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CLASSICS

**Simon & Schuster Classroom Activities
for the Enriched Classic edition of
The Call of the Wild by Jack London
1-4165-0019-7 • \$4.95 / \$5.99 Can.**

Activities created by Robert Marantz

Each of the three activities includes:

- NCTE standards covered
- An estimate of the time needed
- A complete list of materials needed
- Step-by-step instructions
- Questions to help you evaluate the results

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**“The Gold Rush”
(A Lesson in Setting)**

The Klondike...Skagway...Dyea...The Chilkoot Divide...White Pass...Forty Mile Creek ... Buck’s journey from California to The Yukon, and from domestication to atavism, takes him, along with his human masters, through these as well as other unusual and interesting-sounding locations in the search for gold. To truly appreciate the harsh conditions encountered by both man and beast in Jack London’s *The Call of the Wild*, it is helpful to visualize where the novel takes place.

In this lesson students will research the Alaskan and Canadian settings of *The Call of the Wild*, as well as the Klondike Gold Rush of 1896-7.

This lesson will take two or three class periods.

NCTE Standards Covered:

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their words identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).

7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

8. Students use a variety of technological and informational resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literary communities.

12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

What to Do:

1. Start the lesson by asking the class what they already know about Alaska and the Klondike Gold Rush. If any of your students have been to either of these places, ask them to share their experiences and impressions. Perhaps these students can even bring in pictures from their trip.

2. Divide the class into four groups. Each group will research one aspect of the setting of *The Call of the Wild*:

a. **Geography:** This group will create a map of the west coast, from the Yukon Territory to San Diego, and mark places along the path mentioned in the novel.

b. **Alaska and The Yukon:** This group will investigate the native people and climate of these regions

c. **The Klondike Gold Rush:** This group will research facts and figures concerning the Gold Rush (how many people took part, how many struck it rich, how many died, how much gold was actually found, etc)

d. **Dog Sledding:** This group will look into how dogs were used to haul people and supplies across the rugged terrain. What dogs were best suited to this task? Why?

3. If your classroom has enough computers, allow the students to conduct their research there. Otherwise, make arrangements for your class to spend one or two class periods in the school library.

4. Each group will give a ten-minute presentation on their topic with some sort of visual aid. (It could be a poster, map, video, slide show, etc.)

5. As you read *The Call of the Wild*, call on each group as a panel of experts to authenticate or debunk London's descriptions of the people and places of Alaska and The Yukon.

What You Need:

A copy of the Enriched Classics edition of *The Call of the Wild* (ISBN: 1416500197, \$4.95/\$5.99 Can.) for each student, and materials for visual aids (poster boards, markers, etc.)

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How Did It Go?

This activity offers the students an excellent opportunity to conduct independent research and manage their time effectively while working in groups. The depth of each group's research will be indicative of how well they used their time and how well they worked together. Depending on the results, you may want to follow up this activity with mini-lessons on research and/or time management.

“What’s That Supposed to Mean?” (A Lesson in Meaning)

A cursory glance at the chapter titles in *The Call of the Wild* reveals much about the novel’s plot and themes. Certainly, “Into the Primitive,” while vague and without context, is the perfect title for introducing the reader to Buck and his literal and figurative journey into the wild. Likewise, Jack London’s other chapter titles project meaning with an almost poetic quality (i.e. “The Toil of Trace and Trail”). Writing a novel is not just about plot and character but also about how one uses words to convey denotative and connotative meanings.

In this lesson, we will examine the seven chapter titles in *The Call of the Wild* in order to gain an understanding into the process of writing.

This activity will carry through the entire unit on *The Call of the Wild*.

NCTE Standards Covered:

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their words identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

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6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.

11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literary communities.

12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

What to Do:

1. Divide the class into seven groups. Each group will be responsible for one of the seven chapters in *The Call of the Wild*.

2. Before starting each chapter of the novel, have all your students consider the title of the chapter. What do they predict the chapter will be about, based on what has come before in the novel? Have them record their thoughts in a journal.

3. While reading a specific chapter, the group assigned to that chapter will work together to create a poster with images and other media that represent the chapter. (For instance, a poster for “The Dominant Primordial Beast” might depict the savage fight between Buck and Spitz. Or, a group might have a less literal and more figurative interpretation of the chapter by showing Buck on top of a mound made up of other dogs—in effect the “King of the Hill.”) When the class has finished reading the chapter, the group will make a brief presentation of their poster. By the time the class finishes the novel, there will be seven posters representing each chapter of the novel on display in your classroom.

4. Additionally, each member of each group will write a poem, adopting the title of the assigned chapter as the title of the poem. Each poem will convey the themes or main ideas of the chapter, and may or may not refer to the plot itself. Each poem must be at least 25 lines.

5. Poems will be posted near the corresponding posters. Place blank sheets of paper near each poem as well as the poster. When the class has finished reading the novel, have your students do a gallery walk around the classroom. They can write any comments they have about a poem or poster on the blank sheet next to that artifact.

What You Need:

A copy of the Enriched Classics edition of *The Call of the Wild* (ISBN: 1416500197, \$4.95/\$5.99 Can.) for each student and materials for posters (poster boards, markers, etc.)

How Did It Go?

The underlying idea of this activity is to get your students to think beyond the literal, beyond plot and character, and to consider theme and subtext. Their poems and posters will offer insight into how they interpret *The Call of the Wild* for themselves. If too many of your students explore only the literal, then this is an opportunity for you to address literary analysis on a more complex level.

“Word Play”
(A Lesson in Vocabulary)

By most accounts, students find *The Call of the Wild* a good read that is not too hard to understand (unlike, say, Shakespeare.) Yet Jack London peppered his novel with an impressive vocabulary, including many words that are the staple of standardized tests today. Perhaps it is because students can follow Buck’s story so well that they do not get bogged down by the big words. It is very likely that any unfamiliar words encountered by students in *The Call of the Wild* are subsequently defined based on their usage in the story.

This is the best way to learn new vocabulary—seeing it in context rather than solely as a definition to be memorized. In this lesson students will define 50 words based on how London uses them, and then the students will use those words themselves.

This lesson will take two weeks.

NCTE Standards Covered:

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their words identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literary communities.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

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What to Do:

1. Distribute Handout #1, which includes 50 vocabulary words from *The Call of the Wild*. (The number in parentheses next to each word is the page on which that word can be found.)
2. Inform students that they will learn 25 words from the list each week. The class will focus on words 1-25 the first week (from chapters one through four), and 26-50 the second week (from chapters five through seven). This should correspond to the class' reading schedule. For each word, students will:
 - a. Write the word on one side on an index card.
 - b. On the other side of the card, write "Context:" and then the sentence with the word in it, with the vocabulary word underlined. This is the vocabulary-in-context.
 - c. Below "Context:" students will write the dictionary definition of the word, and what type of word it is (i.e. noun, verb, etc.).
3. For the first week, assign half the class to create matching exercises using the 25 words of the week. The exercise will have the vocabulary words in one column, and their scrambled definitions in another column.
4. The other half of class will each write a story using at least fifteen of the 25 words of the week. (You can offer a bonus if they get all 25 words into their stories if you like.)
5. You will then assign students into pairs, one from the half of class that created the matching exercises, and the other from the half that wrote stories using the vocabulary words. The student who wrote the story will have to complete his partner's matching exercise while the partner reviews the story to confirm that the words have been used properly.
6. For the second week, the pairs switch roles. The student who wrote the story will now create a matching exercise based on the second set of 25 words while her partner will now write a story using at least fifteen of those words. This same student will then have to complete her partner's matching exercise while her partner reviews her story for correct vocabulary usage.
7. Optional: Give the students weekly and cumulative quizzes on the words.

What You Need:

A copy of the Enriched Classics edition of *The Call of the Wild* (ISBN: 1416500197, \$4.95/\$5.99 Can.) for each student

How Did It Go?

Freeing your students from the drudgery of vocabulary workbooks should empower them to be more engaged in (and less resentful towards) learning new vocabulary. This activity offers students the chance to consider these words in three different contexts—reading them initially in *The Call of the Wild*, matching them in a typical vocabulary exercise, and using them in their own writing. After being exposed to the words in these three different lights, how well did your students retain their meanings? Which context allowed for the best absorption of meaning? Did it vary from student to student? If so, you can keep this in mind as you expand their vocabulary in other units.

Vocabulary in *The Call of the Wild*

Chapters 1-4

- 1) demesne (26)
- 2) imperiously (27)
- 3) sated (27)
- 4) insular (27)
- 5) progeny (27)
- 6) deft (28)
- 7) futilely (28)
- 8) impending (30)
- 9) calamity (30)
- 10) primitive (34)
- 11) cunning (34)
- 12) morose (36)
- 13) primordial (38)
- 14) reproof (40)
- 15) appeasingly (41)
- 16) disconsolate (42)
- 17) malingerer (46)
- 18) covert (58)
- 19) travail (59)
- 20) insidious (60)
- 21) placatingly (60)
- 22) inexorable (65)
- 23) obdurate (67)
- 24) celerity (69)
- 25) lugubriously (75)

Chapters 5-7

- 26) salient (79)
- 27) callowness (79)
- 28) chaffering (79)
- 29) apprehensively (79)
- 30) remonstrance (79)
- 31) averred (83)
- 32) jaded (84)
- 33) voracious (85)
- 34) cajole (85)
- 35) innocuously (91)
- 36) terse (91)
- 37) inarticulate (93)
- 38) eloquent (97)
- 39) reverently (97)
- 40) feigned (97)
- 41) transient (98)
- 42) tenderfoot (101)
- 43) contagion (107)
- 44) ramshackle (111)
- 45) formidable (119)
- 46) sequential (120)
- 47) simultaneous (120)
- 48) slake (123)
- 49) discomfited (129)
- 50) muses (130)