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Teacher's Guide

The Jungle

by Upton Sinclair

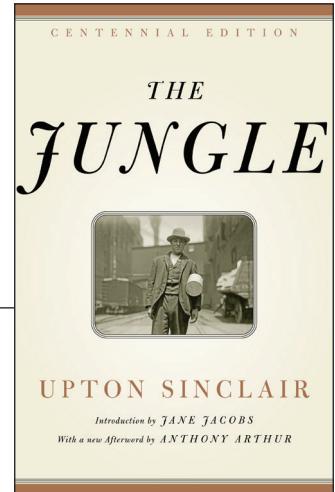
Introduction by Jane Jacobs

Afterword by Anthony Arthur

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Reading Level: 11.2



• note to teachers •

The Jungle is the best-known of the muckraking works that came out of the Progressive Era of the early twentieth century; however, its scope is not limited to that particular period. While the plot focuses on the trials of immigrant industrial workers, the novel gives us an understanding of the role of labor in early industrial society and the government's support of big business. Sinclair paints an interesting picture of the progress of organized labor and the political power of business in American society. *The Jungle* is a valuable tool to anyone interested in the current issues of immigration, industrialization, organized labor, and government regulation of the economy for it shows us from whence we came. Through its exposure of the worst characteristics of industrial society, its depiction of a specific era in American history, and its use of literary elements to inform the reader, it can be used in World history or American history classes, or in English classes that study the novel as a genre.

• about this book

In 1904, Upton Sinclair received a five hundred dollar advance from the socialist newspaper *Appeal to Reason* to investigate the living and working conditions for immigrant industrial workers in Chicago. *The Jungle*, originally serialized by the newspaper, was published in book form in 1906. Sinclair's purpose was to expose the inhumane treatment of the working class and to precipitate change in American industry. Instead, his graphic and nauseating descriptions of the meat packing industry led to passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act that had been stalled in Congress. Sinclair was less than ecstatic about this result, saying "I aimed at the public's heart and by accident I hit it in the stomach." Still, the direct relationship between the novel and the landmark legislation makes it one of the most influential books in American history.

The Jungle follows the experiences of an extended Lithuanian family that immigrates to the United States in the early 1900s to make their fortune. They arrive in Chicago full of excitement and optimism and gain employment in the meat packing plants. A seemingly innocent and practical desire to own a home begins the chain of events that leads to ruin. Surrounded by cruel and unscrupulous businessmen and politicians, the family cannot meet monthly expenses. Chapter after chapter depicts the extremes to which they must go to earn enough money to survive, and the steady loss of their humanity. Finally, after three years of struggle, most of the adults are dead or ruined, and the children are on the streets as often as they are in school.

• about this author

Upton Sinclair was born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1878. Although his immediate family struggled financially, his extended family was well-to-do. This discrepancy among classes in modern industrial society led to Sinclair's association with the

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socialist movement and his lifetime interest in activism and reform. Sinclair was involved in several failed political campaigns, including the 1933 California governor's race. While *The Jungle* is his best-known work, it is not the most critically acclaimed. His 1942 novel, *Dragon's Teeth*, won the Pulitzer Prize. Sinclair spent the last years of his life in a nursing home in New Jersey, where he died in 1968. Perhaps his best epitaph is a statement by George Bernard Shaw. "When people ask me what has happened in my long lifetime I do not refer them to the newspaper files, but to (Sinclair's) novels."

For more information on Upton Sinclair, see *Radical Innocent*, a comprehensive biography of Sinclair by former Fulbright scholar Anthony Arthur. Arthur's book offers an enlightening account of Sinclair's life and the country he helped to transform, taking readers from the Reconstruction South to the rise of American power to the pinnacle of Hollywood culture to the Civil Rights era.

→ teaching ideas

The Jungle is probably most often utilized in American history classes studying the Progressive Era and muckraking literature. The Progressive movement was the first major reform movement of twentieth-century industrial America. It was a movement primarily of the urban middle-class who sought government intervention in the industrial economy to improve the living and working conditions of the working class, many of whom were eastern European immigrants. While many Progressives were motivated by humanitarianism, some were frightened by the growing influence of the socialist party in Europe and the threat of that same influence in the United States. They saw assistance to the poor as a way to counteract that threat. Journalists called "muckrakers" exposed the myriad problems of American society, politics, and industry in books and magazine articles. However, they generally did not propose solutions. Sinclair's promotion of the socialist party is an exception.

The history student can also benefit from using this novel as an example of the immigrant experience or the problems of early industrial society. Because of the obvious legislative results of *The Jungle*, it could be incorporated into a study of books that changed the country.

→ discussion and writing

comprehension

chapter I

The book begins with a description of the wedding feast of Jurgis and Ona. The coming misfortunes are hinted at in the descriptions of guests and their own misfortunes.

1. What event begins the book?
2. Who is in charge of the festivities?
3. What is the ethnic background of the main characters?
4. What problem develops?
5. What is Jurgis' solution to the problem?

chapter II

Chapter Two describes the family's decision to come to America and their first impressions of Packingtown.

1. Why is Jurgis always optimistic about the prospect of work?
2. How many members of the extended family immigrated to America? Identify them.
3. Why did the family choose to go to Chicago? What reality did they encounter once they arrived?
4. Where did the family find lodging on their arrival in Chicago?
5. What is their first impression of Packingtown?

chapter III

Before they begin work, the family tours one of the packing plants and is amazed at the activity and apparent efficiency.

1. What process does the family observe on their tour? What is Jurgis' reaction to what he has seen?

2. What characteristics of Durham and Company impress the family?
3. What indications are there on this initial tour that working conditions at Durham's will be difficult?

chapter IV

In Chapter Four two hurdles are dealt with. The adults find work and the family decides to invest in a house. However, they discover that the details of the purchase are not what they expected.

1. Which members of the family went to work?
2. Why did Jurgis refuse to allow Ona and the children to work?
3. Why are the prospects for work for Dede Antanas poor?
4. Why does the family decide to buy a house?
5. What concerns Teta Elzbieta at the signing of the papers?
6. How is that concern reconciled?

chapter V

As the family members become more accustomed to Packingtown, they begin to discover the corruption underlying the system.

1. What new need arises once the house is purchased?
2. Why is Jurgis dismayed to discover that most of the workers hate their situation?
3. Why does Jurgis initially refuse to join the union?
4. How does Dede Antanas get work? What is his job?
5. What unpleasant truths do the working members of the family begin to discover about their work places?

chapter VI

In Chapter Six the family discovers that they must pay interest on their purchase, which almost doubles the monthly payment. This need requires that more members of the family go to work.

1. Why had Jurgis and Ona been forced to wait to be married?
2. What two horrible truths do they learn about their house?
3. What political philosophy does Grandmother Majauskiene support? What does she predict will happen?
4. Why do the owners keep bringing in new immigrant workers?
5. How does the family raise the money for the monthly interest?

chapter VII

In Chapter Seven the family's situation becomes more desperate. Dede Antanas dies from the poor working and living conditions.

1. How does Jurgis' outlook on life and humanity change?
2. What unknown hazards account for the poor health of the children?
3. How does old Antanas die? Why is his death a double tragedy to the family?
4. What incident at work makes Stanislovas fear the cold and snow?
5. What moral pitfalls plagued the working men? What saved Jurgis from these threats?

chapter VIII

At the beginning of Chapter Eight, Marija has fallen in love and plans to be married. However, loss of work and the financial needs of the family force her to postpone her plans.

1. What "great adventure" did Marija embark on? Who was the target of her affections?
2. What tragedy puts a stop to her plans?
3. Why does Jurgis decide to join a union?

chapter IX

Jurgis becomes more and more involved in the union. Through the union, he gets his first exposure to the American political system.

1. Why did Jurgis decide to study English?
2. How did union membership introduce Jurgis to American politics?

3. Who was Mike Scully?
4. How did the Chicago political machine work?
5. What corruption were the packers involved in?

chapter X

More tragedy befalls the family in the form of taxes, insurance, and sewer fees. Marija and Ona both struggle with their work situations. Ona gives birth to a son, but remains in poor health after the birth.

1. What unforeseen expenses were associated with the house?
2. Why did Marija lose her job? How does she find another one?
3. What were the threats to a decent girl like Ona?
4. What problems does Ona have after the birth of the baby?

chapter XI

Jurgis suffers a serious accident at work and is unable to work for weeks. Without his pay, the family comes closer to financial ruin.

1. What does Sinclair mean by the "Beef Trust"?
2. What happened to Marija during the "run on the bank"?
3. What threat does the winter blizzard hold?
4. What accident befalls Jurgis?
5. What are the results of Jurgis' accident?

chapter XII

Jurgis tries to return to work too soon and is reinjured. When he finally recovers, he discovers that his job has been given to someone else. He begins the long difficult task of finding another job. Meanwhile, Jonas disappears; the family never learns his fate.

1. What happens when Jurgis tries to go back to work?
2. What happens to Jonas while Jurgis is incapacitated?
3. What decision is the family forced to make?
4. Why is Jurgis unable to find another job easily?

chapter XIII

One of Elzbieta's children dies after she is forced to find work. Jurgis finally gets a job at the fertilizer plant, the worst job in Packington.

1. What crisis arises with the death of little Kristoforas?
2. Where does Jurgis finally find work? Why is this job considered the lowest labor in Packington?
3. Why does Elzbieta go to work? Where and under what conditions does she work?

chapter XIV

In Chapter Fourteen, the adults realize that they will never be able to make enough money to finally own the house. This realization does not change anything however, because they can only continue to work and try to pay the bills. Ona begins to suffer from apparent depression.

1. What sorts of things went into the sausage?
2. How have Jurgis, Ona, and Elzbieta changed since coming to Chicago?
3. What horrible realization do the adults reach?
4. What vice has Jurgis discovered? What is his only defense? What does he secretly wish?
5. What effect has the family's declining fortunes had on little Antanas?
6. What effect does her second pregnancy seem to have on Ona?

chapter XV

In Chapter Fifteen, the second major blow hits the family. Jurgis discovers that Ona has been forced into a sexual relationship with her boss. He assaults the man and is arrested.

1. What happens a day or two before Thanksgiving? What is the explanation?
2. What does Jurgis discover the second time Ona does not come home?

3. Who is Connor? What have he and Miss Henderson done to Ona?
4. How does Jurgis react to this news? What is the result of his actions?

chapter XVI

Chapter Sixteen describes Jurgis' experiences in jail.

1. With what crime is Jurgis charged?
2. What meal is Jurgis fed in prison? How did it get its name?
3. What fears does Jurgis have for Ona and his family?
4. What role does Pat Callahan play in Packingtown?
5. Why is Jurgis sent back to jail?

chapter XVII

While in jail, Jurgis meets Jack Duane, who introduces him to the life of a professional criminal.

1. Who is placed in the cell with Jurgis? What is his profession? Why has he been arrested?
2. What did the other prisoners call Jurgis?
3. At the trial, what explanation does Connor give for the attack?
4. What is Jurgis' sentence?
5. Who visits him at Bridewell? What bad news does he bring?

chapter XVIII

Jurgis is released from jail and discovers that his family has disappeared. He tracks them down and learns that Ona is in a very difficult labor with her second child.

1. What time was added to Jurgis' sentence? Why?
2. What does Jurgis discover upon his release when he returns to his house?
3. How does Jurgis discover the fate of his family? Where have they gone?
4. What is Ona's condition? What does Jurgis resolve to do?

chapter XIX

Ona and the baby both die. Jurgis is overcome with grief.

1. Who is Madame Haupt?
2. Where does Jurgis go while Madame Haupt delivers the baby?
3. What does Jurgis discover when he returns? How does he react?

chapter XX

Jurgis tries to go on for the sake of little Antanas and the rest of the family. He is able to find a better job, but loses it when the plant closes.

1. What do Aniele and Elzbieta insist that Jurgis must do? For whose sake?
2. What does Jurgis discover when he seeks employment? What is he forced to do?
3. Where does Jurgis finally find work? How are the conditions here different from in the packing plants?
4. What happens to this job?

chapter XXI

A settlement worker helps Jurgis find a job. Things seem to be improving until little Antanas dies in an accident.

1. How does the settlement house lady meet the family? Where does she help Jurgis find work?
2. What new tragedy does Jurgis discover when he returns home on Saturday?

chapter XXII

Grief stricken over the death of his child, Jurgis leaves Chicago and becomes a tramp. He survives as a migrant farm worker.

1. How does Jurgis change with the death of Antanas? What does he do?
2. What experience did Jurgis have at the first farm he came to?
3. Why does Jurgis refuse a job when the second farmer offers him one?

4. What was Jurgis' life as a tramp like?
5. Sinclair says that "Wanderlust had got into (Jurgis') blood." What does he mean by this statement?
6. Why did Jurgis spend his money as soon as he made it?

chapter XXIII

Jurgis returns to Chicago with the coming of winter. He is again destitute and afraid to return to Packingtown.

1. Why does Jurgis decide to return to Chicago in the fall?
2. What work does Jurgis find when he reaches the city? Why does he lie when the employer asks if he has ever worked in Chicago before?
3. How does Jurgis lose this job?
4. Where does he go to keep warm?
5. Why is Jurgis not successful as a beggar?

chapter XXIV

A chance encounter with a drunken millionaire proves a temporary respite for Jurgis.

1. What transpires in what Sinclair calls "the one adventure of (Jurgis') life?"
2. What is the irony of Jurgis' companion's identity?
3. Why does the butler throw Jurgis out when Freddie passes out?

chapter XXV

Jurgis leaves the company of the millionaire with a hundred dollar bill in his pocket. When he tries to get it changed at a saloon, the bartender cheats him. Jurgis attacks the bartender and is again arrested.

1. What did Jurgis have in his pocket from his visit with Freddie?
2. How does Jurgis lose his money?
3. With whom is Jurgis reunited in jail? Why does Duane take him on as a partner?
4. Why does Jurgis regret the mugging?
5. Whom does Jurgis meet in a saloon? What opportunities does that acquaintance open for Jurgis?
6. What does Jurgis agree to do for Mike Scully? Why is his association with Scully ironic?

chapter XXVI

Jurgis becomes involved with local politics and breaking the strike at Packingtown.

1. What does Jurgis learn about Elzbieta and the family? What does he do?
2. What role does Jurgis play during the first "Beef Strike?"
3. Why does a second strike begin? Who do the owners bring in to work during the strike?
4. How does Jurgis benefit from the second strike?
5. What happens when Jurgis encounters Connor again? Why is Harper unable to help him? What does Jurgis finally do?

chapter XXVII

Once again out on the streets, Jurgis discovers that Marija has become a prostitute. He goes to her for help and learns that Stanislovas has died.

1. Why is Jurgis' situation this time more serious than when he was unemployed earlier?
2. Where does Jurgis go to get warm? What happens when he falls asleep?
3. What does Jurgis discover about Marija?
4. How did Stanislovas die?
5. What conclusion has Marija reached about Ona that shocks and dismays Jurgis?

chapter XXVIII

Marija explains the realities of her situation to Jurgis. Seeking warmth, he goes to a socialist meeting and is transformed.

1. How are girls like Marija forced to remain prostitutes?

2. What political meeting does Jurgis go to for warmth? How do they respond when he falls asleep?
3. What effect does the speech have on Jurgis?

chapter XXIX

The socialists give Jurgis a place to stay and a reason for hope.

1. What does Comrade Ostrinski tell Jurgis about himself and socialism?
2. Why is socialism an international movement?

chapter XXX

Newly employed and inspired by socialism, Jurgis returns to the family.

1. Why does Elzbieta approve of socialism?
2. How was Tommy Hinds different from most Chicago businessmen?
3. What job did Jurgis get at Hinds' hotel? Why was this job secure?
4. How did Amos Struver and Harry Adams become associated with Hinds?
5. What types of socialists does Jurgis meet through Hinds?

chapter XXXI

Jurgis tries to convince Marija to come home, but she refuses. His devotion to socialism grows. As the book ends, Jurgis is filled with the hope that socialism will triumph and the lives of workingmen will improve.

1. Why did Marija refuse to give up her life of prostitution when Jurgis went to see her?
2. Why did Jurgis stick with the family? What gave him comfort when the situation at home depressed him?
3. What were the only two aspects of socialism that Lucas and Schliemann agreed on?
4. How does Schliemann define "philosophic anarchist"?
5. How does Schliemann describe the communist utopia?
6. How successful is the Socialist party in the election?
7. With what promise does the book end?

discussion

1. In her introduction to the Modern Library edition, Jane Jacobs refers to the "huge cast of characters: victims and villains." Are any of Sinclair's characters multi-dimensional or does each fall neatly into one of these categories?
2. Jacobs says the end of the book is contrived by the author. Do you agree? Does the end strengthen or weaken Sinclair's message and appeal to his readers?
3. Concerning the impact of *The Jungle*, Sinclair said, "I aimed at the public's heart and by accident I hit it in the stomach." What aspects of American industrial society did Sinclair hope to change?
4. Why did the novel impact America's stomach rather than its heart as Sinclair intended?
5. Throughout the novel, workers who must struggle for every penny spend money on weddings and funerals. In what way is that expense necessary?
6. What expectations did the family have of America? Were these expectations realistic?
7. What fate is foreshadowed by the description of the hog killing and Jurgis' reaction to it in Chapter III?
8. How does the purchase of the house lead to the family's downfall?
9. Have the unscrupulous practices described in *The Jungle* disappeared or do these same challenges face workingmen today?
10. In Chapter VII Sinclair writes that Jurgis was saved from drink and the other moral pitfalls that plagued workingmen by Ona's love. How did the relationship between Jurgis and Ona change through the course of the book?
11. Two factors—the purchase of a house and Connor's abuse of Ona—lead to the family's downfall. Which of these factors is the more damaging?
12. Is it valid to say that the multitude of tragedies that befall the family cause the reader to become desensitized? Is the reader as shocked and sympathetic at the end of the book as he is at the beginning?

→ suggested activities

1. Design a family tree of the central characters. Add those secondary characters who interact with the various family members. Examine the relationships among the main characters. How do these relationships change throughout the story?
2. Examine the setting of *The Jungle* by designing a map of Packingtown. Extend the map to include greater Chicago and the harvester works and steel plant. How does the setting contribute to the mood of the book?
3. Trace the route of Jurgis' "hobo" journey.
4. Create a plot map showing the main elements of the plot. Explain how each of these events promoted Sinclair's message.
5. Some view the ending of *The Jungle* as contrived. Write an alternate ending that does not include the promotion of the Socialist party.
6. Research industrial concerns in your area. Tour local plants. How do the working conditions differ from those described in *The Jungle*? Are any of the conditions similar?
7. Examine the character of Jurgis throughout the book. How does he change? What motivates him in the beginning of the book? How does his motivation change?
8. Analyze Sinclair's description of the two major political parties and the political system in Chapters Nine, Twenty-five, and Twenty-seven. Research the modern Democratic and Republican parties. How have the public perceptions of the parties changed in the last century?
9. Sinclair compared the exploitation of female employees in Packingtown with the exploitation of female slaves in the antebellum South. Research sexual harassment laws in your state and on the national level. Is exploitation still a concern?
10. Research the early labor movement in the United States and the relationship between unions and socialism. Did the relationship help or hinder the unions?
11. A major factor in the family's misfortune was work-related injury. Research workmen's compensation programs in your state and on the national level. How are work-related injuries handled today?
12. Sinclair dedicated his book to "the workingmen of America." Would workingmen in general be able to relate to the characters, or is *The Jungle* more a record of the immigrant experience?

→ beyond the book

1. Read and compare *The Jungle* to other muckraking works of the Progressive Era such as Ida Tarbell's *History of the Standard Oil Company*, Lincoln Steffens' *Shame of the Cities*, and Ray Stannard Baker's *Following the Color Line*. What do these works tell you about the period and the reformers of that period?
2. Read and compare *The Jungle* to other works dealing with immigration and immigrant experiences. Possible titles include *The Immigrants* by Howard Fast, *My Antonia* by Willa Cather, and *Enrique's Journey* by Sonia Nazario. What do these works tell you about the immigrant experience? What commonalities do you see? How are the experiences different? Does the time period affect the experience?
3. In a US History class, *The Jungle* can be part of a series on books that changed America. Study *The Jungle* along with Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*. What changes occurred because of the publication of each of these works? How did the work bring about the change?
4. Use *The Jungle* to compare American industrial society with European industrial society. *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens is a possible source of information on the English working class. Are the problems of the working class the same in both countries? Which novel is more effective in presenting the problems? Use one or both of the novels as a jumping-off point to examine *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and the radical solutions it recommends.
5. Use *The Jungle* in conjunction with other works of social protest. Possibilities include classics such as *Huckleberry Finn* by Twain, *The Grapes of Wrath* by Steinbeck, and *The Invisible Man* by Ellison to more recent works such as *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien and *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* by Ken Kesey.

• other titles of interest

Common Sense by Thomas Paine
Communist Manifesto by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels
Enrique's Journey by Sonia Nazario
Hard Times by Charles Dickens
History of the Standard Oil Company by Ida Tarbell
Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain
The Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison
My Antonia by Willa Cather
Radical Innocent by Anthony Arthur
The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien
Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriett Beecher Stowe

• about this guide's writer

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