

The King of Mazy May

Jack London

Activate Prior Knowledge

What do you already know about what it is like to live in a cold climate?

Literary Analysis

The **setting** of a story is the time and place of the action. Describe the setting of this story.

Reading Check

How old is Walt Masters? Circle the answer.

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to live in the wilderness? Walt Masters, a fourteen-year-old boy in Jack London's story "The King of Mazy May," has lived his whole life in the lonely Yukon wilderness. He and his father have been prospecting for gold and have filed a claim. While Walt's father and their neighbor Loren Hall are away, Walt comes across men planning to steal Hall's claim.

The story opens with a description of Walt and details about his life:

Walt Masters is not a very large boy, but in some ways he is like a man. There are many things he has never seen, because he has lived in the wilderness all his life. He has never seen a train or an elevator, nor has he ever seen a farm, a plow, a cow, or even a chicken. He has never gone to a picnic or party, nor talked to a girl. But he has seen the sun at midnight and played beneath the northern lights.

Walt is the only young white boy in thousands of square miles of frozen wilderness. He can trade with the Indians for their precious furs. He can bake bread and shoot a moose. He can also drive his team of wild wolf dogs fifty miles a day on the snow-packed trail.



Walt was born a thousand miles or so down the Yukon,¹ in a trading post below the Ramparts. After his mother died, his father and he came up on the river, step by step, from camp to camp, till now they are settled down on the Mazy May

1. **Yukon** (YOO kahn) river flowing through the Yukon Territory of northwest Canada.

Creek in the Klondike country. Last year they and several others had spent much toil and time on the Mazy May, and endured great hardships; the creek, in turn, was just beginning to show up its richness and to reward them for their heavy labor. But with the news of their discoveries, strange men began to come and go through the short days and long nights, and many unjust things they did to the men who had worked so long upon the creek.



One of the prospectors goes hunting. He returns to the creek to find his claim jumped. Others lose their claims by taking too long to reach Dawson to record them.



But Walt Masters's father had recorded his claim from the start, so Walt had nothing to fear now that his father had gone on a short trip up the White River prospecting for quartz. Walt was well able to stay by himself in the cabin, cook his three meals a day, and look after things. Not only did he look after his father's claim, but he had agreed to keep an eye on the adjoining one of Loren Hall, who had started for Dawson to record it.




Loren Hall is an old man. He travels very slowly because he has no dogs and has to walk. At Rosebud Creek Loren falls through the ice and his feet are frozen. He is not able to travel for a couple of weeks. Then Walt gets word that Loren is better and is getting ready to travel again.




Stop to Reflect 

What do you think are some of the hardships that the settlers had to endure?

Reading Skill 

Walt has been given many responsibilities while his father is away. **Draw a conclusion** about Walt based on this detail. What does his ability to look after his father's claim tell you about Walt's character?

Reading Check 

What began to happen after the hard work of the settlers started to pay off? Underline the answer.

Vocabulary Development

toil (toyl) *n.* hard work

endured (in DO_ORD) *v.* suffered through

TAKE NOTES

Literary Analysis

Characters' actions depend on the **setting**. Think about the travel choices available during the time in which the story is set. How does the time of the story affect travel?

Reading Skill

Read the bracketed paragraph. Walt keeps watch on the men. **Draw a conclusion** about Walt's feelings. What does Walt's behavior tell you about his attitude toward the men?

Read Fluently

Break long sentences down into smaller sentences to understand them. Read the underlined sentence in the story. Simplify the underlined sentence by breaking it up into shorter sentences. Mark the break with a line.

Walt was worried, however; the claim was liable to be jumped at any moment because of this delay, and a fresh stampede had started in on the Mazy May. He did not like the looks of the newcomers, and one day, when five of them came by with crack dog teams and the lightest of camping outfits, he could see that they were prepared to make speed, and resolved to keep an eye on them. So he locked up the cabin and followed them, being at the same time careful to remain hidden.



Walt sees the men change many stakes, destroy old ones, and set up new ones. He creeps up to their camp, close enough to hear what they are saying. The leader, a big man with a black beard, tells the others that they should head back to Dawson tonight.



“That’s it,” said the leader. “If we can get to Dawson and record, we’re rich men; and there’s no telling who’s been sneaking along in our tracks, watching us, and perhaps now off to give the alarm. The thing for us to do is to rest the dogs a bit, and then hit the trail as hard as we can. What do you say?”



The other men agree. Before they get ready to leave, the leader takes three of his men to check on one last claim. Walt follows them to Loren Hall’s claim. The men scoop up a couple of buckets of dirt. They put the dirt in a pan and wash it in the creek.



Vocabulary Development

liable (LY uh buhl) *adj.* likely to do something

stampede (stam PEED) *n.* a sudden mass movement of people

resolved (ri Z AHLVD) *v.* decided

When this was finished, they stared at the broad streak of black sand and yellow gold grains on the bottom of the pan, and one of them called excitedly for the man who had remained in camp to come. Loren Hall had struck it rich and his claim was not yet recorded. It was plain that they were going to jump it.

Walt lay in the snow, thinking rapidly. He was only a boy, but in the face of the threatened injustice to old lame Loren Hall he felt that he must do something. He waited and watched, with his mind made up, till he saw the men begin to square up new stakes.



Walt crawls away till he is out of hearing. Then he breaks into a run for the camp of the claim jumpers. Walt's father has taken their own dogs with him prospecting. Walt knows that he cannot go the seventy miles to Dawson without the aid of dogs. So when he reaches the camp, he picks out the ten best dogs and harnesses them to one of the sleds. Just then the claim jumpers come into sight. As they cry out to Walt, he grabs one of their fur sleeping robes. He leaps upon the sled and takes off.




"Mush! Hi! Mush on!" he cried to the animals, snapping the keen-lashed whip among them.



The dogs race along the frozen creek bed, pulling Walt on the sled. He can hear the cries of the claim jumpers as they run along the high creek bank to cut him off. Walt's heart is beating wildly. Suddenly, one of the men leaps at the sled. He grabs onto one end of the sled and is dragged along behind it. Walt cracks him across the knuckles with his whip until he has to let go.


For the next eight miles the Mazy May follows a crooked course until it meets the Yukon. Two of the men take a shortcut across

Reading Skill 


Walt feels that he must do something to protect Loren Hall's claim. What does this tell you about Walt's character? Answer this question by **drawing** your own **conclusions**.

Stop to Reflect 

In order to stop the thieves, Walt decides to steal their dogs. Do you agree with his decision? Explain.

Reading Skill 

Draw a conclusion about why it would be impossible to travel seventy miles to Dawson without dogs.

Reading Check 

What made Walt decide to steal the dogs and travel to Dawson? Underline the answer.

TAKE NOTES

Literary Analysis

The **setting** can affect a character's actions in a story. What details about the Mazy May make it hard for Walt to travel to Dawson?

Stop to Reflect

To run *as the crow flies* means to run in a straight line, like a bird flying from one place to another. Is a straight line a shorter or a longer distance than a crooked one?

How does this help Walt? Explain your answer.

Literary Analysis

The **setting** has changed at this point in the story. Read the bracketed paragraph. Circle the detail that shows a change in time. Put a star next to the detail that shows a change in place.

a narrow neck of land. At the next bend in the creek, they have almost caught up to Walt.

◆ ◆ ◆

“Halt!” they cried after him. “Stop, or we’ll shoot!”

But Walt only yelled harder at the dogs, and dashed around the bend with a couple of revolver bullets singing after him. At the next bend they had drawn up closer still, and the bullets struck uncomfortably near him but at this point the Mazy May straightened out and ran for half a mile as the crow flies. Here the dogs stretched out in their long wolf swing, and the stampedeers, quickly winded, slowed down and waited for their own sled to come up.

◆ ◆ ◆

Walt knows that they have not given up the chase and will soon be after him again. It is twilight by the time Walt comes upon the mighty frozen Yukon. The sled flies along the glassy ice of the main river trail. At times it becomes necessary to guide the dogs by his voice. Walt now learns that he has made a mistake in his choice of lead dog. This dog has never learned the meaning of “gee” and “haw.” Several times he capsizes the sled.

With the air temperature at forty below, Walt knows he will freeze to death if he remains constantly upon the sled. Every now and then he jumps off the sled and runs behind it until he warms up. When Walt looks back, he can now see the sled of the claim jumpers.

◆ ◆ ◆

Night fell, and in the blackness of the first hour or so Walt toiled desperately with his dogs. On account of the lead dog, they were continually floundering off the beaten track into the soft snow, and the sled was as often riding on its side or top as it was in the proper way.

◆ ◆ ◆

When the moon rises, Walt can see that his enemies have come within four hundred yards of him. They begin firing at him with a

rifle. Suddenly a bullet strikes Walt’s bad lead dog. Walt stops to drag the dying animal to the side and straighten out the team.

As Walt leaps back upon the sled, the claim jumpers come up alongside him. Walt strikes at their faces with his whip. Then he reaches out, catches their lead dog by the forelegs, and throws him. This capsizes the sled, snarls the team, and tangles up Walt’s enemies.




Away Walt flew, the runners of his sled fairly screaming as they bounded over the frozen surface. And what had seemed an accident proved to be a blessing in disguise. The proper lead dog was now to the fore, and he stretched low and whined with joy as he jerked his comrades along.



Walt leaves the claim jumpers far behind. At daylight he reaches Swede Creek and runs into the camp of old Loren Hall. Loren quickly joins Walt on the sled. There is no sign of the claim jumpers. Just as they pull up at the gold commissioner’s office in Dawson, Walt falls asleep.



And because of what Walt Masters did on this night, the men of the Yukon have become proud of him, and speak of him now as the King of Mazy May.

Reading Skill 

Draw conclusions about why Walt falls asleep when the sled pulls into Dawson.

Stop to Reflect 

Explain the title of this story, “The King of Mazy May.”

Reading Check 

What happens when Walt throws the claim jumpers’ lead dog? Circle the answer.

The King of Mazy May

1. **Compare and Contrast:** Think about the responsibilities that most kids have. How is Walt’s life different from those of other children his age?

2. **Apply:** Would you have been tempted to travel to the Klondike in search of gold? Explain.

3. **Reading Skill:** People call Walt the “King of Mazy May.” Use your **prior knowledge** to **draw a conclusion** about how Walt feels about his new name.

4. **Literary Analysis:** Use this chart to list ways in which details of the **setting** affect events in the story.

	Details of Setting	Story Events
Time		
Place		