

Split-Page Notes: *The Call of the Wild*, Chapter 1 “Into the Primitive”

Question	Response
<p>1. What does the reader learn in the first sentence about the problem, the main character, and the setting?</p> <p>2. What do you learn about Buck in paragraphs 3-5? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.</p> <p>3. What words and phrases in paragraph 22 present Buck in “human-like” ways? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.</p>	<p>The reader learns that there is some kind of trouble, but does not yet know what the trouble is beyond that it involves dogs in some way. We learn about a character in the book, Buck, who must be a dog, since the sentence says that the trouble was “not alone for himself, but for every tide-water dog...” We learn that the setting of the book might be the west coast of the United States, since the author refers to the area from Puget Sound to San Diego—all the way from Washington State to the southern tip of California.</p> <p>We learn that Buck is an impressive creature. He holds a distinct place in the hierarchy of animals and humans on the ranch. He is described as the ruler over all of them. He is not an indoor or an outdoor working dog. He is large (“he weighed only one hundred and forty pounds”). He is strong (“hunting and kindred outdoor delights had kept down the fat and hardened his muscles”). He is proud (the author compares him to royalty). He has been pampered (he plays with the family and “had lived the life of a sated aristocrat”).</p> <p>Buck is portrayed as having thoughts and feelings that are similar to what a person might express in his situation. For example, the text states “He could not understand what it all meant. What did they want with him, these strange men? Why were they keeping him pent up in this narrow crate?” These words and questions suggest that Buck has a curiosity and a cerebral concern about his current situation. The text also says, “He felt oppressed by the vague sense of impending calamity.” The feeling of being oppressed is very much associated with the human condition, and it not a word that people often use when talking about their animals.</p>
<p>Explain how the encounter with Manuel and the subsequent event described in paragraph 11 change Buck, citing evidence from the text to support your claim.</p> <p>This event changes Buck’s relationship with humans. Up to this point, Buck has always been treated well by all of the humans he has encountered; the paragraphs before say that he was the ruler of the humans, not the other way around. This paragraph says that “he had learned to trust in men he knew...” Now, suddenly, someone is placing a rope around his neck—and he learns that he cannot trust all men. Manuel was a human who Buck knew and did not see as a threat. Because Buck knew him and trusted him, Manuel was able to steal Buck and sell him to a man at the station. Now, all men are a threat and he reacts by growling threateningly—and then by reacting violently.</p>	

Question	Response
<p>4. Underline sensory details used to describe Buck's beating. How does the author's use of vivid, violent description impact the tone and mood of the text?</p> <p>5. What does the author mean by the phrase the "reign of primitive law"?</p>	<p><i>Select any relevant details; some examples are included below:</i></p> <p>Buck has become a violent creature, and the author calls him a "devil" in this scene of the book. Buck has a "mad glitter" in his eyes. The club brought him down "crushingly." It "smashed him down." Buck's coat is "flecked with bloody slaver." At the end, Buck "crumpled up and went down, knocked utterly senseless."</p> <p>These details create a harsh, cold, violent tone and help convey the idea that nature and the wilderness is a brutal place. It emphasizes the harsh reality that Buck now finds himself in as a dog of the wild, and helps the reader feel both empathy for him, reverence for the intensity of nature/the wild, and a deeper understanding of what it will take for survival in the wild.</p> <p>The lines refer to the rules of nature, rather than the rules of civilization.</p> <p>This quote touches on another theme of the book: a comparison of the wild and civilization. In these lines, the author shows just how far Buck has come from Judge Miller's place. There, the Judge treated Buck with respect.</p> <p>In this new, primitive world, Buck can expect violence. As long as he knows how to react to it, though, Buck has shown he can survive—and still keep his dignity. Buck has learned that he has to obey men with clubs, but also that he does not have to treat them as his master.</p>
	<p>Consider the author's use of word choice and sensory details; select a word, phrase or sentence from chapter 1 that emphasizes Buck's return to a primitive state. Explain why you choose this phrase/sentence given its impact on the reader.</p> <p><i>Accept any relevant details from the text that emphasize that Buck is returning to his most natural state - that of a dog in the wild who will kill or be killed and do what it takes to survive, even if it means having to give up the way he used to be.</i></p>

--