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Lesson Eight

FOCUS: The Plot Unfolds

The author artfully builds a plot structure to create expectations, increase suspense, and inform character development. The timing of events from beginning to middle to end can make a book predictable or riveting. A plot, propelled by a crisis, will reach a climax, and close with a resolution (sometimes called *dénouement*). Foreshadowing and flashbacks allow the author to defy time while telling the story. A successful author will keep a reader entranced by clever pacing built within the tale, sometimes confounding a simple plot by telling stories within stories.

The Call of the Wild is told chronologically without any flashbacks. The reader witnesses Buck's transformation from the contented, civilized pet of Judge Miller to the "dominant primordial beast" who kills his rival, endures hunger and fatigue, and eventually answers the call of his wild ancestors.

Discussion Activities

Map the book's major turning points, plots, and subplots. In small groups, students will map a timeline of *The Call of the Wild*'s major events. Students should identify the arc of the story including rising action, climax, and resolution. Make sure they include the following significant events:

- Chapter 3: Buck defeats his rival, Spitz. How does this fight trigger Buck's more "primitive" nature?
- Chapter 6: Buck wins \$1,600 dollars for Thornton in a bet at Dawson City. How does Buck accomplish this feat? Why does this lead to Buck's fame throughout Alaska?
- Chapter 7: John Thornton discovers gold "like yellow butter." How does Buck respond to this new lifestyle, compared to the other dogs?
- Chapter 7: Buck leaves John Thornton, unknowingly missing a raid that wipes out the entire camp. How does Buck respond to Thornton's death?

Writing Exercise

Flashbacks are absent from the book, but many events foreshadow its conclusion. Was the ending a surprise to you? Why or why not? Ask students to find specific textual references where the narrator suggests that Buck will ultimately reject civilization and follow his nature.

Homework

Pretend that John Thornton survived the brutal massacre. Do you think Buck would stay with Thornton, or would Buck still follow the wolves into the forest? What might London be suggesting by killing Buck's beloved master?