

PARAMOUNT PRESENTS



THEATRE HEROES
PRESENTS

JACK LONDON'S

CALL OF THE WILD

ILLUSTRATED
EDITION



Study Guide courtesy of Popejoy Hall's Schooltime Series

“

It is... the great triumphant joy of living to the fullest extent in which real meaning is found.”

- JACK MCCANDLESS, CHAPTER 4

Synopsis

Call of the Wild is based on the classic book by Jack London. It is told from the perspective of Buck, the magnificent offspring of a St. Bernard and Scottish Collie. Buck is a privileged, dignified dog who is taken from his southern California home and shipped to Alaska to work as a sled dog during the 1890s Gold Rush. Along the way, Buck is mistreated by a series of owners while he learns to survive as a member of a dog sled team. With each new experience, Buck regresses to a more primal state in order to survive. After successfully pulling 1,000 lbs. on a sled, he becomes the most famous dog in the northland's history and discovers the endurance and strength of his wild, primal ancestors as their call courses through his blood.

This play, like the book, explores the role environment plays in shaping character. It is a thrilling tale of adventure, courage, and survival made even more so by the production's use of projections that surround the solo performer and provide scenic, artistic, and historical context to the show. The images feature a unique mix of Philip R. Goodwin's classical illustrations from the book's first edition, period photographs, and new drawings and animations created by artist Michael Rae.





Vocabulary

aristocrat - a noble; something or someone believed to be the best of his/her kind

dignity - the quality of being worthy or honorable

ferine - wild, untamed; derived from feral

husky - one whose appearance suggests strength and force

lacerate - to tear roughly; to cut (esp. flesh or tissue) with deep irregular incisions; to slice

folly - state of being foolish or deficient in understanding

grapple - engage in a close fight or struggle without weapons; wrestle

placer - a deposit of sand in the bed of a stream containing particles of gold or other valuable minerals

parched - deprived of water, esp. by the sun's heat; dried up, scorched

tallow - a substance consisting of animal fat used for making candles and soap, dressing leather, and other purposes

treachery - violation of faith or betrayal of trust; deceptive action or nature

musher - a person who travels through snow, on foot or with a dog sled; (also) the driver of a dog sled

wheel-dog - the dog harnessed nearest to the sleigh in a dog team

Fun Facts for Students

Sled Dogs:

can travel at speeds up to **20 miles per hour**; are not bred for the coldness of the Arctic and **do not love the extreme cold**, which is why they wear protective coats and booties;

played a key role in the **Klondike Gold Rush** because the terrains were

inaccessible during winter and people found it difficult to travel by foot;

traversed one of the most important trails during the Klondike Gold Rush, the **1000-plus mile Iditarod Trail**, a trail which is still used today for the annual Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race run in early March from Anchorage to Nome, Alaska.

Wolves:

have a sense of smell that is **100 times stronger** than humans;

are **known to be the ancestor** of every known breed of dog;

find mates only once and stick with their mates **for the rest of their lives**, creating a couple we call the alpha pair;

eat up to **one-fifth of their total weight** due to the irregularities in the availability of food;

can live for over **13 years** with the average life being six to eight years.;

can swim up to **eight miles**.

About the Klondike Gold Rush

The Klondike Gold Rush was a stampede of migration by an estimated 100,000 people to the Klondike region of north-western Canada in the Yukon region between 1896 and 1899. The people who moved to the area were seeking gold, which had been discovered in the region. It's also called the Yukon Gold Rush, the Last Great Gold Rush and the Alaska Gold Rush.

Starting in the 1870s, prospectors trickled into the Yukon in search of gold. By 1896, around 1,500 prospectors panned for gold along the Yukon River basin. Reports of gold were discovered in many rich deposits along the Klondike River in 1896 and created a hysteria that was nationwide. Many people quit their jobs and left for the Klondike to become gold-diggers searching a wealthier fate. Most had no idea where they were going or what they would face along the way.

For many Americans, traveling to the Klondike in search of gold was their key to the American Dream. Gold "fever" quickly reached epidemic proportions. Aspiring prospectors from all over the world set out for the new gold fields with dreams of a quick fortune dancing in their heads. Because of the harsh terrain and even harsher weather, it took gold rushers a year to reach the Klondike from Northern California. The long climb over mountainous terrain, frozen rivers, intense cold, and frequent snowstorms combined with malnutrition and infectious illnesses made for a long and difficult journey. Because of these conditions only about 30,000 actually made it to the Klondike. Only about 4,000 actually found gold. For most, their arduous journeys and rigors of camp life were unrewarding. Even so, the adventurous stampede for gold united people of all walks of life in a common goal. [Listen to stories](#) about the famous Gold Rush.





About the Author

Jack London, whose life symbolized the power of will, was the most successful writer in America in the early 20th Century. His vigorous stories of men and animals against the environment, and survival against hardships, were drawn mainly from his own experiences. His years in the Klondike searching for gold left their mark in his best short stories; among them, *The Call of the Wild*, and *White Fang*.

London passed his childhood in poverty in the Oakland, California slums. He rode trains, pirated oysters, shoveled coal, worked on a sealing ship on the Pacific, and found employment in a cannery. In his free time, he hunkered down at libraries, soaking up novels and travel books. His life as a writer essentially began in 1893 when he survived a horrifying voyage in which a typhoon nearly killed him and his crew. The 17-year-old adventurer wrote about his experience and submitted his story to the local paper's writing contest. With just an eighth-grade education, London captured the \$25 first prize (equivalent to about \$650 today), beating out college students from Berkeley and Stanford. For London, the contest was an eye-opening experience, and he decided to dedicate his life to writing.

Questions to Engage & Connect

Why does London have Buck narrate the story?

How would the story change if it were told by the dog-trainer instead of Buck?

What is the “call of the wild”? How does it affect Buck’s behavior?

What role does survival play in the story? How is it different for dogs and humans?

To what extent does London anthropomorphize Buck (present him like a human being) and to what extent is he emphatically an animal?

What do the color red, the fang, and the club symbolize?

What emotions did you experience during the show and what stirred them? For example: How did you feel when Manuel sold Buck to the man in the red sweater?

Do you think Buck’s story is a sad one or a happy one? Explain your answer.

Bonus Explorations

LESSONS & ACTIVITIES

Write a dramatic scene in which Buck confronts Spitz. Create human dialogue for each of the characters showing their emotional and mental states (two-page minimum). Then, draw the fight between the two dogs showing features illustrating their characters.

Ask students the following question: Who is civilized in *Call of the Wild* and who is wild, or uncivilized? Instruct them to define each term, answer the question, and cite specific examples from the play or novel. Have each side explain what, in their opinion, is the most important difference between being civilized and uncivilized.

Rewrite the opening poem in *The Call of the Wild* using language from today’s world. Then, write a one-page analysis explaining how this poem represents Buck’s journey from Judge Miller’s house to the wild.

Resources

BOOKS

Kershaw, Alex. *Jack London: A Life*. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997.

Labor, Earle. *Jack London*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994.

London, Jack. *The Call of the Wild and White Fang*. London: Bantam Books, 1981.

WEBSITES

8 things you didn’t know about the [Klondike Gold Rush](#)

Interesting facts about the Klondike Gold Rush.

[Klondike Gold Rush: Facts, History and Timeline](#)

A concise summary and detailed timeline of the Klondike Gold Rush.

[Best Selling Sled Dog Racing Books](#)

A list of books on sled dogs for every reading level.

VIDEOS

Svatek, Peter: *The Call of the Wild: Dog of the Yukon*, 1997

[How Smart Are Animals](#) (53 min.)

[Sled Dogs: More Than Meets the Eye](#) (3:41)

[Why Don’t Sled Dogs Ever Get Tired?](#) (2:38)

About the Company

Theatre Heroes is an Austin-based company of artists who create high quality touring performances for young audiences and those young at heart. They are theatre makers, fearless adventurers, and terrified mistake makers. They celebrate the live theatre experience as a launch pad for promoting creativity and innovation. They make story and adventure, encouraging youth to pursue their own dreams and keep this art form alive. They strive to create a world of infinite possibilities and limitless imagination where anyone can be their own hero.