

JACK LONDON **A LIFE OF STRUGGLE, ADVENTURE, AND SUCCESS**



*I would rather be ashes than dust!
I would rather that my spark should burn
out in a brilliant blaze
than it should be stifled by dry rot.
I would rather be a superb meteor,
every atom of me in magnificent glow,
than a sleepy and permanent planet.
The proper function of man is to live, not
to exist.
I shall not waste my days in trying to
prolong them.
I shall use my time.*

Jack London (1876 - 1916)

Jack London's life was as adventurous as his books. He only lived to be forty years old, but his life was marked by both great struggle and great success.

London was born as John Griffith Chancey in San Francisco on January 12, 1876. The beginning of his life was filled with poverty and hardship. His father abandoned his family while London was still young. His mother, Flora Wellman, raised him in Oakland, California. Later on, London took on the nickname "Jack" and the surname of his stepfather, John London.

London attended school through the eighth grade. After that, he was mostly self-educated. He was an avid reader who spent much of his spare time in the Oakland Public Library reading books. He would later go back to school to earn his high school diploma. For a short time, he also attended the University of California at Berkeley.

In 1889, London began working twelve to eighteen hour days at Hickmott's Cannery. He later took on a variety of other pursuits, including an oyster pirate, a member of the California Fish Patrol (a law enforcement group which caught poachers), a sailor, a hobo, a gold prospector in the Alaskan Gold Rush, a candidate for the mayor of Oakland, and of course an author.

JACK LONDON: A LIFE OF STRUGGLE, ADVENTURE, AND SUCCESS, cont.

In 1898, London published his first short story, "To the Man on Trail". In 1900, his first novel, *Son of the Wolf*, was published. He went on to become the most popular and highest-paid novelist and short story writer of his time. His most famous novels include *The Call of the Wild*, *Sea Wolf*, and *White Fang*. London attributed his publishing success to his strong work ethic. He wrote a thousand words every day. Between the years of 1900 and 1916, London published over fifty fiction and non-fiction books and hundreds of short stories and essays. Most of his works dealt with the struggle of man against nature.

Jack London was one of America's first writers to work in the movie industry. His novel *The Sea Wolf* was the basis for one of America's first full length movies. London also became one America's first celebrities to use his fame to endorse products such as men's dress suits and grape juice. London also used his fame as a pulpit to endorse causes he believed in, including socialism, women's suffrage, and later, prohibition.

Despite the large amount of writing he produced, London also found time to pursue his other interests. He enjoyed swimming, sailing, traveling and horseback riding. He served two tours of duty as an overseas war correspondent. When he was home, he entertained guests at his ranch in the Sonoma Valley and stirred up debates at local saloons. In order to fit these numerous activities into his days, London allowed himself only four to five hours of sleep a night.

London died on November 22, 1916. London's legacy is through his writings, which have been translated into dozens of languages and continue to be widely read in the United States and worldwide.



Name: _____ Date: _____

Reading Comprehension and Critical Thinking Questions

Answer the following questions about “Jack London: A Life of Struggle, Adventure, and Success.”

1. Jack London attributed his success in writing mainly to...
 - a. the help and support of his friends and family.
 - b. good fortune.
 - c. his strong work ethic.
 - d. his college education.

2. London’s move from being an oyster pirate to a member of the California Fish Patrol is an example of:
 - a. hyperbole
 - b. irony
 - c. characterization
 - d. theme

3. Where did London most likely find inspiration for his stories?
 - a. from the books he read
 - b. from his life experiences
 - c. both of the above
 - d. none of the above

4. London used his fame as a writer to do which of the following? Circle all that are correct:
 - a. support causes that he believed in
 - b. earn extra money endorsing products
 - c. run for Lieutenant Governor of California on the Socialist ticket
 - d. become one of America’s first novelists to work in the movie industry

5. Which statement about London’s life is true?
 - a. London was born in California and also died there.
 - b. London was born in Alaska and died in California.
 - c. London was born in California and died at sea.
 - d. London’s birthplace is unknown, but he died in California.

Comprehension/ Biography

Answers:

1) c

2) b

3) c

4) a, b, d

5) a