

6

Lesson Six

FOCUS: Jack London's Writing Style

A little background information may help students appreciate the complexity of the novel despite London's straightforward style. In a 1900 letter, Jack London wrote, "Never a night (whether I have gone out or not), but the last several hours are spent in bed with my books. All things interest me—the world is so very good." He maintained a disciplined, rigorous writing schedule throughout his life, even while travelling and exploring the world. He spent the mornings writing with the goal of 1,000 words each day. After he married his second wife, Charmian Kittredge in 1905, they maintained a new daily schedule until his death. While he wrote 1,000 new words, she would type and prepare the manuscript for the previous day's work.

Discussion Activities

Using Handout Three, ask your students to identify some of the characteristics of Naturalism. Have them share some of their favorite passages from the book. Do they feel the passages reflect a realistic view of nature and the environment? Other than the subject matter, is there a quality that makes London's writing seem "natural"?

London's artistic intentions were often misunderstood. In his essay, "The Other Animals," London explained: "The writing of [*The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*]...was in truth a protest against the 'humanizing' of animals...Time and again...I wrote, speaking of my dog-heroes: 'He did not think these things; he merely did them'...and I did it in order to hammer into the average human understanding that these dog-heroes of mine were not directed by abstract reasoning, but by instinct, sensation, and emotion, and by simple reasoning." What does London mean by this? Discuss this quote and its relevance to the book, using specific examples from the text.

Writing Exercise

One of *The Call of the Wild*'s most famous and important passages occurs in Chapter 3: "There is an ecstasy that marks the summit of life, and beyond which life cannot rise. And such is the paradox of living, this ecstasy comes when one is most alive, and it comes as a complete forgetfulness that one is alive." Read the full passage closely as a class. Notice that the full passage unites the artist, the soldier, and Buck. This comparison may come as a surprise, but consider what parallel London is drawing among these three types. What insight does this passage offer into London's writing style and artistic vision?

Homework

Read *The Call of the Wild*, Chapter 6: "For the Love of a Man." How does John Thornton differ from Buck's previous masters? Why does Buck respond to Thornton with such devotion?