

# The Man Within the Beast: Exploring Humanity in *\*Bisclavret\** and *\*White Fang\**

## Materials Needed

- A copy of Marie de France's *\*Bisclavret\** (many free translations are available online)
- A copy of Jack London's *\*White Fang\**
- Notebook or digital document for writing
- Pen or pencil
- Optional: Art supplies (for comic strip option), audio recording device (for podcast option)
- Access to the internet for background information (optional)

## Lesson Activities

### Part 1: Warm-Up - Defining the Line (15 minutes)

In your notebook, respond to the following prompt. Don't worry about right or wrong answers; just explore your initial thoughts.

**Prompt:** What truly separates humans from animals? Is it language? Is it our code of laws and morality? Is it our ability to love or feel betrayal? Write a paragraph explaining where you believe the dividing line lies, if one exists at all.

### Part 2: The Noble Beast - Analyzing *\*Bisclavret\** (45 minutes)

Read (or re-read) *\*Bisclavret\**. As you read, consider the main character, the baron who becomes a werewolf. In your notebook, answer the following questions with specific examples from the text.

- **The Confession:** How does Bisclavret explain his situation to his wife? What does his honesty and his fear of her reaction tell us about his character, even before his transformation?
- **The Wolf at Court:** When Bisclavret lives at the king's court as a wolf, how does he behave? List three actions that show he retains his human reason, nobility, and sense of justice. (For example, how does he greet the king vs. how he greets his wife and her new husband?)
- **The Betrayal:** Marie de France writes that the wife was punished for her betrayal. In your opinion, was Bisclavret's violent attack on his former wife and her new husband an act of animal savagery or human justice? Explain your reasoning.

### Part 3: The Tamed Beast - Analyzing *\*White Fang\** (45 minutes)

Think about *White Fang's* journey throughout the novel. You don't need to re-read the whole book, but skim key sections that show his development (his time with Grey Beaver, Beauty Smith, and Weedon Scott). Answer the following questions.

- **Nature vs. Nurture:** Jack London describes *White Fang* as a creature of the "Wild." How do his different human masters either suppress or encourage his "tame" or "human-like" qualities (like loyalty and affection)? Provide one example for each master.
- **The Law of the Wild:** *White Fang* learns to survive by the "law of club and fang." How does this "law" compare to the human laws and morals he encounters with Weedon Scott? Is one inherently better or more just than the other?
- **The Transformation:** By the end of the book, *White Fang* is called the "Blessed Wolf." Does he become more "human," or does he simply adapt his wild nature to a new environment?

What part of his wolf-nature does he never lose?

### Part 4: The Great Debate - Man vs. Beast, Head-to-Head (30 minutes)

Now, let's put these two characters in conversation. Create a T-chart or Venn Diagram in your notebook to compare Bisclavret and White Fang. Use the following themes to guide your comparison. For each point, try to note whether the character's actions are driven by human-like reason or animal instinct.

- **Loyalty:** Who is more loyal? To whom or what are they loyal (a person, a king, a personal code)?
- **Justice vs. Revenge:** How do they react to betrayal? Is their response calculated or instinctual?
- **Identity:** How do they see themselves? Does society's view of them (as a monster or a wild beast) affect their actions?
- **Nobility:** Both characters are described as noble. What does "nobility" mean for a man-trapped-in-a-wolf versus a wolf-becoming-a-companion?

### Part 5: Creative Challenge - A Modern Myth (60 minutes)

Your task is to re-imagine one of these stories in a 21st-century setting. Choose **one** character (Bisclavret or White Fang) and **one** of the following creative formats to explore how their story would play out today.

**Scenario:** Think about modern society. How would we react to a werewolf or a wolf-dog with near-human intelligence? Consider social media, science, urban environments, and modern ideas of justice.

#### Choose your format:

1. **A Short Story (1-2 pages):** Write a scene where a modern Bisclavret (perhaps a CEO, a soldier, or a scientist) has to navigate his secret in today's world. How does he hide? What happens when he's discovered?
2. **A Comic Strip (6-8 panels):** Illustrate a key moment from either story, but set in the present day. For example, you could draw the court scene from *\*Bisclavret\** taking place in the White House, or White Fang's rescue by Weedon Scott happening at an illegal dog-fighting ring broken up by animal rights activists.
3. **A Podcast Script (1 page):** Write a script for a short segment of a true-crime or mystery podcast titled "The Wolf of Wall Street" (about Bisclavret) or "The Sierra Story: From Wild to Hero" (about White Fang), where the host investigates the strange events surrounding the character.
4. **A Character Design & Bio:** Create a concept for a video game or film character. Draw the character (either human or animal form) and write a detailed biography explaining their backstory, their special abilities, and their central conflict in a modern world.

### Part 6: Final Reflection (15 minutes)

To wrap up the lesson, return to the question from the warm-up. In your notebook, write a final paragraph answering the following:

**Reflection Prompt:** After comparing the noble man-as-wolf in *\*Bisclavret\** and the wild wolf-as-companion in *\*White Fang\**, has your view on the line between human and animal changed? What do these stories, written centuries apart, teach us about how society judges others based on appearances?

## For the Teacher: Evaluation Rubric for the Creative Challenge

Use these simple criteria to self-assess the final project:

- **Connection to Text (40%):** Does the project clearly and creatively incorporate key themes, character traits, or plot points from the original text?
- **Modern Adaptation (30%):** Does the project thoughtfully consider how the story would change in a 21st-century setting? Are the modern elements well-integrated?
- **Creativity & Effort (30%):** Does the project show original thought and care in its execution, regardless of artistic skill?