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Study Guide

for

**The Call of
the Wild**

by Jack London



New York, New York Columbus, Ohio Woodland Hills, California Peoria, Illinois

Meet Jack London



Because men, groping in the Arctic darkness, had found a yellow metal, and because steamship and transportation companies were booming the find, thousands of men were rushing into the Northland.

—Jack London, in the opening paragraph of *The Call of the Wild*

Jack London not only wrote adventure stories, he lived them. He was one of thousands of men who went to Canada during the 1890s to prospect for gold, and he once traveled hundreds of miles across the United States by hopping freight trains.

The author-adventurer was born John Griffith Chaney on January 12, 1876. Shortly thereafter, the boy took his stepfather's last name, London. The family lived in Oakland, California.

London quit school when he was fourteen and alternately worked and traveled for several years. For awhile, he made a living stealing oysters. Then he switched jobs and worked on a government patrol to prevent people from stealing oysters. He also went to Japan, working as a sailor.

When London was nineteen, he returned to school. He completed a four-year high school curriculum in one year and entered

the University of California. After a year at the university, he couldn't resist the lure of the Klondike gold rush in Canada. He never returned to college, but he also never got rich from his trip to the goldfields.

London came home from Canada not with gold, but with ideas. Becoming a writer was one way to escape what he felt would be a dreary existence as a laborer. He trained himself by studying other writers' works. He began submitting jokes, stories, and poems to magazines and received many rejection letters. Gradually, however, success came. His first book, *The Son of the Wolf*, was well received when it was published in 1900. *The Call of the Wild*, published three years later, brought London lasting fame.

London was a popular figure. He used his position to win support for certain causes in which he believed, such as socialism, women's suffrage, and prohibition. He also endorsed, or recommended for use, certain commercial products, making him one of the first celebrity spokespersons.

Even after London achieved success as a writer, he continued to be well disciplined about his work. He completed fifty books—including novels and short story collections—during his seventeen-year writing career. At the time, he was the highest paid writer in the United States.

London was married twice. He and his first wife had two daughters. In 1905 he bought a ranch in Glen Ellen, California. There, he practiced agricultural techniques he had learned in Japan.

Though the circumstances of London's death are somewhat controversial, he probably died from kidney disease. He was only forty years old when he died, but he had achieved a great deal in his lifetime. Translations of his works are still widely read all over the world.

Introducing the Novel

*Mere escape novels do not become classics—and *The Call of the Wild* has become one of the great books in world literature, published in hundreds of editions in more than fifty languages.*

—Earle Labor, in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*

The Call of the Wild could be called an entertaining tale about a dog, but it is much more to its readers. London explores basic questions about a person's relationship to him or herself, to others, and to the natural world.

The story appeals to many different types of readers. Anyone who has known the loyalty of a dog can understand how some of Buck's masters feel. Adventurers and risk-takers will see themselves in the sled drivers as they travel across the frozen expanses of the Yukon.

The detail of the story is rich because London wrote about subjects with which he was familiar. He had been in the Yukon Territory during the gold rush, had felt the cold, heard the dog fights, and seen the many different kinds of people who were there. He weaves his story of Buck so carefully that readers, too, can be in the Yukon.

THE TIME AND PLACE

George Washington Carmack, Tagish Charlie, and Skookum Jim made a discovery that brought tens of thousands of people streaming into the northwestern part of Canada. They discovered gold in Bonanza Creek, a tributary of the Klondike River, in August 1896. This was not the first time gold

Did You Know?

Inuit, a native people of North America, were the first to use dogs to pull sleds over the snow and ice of Canada and Alaska. Dogsleds were practical for transporting supplies such as firewood or freshly killed meat. Some people still use dogsleds for work and transport. However, airplanes and snowmobiles have mostly replaced the dogsleds as a means of transportation. Dogsledding has become a popular hobby and sport in some areas.

Modern dogsleds are still made of wood, like the early Inuit sleds, but the runners are covered with aluminum or steel. Lightweight ash wood is used to make racing sleds.

Dogs are especially trained for sled racing. Breeds such as Eskimos, Siberian huskies, Samoyeds, and malamutes are best suited to the task because of their strength, coats, and disposition. Most dog teams include odd numbers of dogs—usually five,

seven, or nine. The method of hitching the dogs to the sled, called a gang hitch, requires an odd number. A single dog leads, with the other dogs hitched in pairs behind. The dogs respond to voice commands from the driver, or musher. Average races are twelve- to thirty-miles long. Drivers and their teams race against time.

Perhaps the most famous dogsled racing event is Alaska's Iditarod Trail race. The race's fame stems from its length—over 1,150 miles. The route follows a mail route that was established in 1910 between Knik, a city near Anchorage, and Nome. At that time, dogsleds carrying mail regularly covered the distance. The race, as it is today, began in 1973 and is run in March each year. The 1973 winner took about twenty days to complete the course. In the 1990s, the winners were finishing in about eleven days.

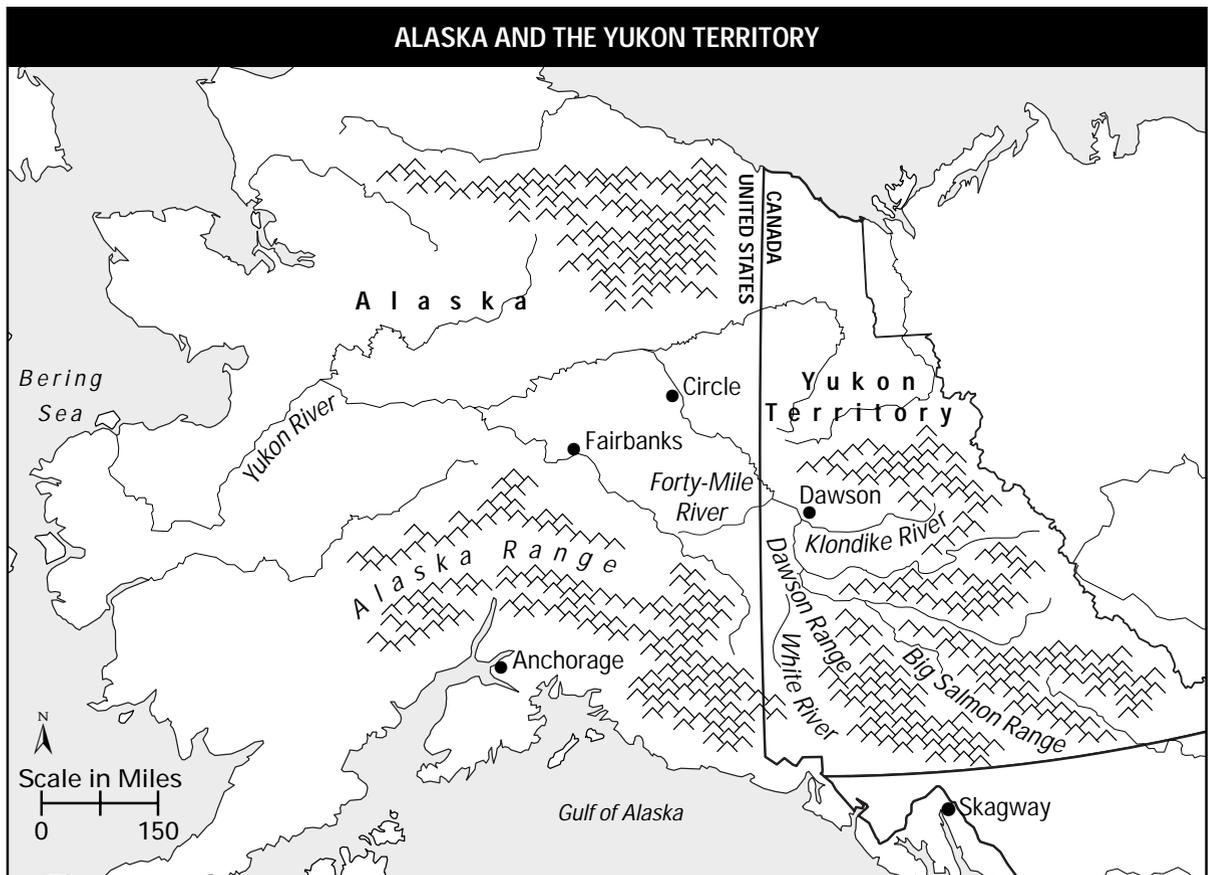
had been found in that region of the world. Prospectors had been working in and around the Klondike and Yukon rivers for several decades. But the find on Bonanza Creek was notable for two reasons. First, the quantity of the gold in the stream was remarkable. Second, much of the gold was easy to get using simple mining techniques.

The Klondike gold rush, as it came to be called, attracted thousands of hopeful miners. Many came by ship to Skagway, Alaska, where they purchased supplies at inflated prices and outfitted themselves for the trip north. Winter was the easiest season during which to travel because the rivers were frozen, but winter temperatures regularly registered 50 degrees below zero. During the

summer, humans and animals were attacked by swarms of mosquitoes and flies.

Few miners came away wealthy. Many who actually did find gold spent it all while celebrating in boomtowns such as Dawson City. Merchants and opportunists were all too ready to accept gold dust and nuggets from miners who were happy to show off their good fortune. Miners were often the target of lawless men who were willing to rob or murder to get a share of the riches.

In addition to the hazards of boomtowns were the dangers of wilderness travel. The elements claimed many victims as inexperienced prospectors froze, starved, or got lost in the forests and snowfields. The territory's rushing rivers also claimed many victims.



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Before You Read

The Call of the Wild Chapters 1–3

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Book and chapter titles provide clues to content, hinting at actions to come. What does the title *The Call of the Wild* suggest that the book will be about? What do the titles of the first three chapters suggest?

Think–Pair–Share

Pair up with a classmate and, based on the titles, predict what will happen to Buck the dog. Make note of your predictions so that you can check them later.

Setting a Purpose

Read to discover how Buck is used to living and what changes he must endure.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

In *The Call of the Wild*, Jack London writes about his main character, the dog Buck, as if the dog were human. The formal name for giving human qualities to animals is **anthropomorphism**. This word comes from the Greek words for “human” and “form.” To anthropomorphize something is to give it human form, or human characteristics. London doesn’t have Buck speak or walk upright, but he does give the dog human thoughts and emotions. As humans, we relate to those thoughts and emotions and accept them. As readers, we identify closely with Buck because we feel the same anger, the same surprise, and the same fear.

The End of the Nineteenth Century

In the novel, the nineteenth century is nearly over. As thousands of people head for the goldfields in Canada and Alaska, what are other Americans doing and thinking about? The final decades of the nineteenth century are considered a time of growth and change. The population of the United States increased by more than fifty percent from 1880 to 1900. Much of this increase was due to immigration. People from Europe came to the United States in record numbers.

During this period, Americans began to use machines to do their work. Industrialization spread quickly. Ways of doing things changed. Small factories became larger and produced more goods, creating more jobs for people. At home, machines also helped with everyday tasks.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

auspiciously [ôz pish’əs lē] *adv.* in a way that suggests a positive outcome; favorably

cowed [koud] *adj.* intimidated

discomfiture [dis kum’fi chər] *n.* uneasiness; discomfort

divers [dī’vərz] *adj.* several; various

insular [in’sə lər] *adj.* isolated

latent [lāt’ənt] *adj.* hidden

malignant [mə lig’nənt] *adj.* causing or intending harm

primordial [prī mōr’dē əl] *adj.* relating to the earliest ages; primitive

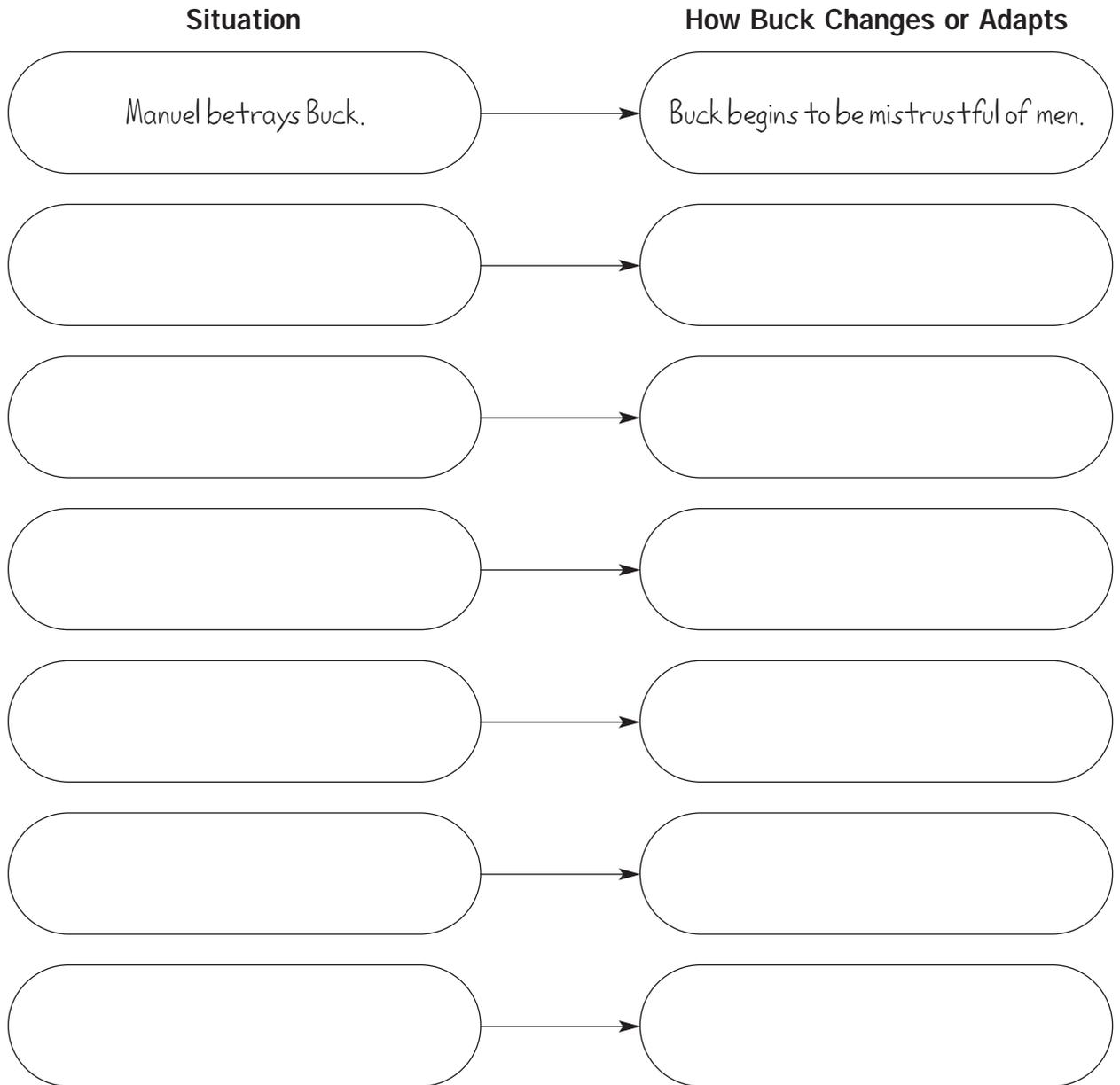
score [skôr] *n.* twenty

unwonted [un wôn’tid] *adj.* unusual; out of the ordinary

Active Reading

The Call of the Wild Chapters 1-3

Buck has many new experiences in the opening chapters of the novel. In each case, he is able to adapt. Use the diagram on this page to record each new situation Buck experiences and how it changes him.



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Responding

The Call of the Wild Chapters 1–3

Personal Response

How did you feel when Manuel sold Buck to the man in the red sweater? Why?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What is Buck's life like at Judge Miller's place? Why does Buck assume he is simply out for a stroll with Manuel?

2. What does the man in the red sweater teach Buck? Why was this an important lesson for Buck to learn?

3. What do François and Perrault expect of their dogs? Why do they admire Buck?

Responding

The Call of the Wild Chapters 1–3

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. The story is mainly told from Buck’s point of view. How does this perspective influence how you feel about Buck? How might the story change if it were told from the dog trainer’s point of view?

5. Does the story—a gold rush and a kidnapped dog—seem true to life? Explain.

Literature and Writing

Character Development

In many stories and novels, the goal of the main character is to improve himself or herself in some way. In *The Call of the Wild*, the narrator points out that once Buck learns to steal food, his moral decay has begun. He then says that this is vital, or absolutely necessary, for Buck’s survival. In one or two paragraphs, explain what this means. Do you agree with the narrator’s statement? Why or why not?

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

In your group, share the predictions you made in the **Focus Activity** on page 12 and see which ones are correct. Then, together skim the titles of Chapters 4 and 5 and predict what will happen next in the novel.

Geology Connection

The days when prospectors can find gold sparkling in the bottom of a creek bed are probably gone. Find out why gold used to be found in river beds. In addition, find out where most of the world’s gold mines are. What geographic or geologic characteristics do these areas have in common? Create a map that shows the world’s major gold-producing regions. Display your map as you report on the common characteristics of these regions.

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Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

The Call of the Wild Chapters 4 and 5

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Have you ever had to get control of or lead a group? How did you do it?

Quickwrite

Jot down brief notes about the situation and what you did to gain control. How did you communicate to the group that you intended to be the leader? Were others trying to lead the group as well?

Setting a Purpose

Read about Buck's struggle for mastery and how he resolves the conflict.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Northern regions that are far inland have colder winters than the areas that are closer to the ocean. The interior plains of northwestern Canada are characterized by short summers and long, cold winters. In *The Call of the Wild*, the dogs and drivers travel "comfortably" on days that are -50°F . That is far colder than most of us could stand. At that temperature, exposed flesh freezes in a manner of minutes. The drivers would have been wrapped and bundled from head to toe.

Yukon Territory

Prior to 1898, the area where the Yukon and Klondike rivers flow was part of Canada's vast sparsely populated Northwest Territories. With the discovery of gold in the region, the population grew quickly. In 1898 the Canadian Parliament separated the most northwest portion of the region into its own territory. No one yet realized that the population growth of this new Yukon Territory would be only temporary. By 1899 the Klondike gold rush was almost over. Gold had been discovered in Alaska and many Yukon prospectors packed up and headed to the west.

The area we know as Alaska had been purchased from Russia in 1867. The U.S. official who pushed for the purchase was William Seward. Many Americans opposed Seward's idea. What good could come from owning all that land? It wasn't even connected to the other states. They labeled Alaska "Seward's Folly," or foolish act. How pleased those same Americans were when gold was discovered in Alaska not many years later.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

callowness [kal'ō nəs] *n.* immaturity

inexorable [i nek'sər ə bəl] *adj.* relentless; not to be persuaded

manifested [man'ə fest əd] *v.* made evident or obvious

obdurate [ob'dər it] *adj.* resistant to persuasion; inflexible

perambulating [pər am'byə lāt'ing] *v.* traveling on foot

plaint [plānt] *n.* plea

prerogative [pri rog'ə tiv] *n.* a special right

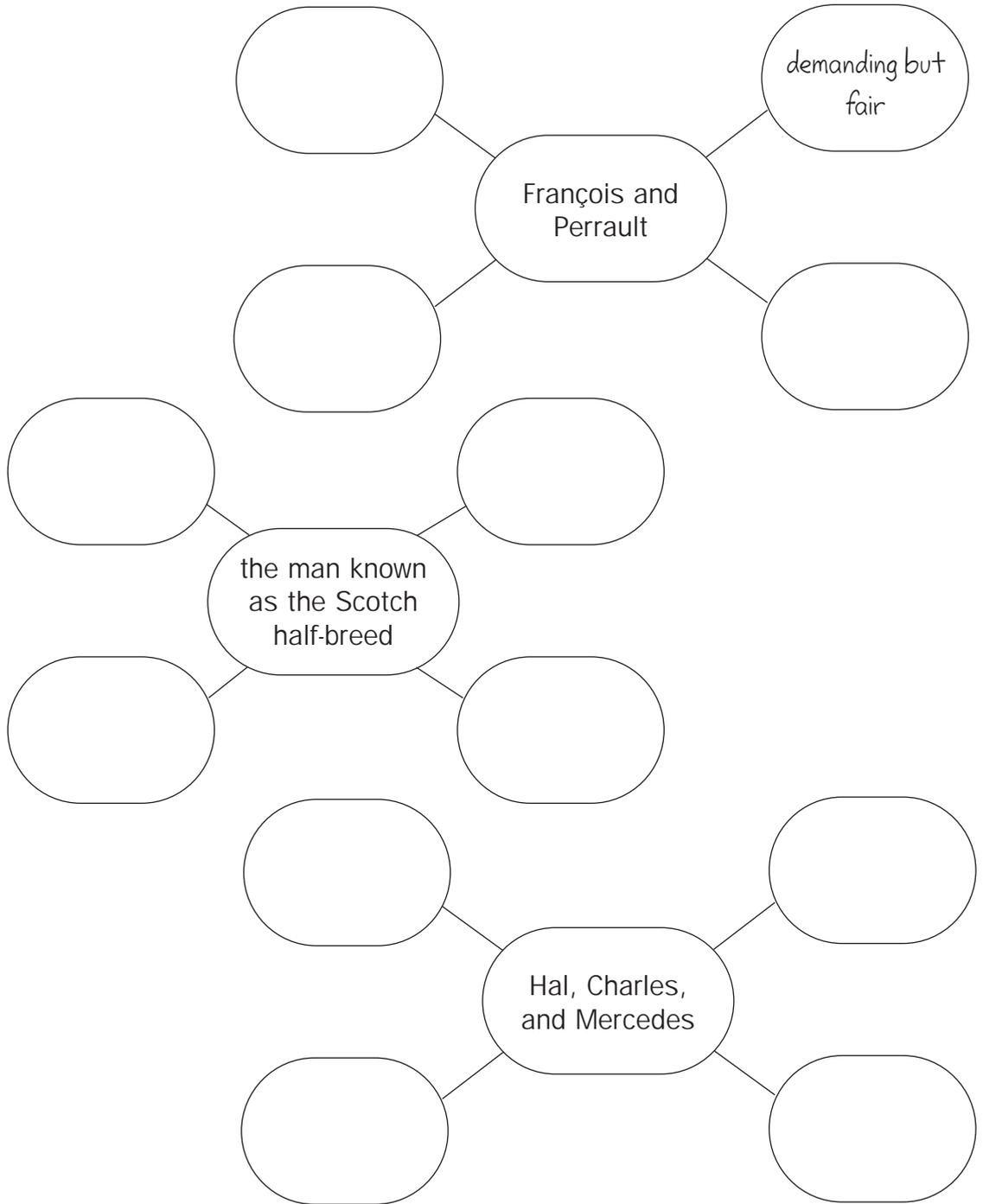
rend [rend] *v.* tear

salient [sāl'yənt] *adj.* noticeable; prominent

Active Reading

The Call of the Wild Chapters 4 and 5

For each set of owners Buck has in this section, write words and phrases in the web diagram that describe the people, how they treat the dogs in general, and what the dogs experience.



Responding

The Call of the Wild Chapters 4 and 5

Personal Response

If you were able, what would you say to the people who owned Buck?

François and Perrault

the man known as the Scotch half-breed

Hal, Charles, and Mercedes

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. How do François and Perrault respond when they discover that Buck has killed Spitz? Why had the dog team become unruly?

2. How are the dogs treated by the Scotch half-breed? How does this become important to Buck's future?

3. What does Mercedes do to "help" the dogs that only ends up harming them? What do her actions allow you to conclude about her, Hal, and Charles?

Responding

The Call of the Wild Chapters 4 and 5

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. How does reading about these three different kinds of owners—one after the other—affect your response to each owner?

5. Do you think that Hal, Charles, and Mercedes are realistic characters? Or do you think that London has exaggerated to make a point? Explain.

Literature and Writing

Letter Home

Suppose you are one of Buck's owners—François; the man known as the Scotch half-breed; or Hal, Charles, or Mercedes. Write a letter to someone back home about your experience in the Yukon. Tell about the travel conditions, your travel companions, and the dog team. Remember to write from the point of view of the character you've chosen. Borrow details from the story to add specifics to your letter.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Review the notes you wrote in the **Focus Activity** on page 16. Summarize the situation for the members of your group. Talk about the techniques you used to lead the group. Did you exercise authority? Were you conclusive? Were you willing to take responsibility for the group's decisions? In your discussion, include any techniques you used that did not work. Have a group member keep a list of effective and ineffective techniques mentioned in the discussion.

Math Connection

In this section, the dogs make the trip from Skagway to Dawson in the Yukon Territory. Locate those towns in an atlas. Use the scale of miles to determine the distance between the towns. Knowing that the trip took thirty days, make rough calculations about the speed at which the dogsled was traveling.



Save your work for your portfolio.

Before You Read

The Call of the Wild Chapters 6 and 7

FOCUS ACTIVITY

How does it make you feel when you experience *déjà vu*—a feeling that you have done something or been some place before?

Journal

Write about an experience you have had with *déjà vu*. Did the feeling make you uneasy? Or did it reassure you in some way?

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out about Buck's experience with *déjà vu* as he rests near John Thornton's fire.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Wolves and domestic dogs are both members of the Canidae family. We know them, more commonly, as canines. They share characteristics—such as powerful teeth and bushy tails—and differ in certain other details, such as size and weight.

Scientists believe that dogs were the first wild animals to be domesticated. Archaeologists have found evidence in sites dating as far back as 8,000 years that dogs were living with humans. Wolves still survive in significant numbers in Alaska and Canada. In the United States, however, only small populations exist. Over the years, urban expansion has eliminated the wolves' habitat. People have long believed that wolves are dangerous animals. In fact, there are few instances of wolves attacking humans. The attitude persists, however, and there is relatively little support for increasing the wolf population in the United States.

Realism

Have you ever looked at an old painting and thought the characters and the setting looked like a scene from a dream? Chances are, you were looking at the work of a romanticist—someone who created art in a highly subjective, or emotional, manner according to ideas and customs that were fashionable in his or her time. Around the middle of the 1800s, some artists and writers attempted to show and to write about things as they really were, not as someone thought they ought to be. The attempt to depict or describe *real* human behavior and circumstances is called realism.

Jack London uses realism in his telling of *The Call of the Wild*. He does not pick and choose only the “nice” details or only the unpleasant ones. London includes details and episodes that represent life faithfully, even if that life is unpleasant.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

commingled [kə ming'gəld] *adj.* mixed together

expediency [iks pē'dē ən sē] *n.* practical haste

feigned [fānd] *n.* pretended; faked

ministrations [min'is trā'shəns] *n.* careful attentions

palpitant [pal'pə tənt] *adj.* trembling, throbbing

peremptorily [pə remp tə ri lē] *adv.* in an arrogant or self-assured manner

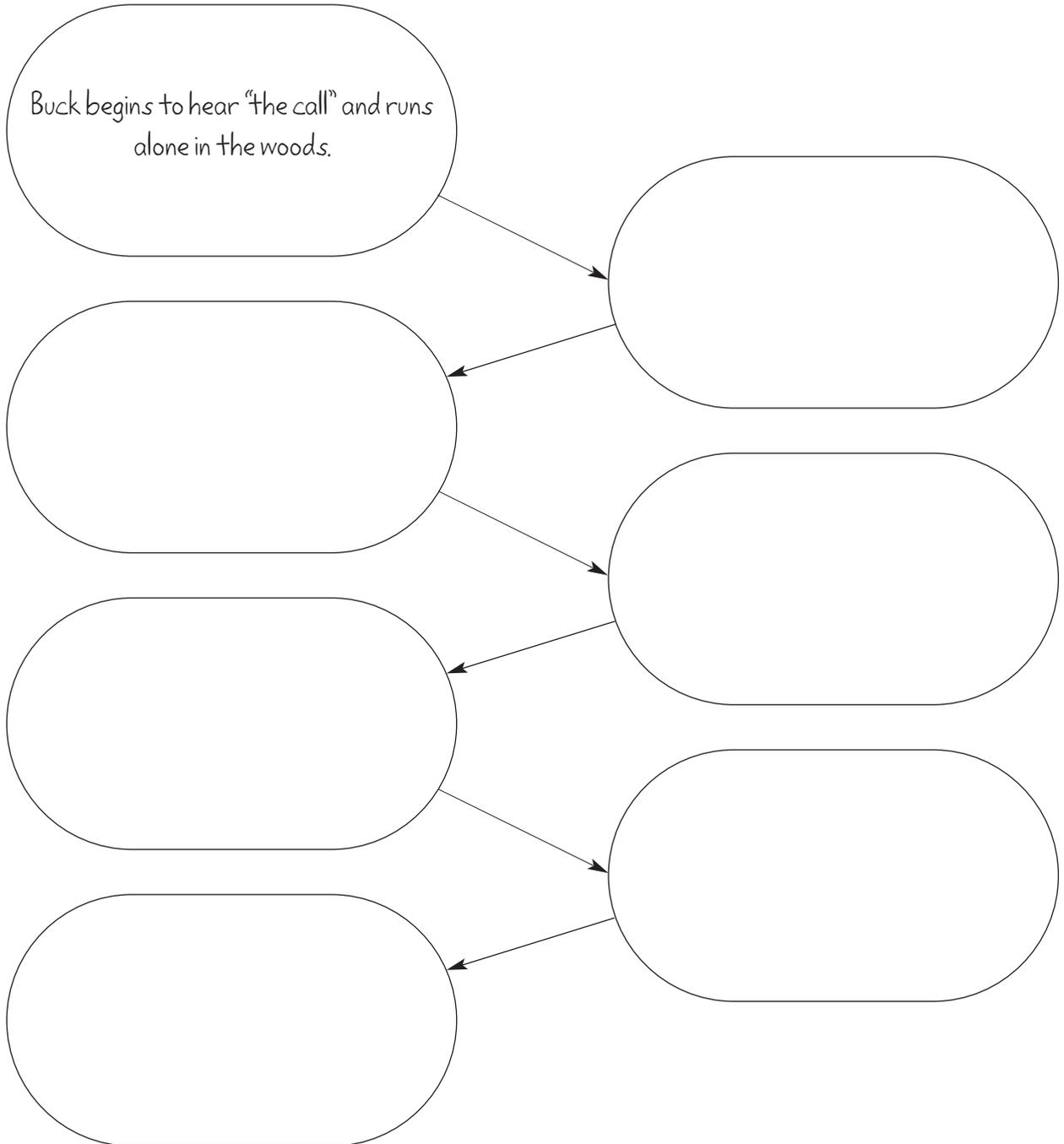
plethoric [ple thôr'ik] *adj.* excessively full

tangible [tan'jə bəl] *adj.* real; capable of being perceived by the senses

Active Reading

The Call of the Wild Chapters 6 and 7

Buck's return to the wild happens gradually. Record the steps Buck takes, or the phases he goes through, in the sequence chain on this page.



Responding

The Call of the Wild Chapters 6 and 7

Personal Response

How did you react to Buck becoming wild? Did you find yourself cheering for him? Or did you feel regret that he was moving away from the world of men? Explain.

How, if at all, would you change what happens to the various characters?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Why was Thornton camping alone? Why was he the ideal master?

2. What do Thornton and his partners find after a long search? Why does this cause Buck to move toward the call of the wild?

3. What does Buck find when he returns to camp after killing the moose? Why do the Yeehats consider Buck an Evil Spirit?

Responding

The Call of the Wild Chapters 6 and 7

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. How does London create suspense in the scene in which Buck pulls the thousand-pound load?

5. Were you surprised by what happened to John Thornton? Why or why not?

Literature and Writing

Plot Explanation

The story of Buck moves gradually from his life as a pampered pet to wild woodland dog-wolf. On a separate piece of paper, describe the process of Buck's return to the wild. What, if anything, does London do to prepare readers for John Thornton's death? In your opinion, could the story have ended *without* Thornton's death? Why or why not?

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Before meeting with your group, review the journal entry you made in the **Focus Activity** on page 20. Discuss whether any of you feel that your *déjà vu* experiences were related to instinct. Identify passages in the last section of the novel in which Buck begins to be aware of his more basic instincts. Talk about how London uses those passages to hint at the outcome of the novel.

Art Connection

Artists sometimes try to show progress, or a process, in works of art. How could an artist show the transformation of Buck from pet to lead sled dog? What medium would lend itself to showing this change? Plan such a work of art. If possible, carry out your plan. If the medium is not available, describe the work, explaining how the work will depict Buck's transformation.

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from A Wolf Tale

Dr. Ann Squire

Before You Read

Focus Question

In what ways are wolves similar to dogs? In what ways are they different?

Background

Dr. Ann Squire is an expert on animal behavior. This passage from her book describes wolf behavior and the behaviors that dogs may have inherited from wolves.

Responding to the Reading

1. According to Squire, wolves communicate through the senses of sound, sight, and smell. Give a brief example of each type of wolf communication and explain the meaning of each "message."

2. In the wild, how often do wolves eat? In your opinion, would a wolf born and raised in a zoo be able to survive in the wild? Why or why not?

3. **Making Connections** Squire says that domesticated dogs may view their humans as the alpha members of the pack. In your opinion, did Buck think Judge Miller and John Thornton were the alpha members when he lived with them? Explain.

Researching a Topic

Get together with a classmate and select an animal to research. Find information on the kinds of social orders and behaviors the animal exhibits in its natural habitat. Present your reports to the class.

With Age, How Do the Animals Fare?

Sherry Joe Crosby

Before You Read

Focus Question

Many people have mixed feelings about zoos. What do you think? Do you think that it is wrong to keep wild animals in captivity, or do you believe the benefits outweigh the potential harms?

Background

In zoos, animals are protected from predators and life-threatening conditions that they would face in the wild. Consequently, zoo animals often live to be much older than their wild relatives. As animals age, they face many of the same problems that aging humans face. In this article from the *Los Angeles Daily News*, journalist Sherry Joe Crosby explains how humans are improving life for many zoo animals.

Responding to the Reading

1. The article states that the Los Angeles Zoo spends a lot of money on medicine for older animals. How does the zoo's veterinarian justify the cost?

2. In your opinion, is the cost to the animals of living in captivity worth the improved care and longer life they experience in the zoo? Why?

3. **Making Connections** What might Buck think about older animals being treated with medicines at the zoo to prolong their lives?

Science Connection

What programs do modern zoos have in place to help protect endangered species? Use the Internet to research this question, then report your findings to your class.



from Sled Dogs

Elizabeth Ring

Before You Read

Focus Question

If you were going to buy a sled dog, what characteristics would you look for in the dog? Why?

Background

Writer Elizabeth Ring is the author of the *Good Dogs!* series. This passage by Ring provides information about the kinds of dogs that pull sleds.

Responding to the Reading

1. According to Ring, how are arctic dogs different from other dogs? What caused the differences?

2. In this age of snowmobiles and four-wheel drive, why do some people still travel by dogsled?

3. **Making Connections** Ring quotes dog trainers Frank and Nettie Hall as saying, "Some dogs are [natural sled dogs]; they simply enjoy working." Do you think this statement applies to Buck? Explain why or why not.

Creating a Radio Script

Suppose Ring were a guest on a radio program about sled dogs. What questions might an interviewer or an audience member ask? Using information you have read, create a script of a conversation Ring and an interviewer might hold on the air. You may wish to use a question-and-answer format.

The Animal Mind

James L. Gould and Carol Grant Gould

Before You Read

Focus Question

Have you ever wondered if animals can think?

Background

In *The Call of the Wild*, Jack London describes what Buck is thinking and feeling. Although London's portrayal of Buck is convincing, it is debatable whether animals actually think the way humans do. In this article, James L. Gould, a professor of ecology and biology, and Carol Grant Gould, a science writer, explore animal intelligence.

Responding to the Reading

1. The article states that the "idea that animals are intelligent has appealed to people for thousands of years." Why do you think this might be?

2. What did Pfungst think Clever Hans could do? What was Hans really doing? How did Clever Hans affect the scientific community?

3. **Making Connections** If a researcher had observed Buck's life from the time he was stolen, what conclusions do you think the researcher might draw about the dog's ability to solve problems? What evidence can you cite of Buck's thinking?

Speaking and Listening

Suppose you are a radio journalist who has read "The Animal Mind." Write a review of the Goulds' article, and share it with the class.

The Cat That Walked by Himself

Rudyard Kipling

Before You Read

Focus Question

Which pets do you prefer: cats or dogs? Why?

Background

A novelist and poet, Rudyard Kipling is also well known for his poems and “Just So” stories for children. This “Just So” story is about how wild animals became domesticated. Buck, in *The Call of the Wild*, is a domesticated dog that turns wild.

Responding to the Reading

1. Do you see any differences in the way Kipling and London portray animals? Which approach do you like better? Why?

2. How is the Cat different from the Dog or the Cow? Why, do you think, did the Cat want to remain wild?

3. **Making Connections** In your opinion, why does Buck choose to become wild? Why does the Cat in Kipling’s story let himself become somewhat domesticated?

Literature Groups

In your group, discuss the statement, “. . . they walked in the Wet Wild Woods by their wild lones. But the wildest of all the wild animals was the Cat. He walked by himself, and all places were alike to him.” What does it mean in this story to be wild? What does it mean in *The Call of the Wild*?