



The Call of the Wild

Jack London



Summary

Buck is a strong dog who lives a comfortable life with a family in California. One day his world is changed forever. A man who works for his owner steals Buck and sells him. It is the time of the gold rush and people pay lots of money for dogs to work in wild and dangerous regions of Alaska and western Canada.

After some unpleasant experiences, Buck finds himself in Alaska, where his new owners train him to pull a sledge. Buck learns the ways of his tough new life, fights for survival, and becomes the top dog on the sledge team. Then the team of dogs is bought by a mail company and has to work so hard that after a month the dogs are worn out.

Two cruel and inexperienced men buy Buck. The result of the men's ignorance is a terrible disaster that Buck luckily escapes thanks to Thornton, a man he comes to love. But when Thornton is killed by Indians, Buck becomes a completely wild animal, living in the forests and mountains with his friends, the wolves.

Chapter 1: Buck lives happily at Mr. Miller's house in California, until Manuel, one of Mr. Miller's workers, steals him and sells him. Buck is taken to San Francisco and then to Seattle and he is beaten with a club until he learns to obey. Then he is sold again. Two men, Perrault and François, take Buck and other strong dogs to Alaska.

Chapter 2: Buck must learn to live in the wild, where dogs work hard and fight to the death. He learns to pull a sledge, make a warm bed under the snow, and eat quickly so that other dogs don't eat his food. He soon becomes stronger and wilder.

Chapter 3: Life in the icy North is dangerous. Wild dogs attack the camp and the sledge dogs fight with each other

all the time. The ice breaks and there are accidents. Spitz, the most important dog, hates Buck. They fight and Buck breaks Spitz's leg. The other dogs attack Spitz. Buck is the most important dog now.

Chapter 4: Buck takes Spitz's place as the leader. The men are very happy with the trip, but when they arrive at Skaguay they sell the dogs to a Scottish man. The dogs start working for the Canadian Mail Company. The work is exhausting. One of the dogs, Dave, gets very ill and has to be killed.

Chapter 5: As the dogs are exhausted and there are letters to be delivered, the Scottish man sells the dogs to Charles and Hal, two Americans who do not understand life in the North. The two men and a woman, Mercedes, force the dogs to work very hard and don't give them enough food. Several dogs die. Buck can't go on and Hal hits him, but a man called Thornton saves him. Though it's spring and the ice is thin, the men, Mercedes, their dogs, and their heavy sledge go across the river. The ice breaks and they disappear into the icy water.

Chapter 6: Buck gets stronger and learns to love Thornton. He is happy with him, his other dogs and his friends Hans and Pete. One day an angry man fights Thornton in a bar and Buck attacks him. Another time, Thornton and Buck fall into a fast river and Buck saves his friend's life. He then wins a bet for Thornton: he pulls a very heavy sledge and gets a thousand dollars for him.

Chapter 7: Thornton and his friends go East and find gold. Buck doesn't have any work. He makes friends with the wolves and hears the call of the wild. He learns to kill animals and eat them. One day he follows and kills a big moose and stays by the dead animal eating and sleeping. When he goes back to the camp, he finds everyone is dead. Indians are dancing in the camp. Buck attacks them and kills several of them. He then joins the wolves. He is a dangerous animal now, but he often goes back to the place where the camp had been and howls sadly.

About the author

Jack London, whose real name was John Griffith Chaney, was born in San Francisco, in the United States, in 1876.

He had little formal schooling, but his extensive life experiences included being a laborer, a factory worker, a sailor, a rancher, a journalist, and a gold prospector.

He married twice but his one child lived for only a few hours.



The Call of the Wild

By his death at the age of forty in 1916, Jack had suffered a vast number of health problems for years.

London was in favor of socialism and women's suffrage. He was a controversial personality who was often in the news, as well as a best-selling and prolific writer. Millions of readers have been thrilled by his stories of adventure, often based on personal experiences, where he shows the struggles of people and animals against adversity.

The original text

Published in 1903, *The Call of the Wild* was originally entitled *The Sleeping Wolf*. London was a gold prospector in the Yukon Territory himself. He left San Francisco on July 25, 1897, and staked a claim on Henderson Creek in November 1897, but soon had to go back home due to illness. Although he had not found much gold, he gained invaluable experience from which he drew material for his novels and stories.

Background and themes

The Call of the Wild is the story of how a domestic dog changes into a wild animal. This change is brought about through a series of events over which the dog has no control. It is the people he belongs to and the places he finds himself in which cause him to change.

This story presents several themes related to values:

Survival: How does the environment in which we live affect our values and behavior? Is violence justified in extreme conditions?

Ambition: To what lengths are people ready to go in their search for gold?

Animal rights: Is it right to force dogs to work until they are almost dead (even to win a bet)? Is it justifiable to beat them with clubs to train them to obey?

Domesticity vs. wildness: Is there a wild animal in all animals? How deep are the civilizing effects of compassion, gentleness, and love? In the natural world, are these qualities useful at all?

Discussion activities

The following teacher-led activities aim at **discussion and extension**.

Chapter 1

Before reading

- Discuss:** Have students discuss dogs in their culture.
 - Do people like dogs here / in our country / in this city/town/village?
 - Is there a dog in your house? Does the dog live inside the house with the family? Or does it live in the garden? Do you play with it? What does it eat?
 - Are there dogs in the street? What do they eat?
- Write:** Have students complete a chart with simple words and phrases.
What is the difference between family dogs and wild dogs? Complete and compare.

Family dogs	Wild dogs

After reading

- Guess:** Ask students to imagine the following.
 - What will Buck do in Alaska?
 - Who will be his friends? Who will he fight with? Why?
 - Will Perrault and François find gold?

Chapter 2

After reading

- Check:** What did Buck learn during his first days in Alaska? Have students make a list. Use questions to help them.
 - What can dogs do with a harness? What must dogs do when men shout "Mush!" and "Ho!"?
 - Can dogs sleep inside, with the men? Where can they find a warm place to sleep?
 - Did Buck eat quickly? Does he eat slowly now? Why not? Where can dogs get more food?
- Discuss:** Ask students to talk in pairs about "life teachers," and then share their ideas with the class.
Who are Buck's teachers in the North? Are they good teachers?

Chapter 3

After reading

- Read carefully:** Have students make a list of the names of the sledge dogs mentioned in Chapter 3.
Who are Buck's friends? Who hates Buck?
- Discuss:** Ask students their opinion about leaders. Then they check if their opinions match the story as they read Chapter 4.
Why is Buck the most important dog now? What can he do? Can Buck be a good boss? Why?



The Call of the Wild

Chapter 4

Before reading

- 8 **Guess:** Ask students to read the words in *italics* under the title and imagine the following.
Why did François cry? What happened to the men?

While reading

- 9 **Guess:** Have students guess what happened (after reading pages 24–27).
On page 27, we read:
“But when they arrived at Skaguay, François and Perrault’s plans changed. They had to leave Skaguay and the Yukon.
They had to sell the dogs quickly. François put his arms around Buck’s neck and he cried. Buck never saw the two men again.”
Have students compare this information to their predictions in the previous activity and to imagine the missing information.
Why did François and Perrault change their plans?
Why did they sell the dogs quickly and leave? Why was François so sad? Where did they go after that?

After reading

- 10 **Write:** Have students respond to the events in this chapter as if they were one of the characters.
Suppose you are the Scottish Man. Write a short note to your friends in Scotland about the trip. Explain what happened to Dave and what you did.
Get them to discuss their ideas in pairs first and then ask them to write the short note in class or as homework.

Chapter 5

After reading

- 11 **Discuss:** Talk about people living in the wild. Hal and Thornton fight like wild dogs. Ask students what they think of their behavior.
What do you think of Hal?
Why doesn’t Hal listen to Thornton?
Is Thornton a good man?
Must Thornton stop Hal?
- 12 **Role play:** Discuss with students what the characters would say to each other in the situation below. Then get them to dramatize different short dialogues.
Hal, Charles and Mercedes are in Thornton’s camp.
Student A: *You are Thornton. Help them get to Dawson.*
Student B: *You are Hal. You don’t listen to Thornton.*
- 13 **Guess:** Have students talk about the picture on page 37 imagine what is happening.
What is Thornton saying to Buck? Do you speak to dogs?
What can Thornton do to help Buck get stronger?

Chapters 6–7

After reading

- 14 **Discuss:** Have the students talk about animals and people. Divide students into groups to discuss. Then have a class discussion and see whether the others agree.
- Why does Buck love Thornton? Compare Thornton to Buck’s other bosses. Why does Thornton love Buck? What does the dog do for him?*
 - Hal hits Buck and Thornton talks to the dog. How do people usually teach animals? What is the best way?*
 - On page 49, Buck “started to feel something strange inside him.” Is there something wild inside all dogs?*
- 15 **Write:** What happens next? Get students to imagine Buck’s life in the wild.
Did he make friends? Did he have to fight to survive? What did he eat?
After discussing different possibilities, in pairs or in small groups, get them to write a short “Chapter 8” and share their versions with the class.
- 16 **Write:** Have students change the ending. At what point in Chapter 7 can the story be different? In class or as homework, ask students to write an alternative ending to the story and share it with the rest of the class.

Vocabulary activities

For the Word list and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.