

# The Call of the Wild

## Reading Group Guide for Students

### About this Book

Buck has everything a dog could want: a huge estate in the Santa Clara Valley to roam about, plenty of food and other creature comforts, and the respect of his master. The story opens at a ranch in Santa Clara Valley, California, when Buck is stolen from his home and sold into service as a sled dog in Alaska. He becomes progressively feral in the harsh environment, where he is forced to fight to survive and dominate other dogs. By the end, he sheds the veneer of civilization, and relies on primordial instinct and learned experience to emerge as a leader in the wild..

### Discussion Topics

- Describe Buck's life on Judge Miller's estate. In what ways is it like his life as a sled dog? In what is it different?
- How did Buck learn what was required of him up North? Can you think of more effective ways to train a dog? What was Buck's reaction to the way he was trained and to the lessons he learned?
- A team of sled dogs has a very clearly defined social order. How is this order maintained? How does Buck fit into Francois and Perrault's team of dogs?
- When describing a pack of sled dogs chasing a snowshoe rabbit, the author says "There is an ecstasy that marks the summit of life, and beyond which life cannot rise. And such is the paradox of living, this ecstasy comes when one is most alive, and it comes as a complete forgetfulness that one is alive." What does this mean? Do you agree with this statement? Can you think of examples of this particular sort of ecstasy? Do you think that Buck would ever have reached this state if he hadn't been brought North?
- Hal, Charles, and Mercedes are clearly not suited for life on the Alaskan trail. Why did so many people like them go to Alaska during this period? Can you think of other situations that drew large groups of ill-prepared people into a certain area or lifestyle?
- Discuss the character of John Thornton. Why is Buck so devoted to him? In what ways is John Thornton different than Buck's other masters?
- What is "the call of the wild" that resonates so fully with Buck? How does he respond to it? Is Buck unique in hearing this call?

### Activities

- Dogs have a long been used by man as a source of labor. Write a report on working dogs-what sorts of jobs they do, what traits the different breeds possess that make them well-suited for certain jobs, etc.
- The Alaskan gold rush of 1900 was a unique time in American history, and Jack London experienced it firsthand. Find as much information as you can about this fascinating period.

- Find a map of Alaskan and Canada and trace the route that Buck and other dogs followed. What towns might they have passed through, and what sort of things might they have seen along the way?
- There has been a great deal of interest in wolves since Jack London wrote *The Call of the Wild*. Choose a topic to research and present your findings to the group. Possible topics are wolf populations in the United States and how they have changed, or how wolves communicate with each other.
- Several of Buck's owners treat him cruelly. Today we have several associations and organizations that try to prevent cruelty to animals. What are some of these organizations, and what do they do? If one of these societies has a branch in your neighborhood, perhaps you can arrange a visit there to experience firsthand what they do.
- Plan an imaginary gold rush trip of your own. How many dogs would you need? What sort of supplies should you take with you? Create a budget for this trip, and plan your route.