

# The Call of the Wild

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## Whole-Novel Discussion and Activities

### BURNING ISSUES

1. London calls life “a puppet thing.” Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. “The blood lust, the joy to kill” makes parts of this story very savage. In your opinion, are the details of the fights unnecessarily graphic? Why or why not?
3. Jack London cared deeply about labor conditions that he felt were unfair to workers. Think about the ways in which the owners (the employers) treat their dogs (their employees). What might London be saying about what makes working conditions good or bad?
4. Buck and Thornton cannot express their devotion in words, but their actions tell all. How do you see people today expressing their devotion to other people through actions?
5. As we leave Buck, he is a legend, untouchable by any predator. Does it bother you that Buck becomes “larger than life,” or do you like seeing him in this role? Explain.

### CHOICES ACTIVITIES

1. **Art Art and Soul.** Illustrate one or more scenes from *The Call of the Wild* in the medium of your choice. Whether you decide to draw, paint, sculpt, or make a collage, try to capture the “soul”—the important ideas and feelings—in the part of the novel that you are illustrating. You might want to get together with some classmates and create a “*Call of the Wild* Art Gallery” of your finished pieces.
2. **Science Yukon Ecology.** What might you expect to find if you visited the Yukon? With a few classmates, research the plants and animals that live in the region. (Hint: Part of the Yukon is in a *tundra* climate; part is in a *taiga* climate.) Together, decide how you will divide the tasks in your group, what characteristics you will select, how to plan what you will study, and what kind of presentation you want to make. Consider illustrations, charts, or other visuals. After you present your findings, discuss how knowing this information helps you understand the challenges that the characters in London’s novel face.
3. **Mathematics Going for the Gold.** “A sack of gold dust the size of a bologna sausage.” Fifty-pound bags of gold “piled like so much firewood.” Seekers of gold who struck it rich could buy—well, what *could* they buy? Conduct research to find out how much an ounce of gold is worth today and, if you can, how much it was worth around 1903, when *The Call of the Wild* was published. Calculate the value of a fifty-pound bag of gold, or guess the weight and value of a sausage-sized sack of gold dust. Make a list of what you might buy with that fifty-pound bag today, giving an approximate price for each item. If you prefer, find out the cost of several items in 1903 and make an “old-fashioned” list. As you share your findings, discuss why the Klondike Gold Rush attracted so many people and created the need for more sled dogs.
4. **Film: Viewing and Reviewing Calling All Critics.** There are several film versions of *The Call of the Wild*. Choose two of them. Then, find the same scene in each. For example, you might choose the scene in which Buck defeats Spitz or wins the bet for Thornton. Compare and rate the scenes. Which film seems more true to the book? In which one is the acting better? Which one is more exciting, and why? Show the scenes in class, share your opinions, and see if your classmates agree.