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SAMPLE EXCERPTS FROM THE MONKEYNOTES FOR "The Call of the Wild" by Jack London.

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THE CALL OF THE WILD

by

JACK LONDON



Edited by Diane Sauder

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The first gold rush in America took place in California. This novel deals with the second gold rush, the Klondike Gold Rush; it took place at the end of the nineteenth century in the cold, Arctic regions of the Yukon Valley in far Northwestern Canada and Alaska. It took great fortitude and.....

CHARACTERS

Major Characters

Buck - the protagonist of the story. He is a huge dog, a cross between a St. Bernard and a Scotch Shepherd. He is stolen from his.....

Spitz - a Husky, equal to the size of a full-grown wolf. He is the.....

Perrault - a French-Canadian with swarthy looks. He is Buck's first master in.....

Francois - a French Canadian Half-breed, twice as.....

John Thornton - an informed and interested trapper in the Yukon, who rescues Buck from the tenderfoot explorers. Buck becomes

Minor Characters

Judge Miller - Buck's original owner in Santa Clara. Buck is born on.....

Manuel - Miller's Mexican gardener, who steals.....

Curly - a friendly Newfoundland Dog (similar to the St. Bernard in appearance), who is.....

CONFLICT

Protagonist: Buck, a cross between a St. Bernard and a Scotch Shepherd, is the protagonist of the novel. He is stolen from his home in California and sold to Francois and Perrault to work in the harsh Yukon Territory.

Antagonist: The general antagonist is nature, in its brutal Arctic character, and a fight for survival in spite of the hardships. Buck, a spoiled ranch dog from warm California, must

Climax: The turning point, or climax, comes when Buck fights.....

Outcome: The story ends in comedy, for Buck learns to cope with the Arctic wilderness, defeats.....

PLOT (Synopsis):

The Call of the Wild, on the surface, is a story about Buck, a four-year old dog that is part Shepherd and part St. Bernard. More importantly, it is a naturalistic tale about the survival of the fittest in nature. Throughout the novel, Buck proves that he is fit and can endure the law of the club, the law of the fang, and the laws of nature.

Buck had been raised in California, on the ranch of Judge Miller. There he had the run of the place and was loved and pampered by all. Unfortunately, one of the judge's workers had a gambling problem and stole Buck to sell him for fifty dollars. Buck fights being tied, caged, and beaten, but his efforts.....

THEMES

Major Theme

The major theme of the novel is "the survival of the fittest" as shown when Buck defeats Spitz and goes on to master the natural environment in all its harshness; this same environment quickly

Minor Theme

Closely related to the main theme of the novel is the quest motif. There is something "natural" and primitive in

MOOD

A serious, tense mood is developed throughout the story, with Buck experiencing

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

JACK LONDON

Jack London was born out of wedlock in San Francisco, California, on January 12, 1876. His parents were Flora Wellman and William Henry Chaney, who had left his mother before Jack's birth. The author never knew his father and adopted the last name of John London, whom his mother married in September of 1876. His childhood in Oakland was spent in the slums and was marred by poverty. After completing grammar school, he worked at various odd jobs. By the age of fifteen, he had become a delinquent, robbing the nets of fishermen. At the age of 17, he became a sailor on the Sophie Sutherland and traveled to the Far East. Upon his return from his first journey, he joined a group of militant workers headed to Washington D.C. to protest. He left the group in Missouri and traveled as a hobo on freight cars. He was arrested for vagrancy and spent thirty days in jail in New York. After his release, he began to prepare himself to enter the University of California at Berkeley. For one semester, he studied Darwinism, Marxism, and other liberal philosophies, but he grew.....

LITERARY/HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Robert Campbell, a British fur trader for the Hudson Bay Company, first explored the Yukon Region of Northwestern Canada in the 1840's. In 1870 it became part of Canada's Northwest Territories, but was still largely unpopulated. In 1896, George Carmack and his Indian friends made a gold strike at a mining camp about fifty miles from Dawson City. This discovery led to the Klondike Gold Rush of 1897 and 1898. Thousands of prospectors poured into the Yukon, and many staked claims. Few, however, were successful in finding gold.

The author, Jack London prospected for gold in the Yukon in 1897, and experienced freezing weather during the winter, gnawing hunger from the scarcity of food, and a deep sense of isolation

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES

CHAPTER 1: Into the Primitive

Summary

Buck is an active and proud dog who carries himself in a royal fashion. Buck's father, Elmo, is a huge St. Bernard and his mother; Shep is a huge Scotch Shepherd. Buck was born in 1892 on the Miller ranch

in Santa Clara, California. He lives in a big house and has enjoyed an aristocratic lifestyle for five years. Unlike the other dogs, Buck is not restricted; no place is out of bounds for him, for he is considered neither a housedog nor a kennel dog. Buck goes hunting with the Judge's sons, escorts the Judge's daughters on their walks, and carries the Judge's grandsons on his back. In fact, Buck rules over the entire household, for he is "king - king over all creeping, crawling, flying things of Judge Miller's place - humans included." London describes him as a "stated aristocrat," who carries himself in a royal fashion. He is obviously proud of himself, perhaps a trifle egotistical. His saving grace is that he has had an active outdoor life; as a result, he is healthy and has not become a pampered housedog.

In 1897, the year the novel begins, prospectors are groping in the Arctic darkness for gold. They are in need of strong and healthy dogs that will be able to withstand the cold and hard work of the Klondike. Buck seems to be a perfectly suited dog for the challenges of the Arctic.

Manuel, one of the Judge's Mexican gardeners, is desperate for money for to satisfy his gambling habit. He decides to kidnap Buck and sell him as a work dog for the Yukon. While the Judge is out and the sons are busy, Manuel seizes Buck, who offer no resistance since he knows the thief. Manuel informs the man who buys Buck for \$50.00 that he should twist the rope to keep Buck in control. When the rope tightens round his neck, Buck springs in anger, pain, and frustration, for he is unused to such

Notes

The title of the first chapter, "Into the primitive," foreshadows the future adventures in the harsh wilderness for the protagonist, Buck. The poem that begins the novel summarizes the naturalistic theme, that within every creature, human or animal, there is a "primitive beast" that can emerge when needed in times of stress. London will use Buck, an enormous, intelligent, and powerful dog, to develop the theme. In order to make Buck a symbol for humankind, he gives him characteristics such as loyalty, love, ambition, and revenge, traits that usually describe humans. In fact, at the end of the first chapter, Buck is feeling embarrassed and ashamed that the humans have laughed about his reaction to snow.

In order to make Buck's transition seem harsher and to prove that even the most gentle of creatures has a beast within, London gives Buck the softest of beginnings, the best of civilization. Buck's master, Judge Miller, is gentle and kind. Buck also has the run of the house and is loved by everyone. Finally, he is well fed and lives a life of ease. In fact, London says that Buck is a "stated aristocrat," who has no reason to be untrusting. As a result, he willingly goes with Manuel, the thief who sells him, believes the Judge or his sons will rescue him from his cage, and is totally shocked when he is beaten. But this poor treatment quickly brings out the "beast" in Buck. He bites the man who chokes him and attacks his beater in "unbridled anger." It is important to note that when his captors file off his heavy brass collar, it will be Buck's last contract with the civilized world into which he was born and raised.

Buck's endurance of the first rites of initiation into the uncivilized world foreshadow the final transformation of Buck into the unbelievably disciplined and powerful animal that can pull 1000 pounds and survive on his own in the Yukon. During his harsh train trip, Buck accumulates a "fund of wrath." His metamorphosis into ferocity is so complete that even the judge would have failed to recognize him when he arrived in Seattle. He is, indeed, a new creature, an antithesis to the animal that would let children ride on his back.

Buck's first reaction to the rough treatment in the uncivilized world is a

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTERS

Buck

Buck, the dog hero and protagonist of the novel, begins life as a sated aristocrat. Proud and self-assured, he lives in a big house in the sun-kissed Santa Clara Valley in California. Although he is pampered by his master, Judge Miller, and his sons, he is more than a mere housedog. Buck keeps his large body lean and strong by hunting with the judge and by exercising in the outdoors. Because of his tremendous size and ability, he is stolen and sold to become a sled dog in the Yukon.

On the journey to Alaska, Buck experiences restriction for the first time in his life. He is tied, caged, and beaten, bringing out the fierceness in him. The trip also teaches.....

Francois and Perrault

Francois and Perrault are Buck's first owners in Alaska. They are experienced dog sled drivers who know and understand the hardships of travelling in the Yukon. Because life in the Arctic is hard, they also have to be hard, disciplining the dogs to obedience. From them, Buck learns the.....

John Thornton

John Thornton is the person in the novel who teaches Buck the true meaning of love. After.....

PLOT (Structure)

On the surface, the novel is a simple story of Buck, a cross between a St. Bernard and a Scotch Shepherd. He is raised in an aristocratic manner on Judge Miller's ranch in California; but he is stolen and sold to become a sled dog in Alaska.

In the Klondike, he is put to work on a dog team; during his travels, he learns the law of the club and the law of fang, but they make him stronger and more determined. His experiences make him strong and wise, allowing him to survive when other dogs perish. Even though Buck is badly wounded by

THEMES

The main theme of *The Call of the Wild* is "Survival of the Fittest," as evidenced in Buck. This philosophy, or theme, is developed from several sources:

1) Natural Selection

The mechanism of evolutionary change was suggested by Darwin in 1858. This theory asserts that evolution occurs because those individuals of a species, whose.....

QUESTIONS

Buck is a pampered Southland dog. Yet by the end of the novel, he has learned to survive in the cold North. Describe in brief the lessons of survival that he learns.

1. *The Call of the Wild* is the story of a quest. Compare and contrast Buck's quest with the other quests in the novel.
2. Compare and contrast all of Buck's masters in the novel. What does he learn from each? Which do you consider to be the most important lessons?.....

END OF SAMPLE MONKEYNOTES FOR "The Call of the Wild" by Jack London