

To build a fire by jack london essay



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To Build a Fire By Jack London In the novel, “ To Build a Fire”, author Jack London make use of the theme of man against the force of nature. In this story, London depicts nature as a force to be reckoned with, wherein one moment it may be calm and peaceful and in the blink of an eye, may prove to be dangerous and deadly.

Before embarking on his trip through the Yukon trail, London depicted the protagonist as having no knowledge of the conditions of the area during the winter season and remains unfamiliar and relatively new to the area, He chose to ignore the bleak weather upon him as evidenced when London writes that “...he spat speculatively. There was a sharp explosion crackle that startled him..

. before it could fall to the snow, the spittle crackled in the air. He knew that at fifty below spittle crackled.

.. it was colder..

. how much colder he did not know. But the temperature did not matter” (302). From a line in the story, it is obvious that the protagonist of the story tries to survive in the cold and harsh weather, written as follows: “ In the course of the next two hours he came upon several similar traps. Usually the snow above the hidden pools had a sunken, candied appearance that advertised the danger...Suddenly it broke through, floundered to one side, and got away to firmer footing” (p 304).

The dominant character of nature is illustrated through the use of traps.

Although these traps served as a warning of the risks and dangers

associated, the protagonist refuse to listen to the old-timer who states that “ no man must travel alone in the Klondike after fifty below.” Instead, he becomes even more set on proving his power over nature thinking that “...he was alone; and he had saved himself.

Those old-timers were rather womanish, some of them, he thought” (307). Common sense would have dictated that he turn back and abandon the journey. However, his desire to prove that he can overcome the power of Mother Nature won and he continued on.

The protagonist was able to build a fire by using several branches from the surrounding trees and one match. As stated in the novel, “ the fire was a success. He was safe...here he was; he had had the accident; he was all right” (p. 307).

The man became arrogant at his one small success and as such, he overestimated his own logic and intelligence. The protagonist’s confidence soon crumbles when he faced the wrath of Mother Nature. This is depicted in the novel by snow crumbling from the trees and killing the fire built by the narrator. As stated by London, “ He should have built it in the open. But it had been easier to pull the twigs from the brush and drop them directly on the fire. Each time he pulled a twig, he had communicated a slight agitation to the tree- an imperceptible agitation.

This process continued, spreading out and involving the whole tree. It grew like an avalanche, and it descended without warning upon the man and the fire, and the fire was blotted out” (p. 307).

The protagonist finally realized his fatal mistake after the fire died out. He failed to understand what the old-timer from Sulphur Creek was telling him and as such, underestimated the power of nature. London writes that “ The man was shocked. It was though he had just heard his own sentence of death. For a moment he sat and stared at the spot where the fire had been...

Perhaps the old-timer on Sulphur Creek was right” (307). At the end, he came to accept the innate strength of nature as he awaits his imminent death. He finally realized the nature is a force that is very hard to overcome. He understood now that the old timer from Yukon trail was correct and nature would always best man. However, his realizations came too late. As written by London, “ A certain fear of death, dull and oppressive, came to him. This fear..

. was no longer a mere matter of freezing his fingers and toes... it was a matter of life and death with the chances against him” (310). At first, the protagonist also underestimated the danger that may befall him and initially made excuses regarding his frostbite.

His first reaction upon learning of his imminent death was panic as although he was able to acknowledge his mistakes, everything is too late. His fate does not lie on his hands anymore and he is left with no other alternative to accept his imminent fate of death. His dog already realized that the protagonist’s fate is sealed and thus, he chose to abandon the man. This is depicted as the protagonist’s dog abandoning him in the wilderness. As written by London, . “ And still later it crept close to the man and caught the scent of death. This made the animal bristle and back away” (312).

The protagonist's dog was able to sense that death is near. The pet's departure and abandonment of the protagonists signify that the once had the choice of continuing or abandoning such a perilous and impossible journey. We can say that the man determined and sealed his own fate. It is evident from this narrative by London that the power of nature cannot be ignored and underestimated. As depicted by the protagonist who did not heed the warning given by the old-timer, ignorance can have significant effects.

In this case, ignorance caused the man's death as well as his blatant underestimation of the power of Nature. It just goes to show us that strength and intelligence do not matter as nature would always have the upper hand and that humans are defenseless when face-to-face upon nature and its immense power.