

Study Guide

***The Call of the Wild* by Jack London**

LEXILE 1170

The Novel at a Glance**MORE ABOUT THE WRITER**

Jack London made it his goal to write a thousand words every day. His discipline paid off: In the sixteen years after the turn of the century, he wrote more than fifty books and numerous short stories and articles.

London apparently took his hobbies seriously, too. He was skilled in animal husbandry and applied Asian agricultural techniques at Beauty Ranch. The land could not contain him, though. He and his wife planned a seven-year trip around the world on his ship, the *Snark*. Although problems cut the trip short, the voyage gave London material for his writing. After mingling freely with the lepers in Molokai, for example, he wrote an article about them.

London packed his short life full of other activities: horseback riding, sailing on San Francisco Bay, entertaining guests at his home, serving as a war correspondent, speaking on a variety of topics, traveling, and planning his dream home, Wolf House.

BACKGROUND**Setting**

The Call of the Wild takes place during the late 1890s, mostly in the Yukon Territory of northwestern Canada. In 1896, gold was discovered in the Klondike River, and thousands of miners and adventurers—including Jack London—flooded the Yukon Territory, hoping to strike it rich. The Yukon Territory posed many hardships for these gold seekers, however. This area contains high mountains, remote wilderness, and temperatures that range from 95 degrees in the summer to 60 degrees below zero in the winter.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Buck is the focus of the novel. Externally, he acts as one might expect a dog to act in encounters with people, nature in general, and other animals in particular. Internally, his thought processes mirror those of humans as he battles the new direction that his life is taking. Buck's **conflicts** reveal such character traits as loyalty, determination, courage, alertness, diligence, and leadership. London presents Buck as a **dynamic character**, even a **hero**, continually changing until he takes on legendary proportions at the end.

Spitz is the lead dog when Buck joins the team. He kills Curly, a good-natured Newfoundland, when she tries to warm up to him. Spitz and Buck fight constantly to lead the team.

François and **Perrault** are Buck's first owners. Fair, skillful, and experienced, they introduce the dog to sledding. They forge a strong working relationship, and François weeps when he has to leave Buck.

The Call of the Wild *continued*

The Scotch half-breed is the mail-train driver who takes charge of the dog team after official orders come to François and Perrault. He works the dogs to the point of collapse.

Charles is one of Buck's third owners. He knows little about mushing and packing for the trail.

Hal is one of Buck's third owners. He is cruel and beats Buck nearly to death.

Mercedes is Charles's wife and Hal's sister. She is not used to the harsh life of the trail.

John Thornton is Buck's last and best master. Indeed, London presents an ideal **characterization** of Thornton—a man of compassion, true kindness, and loyalty toward Buck—and the author gives this pair the fullest treatment in the novel.

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

When you encounter unfamiliar words, you can often figure out the meanings of these words by looking for **context clues**. As you read the novel, you should examine the contexts of unfamiliar words and try to figure out their meanings. Then, you can check in a dictionary to see if you are right.

Chapters 1–3

metamorphosed, p. 8
primordial, p. 15
fastidiousness, p. 23

Chapters 6–7

mandate, p. 81
paroxysms, p. 107
usurp, p. 111

Chapters 4–5

salient, p. 59
repugnance, p. 61
voracious, p. 66