

To promote
cleanliness of our
surroundings



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The primary theme of the story is of survival and a return to primitivism. Pizer writes that the theme is allegorical and clear: “ the strong, the shrewd, and the cunning shall prevail when ... life is bestial”.[28] Pizer also finds evident in the story a Christian theme of love and redemption, as shown by Buck’s refusal to revert to violence until after the death of Thornton, who won Buck’s love and loyalty.[29] London, who went so far as to fight for custody of one of his own dogs, understood that loyalty between dogs (particularly working dogs) and their masters is built on trust and love.

[30]

BACKGROUND

By 1897, California native Jack London had traveled around the United States as a hobo, returned to California to finish high school (he dropped out at age 14), and spent a year in college at Berkeley. He then traveled to the Klondike by way of Alaska during the height of the Klondike Gold Rush, later saying of the experience: “ It was in the Klondike I found myself.

”[4] Leaving California in July, he traveled to Dyea, where he went inland. To reach the gold fields, he and his party transported their gear over the Chilkoot Pass, often carrying on their backs loads of up to 100 pounds (45 kg).

They staked claims to eight gold mines along the Stewart River.[5] London stayed in the Klondike for almost a year. He lived for a time in the frontier town of Dawson City, before moving to a nearby winter camp, where he spent the winter reading books he had brought: Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of the Species*; and John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.[6] In the winter of 1898,

Dawson City (today mostly deserted) was a city with about 30, 000 miners, a saloon, an opera house, and a street of brothels.[7] In the spring of 1898, as the annual gold stampedes began to stream into the area, London left.

He had contracted scurvy, common in the Arctic winters, where fresh produce was unavailable. When London's gums began to swell he decided to return to California. With his companions, he rafted 2, 000 miles (3, 200 km) down the Yukon River, through portions of the wildest territory in the region, until they reached St. Michael, where he hired himself out on a boat and returned to San Francisco.[8] In Alaska, London found material that inspired him to write the novella *The Call of the Wild*. [4] Dyea Beach was the primary point of arrival for miners at the time London visited, but without a harbor access was treacherous, so Skagway became the new arrival point.[9]

From there, to reach the Klondike prospectors had to navigate the White Pass, which became known as "Dead Horse Pass", with horse carcasses littering the route; it was too steep and harsh for them to survive the ascent. Dogs began to replace horses to transport material over the pass,[10] and at this time strong dogs with thick fur were "much desired, scarce and high in price".[11] London would have seen many dogs, especially prized Husky sled dogs, in Dawson City and in winter camps close to the main sled route. He became friends with Marshall Latham Bond, who owned a mixed St. Bernard-Scotch Collie dog; in a letter to his friend London later wrote: "Yes, Buck is based on your dog at Dawson." [12]

Beinecke Library at Yale University holds a photograph of Bond's dog, taken during London's stay in the Klondike in 1897. The depiction of the California ranch in the beginning of the story was based on the Bond family ranch.[13]