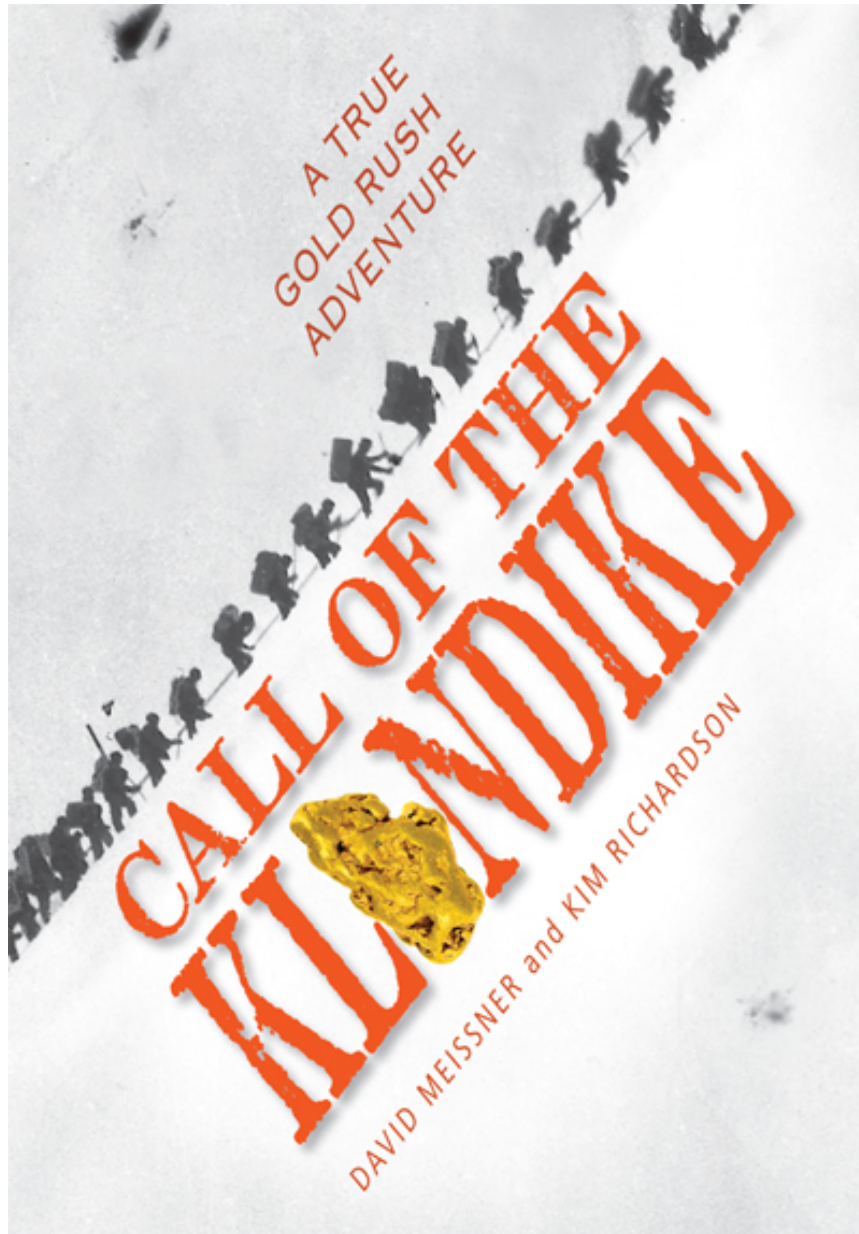


CALL OF THE KLONDIKE DISCUSSION GUIDE

Developed by David Meissner



Discussion & Essay Questions

Companion Guide to *The Call of the Wild*

DISCUSSION & ESSAY QUESTIONS

While researching and writing this book, I realized how many rich discussion topics this book holds. Hopefully you will find these ideas useful for class discussions, homework assignments, and longer essays. As always, adjust as needed for your class and curriculum.

BEFORE READING

1. What do you already know about gold rushes? Why was gold considered so valuable?
2. What everyday terms do we still use that come from gold, gold mining, and gold rushes? (Striking it rich; hitting pay dirt; mother lode; bonanza; a gold mine of information; El Dorado; all that glitters is not gold; worth its weight in gold; gold digger; etc.)
3. What was happening in the world and in the United States in 1897? What exactly is an economic recession? How do you think the recession affected the intensity of the Klondike gold rush?
4. What types of transportation do you think people used back in 1897? Which of the following had been invented? Airplanes? Helicopters? Cars? Trains? Steamboats? (See p. 155 timeline.)
5. What types of communication devices do you think people used back in 1897? Which of the following had been invented? Telegraphs? Telephones? Letters? Newspapers? Television? Radio? Computers? Internet? Cell phones? (See p. 155 timeline.)
6. What do you think is going to happen in this book? Will the two protagonists, Stanley Pearce and Marshall Bond, strike it rich? Why do you think that?
7. Look closely at the map on pages 8-9 and then look at a larger map of North America to put it in context. How many miles is it by ship from Seattle to Juneau? To Skagway? How many days would that take?

Video: City of Gold

City of Gold is a 21-minute film from 1957 about Dawson City and the Klondike gold rush: http://www.nfb.ca/film/city_of_gold/. It was produced by the National Film Board of Canada and narrated by a well-respected author and historian. (Note: You may want to review the film ahead of time for its subtle reference to working girls.)

CHAPTER 1: GOLD FEVER STRIKES

1. If you were in Pearce and Bond's shoes when the ship full of gold arrived, would you have joined the gold rush? Why or why not? What if you had known about all of the hardships ahead of time?
2. On page 16, it says that stores were advertising "special" Klondike underwear, and that regular dogs were being sold as sled dogs. What is happening here? Do you think this type of misleading advertising still happens today?
3. Reread the telegram on pages 16-17. What exactly is a telegram? How did it work? How is a telegram similar to and different from a text message, or a Twitter tweet?
4. Photocopy the maps from *Call of the Klondike* – pages 8-9, 30, and 74-75. Throughout your reading, track Pearce and Bond's movements by marking them on the maps every time a place is referenced.

CHAPTER 2: RACE TO THE KLONDIKE

1. Reread Bond's letter to Pearce's mother on pages 31-32. How might this letter be different if someone wrote it today? (Formality? Punctuation? Spelling? Discuss how the English language may have changed slightly since 1897.)

2. Study the map on page 30 and reread the top paragraph on page 35. Which trail do you think Pearce and Bond should take – the White Pass or the Chilkoot? Why? Which do you think they will take?
3. Reread the letter on pages 35-37 from Bond's father to Pearce's father. Could Marshall Bond and Stanley Pearce have taken this expedition if their fathers hadn't been wealthy? If their fathers didn't have money, could Pearce and Bond still have joined the Klondike gold rush? If so, how would their experience have been different?

CHAPTER 3: THE DEAD HORSE TRAIL

1. Reread Pearce's article about the horses on page 47 and study the photo on the following page. Do you think animals would be treated like this today in a similar situation? What were the attitudes of many stampedeers toward animals? Do you think Pearce and Bond thought differently? Why?
2. Reread Pearce's pullout quote on page 52. Is he being realistic or idealistic? Is he tempting fate?
3. On page 52, Pearce lists some of the books that he brought with him. If you could bring five books on a yearlong expedition, which ones would you choose, and why?
4. At the bottom of page 52, Pearce writes: "One immense satisfaction to me, in fact to Marshall as well is that we are on British soil and under British rule. A detachment of mounted police is here at the lake." How are Pearce and Bond under British rule in Canada in 1897? What was the relationship between Britain and Canada then? Now? (Research as needed.)

CHAPTER 4: DOWN THE YUKON

1. Study the photo on page 57. What is "whipsawing" exactly? With the tools available in 1897, do you think your class could whipsaw trees into a boat that could withstand a 500-mile journey down lakes and

ivers? How long would it take to cut down trees? Make boards? Build a boat? What would be the greatest challenge?

2. Reread Bond's description on page 66 about his encounters with Indians living along the river. What are their living conditions like? How do you think Bond views them?
3. Throughout the book, Pearce and Bond refer to the Native people they meet as "Indians"? What do you think about that? When did people in the United States start using the term "Native Americans"? In Canada, other terms such as "First Nations People" are preferred. Which do you think is best?

CHAPTER 5: WELCOME TO DAWSON CITY

1. Study the photograph of Pearce and Bond in front of their cabin on page 76. Describe the things you see – from clothing to the cabin to the hatchet. Does anything surprise you? Why or why not?
2. Reread "Staking a Claim" on page 79. Describe in your own words how miners used to stake claims and what problems could arise. How might staking a claim or purchasing land be different today?
3. Reread "Meeting Jack London" on page 83. Have you ever heard of Jack London or read *The Call of the Wild* or *White Fang*? Where else do references to Jack London appear in this chapter?
4. Try to decipher the handwriting on the original mining agreement between L.W. Fox and Marshall Bond on page 90. How might a mining contract look and be different today?
5. Reread Pearce's December 1 letter from page 91 to page 93. Have you ever experienced 60° below zero? What is the coldest temperature you have ever felt? Compare what they wore to what someone might wear today in similar conditions. Do you think you could have survived their dogsled trip?
6. Reread Bond's and Pearce's letters on pages 98 and 99. Do their tone and sense of optimism seem to be changing? If so, how?

7. In Bond's letter on page 101, he writes that they are playing hearts. Do you think this might be the same card game that people play today? Do you know this game? How long has our current 52-card deck existed?
8. After rereading page 102, look back through the book and try to piece together Pearce and Bond's budget as best you can, including how much money they started with and how they spent it.

CHAPTER 6: THE SEARCH FOR GOLD

1. In his February 13 diary entry on page 109, Bond writes that he saw "Ex Mayor Wood." What do you think about Wood's decision to quit his job as the mayor of Seattle to look for gold? Would a politician do something similar today? Why do you think that?
2. Reread page 114. If stampederers had cell phones and Internet in 1897, how would their experiences have been different? How has the role of "snail mail", or hand-delivered letters, changed over time?
3. Reread the "Game of Claim Selling" on page 115. Can you think of any modern-day scams in which unsuspecting people are tricked out of their money?
4. Reread Bond's June 2 letter on pages 125-126. What mix of emotions is he feeling? Knowing what he knows now, do you think he would have set off on this trip? Was it worth it?
5. Reread "The Newcomer" article on page 133. Why do you think stampederers overestimated their chances of striking it rich?
6. What is gold fever really? Are there modern-day forms of gold fever? Are there any "get-rich-quick" opportunities out there today?
7. What do you predict Stanley Pearce and Marshall Bond will do with their lives after the gold rush?

CHAPTER 7: AFTER THE GOLD RUSH

1. How do you feel after reading about Pearce's life after the gold rush? Bond's life? Do you feel like you got to know them by reading their own words?
2. What do you think actually happened to the two dogs? How do you think they lived out the rest of their years? (Option: Write your own version of what might have happened.)
3. Reread the section on Alexander McDonald on pages 144-145. Why do you think that Klondike Kings like him lost all of their money? Can you think of any modern-day examples of people who have lost their riches?
4. Reread "Success or Failure" on pages 145-146. Make a visual representation (pie chart or other) that shows the chances stampedeers had of striking it rich. Do people today have a better chance of winning the lottery? Discuss.
5. Have you ever visited historical places that you found boring? Do you think the visit would have been different if you had learned about the place's history first? Would you want to visit Skagway and hike the Chilkoot Trail? Why or why not?
6. Reread the "Casualties of the Gold Rush" section on pages 151-153. Do you think the stampedeers were aware of the impacts they were having on the lives of Native people? How might things be the same or different in a similar situation today?
7. Were stampedeers aware of the environmental impacts they were having during the gold rush? Do you think they cared? Do people generally see the environment differently now than in 1897? If so, how and why?
8. What resources do we still mine or extract from the earth today? (Oil, natural gas, coal, copper, aluminum, gold, etc.) What do we use them for in our daily lives? Are we aware of the environmental impacts we are having? Do we mine responsibly? Could we sustain our modern-day lives without mining?

AFTER READING

1. How would the Klondike gold rush have been different with modern-day communication technology? Modern-day transportation? How would Pearce and Bond's particular experience have been different and/or similar?
2. How did Pearce and Bond change over the course of the year, both as people and in terms of how they viewed their expedition? How were their personalities similar and different?
3. Do you think their expedition was a success or failure? Define each term in your own words. Explain.
4. Do you think you could endure the same hardships as Pearce and Bond? What would be the hardest part? Which modern-day comforts would you miss the most? Why?
5. Were you disappointed that Pearce and Bond didn't strike it rich in the end? Why or why not? In most books that you read, or movies that you watch, do the protagonists usually succeed in their quest? Which outcome do you think is more realistic in everyday life?
6. This book is told through primary documents. When doing research or writing a paper, what are the benefits of finding and using primary documents versus other sources? How do you know when secondary sources are historically accurate? How can you find out?
7. Would you rather learn about history through primary or secondary sources? Why? What are the benefits of each?

THE CALL OF THE WILD **COMPANION GUIDE**

Kirkus Reviews wrote that Call of the Klondike is “an excellent companion to The Call of the Wild.” Booklist agrees that it is “a natural companion for Jack London’s Call of the Wild and other historical-fiction works about the Klondike gold rush.”

Here you will find some ideas for this fiction-nonfiction pairing. In addition to a real-life overlap with Jack London himself, Call of the Klondike can provide students with insightful historical context prior to reading London’s classic novel.

Note: All page numbers below refer to Call of the Klondike. Chapter numbers refer to The Call of the Wild.

AFTER READING CALL OF THE KLONDIKE **(AND BEFORE THE CALL OF THE WILD)**

1. From reading *Call of the Klondike*, what did you learn about Jack London as a person? Refer back to pages 83 and 142-3. Research to find out more about the real life of this famous author. Where he grew up? What other adventures did he experience? When did he become famous?
2. Why do you think Jack London decided to go on the Klondike gold rush? How is London’s background similar to and different from those of Marshall Bond and Stanley Pearce?
3. On page 16, it says: “Some Seattle entrepreneurs even advertised regular dogs as sled dogs that could pull heavy loads across snowfields and up frozen rivers.” In fact, when gold fever struck, there were reports of missing pets that were presumably dognapped and sold for a profit. While reading *The Call of the Wild*, keep track of which dogs you think were stolen in this way.

WHILE READING

1. *The Call of the Wild* opens with Buck living at Judge Miller's ranch in the "sun-kissed Santa Clara Valley." On page 143 of *Call of the Klondike*, London tells the Bonds that "Judge Miller's place was Judge Bond's." Do you think authors normally create settings from their imaginations, or base them on places they've been?
2. Photocopy the maps from *Call of the Klondike* – pages 8-9, 30, and 74-75. Throughout your reading, track Buck's movements by marking them on the map every time a place is referenced. (Most, but not all place names, are on these maps: Seattle, Dyea, Lake Bennett, Chilkoot Divide/Pass, Lake LaBerge, Stewart River, 30-Mile River, 60-Mile River, Pelly River, White River, Dawson City, Whitehorse Rapids, Marsh Lake, Tagish Lake, White Pass, Skagway, Yukon River, etc.)
3. How did Buck's travels to Dawson City differ from those of Pearce and Bond? (1. Buck took the Chilkoot Trail. Pearce and Bond traveled up the White Pass Trail. 2. Pearce and Bond traveled in late summer and early fall, which allowed them to travel the rivers and lakes by boat. Buck left after the water had frozen, so they traveled up the same rivers and lakes by dogsled.)
4. Look at the picture of the dogsled on pages 96 and 97. Is this how you picture Buck's sleds?
5. Look closely at the photograph on page 144. London based his character, Buck, on the dog (Jack) on the left. Might this photograph tell you anything about the character of this dog? (Jack was known for having a strong work ethic, while Pat, the dog on the right, had a reputation for being lazy.) Do you think Buck and Jack were similar? Where do you think the character Buck departs from the real dog, Jack?
6. What parallels can you find between the two books with regard to the treatment of animals? Were dogs and horses treated differently? (On page 47, Pearce describes the ill treatment of horses, including a fellow traveler who borrowed an ax to kill an injured horse. In Chapters 4 and 5 of *The Call of the Wild*, there are multiple instances of men killing dogs who could no longer help pull the sled.)

7. What is the difference between a “cheechako” and “sour dough”? (Cheechako is a naïve, tenderfoot newcomer and sour dough is an old-timer. See Pearce’s description on page 115.) Find real examples of each in both books. (Cheechakos: the man Pearce describes tying on a boulder to balance out a horse, p. 47; Hal, Charles, and Mercedes in Chapter 5. Sour doughs: L.W. Fox, p. 78; John Thornton, Chapters 5 and 6.)
8. At what point do you think Buck shifted from being a tenderfoot Cheechako to an experienced sour dough?

AFTER READING

1. Both book titles sound similar (*The Call of the Wild* and *Call of the Klondike*), but their meanings are actually quite different. How do you interpret the meaning of each title as it relates to each book? (One interpretation: *The Call of the Wild* tugs at Buck’s primordial side – he eventually leaves human civilization for the dog-eat-dog, survival-of-the-fittest wild. In *Call of the Klondike*, gold fever tugs at humans’ greed, ambition, and desire for wealth—a primordial side of sorts—which lures them into the barren North and forces them to sharpen their survival skills in a different way.)
2. Did reading *Call of the Klondike* first help you better understand *The Call of the Wild*? If so, how?
3. Do you think London could have written *The Call of the Wild* if he had not traveled to the Klondike? Do you think it is possible for authors to write about places and times they have not experienced themselves? Why or why not?

EDUCATOR’S GUIDE

The publisher of *Call of the Klondike*, Calkins Creek/Boyd’s Mills Press, has developed an Educator’s Guide that correlates to Common Core Standards. It is also available at www.bydavidmeissner.com.