

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for White Fang (Unabridged) by Jack London

Book Information

Jack London, White Fang (Unabridged)
Quiz Number: 72204
Puffin, 1994
ISBN 0-14-036667-9; LCCN
271 Pages
Book Level: 7.4
Interest Level: MG

This classic tale tells of a savage dog's transformation through love.

Topics: Animals, Dogs; Animals, Wolves; Classics, Classics (All); Community Life, Animal Rights; Series, Scholastic Classics

Main Characters

Baseek an old Indian dog
Beauty Smith the man who buys White Fang and uses him as a fighting animal
Bill and Henry two men traveling along the Northland trail
Cherokee the bulldog who nearly kills White Fang
Collie the sheepdog at Scott's California farm who takes her time in accepting White Fang
Dick the deer-hound at Scott's California farm
Gray Beaver White Fang's first god (owner), who eventually sells him
Jim Hall a prison escapee who is subdued by White Fang while breaking into the Scott house
Judge Scott Weedon Scott's father, who doesn't appreciate White Fang until the break-in
Kloo-kooch Gray Beaver's squaw
Lip-lip the Indian dog who bullies White Fang
Matt a sled-dog musher and associate of Weedon Scott
Mit-sah Gray Beaver's son
One Eye White Fang's father
she-wolf (Kiche) White Fang's mother, who is part dog and part wolf
Weedon Scott the man who buys White Fang from Beauty Smith and treats him with love
White Fang a wolf who learns to live with men

Vocabulary

fealty loyalty
indomitable not easily defeated
palpitant throbbing, trembling
remuneration reward

Synopsis

Bill and Henry are traveling along the Northland trail by dogsled to deliver the body of Lord Alfred to Fort McGurry. As they travel, they become aware of the threat of starving wolves. One by one, their sled dogs are lured away by a she-wolf only to be attacked and consumed by packs of hungry wolves. Henry is found and saved as the wolves are closing in on him.

The she-wolf, who appears to be part dog and is wise in human ways, hears the men's voices and runs from the area. The pack leader follows her along with the rest of the pack, and a competition for the right to run with her ensues. One Eye, an old battle-scarred wolf, is the victor, and she bears his puppies.

Due to another famine, the gray cub is the only one of the litter to survive. His lessons in survival in the Wild begin when he strays from the safety of the cave. His time in the Wild is short-lived when he encounters five Indians, and he and his mother are claimed by Gray Beaver. Gray Beaver names the cub White Fang and takes both White Fang and his mother to live in the Indian village.

Life in the village is very different for White Fang. Here he learns to survive the abuse of the Indian dogs. When he can no longer turn to his mother for protection, he readjusts and learns new survival skills. He decides that to survive he must oppress the weak and obey the strong.

When the tribe moves to another camp, White Fang escapes into the Wild. But he finds this freedom lonely, and he returns to Gray Beaver. Back with Gray Beaver, White Fang is trained as a sled dog

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for Mit-sah and gains a new place among the Indian dogs. His value to Gray Beaver increases as he learns the law of his god's property.

Life takes an unexpected turn for White Fang when Gray Beaver takes him along to Fort Yukon. After squandering his money, Gray Beaver is convinced to sell White Fang to Beauty Smith. White Fang now becomes the notorious "Fighting Wolf."

He is rescued by Weedon Scott, who buys him from Beauty Smith. For the first time, White Fang is treated with kindness and learns to love his master. His devotion to his master takes him to California where he becomes known as the "Blessed Wolf."

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

White Fang's first exposure to humans occurs when Indians arrive near his den area. How does White Fang first learn submissive behavior to humans?

When his mother comes to rescue him on his first meeting with men, he sees her do a strange thing. Rather than attack, she crouches down when Gray Beaver calls her Kiche. This becomes a role model for his behavior in relationship to men-animals.

Literary Analysis

The author spends considerable time telling Henry and Bill's story at the beginning of *White Fang*. Why does London include the first chapters of the book, which took place before White Fang was born?

The chapters centering on the events with Henry and Bill give the reader a sense of the nature of wolves. London broadens that picture by following the she-wolf as she runs with a pack and later goes off with her mate. Those chapters also contrast the she-wolf to the wolves having no blood of domesticated dogs.

Inferential Comprehension

Beauty Smith is one of several men who own White Fang during this story. How are White Fang and Beauty Smith similar?

Each one is an outcast in his own way. Men mistrust Beauty and the dogs steer clear of White Fang. Both White Fang and Beauty delight in being predators. White Fang attacks the dogs from the steamers mainly for the thrill of it, while Beauty sets up dog fights and enjoys the money he wins in bets.

Constructing Meaning

During the course of this story, White Fang has a variety of owners who each treat him differently and get different results. What is London suggesting about the manner in which an animal behaves?

The contrasting reactions we see in how White Fang behaves with Beauty Smith and later with Weedon Scott suggests that London feels that response is dependent on how that animal is treated. When White Fang is ridiculed and mistreated by Beauty, he hates everything. Weedon teaches him love through patience and trust.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The author locates the setting of the action throughout the book. He lists names of specific locations in chapters one, two, four, ten, and fifteen. Have the students draw a map of the area in which the greater portion of the story takes place and label the locations mentioned in the text.

Understanding Characterization Both Beauty Smith and Weedon Scott treat White Fang in a deliberate manner to achieve a certain response. White Fang hates everything when he is owned by Beauty, while he learns love after Weedon gains his confidence. Have the students share instances of their reaction to someone's treatment of them. What were the circumstances, and how did they react? What may have caused them to react differently?

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors

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Thousands of gold-seekers made their way to Dawson and Klondike in the summer of 1898. Gray Beaver travels farther than normal to sell his goods in expectation of generous profits when he hears about the gold rush. Have the students read about the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898 and write diary entries of a man traveling to find his fortune prospecting for gold. They might want to include information about how he travels, what supplies he needs, where he buys those supplies, and any other information they discover.

Responding to Literature Throughout the book, the author explains the laws understood among wild animals and laws that dominate an animal's relationship with humans. For example, the she-wolf does not permit One Eye near her babies because she instinctively knows some fathers are a danger to their newborn offspring. Have the students read about the habits of wolves in the wild. Compare that information to the way in which the author represents wolves. Have them discuss if the author presents an accurate picture of wolves. They should be able to defend their stance. If there are dissenting opinions, allow the students to debate the issue.