



Close Reading Worksheet--Teacher Version

Student Name _____ Date _____

Instructions: Answer the following discussion questions in your small group after reading the corresponding passages closely. While analyzing *White Fang*, keep the following overall guiding question in mind: "How are the concepts of nature and culture defined – and differentiated – in Jack London's *White Fang*?"

1. Review the section and chapter titles of [White Fang](#). Thinking only of these titles, trace the general plot of the novel, focusing on just White Fang. Include just five major elements of plot to correspond with the five sections: "Part 1: The Wild, Part 2: Born of the Wild, Part 3: The Gods of the Wild, Part 4: The Superior Goods, Part 5: The Tame." After identifying five main parts of the novel's plot, broadly label each step "nature," "culture," or "the great divide," based on what you think the focus of each part might be.

Part 1: The Klondike setting includes both a wild landscape and wild wolves. (nature)

Part 2: White Fang is born into the Wild and learns how to live in the Klondike.(nature)

Part 3: The human prospectors have mastery and power within the Klondike, and White Fang learns this "law." (culture)

Part 4: Beauty Smith beats White Fang, making him a famous fighting wolf (the great divide).

Part 5: White Fang goes to live with Judge Scott's family in the Santa Clara Valley as a protective pet (culture).

2. From [Part 1, "Chapter 1: The Trail of the Meat"](#)

Dark spruce forest frowned on either side the frozen waterway. The trees had been stripped by a recent wind of their white covering of frost, and they seemed to lean toward each other, black and ominous, in the fading light. A vast silence reigned over the land. The land itself was a desolation, lifeless, without movement, so lone and cold that the spirit of it was not even that of sadness. There was a hint in it of laughter, but of a laughter more terrible than any sadness -- a laughter that was mirthless as the smile of the Sphinx, a laughter cold as the frost and partaking of the grimness of infallibility. It was the masterful and incommunicable wisdom of eternity laughing at the futility of life and the effort of life. It was the Wild, the savage, frozen-hearted Northland Wild.

But there was life, abroad in the land and defiant. Down the frozen waterway toiled a string of wolfish dogs. Their bristly fur was rimed with frost. Their breath froze in the air as it left their mouths, spouting forth in spumes of vapor that settled upon the hair of their bodies and formed into crystals of frost. Leather harness was on the dogs, and leather traces attached them to a sled which dragged along behind. The sled was without runners. It was made of stout birch-bark, and its full surface rested on the snow. The front end of the sled was turned up, like a scroll, in order to force down and under the bore of soft snow that surged like a wave before it. On the sled, securely lashed, was a long and narrow oblong box. There were other things on the sled -- blankets, an axe, and a coffee-pot and frying-pan; but prominent, occupying most of the space, was the long and narrow oblong box.

In advance of the dogs, on wide snowshoes, toiled a man. At the rear of the sled toiled a second man. On the sled, in the box, lay a third man whose toil was over, -- a man whom the Wild had conquered and beaten down until he would never move nor struggle again. It is not the way of the Wild to like movement. Life is an offence to it, for life is movement; and the Wild aims always to destroy movement. It freezes the water to prevent it running to the sea; it drives the sap out of the trees till they are frozen

to their mighty hearts; and most ferociously and terribly of all does the Wild harry and crush into submission man -- man, who is the most restless of life, ever in revolt against the dictum that all movement must in the end come to the cessation of movement.

a) How would you describe this opening setting of the novel? Use at least three adjectives or descriptive phrases.

frozen, intimidating, ominous, wild, scary, dead, sad, dead, etc.

b) What are three elements of nature in these opening paragraphs?

frozen waterway, fading light, frost, frozen-hearted Northland Wild

c) What are three elements of culture in these opening paragraphs?

a string of wolfish dogs, leather harnesses and traces, blankets, axe, coffee-pot and frying-pan, and oblong box

d) What is in the box?

a man who died in the frozen elements

e) What is the relationship between culture and nature in these opening paragraphs?

This opening scene reveals the Klondike as a setting in which humans are up against nature to survive the frozen Northland Wild.

2. From [Part 2, Chapter 3: "The Gray Cub"](#)

It was in this way that the gray cub learned other attributes of his mother than the soft, soothing tongue. In his insistent crawling toward the light, he discovered in her a nose that with a sharp nudge administered rebuke, and later, a paw, that crushed him down or rolled him over and over with swift, calculating stroke. Thus he learned hurt; and on top of it he learned to avoid hurt, first, by not incurring the risk of it; and second, when he had incurred the risk, by dodging and by retreating. These were conscious actions, and were the results of his first generalizations upon the world. Before that he had recoiled automatically from hurt, as he had crawled automatically toward the light. After that he recoiled from hurt because he *knew* that it was hurt.

a) Read this passage carefully and circle all phrases related to "hurt."

Phrases include "learned hurt," "learned to avoid hurt," "he had recoiled automatically from hurt," "recoiled from hurt because he *knew* that it was hurt."

b) How would you describe White Fang's sense of the concept of hurt?

White Fang ultimately *learns* hurt, which typically is a natural instinct, thereby calling into the question the basic duality of nature (innate drives, instinct) and culture (learning hurt).

3. From [Part 2, Chapter 4: "The Wall of the World"](#)

A great fear came upon him. This was more of the terrible unknown. He crouched down on the lip of the cave and gazed out on the world. He was very much afraid. Because it was unknown, it was hostile to him. Therefore the hair stood up on end along his back and his lips wrinkled weakly in an attempt at a ferocious and intimidating snarl. Out of his puniness and fright he challenged and menaced the whole wide world.

Nothing happened. He continued to gaze, and in his interest he forgot to snarl. Also, he forgot to be afraid. For the time, fear had been routed by growth, while growth had assumed the guise of curiosity. He began to notice near objects -- an open portion of the stream that flashed in the sun, the blasted pine tree that stood at the base of the slope, and the slope itself, that ran right up to him and ceased two feet beneath the lip of the cave on which he crouched.

a) Is fear a natural instinct?

Yes.

b) How would you describe White Fang’s sense of fear in this passage?

Even fear is learned. If White Fang’s instinct had functioned “naturally,” his hair would have bristled on its own accord, without the logical premises that lead to the conclusion “therefore the hard stood up.”

4) From [Part 4, Chapter 3: “The Reign of Hate”](#)

The men outside shouted and applauded, while Beauty Smith, in an ecstasy of delight, gloated over the ripping and mangling performed by White Fang. There was no hope for the mastiff from the first. He was too ponderous and slow. In the end, while Beauty Smith beat White Fang back with a club, the mastiff was dragged out by its owner. Then there was a payment of bets, and money clinked in Beauty Smith’s hand.

White Fang came to look forward eagerly to the gathering of the men around his pen. It meant a fight; and this was the only way that was now vouchsafed him of expressing the life that was in him. Tormented, incited to hate, he was kept a prisoner so that there was no way of satisfying that hate except at the times his master saw fit to put another dog against him. Beauty Smith had estimated his powers well, for he was invariably the victor. One day, three dogs were turned in upon him in succession. Another day, a full-grown wolf, fresh-caught from the Wild, was shoved in through the door of the pen. And on still another day two dogs were set against him at the same time. This was his severest fight, and although in the end he killed them both he was himself half killed in doing it.

In the fall of the year, when the first snows were falling and mush-ice was running in the river, Beauty Smith took passage for himself and White Fang on a steamboat bound up the Yukon to Dawson. White Fang had now achieved a reputation in the land. As “The Fighting Wolf” he was known far and wide, and the cage in which he was kept on the steamboat’s deck was usually surrounded by curious men. He raged and snarled at them, or lay quietly and studied them with cold hatred. Why should he not hate them? He never asked himself the question. He knew only hate and lost himself in the passion of it. Life had become a hell to him. He had not been made for the close confinement wild beasts endure at the hands of men. And yet it was in precisely this way that he was treated. Men stared at him, poked sticks between the bars to make him snarl, and then laughed at him.

a) Who is Beauty Smith? Name three adjectives to describe him.

Beauty Smith is a man who trains wolves to be fighting dogs for sport. He is hateful, mean-spirited, and even beastly. His name belies his inner ugliness.

b) Why had “Life...become a hell to [White Fang]”?

because Beauty Smith tortures him

c) Is White Fang’s reputation as “The Fighting Wolf” natural or cultural (i.e., learned)? Explain your answer.

By repeatedly torturing White Fang, Beauty Smith makes White Fang more wolfish, savage, and wild than he “naturally” was. In short, White Fang learns to be savage. The figure of Beauty Smith therefore

raises questions about the nature/culture duality, because one could argue that Beauty Smith is more beastly than the wolves themselves.

5) From [Part 5, Chapter 4: "The Call of the Kind"](#)

White Fang had never been very demonstrative. Beyond his snuggling and the throwing of a crooning note into his love-growl, he had no way of expressing his love. Yet it was given him to discover a third way. He had always been susceptible to the laughter of the gods. Laughter had affected him with madness, made him frantic with rage. But he did not have it in him to be angry with the love-master, and when that god elected to laugh at him in a good-natured, bantering way, he was nonplussed. He could feel the pricking and stinging of the old anger as it strove to rise up in him, but it strove against love. He could not be angry; yet he had to do something. At first he was dignified, and the master laughed the harder. Then he tried to be more dignified, and the master laughed harder than before. In the end, the master laughed him out of his dignity. His jaws slightly parted, his lips lifted a little, and a quizzical expression that was more love than humor came into his eyes. He had learned to laugh.

a) What is "The Call of the Kind"?

the law of love, as manifested by love-growls and laughter

b) What are the similarities and differences between "The Call of the Kind" and "The Call of the Wild"?

Both "calls" are positioned as natural depending on what "kind" of animal you are. Specifically, the word "kind" raises questions about "kind" in the sense of species or *kind* of animal: wolf/wild; human/love. The novel raises questions, however, about what it means to be wild in the Wild.

c) How is setting related to whether White Fang follows "The Call of the Kind" or "The Call of the Wild"?

"The Call of the Kind" supposedly is found among humans in the Santa Clara Valley, while "The Call of the Wild" is situated in the Klondike.

d) How does the ending of the novel and the figure of Jim Hall call into question the relationship between setting and the Wild?

London sets up the analogy: the prison warden is to Jim Hall as Beauty Smith is to White Fang. The ending suggests that the concepts of wild/nature and tame/culture no longer apply to human kind and animal kind. The novel breaks down the commonly accepted duality of "nature" and "culture."