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Lesson Seven

FOCUS: Character Development

Works of fiction trace the development of characters who encounter a series of challenges. Most characters contain a complex balance of virtues and vices. Internal and external forces require characters to question themselves, overcome fears, or reconsider dreams. The protagonist undergoes profound change. A close study of character development maps the evolution of motivation, personality, and belief in each character. Still, the tension between a character's strengths and weaknesses keeps the reader guessing about what might happen next, affecting the drama and the plot.

Lesson Four focused on the dogs in *The Call of the Wild*; this lesson will focus on the humans. In "The Other Animals" London admonishes, "Let us be very humble. We who are so very human are very animal." As you move through this lesson, consider what London might have meant by this statement.



Discussion Activities and Writing Exercise



What do you think Jack London meant by the statement cited above? As your class discusses the human characters, ask each student to write about the parallels between one human character's behavior and one dog's. (You might ask students to review their notes from Lesson Four.)

- Judge Miller: Although we never meet Judge Miller, what do we learn about him from Buck? Does Buck respect or love him?
- The "man in the red sweater": Upon first reading, this man may seem unreasonably brutal and cruel. But from another perspective, could this man's lesson to Buck—"the law of club and fang"—be exactly what Buck needs to survive in the Klondike?
- Perrault and François: What special qualities does Perrault see in Buck? Why do they allow Buck to fight Spitz to the death, even though this means their sled will lose a member of their sled team?
- Hal, Charles, and Mercedes: Can these three inept humans be viewed as *The Call of the Wild*'s primary antagonists? What might London be suggesting by including three humans who seek gold at the expense of their own well-being?
- John Thornton: Why does Buck develop genuine love for Thornton? Why does Thornton admire Buck so much?



Homework

Read *The Call of the Wild*, Chapter 7: "The Sound of the Call." Despite Buck's adoration for Thornton, why does the "strain of the primitive" remain "alive and active" in Buck?