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BOOK GUIDES

The Call of the Wild

BY JACK LONDON

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Overview Chart

Comprehension Skills and Strategies

Comparing and Contrasting
Drawing Conclusions
Interpreting Character Actions
Interpreting Character Traits
Making Judgments
Predicting Outcomes
Stating Personal Reactions

Literary Concepts

Characterization
Conflict
Plot
Setting
Theme

Management System

The Call of the Wild and the accompanying guide may be used in the following manner:

Whole Class: Have the whole class read the book together. The class then responds to the literature through discussions and activities. For this system, each child has a copy of the book.

Small Group: Divide the class into reading groups. The groups can be set up by interest level, topic, or ability. (Remember to have some fluent readers in each group to share their reading with less-fluent readers.) Each group responds to the literature through discussions and activities. For this system, each child in the group has a copy of the book.

Read Aloud: Read the book aloud to the whole class or small group. This will help less-fluent readers and allow children to hear the language and appreciate the author's technique. For this system, only the person reading aloud has a copy of the book.

Story Overview

The Call of the Wild is the story of Buck, a dog of mixed St. Bernard and Scotch shepherd ancestry raised to be the “king” of Judge Miller’s place in northern California. The discovery of gold in Alaska, however, leads to a booming trade in animals that can be put to work on Yukon dog sleds, and many “Southland” dogs fall victim to merciless thieves and trainers. Buck’s downfall comes at the hands of Manuel, one of the gardener’s helpers, who sells the dog in order to finance his gambling habit.

In the weeks that follow, Buck is introduced to a world that is far more violent and primordial than anything he has ever known. The love and kindness he knew are replaced with beatings, hard work, and, above all, a law of “club and fang” that can lead a team of dogs to even turn on one of its own members.

Buck, however, is strong and smart. Taken to the frozen Northland by Perrault and Francois, two French-Canadian “mushers,” he quickly learns to pull the sled that carries them and the Canadian Government mail across the snowy countryside. Buck is considered one of the best dogs in the entire team, but above him in the team’s pecking order is Spitz, the team’s leader. Sensing a rival in Buck, Spitz immediately sets out to assert his authority.

Eventually, however, in a bitter battle to the death, Spitz is defeated, and Buck assumes leadership of the team. The team performs brilliantly under Buck, setting records for time and distance. Even after Perrault and Francois are replaced by other mushers, the team continues to crisscross the frozen wasteland. Finally, though, the team is worn out. In Skagway, the dogs are sold to two men and a woman, tenderfeet totally incapable of mastering the hard truths of life in the north. Day after day the team struggles to pull the ridiculously heavy load until the dogs’ condition becomes desperate. Finally even Buck rebels, and his master begins to beat him mercilessly.

Into the scene comes John Thornton, an experienced man of the north who rescues Buck from the tenderfeet and saves his life. Buck slowly regains his strength and becomes one of the most formidable and devoted dogs ever seen in the territory. When Thornton and his two partners go prospecting for gold in a deserted part of the territory, Buck soon finds himself torn between his deep love for Thornton and his own primitive yearning to return to the wilderness. When Thornton and his partners are killed by a band of Yeehats, Buck mourns the loss of his master. But he has become too much a creature of the wilderness to ever again be part of the world of people. Returning to the forest, he becomes a full-fledged member of a wolf pack, a creature of the wild as his ancestors had been thousands of years ago.