

Novel·Ties

The Call of the Wild

Jack London



A Study Guide

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LEARNING LINKS

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For the Teacher

This reproducible study guide to use in conjunction with *The Call of the Wild* consists of lessons for guided reading. Written in chapter-by-chapter format, the guide contains a synopsis, pre-reading activities, vocabulary and comprehension exercises, as well as extension activities to be used as follow-up to the novel.

In a homogeneous classroom, whole class instruction with one title is appropriate. In a heterogeneous classroom, reading groups should be formed: each group works on a different novel at its own reading level. Depending upon the length of time devoted to reading in the classroom, each novel, with its guide and accompanying lessons, may be completed in three to six weeks.

Begin using NOVEL-TIES for reading development by distributing the novel and a folder to each child. Distribute duplicated pages of the study guide for students to place in their folders. After examining the cover and glancing through the book, students can participate in several pre-reading activities. Vocabulary questions should be considered prior to reading a chapter; all other work should be done after the chapter has been read. Comprehension questions can be answered orally or in writing. The classroom teacher should determine the amount of work to be assigned, always keeping in mind that readers must be nurtured and that the ultimate goal is encouraging students' love of reading.

The benefits of using NOVEL-TIES are numerous. Students read good literature in the original, rather than in abridged or edited form. The good reading habits, formed by practice in focusing on interpretive comprehension and literary techniques, will be transferred to the books students read independently. Passive readers become active, avid readers.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 1897, as America was in the grip of a severe recession, gold was discovered in the Canadian Northwest along the Klondike River. Gold fever struck the lives of many people who hoped to make their fortunes in the Yukon.

Without knowledge or experience of the hardships to be encountered, hundreds of adventurers left San Francisco for Vancouver and then headed north through Alaska to the Yukon. In their quest for gold, using dog teams to reach their destination, they braved the dark days and nights of winter with temperatures that could drop to sixty degrees below zero. The White Pass Trail was littered with corpses and discarded baggage. The situation became so desperate in the winters of 1897 and 1898 that the Canadian Mounties turned back people who had less than five hundred dollars and a year's supply of food.

These were the conditions that Jack London, the author of *The Call of the Wild*, encountered when he arrived at the Chilkoot Pass in 1898 as a twenty-year-old aspiring writer. Traveling north to the gold fields, he experienced the hardships and lived for a while in the northern frontier town of Dawson. Here, where there were over fifteen hundred dogs, it was not uncommon for dog fights to break out in the streets. These animals, whose teams could pull up to five hundred pounds along icy trails and could travel at a rate of twenty-five miles an hour, had become the most important element in the pursuit of gold. Sledge teams comprised of huskies, malamutes, St. Bernards, Newfoundlands, collies, and assorted mixed breeds, had learned to fight like wolves in order to survive. Developing voracious appetites because of the hard work they endured, these animals were even known to devour leather harness straps and pouches. They not only pulled people and their supplies to the Yukon, they carried the mail and anything else that was needed in the towns that sprang up near the places where gold was discovered. The great importance of these animals was reflected in the fact that dog stealing was the most serious crime in the Yukon.

Jack London drew from his personal experience in the North. In fact, Buck, the central figure in *The Call of the Wild*, is believed to be modeled after an actual animal, owned by Belinda Mulroney, the proprietor of the Fairview Hotel in Dawson.

