Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide

White Fang
by Jack London

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms

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Item No: 301228

White Fang

Notes

Jack London (1876 – 1916) was one of the most popular writers of his time. In this story, London writes about a wolf/dog who is born in the Wild and returns to civilization. The vocabulary level in this story is challenging. The story, however, is interesting enough to make it enjoyable to most students, even though they may not understand all of the language. It is recommend for gifted students in middle school and for general students in grades nine and above.

London includes numerous instances of dog fights and beatings, which are described in detail. Sensitive students should be made aware of this in advance.

All references come from the Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Classics edition of *White Fang,* published 2007.

White Fang

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1.   understand and find examples of anthropomorphism.

2.   define and find examples of foreshadowing in this story.

3.   infer meanings about characters and events when these meanings are not explicitly stated.

4.   discuss the role of environment and of heredity to determine character.

5.   define naturalism and discuss whether or not this novel is an example of naturalistic writing.

6.   define vocabulary words from the story.

7.   discuss the point of view in this story:
     •   understand when and why the point of view switches from that of a man to that of an animal.
     •   comment on the way London writes from an animal's point of view without giving the animal a human consciousness.

8.   comment on the similarities and the differences between humans and other animals.

9.   understand the difference between learned and instinctual behavior.

10. cite incidents from the story to illustrate the following themes:
     •   Things are not always what they appear to be.
     •   Life is a struggle and only the fittest survive.
     •   Love is more powerful than hate.
     •   There is a sense of equity in life.

11. discuss the light at the mouth of the cave as a symbol in this story.

12. comment on the definition of "the Wild" as it refers to both a place and to a state of being.

White Fang

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Discuss the definitions of anthropomorphism and personification. Find examples of anthropomorphism in this novel and comment on why this writing technique is effective for this story.

2. What is the "Wild" as it is defined in this story? Most of this story is about White Fang; why then do you suppose London begins the novel with a story about Bill and Henry?

3. Find two vocabulary words which could be used to describe each of the following: hunting strategies, White Fang's character, the physical appearance of White Fang, or the looks of one of the other characters.

4. How does the point of view change from Part One to Part Two?

5. List several examples of instinctual behavior and several examples of learned behavior from London's descriptions of White Fang's early years.

6. What, according to the story, is the difference between mankind and other animals? For what reasons does mankind seem to dominate the other animals in the story?

7. Cite incidents from the story to support the theme that only the fittest survive. Define "the law of meat."

8. Which incidents from the story help to support the theme that things are not always what they appear to be?

9. How would you characterize White Fang's relationship with Gray Beaver? For what reasons does White Fang choose to remain in the Indian camp?

10. Cite incidents from the story to support or refute the following statement: White Fang enjoys fighting and killing.

11. What do you think of White Fang's final revenge on Lip-lip? Is his revenge in conflict with the "law of meat"? If so, why then do you think White Fang exacts his revenge?

12. Trace White Fang's feelings about laughter throughout the story.

13. What three lessons does White Fang learn about life in the Indian camp?

14. Discuss White Fang's fighting strategy. What name does White Fang earn working for Beauty Smith?

White Fang

PART ONE: THE WILD

Chapter I – The Trail of the Meat

Vocabulary

> **bedlam** – havoc, uproar, confusion
> **cessation** – a ceasing, ending
> **commiseratingly** – with compassion and empathy
> **cribbage** – a two-person card game that uses pegs on a board to keep score
> **dictum** – a formal observation or pronouncement
> **epitaph** – a statement about someone who has died
> **evinced** – showed
> **indomitable** – unconquerable
> **mirthless** – free of humor
> **ominous** – menacing
> **palpitant** – trembling
> **salient** – the most important part
> **traversed** – traveled through

1.   What is the setting of this first chapter?

2.   "It is not the way of the Wild to like movement. Life is an offense to it, for life is movement; and the Wild aims always to destroy movement."

     What might the word "Wild" represent in the passage above?

4.   What is the "sex-tragedy of the natural world" described in this story?

5.   In this chapter London writes that the she-wolf is searching for something. "She seemed to be searching for something that she could not find." What can you infer about the object of her search?

6.   How does the she-wolf react when she and Old One Eye encounter the smells of an Indian camp?

7.   What skill does Old One Eye and the she-wolf master at the end of this chapter?

8.   Find an example of foreshadowing at the end of this chapter.

Chapter IV – The Trail of the Gods

Vocabulary

abasement – a lowering in prestige or esteem
abjectness – a state of being completely sunken in spirit
apprehension – understanding, comprehension
dispelled – eliminated, relieved
mumbling – chewing ineffectively
precipitous – steep
tallow – hard animal fat

1. What evidence is there in this chapter that White Fang is an intelligent dog? Do you think this thinking, reasoning behavior is possible in a dog

2. For what reasons does White Fang decide to find the Indian camp so he can return to Gray Beaver?