragged people from all over the world into the frozen North to seek their fortunes. The Klondike is a vast region in the west-central part of the Yukon Territory in Canada near Alaska. It centers on

the Klondike River, which rises north of Mayo Lake and flows about 125 miles west to the Yukon River. Dawson, the original capital of the Yukon, is located at this river junction. The Klondike was virtually unknown until 1896, when gold was discovered. By 1897, more than 30,000 people had rushed into the Klondike wilderness to seek their fortunes. No matter what routes they took, the dangerous trip into the subpolar climate was long, arduous, and expensive. Many prospectors froze to death because they were not equipped with the food, clothes, and tools necessary for survival. Because supplies were scarce, great profits were made by traders, supply stores, saloons, and gambling houses.

IMPORTANCE OF SETTING: In order to travel over the frozen trails of the arctic wilderness, the prospectors needed large dogs to pull their sleds. The demand for them became so great that many large, strong dogs from the United States were stolen from their owners and shipped to the Northland. Because they were unfamiliar with this dangerous environment, many of these gentle Southland dogs perished. Those who learned to adapt survived.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS 1 AND 2

CHAPTER 1—INTO THE PRIMITIVE: The Klondike gold strike lures greedy men to seek their fortunes in the Northland. Because the demand for strong, heavy sled dogs is great, many Southland dogs are brought to the Canadian wilderness. Manuel, one of the workers on Judge Miller's estate, kidnaps and sells Buck to pay off some gambling debts. Buck is outraged. Before he can comprehend what's happening, he finds himself being jolted around on a baggage car. Buck is transformed into a raging fiend as he's starved and tormented on his agonizing journey. The train stops in Seattle, where Buck is savagely beaten with a club by a man in a red sweater. He's then sold to a French-Canadian named Perrault. Next, Buck, a Newfoundland named Curly, and two other dogs begin a strange

journey on the *Narwhal*. Each day, the atmosphere grows steadily colder. When the ship finally pulls into port, Buck is confused as he's exposed to snow for the first time.

CHAPTER 2—THE LAW OF CLUB AND FANG:

Buck's first day on the Dyea beach is like a nightmare. He's surrounded by savage dogs and people who know no law but the law of club and fang. Buck is shocked when Curly, the good-natured Newfoundland, is suddenly attacked and brutally killed by a husky half her size. Buck learns that there's no fair play. Once down, that's the end of you. Spitz, the snow-white lead-dog, laughs as he witnesses Curly's death, and this initiates Buck's bitter hatred of Spitz. Next, Buck's dignity is hurt when François buckles him into a sled-dog harness for the first time. But Buck quickly adjusts to life on the trail. Day after day, he becomes more wolflike in his behavior. He leaves behind the civilized laws of love and fellowship of the Southland and learns the primitive law of club and fang.

SHARING INFORMATION

GOLD STRIKE: The famous Bonanza Creek gold strike took place on August 17, 1896. *The Call of the Wild* is set in the 1897 Canadian wilderness, one year after this strike. This is a time before walkie-talkies, radio communication, telephones, helicopters, planes, and other modern technology used for survival. This vast, frozen arctic land poses a threat to man and beast.

NEW CHARACTERS: In this novel, the ownership of Buck changes several times. His first masters in the Northland are a French-Canadian government courier named Perrault and his partner, François. In the first two chapters, Buck also becomes acquainted with the other members of his dog-sled team. Most of these dogs will be major characters in the story. The most important of these is Spitz, the team leader. As you read about these dogs, make an effort to remember their names.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

CHAPTER 1	egotistical	retaliate	cadence	incarnation
affirmative	ferine strain*	ruction	consternation	indiscretion
aristocrat	ferocity	sated*	courier*	introspective*
artesian well	hydrophoby*	slaver	diabolical	malingerer*
brumal	imperious	soliloquize*	discomfiture*	placating
calamity	insular	treacherous	disconsolate	primordial*
call	latent	unwonted	divers*	prowess* cay-
use*	metamorphose	weazened	draught	retrogression
conciliate*	morose	CHAPTER 2	gee-pole	trice*
conveyance	nomadic*	antagonist	fastidiousness*	unwitting
demesne*	primitive	appeasing	ignominious	vicarious*
dominion*	progeny*	belligerent	imperative	wheeler

Vocabulary words to be tested are marked with an asterisk ().
The reproducible Vocabulary Preview is on page 130.

INTRODUCING LITERARY ELEMENTS

Literary elements that students will be tested on are marked with an asterisk (*).

PROTAGONIST: A protagonist is the main character or hero in a work of fiction. In Chapter 1, you will meet Buck, who is the protagonist of this novel.

FORESHADOWING: An author uses hints, or clues, to suggest future events. This foreshadowing appears in the poem at the beginning of Chapter 1. A simplified interpretation of this poem is this: *Creatures who roam are annoyed by customs. When they wake from their winter's sleep, their savage elements come to life.* As you read, remember that this foreshadowing pertains to Buck and some of his other companions in the wild.

MOOD: The mood is the feeling or atmosphere of a literary work. Think about the peaceful mood at Judge Miller's place in the sun-kissed Santa Clara Valley. Watch for drastic changes in the mood as Buck is kidnapped and transported to the frozen Yukon.

POINT OF VIEW*: Point of view refers to the vantage point from which a narrative is told. Because the narrator is an outsider who doesn't appear in the story, this novel is written from the third-person point of view. Third person is divided into three major types: third-person objective (the narrator can report only what he or she sees and hears), third-person limited (the narrator can reveal the thoughts and feelings of one character), and third-person omniscient (the narrator can reveal the thoughts and feelings of more than one character). To determine which of these three points of view is used, watch to see if the narrator reveals any of the characters' thoughts and feelings.

PERSONIFICATION*: Buck is described as "king over all," a country gentleman, and "a sated aristocrat." This personification uses favorable human characteristics to encourage respect for his character. In contrast, watch for the unfavorable personification of Spitz in his encounter with Curly.

INVERSION*: In the sentence “And over this great demesne Buck ruled,” the usual order of words in a sentence are reversed. This use of inversion provides emphasis and helps create a special effect.

INCITING INCIDENT*: The event that introduces the conflict is called the inciting incident. Think about the one event that completely changes Buck’s life.

RISE ACTION: The series of events that lead up to the climax is called the rising action. Watch for the rising action after the inciting incident is introduced.

METAPHOR: The man in the red sweater refers to Buck as a “red-eyed devil.” This is a metaphor because it makes an unlikely comparison between Buck and a devil. Watch for this and other metaphors as you read.

SIMILE: To emphasize Buck’s hostile environment, a simile is used at the beginning of Chapter 2: “Buck’s first day on the Dyea beach was like a nightmare.” Keeping in mind that a simile is a figure of speech that uses *like* or *as* in making a direct comparison, watch for more similes as you read.

ANTAGONIST: An antagonist is a character or force that opposes or is in conflict with the main character, or protagonist. At the end of Chapter 1, Buck encounters his first antagonist in the character of Spitz. His next antagonist appears at the beginning of Chapter 2 in the form of the hostile environment on the Dyea beach. Throughout the novel, observe how Buck learns to combat both these antagonists.

CONFLICT: Buck’s life is changed when he’s kidnapped. Think about the conflict this creates for Buck. There is also a growing conflict between Buck and Spitz. Look for examples of this as you read.

DISCUSSING THE STORY

1. When Manuel puts a rope around Buck’s neck, he accepts the rope around his neck “with quiet dignity.” What does this act tell you about his relationship with man?

(*Buck trusts man.*) The rope is then used to choke Buck. How might this incident change Buck’s attitude toward man? (*Now that he’s been deceived, he may no longer feel that trust.*) It’s important to remember this incident because it will influence Buck’s attitude later in the story.

2. Buck learns some important lessons in the uncivilized world of his kidnappers. What lesson does Buck learn from the man with the club? (*He stands no chance against a man with a club. Such a man is a lawgiver, a master to be obeyed.*) What lesson does Buck learn vicariously through Curly’s death? (*There is no fair play. Once down, that is the end of you.*) What do the other dogs do during Curly’s fight with the husky? (*They form a silent circle around them, eager to kill the loser of the fight.*) Remember this incident. It will be echoed later in the story.
3. The main idea or underlying meaning of a literary work is called the theme. The title of *The Call of the Wild* suggests its theme: *A civilized creature will become primitive if savage forces overcome the force of love.* The chapter titles also contribute to the theme. The first chapter is called “Into the Primitive,” and the next is called “The Law of Club and Fang.” What is primitive about the Northland? How does this differ from the law of love and fellowship in the Southland? (*Answers will vary: The animals are domesticated and the people are civilized in the Southland, fostering a mutual respect and trust. Neither of these factors are present in the Northland. Men use clubs to control animals. Animals fight and kill to gain whatever they need.*)
4. Toward the end of Chapter 2, Jack London states that Buck’s “development (or retrogression) was rapid.” The choice of words is contradictory because *development* suggests making progress, while *retrogression* implies moving backward. What do you think he means by this statement? (*London*

appears to approve of the changes in Buck. The dog has definitely become less civilized and has regressed into a more primitive being, but these changes are vital to his survival.) Do you view Buck's changes as an improvement or as unfavorable? (Answers will vary: Some students may approve, while others may miss the "old," civilized Buck.)

READER'S RESPONSE JOURNAL

1. Buck is a big, 140-pound dog who received his size from his St. Bernard father and his cunning and intelligence from his Scotch shepherd mother. He is the protagonist, or hero, of the story. Buck is characterized as a strong and independent dog who is "king over all" at Judge Miller's estate. He is also a loyal and trusting companion to man. What is your opinion of Buck? Do you like or dislike him? Why? Does he remind you of any pets that you have known? Respond to these questions in your journal.
2. An antagonist is a character or force that opposes or is in conflict with the main

METAPHOR

A metaphor is a figure of speech that involves an implied comparison between two basically unlike things.



"THE ROAD WAS A RIBBON OF MOONLIGHT."

character. At the end of Chapter 1, you were introduced to Spitz, Buck's first antagonist. Spitz, who is constantly meditating on some underhanded trick, displays his first sign of antagonistic behavior by stealing Buck's food. What else does he do to display his treacherous nature? How do the other dogs react to him? Why does Buck hate him? What do you predict will happen between the two characters? Write your responses in your journal.

3. Buck encounters his next antagonist at the beginning of Chapter 2 in the form of the hostile environment on the Dyea beach. How does Buck react to his new surroundings? What does he learn vicariously through the death of Curly? What adjustments does he make in order to survive? What do you predict will happen to Buck? Record your responses and predictions in your journal.

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES

1. The man in the red sweater uses a metaphor in describing Buck as a "red-eyed devil." A metaphor is a figure of speech that involves an implied comparison between two basically unlike things. Metaphors are used to make writing more vivid, imaginative, and meaningful. Here are some examples: "The road was a ribbon of moonlight"; "a heart of stone"; and "her eyes were sparkling stars." Think of other metaphors that you've heard, or create some of your own. Make a list and share them with the rest of the class. Using any one of these examples, draw a picture of what the phrase would look like if taken literally rather than imaginatively.
2. Buck once lived a good life in California's sun-kissed Santa Clara Valley. At the beginning of Chapter 2, Buck is exposed to the perils on the Dyea beach. Using three or more paragraphs, compare and contrast Buck's California home to his new environment.

COMPREHENSION CHECK (CHAPTER 1)

Mark each sentence *T* for true or *F* for false.

1. ____ For the first four years of his life, Buck has lived at Judge Miller's place in California.
2. ____ Buck's pampered life has softened his muscles, making him unfit to survive in the wilderness.
3. ____ Manuel kidnaps and sells Buck because he needs money to pay off some gambling debts.
4. ____ Buck allows Manuel to place a rope around his neck but growls when the rope changes hands.
5. ____ Buck enjoys the exciting adventure of traveling by crate to several unknown destinations.
6. ____ Perrault angrily stops the man in the red sweater from beating Buck.
7. ____ Although Buck has no affection for them, he grows to respect François and Perrault.
8. ____ When Spitz steals Buck's food, François punishes Spitz with his whip.
9. ____ One of the dogs traveling with Buck on the *Narwhal* is Curly, a good-natured Newfoundland.
10. ____ At the end of Chapter 1, Buck is introduced to snow for the first time.

VOCABULARY STUDY GUIDE

Write each word in the blank for its definition.

cayuse	demesne	ferine strain	nomadic	sated
conciliate	dominion	hydrophoby	progeny	soliloquize

1. _____ (*noun*) children; offspring
2. _____ (*noun*) slang for *rabies*; "fear of water"
3. _____ (*noun*) estate; domain; realm
4. _____ (*adjective*) fully satisfied
5. _____ (*verb*) talk to oneself
6. _____ (*noun*) wild or untamed elements
7. _____ (*adjective*) wandering; moving from place to place
8. _____ (*noun*) power or right of governing and controlling
9. _____ (*verb*) win over; soothe by friendly acts
10. _____ (*noun*) a Native American-bred pony or horse



courier	divers	introspective	primordial	trice
discomfiture	fastidiousness	malingerer	prowess	vicarious

11. _____ (*noun*) messenger
12. _____ (*adjective*) inclined to examine one's own thoughts
13. _____ (*noun*) very short time
14. _____ (*adjective*) primitive; existing at the beginning
15. _____ (*noun*) defeat of plans; frustration; confusion
16. _____ (*noun*) one pretending to be sick or hurt to avoid work
17. _____ (*noun*) bravery; daring; unusual skill or ability
18. _____ (*adjective*) several different; various
19. _____ (*adjective*) imagined participation in another's experience
20. _____ (*noun*) sensitive and meticulous nature

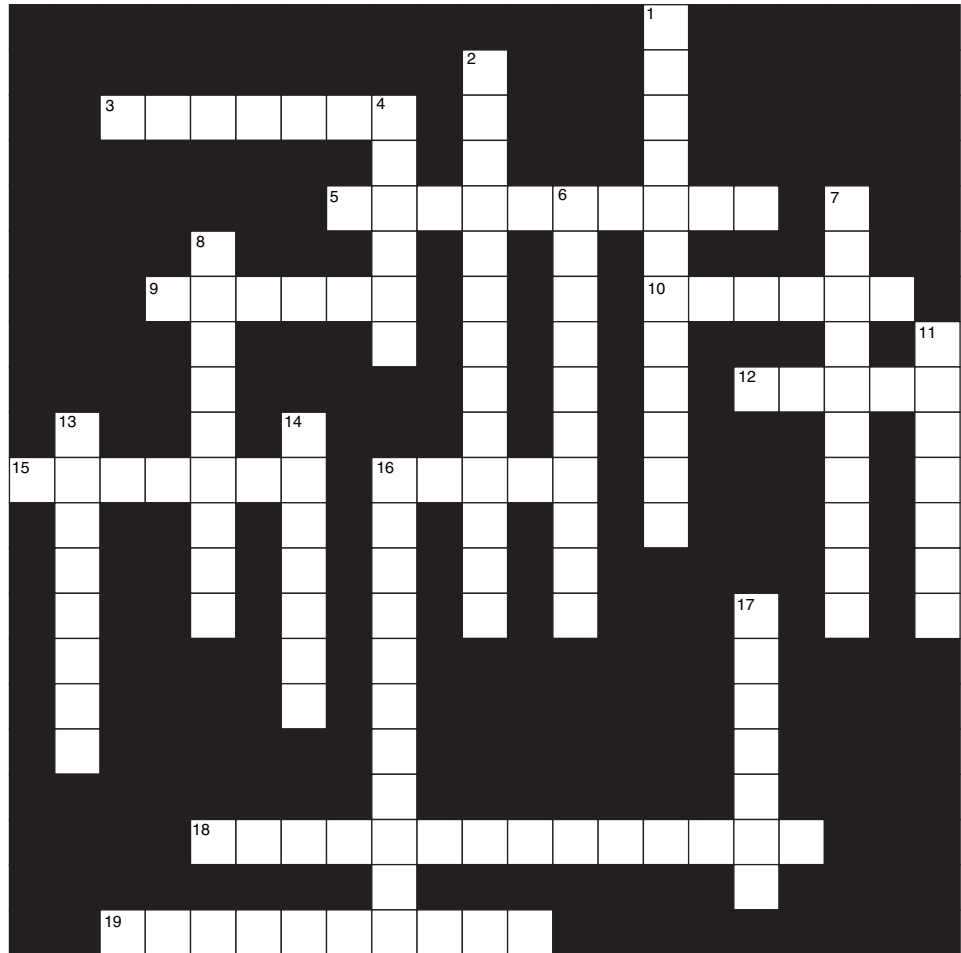


CROSSWORD PUZZLE



ACROSS

3. (*adjective*) wandering; moving from place to place
5. (*noun*) slang for rabies; "fear of water"
9. (*adjective*) several different; various
10. (*noun*) _____ strain: wild or untamed elements
12. (*noun*) very short time
15. (*noun*) messenger
16. (*adjective*) fully satisfied
18. (*noun*) sensitive and meticulous nature
19. (*noun*) one pretending to be sick or hurt to avoid work



DOWN

1. (*noun*) defeat of plans; frustration; confusion
2. (*adjective*) inclined to examine one's own thoughts
4. (*noun*) a Native American-bred pony or horse
6. (*adjective*) primitive; existing at the beginning
7. (*verb*) win over; soothe by friendly acts
8. (*adjective*) imagined participation in another's experience
11. (*noun*) estate; domain; realm
13. (*noun*) power or right of governing and controlling
14. (*noun*) children; offspring
16. (*verb*) talk to oneself
17. (*noun*) bravery; daring; unusual skill or ability