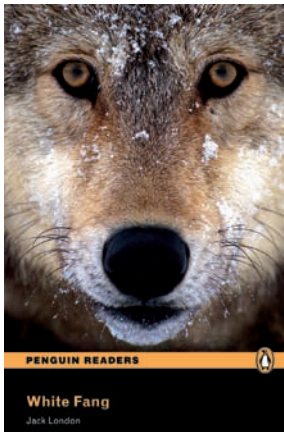




White Fang

Jack London



About the author

Jack London's real name was John Griffith Chaney. He was born in 1876 in San Francisco, the illegitimate son of an astrologer and a spiritualist. He had socialist opinions and belonged to a group of writers called "The Muckrakers," who wanted to write about the corruption and poverty of the society around them. Many of his books are about the struggles of men and animals against hardships, and the realities of life and nature. His style was vivid and exciting. He became an extremely popular writer in the early years of the twentieth century and remains a great favorite today, especially with *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*, both much loved by children. He wrote more than 50 books between 1900 and 1915.

London led a colorful life and it is said that he often used his own experiences in his novels, though much of the biographical information about him is uncertain. In 1893 he worked on a ship that hunted seals, and from 1894–5 he traveled across the USA as a hobo riding freight trains. From 1897–8 he was a gold prospector in the Klondike, and in 1904 and 1915 he worked as a war correspondent for a newspaper. He decided to become a writer after he spent thirty unpleasant days in prison. He was married twice. Problems with alcohol led to a number of illnesses, and he died from an overdose of morphine at the age of 40 in 1916. Some people think he killed himself.

Summary

White Fang is a heart-warming story of how a wild animal, part wolf and part dog, comes to love and live happily with a human family. The story is set in Canada in the 1890s – around the time of the Gold Rush in the Klondike.

First, after being found, White Fang lives with Indians on the Mackenzie River. There, he learns to look after himself and to fight hard. Then he is seen and bought by a cruel man, Beauty Smith, who wants to use him for dog fights.

At one of these fights, White Fang, the great fighter, suddenly finds that he is the loser. He is saved from death by a man with a different way of treating animals. Weedon Scott uses kindness and reward, rather than the stick, and the "wolf" becomes devoted to him. When Scott has to leave the Klondike for California in the south, White Fang learns a new way of life and even saves his new family from some nasty situations. He finds happiness, too, when his own cubs are born.

Background and themes

White Fang is the story of how a wild animal is tamed and civilized. The story begins in the sub-arctic country of the Northwest Territories of Canada. Through this remote land of long, cold winters flows the Mackenzie River, which rises in the Great Slave Lake and flows north-west into Mackenzie Bay. The Mackenzie is one of the longest rivers in North America, but it is frozen for most of the year: it is only navigable from June to October. Few people live there because there are few natural resources, and no farming is possible because the summers are short and the soil is poor.

In this beautiful but harsh country with its pine forests and its high rocky mountains, there are many animals, such as wolves, bears, and wild cats. But the area is hostile even for animals. White Fang's father dies and so his brothers and sisters also die without enough food, leaving just him and his mother behind to fend for themselves. In White Fang's early life, Jack London shows us all the harshness of the natural world, where animal feeds on animal and where only the strongest and fiercest survive.

When White Fang is three years old, he is found by the indigenous people of the Mackenzie River area and is taken to live with them. These Native Americans – or "Indians" – lived by hunting and fishing, and moved from place to place using canoes and sleds, living in camps in tents. There was often not much food, and as we see in the story, many Indians died from famine. Their dogs were an important part of the Indian's life. The dogs pulled the sleds and helped with the hunting. The way in which the Indians treated their animals may seem cruel, but the life they led was hard. Although White Fang does not love his owner, Grey Beaver, he respects him.



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In 1896, gold was found where the Klondike River joins the Yukon River and large numbers of people came up from the south, from San Francisco and other parts of California, hoping to make their fortunes. It is there, in Fort Yukon in Alaska, that a “white” man, Beauty Smith, shows real cruelty to White Fang. Grey Beaver, like many other Indians, travels across the mountains to Fort Yukon, to sell his leather shoes and other goods to the in-comers. But the white men despised the Indians and Beauty Smith knows he can make Grey Beaver sell White Fang to him for just a few bottles of whisky. Beauty Smith enjoys beating White Fang. In return, White Fang hates him.

A third, more civilized way of treating animals is shown to us by Weedon Scott, who rescues White Fang from a dog fight. Scott's approach is through reward and kindness, not hitting and beating. This kinder way means White Fang loves his new owner, and Scott's reward for his kindness is that White Fang rescues him from danger and burglary.

In this moving and perceptive tale of one animal's relationship with humans, Jack London shows us how brutality, hate and anger, even in a wild animal, can be overcome by the civilizing effect of the better side of human nature: compassion, gentleness and affection.

Discussion activities

Chapters 1–3, pages 1–13

Before reading

- Discuss:** Talk about wild animals. Show students four or five pictures of wild animals, including a wolf. Write the names on the board. Ask students to write down the names of the animals and number them 1 to 5. Number 1 is the animal which they like the best. Put students in pairs to talk about their answers. Talk about the animals with the whole class. Which animal do the students like best? Who likes the wolf the best?
- Map reading:** Have students find the Mackenzie River on a map as background information to reading this story.
Look up “map” and “north” in your dictionary and then find a map of Canada. Find the Mackenzie River. Where is it? What are the mountains called?
- Research:** Find out about the wolves. Have students look up the word *fang* in their dictionaries. Tell them that White Fang is the name of the wolf in this story. Ask them what they know about wolves. Ask students to use resources outside the classroom, e.g. the Internet, the encyclopedia, library books, etc. in order to find information about wolves. When students are ready, ask some of them to share their findings with the rest of the class.

*Where do they live?
How big are they?
How long do they live?
What color is their fur?
How many teeth do they have?
What do they eat?
Do you know any other stories about a wolf?*

After reading

- Discuss:** Talk about the cub's life. At the end of Chapter 1, have students work in small groups to talk about the gray cub's life. Encourage them to recap what has happened to the cub so far. Then ask them what they think about the cub's life.
- Pair work:** Talk about the relationship between wolves and human beings.
Why do you think the Indians take White Fang to their camp? Talk about this with another student.
- Discuss:** Talk about White Fang's life. After reading Chapter 3, ask students to write down
 - The bad things in White Fang's life.
 - The good things in his life.
 Students work in pairs or small groups and talk about their answers. Does White Fang really have a “hard life”? Talk about this with the whole class.

Chapters 4–6, pages 13–27

Before reading

- Research:** Find information on the Klondike gold rush. Have students use outside sources, e.g. the Internet, to find some facts about the Klondike gold rush. Ask some students to share their findings with the rest of the class.
- Guess:** Predict the story. Show students the pictures on pages 15, 17, 21, 24 and 26. Put students in groups and have them talk about what will happen to White Fang. Ask each group to share their ideas with the rest of the class.

After reading

- Pair work:** Stop reading at the end of Chapter 4. Put students into pairs and have them ask and answer the following questions:
 - On page 16, it says, “But Beauty Smith knew Gray Beaver.” What does this mean?*
 - On page 18, it says, “Gray Beaver said nothing to Beauty Smith because White Fang was not his dog now.” What do you think about this? Did Gray Beaver do the right thing?*
- Discuss:** Talk about the three owners of White Fang. Write *Gray Beaver*, *Beauty Smith* and *Weedon Scott* on the board. Put students into groups and have them discuss the following questions:
 - Why did they want to have White Fang?*
 - What did they use White Fang for?*
 - Was White Fang happy with them?*
 - Was White Fang's life good with them?*
 - Which owner do you like best? Why?*
 - Which owner do you like least? Why?*



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11 Pair work: Put students in pairs. Ask students to talk about the following questions:

How does Beauty Smith teach White Fang? Give me an example.

How does Weedon Scott teach White Fang? Give me an example.

12 Discuss: Whole class discussion.

After activity 11, talk with the whole class about how people teach animals. What is the best way?

Chapters 7–9, pages 27–37

Before reading

13 Discuss: Have students work in small groups.

Encourage them to talk about wolves and dogs.

Monitor the groups, and later ask some students to share their discussions with the rest of the class.

Now White Fang takes meat from Scott's hand, and he feels a very strong love for him. What do you think? Do you think White Fang is not a wild wolf anymore? Is it because his mother is half dog? Let's think about wolves and dogs. What are the differences between wolves and dogs?

After reading

14 Role play: Put students into groups of three. Have them role play the scenes of Scott leaving for California. They can add some dialogs between Matt and Scott. One of the students should play the role of White Fang. They could come up with the lines for White Fang, pretending that the audience can hear White Fang's thoughts. When students are ready, ask some groups to act out in front of the class.

15 Discuss: Talk about the rules.

In these chapters, White Fang goes to a new place and has to learn new ways. Ask students to look up "rule" in their dictionaries. Then ask them to work in pairs and write five important rules for a new person who comes to their school or to their home. They can make sentences beginning with "You can/can't/have to ...". They can make rules for someone from another world, another country or another town.

16 Artwork: Create drawings and talk about the future of White Fang.

Put students into small groups. Have them discuss what the life of White Fang is like one year later. Encourage them to make up a story. Have them draw a picture or diagram to create a poster to describe their stories. This could be done in classroom or as a homework assignment. Give each group an opportunity to share the story with the rest of the class, doing show and tell.

Extra activities

17 Pair work: Personalize the situation.

Have students imagine that they have an animal like White Fang. Encourage them to talk about their ideas in pairs.

Would you like to have an animal like White Fang? Why or why not?

Do you think you can have a wild animal as a pet?

You have an animal like White Fang. What will you do?

18 Retell: Have students retell the story.

Write the names of the chapters on the pieces of paper and put them on the board in jumbled order. Ask students to arrange the chapter names in the correct order. Then put students into small groups. In each group, each student should take turns retelling the story chapter by chapter. Monitor each group and help them if necessary.

19 Research: Find out about the places in the story.

Give students the list of the places in the story:

- the Mackenzie River
- the Porcupine River
- the Yukon River
- Fort Yukon
- Klondike
- Dawson
- San Francisco
- Sierra Vista

Divide the class into three groups and give each group a set of places, i.e. rivers, places in Canada, places in the USA. Have them use the resources outside the classroom, e.g. the Internet, library books, etc. to find out some facts and the history of these places. Have each group prepare a quiz-show style presentation using the information they found. They could make some multiple choice questions so that the rest of the class can guess the answers. When they are ready, hold a quiz-show day.

20 Project: Have students create a puppet show about White Fang.

Divide the class into three groups. Assign each group three chapters from the book to work on. Explain that they should perform a puppet show. They could make finger or stick puppets, or they could use some stuffed animals. They should also prepare some background settings if they are important in their parts of the story. For example, they could use some fabric to create the river, small boxes to make a cave or house, etc. They could simply draw the background pictures on paper as well. Have students negotiate within the groups who will perform, who will direct, who is in charge of sound effects, who is in charge of art and design, and so on. Give them sufficient time to practice the performance. When they are ready, hold a puppet show day. You could invite an audience from outside classroom too!

Vocabulary activities

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