

The Law of the Wild: A Comparative Study of Character and Conflict

An MCT Level 4 Lesson Plan Exploring Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*

Materials Needed:

- Copy of Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*
 - Copy of Jack London's *White Fang*
 - Student notebook or journal
 - Pens or pencils
 - Blank paper or a large whiteboard
 - Access to the internet to look up Robert W. Service's poem, "The Law of the Yukon"
-

Lesson Overview

This lesson guides the student through a deep, comparative analysis of two literary masterpieces, focusing not just on what happens, but *how* the stories are built. We will move from analyzing the "grammar" of the stories (character and conflict), to appreciating their "poetry" (theme and tone), and finally to practicing the "writing" of literature through a creative final project.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- Analyze and compare the character arcs of Buck and White Fang, tracing their opposite journeys between civilization and the wild.
 - Identify and provide examples of the four main types of literary conflict (character vs. character, character vs. nature, character vs. society, character vs. self) within both novels.
 - Connect the themes and tone of Jack London's prose to a thematically similar poem, identifying key poetic devices.
 - Compose a creative written piece that demonstrates an understanding of character perspective, voice, and literary conflict.
-

Part 1: The Grammar of Literature - Mirrored Journeys (Approx. 60 minutes)

Goal: To analyze the foundational structures of character and conflict in the two novels.

Activity 1: The Character Compass

1. **Discussion Starter:** Ask the student: "What does it mean to be 'civilized'? What does it mean to be 'wild'? Are they always opposites?" Discuss how these concepts apply to both humans and animals in the stories.
 2. **Mapping the Journeys:** On a large piece of paper or a whiteboard, draw two opposite arrows. Label the top one "Buck's Journey" and the bottom one "White Fang's Journey."
 - On Buck's arrow, start with "Civilization (California)" on the left and end with "The Wild
-

(Yukon)" on the right.

- On White Fang's arrow, start with "The Wild (Yukon)" on the left and end with "Civilization (California)" on the right.

3. **Charting the Arc:** Have the student identify 3-4 key events from each book that pushed the character along their journey. Write these events along the respective arrows. For example:
 - **For Buck:** Being stolen from Judge Miller's estate -> Learning the "law of club and fang" from Spitz -> Answering the call of the wolf pack.
 - **For White Fang:** Leaving the safety of the den -> Being brutalized by Beauty Smith -> Learning love and trust from Weedon Scott.

Activity 2: The Conflict Grid

1. **Review the Four Conflicts:** Briefly review the four types of conflict:
 - **Character vs. Character:** (Buck vs. Spitz; White Fang vs. Cherokee)
 - **Character vs. Nature:** (Buck vs. the freezing cold; White Fang vs. starvation)
 - **Character vs. Society:** (Buck vs. the rules of the sled team; White Fang vs. the expectations of the Indian camp)
 - **Character vs. Self:** (Buck's struggle between loyalty to Thornton and the call of the wild; White Fang's struggle between his violent instincts and his love for his master)
2. **Find the Evidence:** Ask the student to find one powerful example of each type of conflict for BOTH Buck and White Fang. They should write the example down in their notebook, creating a simple grid for clarity. Discuss which conflict seems to be the most important or driving force in each novel.

Part 2: The Poetry of Literature - The Law of the Yukon (Approx. 45 minutes)

Goal: To connect the mood, tone, and themes of London's prose to the lyrical expression of poetry.

Activity: Poetic Parallels

1. **Read the Poem:** Read Robert W. Service's poem "The Law of the Yukon" aloud together. This poem captures the harsh, unforgiving, yet beautiful spirit of the North that London writes about.
2. **Thematic Connection:** Discuss these questions:
 - "This is the law of the Yukon, that only the Strong shall survive." How is this line the central theme of *The Call of the Wild*? How is it challenged in *White Fang*?
 - The poem uses powerful imagery (e.g., "the nameless men who moil for gold," "the freshness, the freedom, the farness"). Where do we see similar descriptions in London's novels?
 - Service uses **personification**, giving human qualities to the land ("It's the cussedest land that I know," "It grips you like some kinds of sinning."). How does Jack London personify nature or instinct in his stories?
3. **Literary Device Hunt:** Have the student re-read the poem and identify at least two other poetic devices, such as **alliteration** (repetition of initial consonant sounds) or **metaphor** (a direct comparison).

Part 3: The Writing of Literature - A New Voice (Approx. 75

minutes + writing time)

Goal: To apply the understanding of character, conflict, and voice to a creative writing project.

Activity: Choose Your Path

Present the student with the following writing prompts. They are to choose **one** to develop into a polished piece of writing (1-2 pages).

1. **The Other Side of the Fire:** Rewrite a key scene from either novel from a different character's perspective.
 - **Option A:** Write John Thornton's journal entry on the night he saved Buck from Hal. What were his thoughts and feelings about this magnificent dog?
 - **Option B:** Write from the perspective of Weedon Scott's collie, an intelligent dog who must learn to accept the savage White Fang into her home. Focus on her observations and fears.
 - **Goal:** Capture the unique voice and perspective of the chosen character. Show, don't just tell, their emotions.
2. **The Unwritten Chapter:** Write a short story that acts as a new scene or epilogue for one of the books.
 - **Option A:** Describe one of Buck's first hunts as the leader of the wolf pack. How does he use both his wild instincts and the intelligence he learned from men?
 - **Option B:** Years later, an old White Fang must protect the Scott family from a new danger on their California estate. How does his "tamed" wildness resurface to protect those he loves?
 - **Goal:** Demonstrate an understanding of the character's journey and incorporate at least one clear type of conflict (e.g., Character vs. Nature).

Assessment & Feedback

- **Formative (During the Lesson):** The quality of the student's participation in discussions, the completeness of their Character Compass map, and the accuracy of their Conflict Grid will serve as informal checks for understanding.
- **Summative (The Final Project):** The chosen creative writing piece will be the final assessment. Evaluate it based on the following:
 - **Character Voice:** Does the writing sound authentic to the chosen character and their perspective?
 - **Understanding of Conflict:** Is there a clear conflict present in the story that drives the action?
 - **Literary Detail:** Does the student use strong verbs, sensory details, and imagery in the style of Jack London?
 - **Clarity and Polish:** Is the piece well-organized, with clear grammar and spelling?

Differentiation & Extension

- **For Support:** Provide a pre-writing worksheet to help the student brainstorm ideas for their story, including character feelings, setting details, and a simple plot outline.
- **For Extension/Challenge:** Have the student research Jack London's own life during the Klondike Gold Rush. They can then write a short essay or create a presentation on how London's real-life experiences with hardship, nature, and dogs directly influenced the events and themes in his novels.