
Chapter 1 - "Into the Primitive"

Identity and Characterization

1. How is Buck, the central character, shown to be a good and very special animal?

Ans: He is described as ruling over "this great demesne," meaning a large and excellent *dominion*. His master thought highly of him, as "top dog" among the others. He is depicted as almost human with pride, trust and never needing to get angry.

2. Note Buck's lineage. Describe a contrast between the background of a good dog and a beast.

Ans: Buck was fathered by Elmo, an old St. Bernard who had been the Judge's "inseparable companion." This gives him identity and background, while the wild animals up north are nameless and rootless.

3. Why does Manuel kidnap Buck?

Ans: He had gambled and is irresponsible and unscrupulous. He can get money for Buck with which he can continue gambling.

4. What does the man in the red sweater represent?

Ans: He represents ruthlessness, violence and brutality.

5. What is the first step in Buck's response to the call of the wild?

Ans: Chapter one shows the change from civilized environment to his new and violent one. The kindness and quiet stability of home is replaced forcibly with the mocking, starvation and teasing of his cage and the inhospitable cold of the north.

Theme and Setting

1. What is meant by the title, *The Call of the Wild*?

Ans: Under the surface of life there is a cogent strain that draws to the primitive and toward basic instinct. The right conditions of stress will unleash this power in man as well as beast. Of course, this is very true from a spiritual standpoint. We are always dependent on Divine grace to be kept from outright denial and disobedience. The sweet doctrine of the perseverance of the saints teaches that once God has begun His redeeming work in us He will never leave off and abandon it. He will continue it until the Day of Jesus Christ. See Phil.1:6.

Buck tried to serve his masters but there remained in him the desire (the call) to go back to his primitive “free” state. This idea is often romanticized in literature and movies.

2. Throughout the book there are many contrasts of the civilized and the primitive and wild. What are three that appear in chapter one?

Ans: Among the three contrasts are 1) the controlled and peaceful life at Judge Miller’s wealthy estate, sunny valley, trees and nice lawns and the cold, mindless brutality of the North; 2) the savageness of the man in the red sweater and the fairness and kindness of Francois and Perrault; 3) Buck’s good nature and his smarts and the betrayal of the Spitzbergen dog and the unfriendliness of Dave.

3. Why is Buck stolen and brought to the Klondike?

Ans: Men had found gold in Alaska and dogs were needed to pull sleds and for other work. Big, powerful dogs were very valuable up there during that time.

Vocabulary

nomadic - drifting, roving

chafing - rubbing, abrasion

brumal - wintry, cold

ferine - wild, savage

imperiously - in an overbearing way

metamorphosed - transformed

uncowed - unsubdued, not humbled

latent - hidden, undiscovered

docilely - obediently

dominion - influence

conciliated - made friendly, appeased

uncouth - rude, impolite

morose - gloomy, melancholy

Chapter 2 - "The Law of Club and Fang"

Theme and Setting

1. What does title of this chapter mean?

Ans: The law of the club means that Buck must obey anyone armed with such a weapon. The law of the fang means that there is no fair play. He must never allow himself to go down. Only his fangs will keep him alive. Showing any weakness will bring the others to kill him.

2. What is step two in developing the main theme, Buck's response to the call of the wild?

Ans: In chapter two Buck learns painfully the law of brute force. If he is to survive he must become a brute himself.

3. Can you see any universal theme in this idea? Is the author getting at something beyond telling us a dog story?

Ans: The idea of the "survival of the fittest" is taken up as an explanation of how life, itself, works. Primitive instincts are awakened that are necessary for existence.
