CALL OF THE WILD: ILLUSTRATED EDITION
APRIL 4, 2019

CURRICULUM GUIDE

DES MOINES PERFORMING ARTS
ABOUT THE SHOW

THE STORY
Call of the Wild: Illustrated Edition is based on the classic book by Jack London. It is told from the perspective of Buck, the magnificent offspring of a St. Bernard and Scottish Collie. Buck is a privileged, dignified dog who is taken from his southern California home and shipped to Alaska to work as a sled dog during the 1890s Gold Rush. Along the way, Buck is mistreated by a series of owners while he learns to survive as a member of a dog sled team. With each new experience, Buck regresses to a more primal state in order to survive. After successfully pulling 1,000 pounds on a sled, he becomes the most famous dog in the northland’s history and discovers the endurance and strength of his wild ancestors as their call courses through his blood. The play, like the book, explores the role environment plays in shaping character.

THE PRODUCTION
The thrilling tale of adventure, courage, and survival is made even more so with the production’s use of projections. The production uses 180-degree projection that surrounds the performer and provides scenic, artistic, and historical context to the show. The images feature a mix of Philip R. Goodwin’s classical illustrations from the book’s first edition, period photographs, and brand new drawings and animations created by artist Michael Rae.

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING
"Call of the Wild was a compelling and thought-provoking show that really transported the audience into the Yukon with stunning storytelling and archival photos that created a powerful sense of place. The show features one of the fiercest and most engaging storytellers I’ve ever seen onstage; he filled the space, easily moving between characters and emotions. The use of projections was mindful and clever, and very well-suited to the narrative being told."

-The Flynn Center, Burlington, VT

There is an ecstasy that marks the summit of life, and beyond which life cannot rise. And such is the paradox of living, this ecstasy comes when one is most alive, and it comes as a complete forgetfulness that one is alive.

-Jack London, The Call of the Wild

Watch this trailer to get a preview of the show.
ABOUT THE COMPANY

Theatre Heroes is a theatre company based out of Austin, Texas that creates performances for young audiences and those young at heart.

THEATRE HEROES’ COMPANY MISSION
“We are theatre makers, fearless adventurers, and terrified mistake makers. We celebrate the live theatre experience as a launch pad for promoting creativity and innovation. We use theatre to activate and reawaken classic stories. We believe theatre can encourage youth to pursue their own dreams. We strive to create a world of infinite possibilities and limitless imagination where anyone can be their own hero.”

Theatre Heroes is dedicated to bringing theatre to underserved populations and works with presenters to bring performances to hospitals, detention centers, and rural communities.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT
Playwright Jason Tremblay’s award-winning plays have been recognized and presented by the Kennedy Center, New Visions/New Voices, the Bonderman, One Theatre World, New Dramatists, and at theatres across the country. He was the recipient of the KCACTF Young Audiences award, EVCT emerging playwright award, and a James Michener fellowship in writing at the University of Texas.

ABOUT THE ACTOR
Noel Gaulin is a three-time winner of Best Actor from the Austin Critics’ Table. He has toured over 250 performances across the country. Recently, Noel received a Best Actor award from the Austin Revolution Film Festival.

ABOUT THE VISUALS
The show includes media design by Chris Owen and K. Eliot Haynes, music by Graham Weber, and artwork by Michael Rae.

REVIEWS

Jennifer Luck, presenter, Paramount Theatre. Austin, TX

I loved how Language Arts and History were integrated. The kids were blown away by how many different characters the actor played.

Teacher

Noel Gaulin is such a gifted storyteller; you simply cannot help but fall in love (and experience a little heart-break) with his portrayal of Buck. The projections are truly stunning, adding to the company’s concept of an “Illustrated Edition” and the music captivates from the beginning.
Jack London was one of the most successful writers in America in the early 20th Century. His stories of men and animals struggling against the environment and survival through hardship were drawn mainly from his own experiences. His years in the Klondike searching for gold left their mark in some of his best stories, among them *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*.

London grew up without much money in Oakland, California. He rode trains, pirated oysters, shoveled coal, worked on a sealing ship on the Pacific and in a cannery. In his free time, he hunkered down at libraries, soaking up novels and travel books. His life as a writer began in 1893 when he survived a horrifying voyage in which a typhoon nearly killed him and his crew. The 17-year-old adventurer wrote about his experience. His mother spotted a contest in the local paper and London submitted his story. Although he had only an eighth-grade education, London captured the $25 first prize (equivalent to about $650 today), beating out college students from Berkeley and Stanford. For London, the contest was an eye-opening experience, and he decided to dedicate his life to writing.

London found fame and some fortune at the age of 27 with his novel *The Call of the Wild* (1903), which told the story of a dog that finds its place in the world as a sled dog in the Yukon. A prolific writer, he published more than 50 books over the last 16 years of his life.

Jack London died at his California ranch on November 22, 1916 at only 40 years old.
ABOUT THE KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH

Starting in the 1870s, prospectors trickled into the Yukon in search of gold. By 1896, around 1,500 prospectors panned for gold along the Yukon River basin. Reports of gold were discovered in many rich deposits along the Klondike River in 1896 and created a hysteria that was nationwide. Many people quit their jobs and left for the Klondike to become gold-diggers searching for a wealthier fate. Most had no idea where they were going or what they would face along the way.

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

The Klondike Gold Rush was a stampede of migration by an estimated 100,000 people to the Klondike region of north-western Canada between 1896 and 1899. The people who moved to the area were seeking gold. It’s also called the Yukon Gold Rush, the Last Great Gold Rush and the Alaska Gold Rush.

For many Americans, traveling to the Klondike in search of gold was their key to the American Dream. Gold “fever” quickly reached epidemic proportions. Aspiring prospectors from all over the world set out for the new gold fields with dreams of a quick fortune dancing in their heads. Because of the harsh terrain and even harsher weather, it took gold rushers a year to reach the Klondike from Northern California. The long climb over mountainous terrain, frozen rivers, intense cold, and frequent snowstorms combined with malnutrition and illnesses made for a long and difficult journey. Because of these conditions only about 30,000 actually made it to the Klondike. Only about 4,000 actually found gold. For most, their arduous journeys and rigors of camp life were not rewarded. Even so, the adventurous stampede for gold united people of all walks of life in a common goal.

LEARN MORE
Click here to listen to stories about the famous Gold Rush.
Click here to watch a PBS Documentary on the Klondike Gold Rush.
Objectives: Students will research the roles of men and women in this time period and what it would take for them to join the Klondike Gold Rush. Students will then imagine themselves as Stampeders and research their journey.

Materials: computer, books, paper, pens, ink, magic markers, magazines, glue, scissors, etc.

Activity 1: Invite students to research the Klondike Gold Rush using the websites below or completing a www.kiddle.co search.

Activity 2: The Call of the Wild occurs during the 1890s Klondike Gold Rush in Yukon, Canada. Invite students to take on the role of a person who has decided to leave their homes and make their fortune, perhaps even a character from Call of the Wild! Use the google doc “fakebook” page for Literary Characters or Historical Figures to explore their new identity. The docs include specific categories and posts for students to consider.

Consider the following for creating your character (historical or literary). Use the information from your research to create your “wall” posts.

- What were the typical roles of men, women, and children at this time?
- How would they have to travel to the Yukon? How long will it take?
- What job might they be eligible for?
- What clothes, supplies, and tools will they need?
- What is housing and shelter like during the trip and when they arrive?
- What diseases are spreading during this time period?
- What do the people eat and how do they get it?
- How expensive are items in the Yukon compared to what is normal?
- What do they know and what is rumor or what is true? How do they get their news about the Gold Rush?
- What don’t they know?

Students create individual profiles or divide into small groups to research specific topics and create team profiles.

Extension: Using their research, have each student write a letter to their friends or family about their life away from home or a blog post about their experiences.
**Objective:** Students will research wolves, sled dogs and a breed of dog of their choice. Students will note what characteristics all three share and what is unique about their breed.

**Materials:** Research graphic organizer (page i) and computer/internet access for research.

**Activity:** Students will research wolves, sled dogs and a breed of dog of their choice. Students will note what characteristics all three share and what is unique about their breed.

**Extension:** As a summary to their research students may create a presentation or report about their chosen breed or may develop a visual to explore the shared characteristics for a digital presentation using Padlet.

**SOME FACTS TO GET YOU STARTED**

**Wolves:**
- have a sense of smell that is **100 times stronger** than humans
- are known to be the ancestor of every known breed of dog
- find mates only once and stick with their mates for the rest of their lives
- eat up to one-fifth of their total weight due to the irregularities in the availability of food
- can live for over 13 years with the average life being six to eight years
- can swim up to eight miles

**Sled Dogs:**
- can travel at speeds up to **20 miles per hour**
- are not bred for the coldness of the Arctic and do **not love the extreme cold**, which is why they wear protective coats and booties
- played a key role in the **Klondike Gold Rush** because the terrains were inaccessible during winter and people found it difficult to travel by foot.
- traversed one of the most important trails during the Klondike Gold Rush, the **1000-plus mile Iditarod Trail**, a trail which is still used today for the annual Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race run in early March from Anchorage to Nome, Alaska.

**DOG (BREED OF CHOICE):**
This website from the American Kennel Club provides lots of great information about many breeds of dogs. Pick a breed to research!

**VIDEO RESEARCH:**

How Smart Are Animals NOVA (the first section is on dogs!)

Sled Dogs: More Than Meets the Eye

Why Don’t Sled Dogs Ever Get Tired?
**Objective:** Students will consider aspects of *The Call of the Wild* story and think critically about the meaning.

**Materials:** paper, writing utensils, copy of *The Call of the Wild*.

**ACTIVITY 1: CIVILIZED vs. WILD**

Ask students to consider the definitions of *Wild* and *Civilized* and create a working understanding of each of the terms as a large group. Next, apply those definitions to the question of who is civilized in *Call of the Wild* and who is wild, or uncivilized? Individuals can respond to the question using specific examples from the play or novel. Students can then get into a small groups and have each group explain what, in their opinion, is the most important difference between being civilized and wild.

**Extension:** Assign half the class to be on Team Wild and create an argument that *Wild* is superior to *Civilized*. The other half of the class is on Team Civilized citing examples from the story or from their own experience and research.

**ACTIVITY 2: EPIGRAPH ANALYSIS**

Before *Call of the Wild* begins there is an epigraph taken from a poem called *Atavism* by John Myers O’Hara.

First, as a class, read the epigraph together, defining the new vocabulary and then take apart the lines to understand their meaning. Use an online dictionary - like this one from britannica kids - to look up unfamiliar words.

It may be a good exercise to rewrite the opening stanza using everyday language after defining.

Ask students to consider how the epigraph represents the themes of the story as a whole.

Why would Jack London, the author, chose to put the poem before *Call of the Wild*?
AFTER THE PERFORMANCE
QUESTIONS TO ENGAGE & CONNECT

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AND DISCUSS AS A CLASS OR IN SMALL GROUPS:

1. Why does the author have Buck narrate the story?
2. How would the story change if it were told by the dog-trainer instead of Buck?
3. What is the “call of the wild?” How does it affect Buck’s behavior?
4. What role does survival play in the story? How is it different for dogs and humans?
5. To what extent does the author anthropomorphize Buck (give him human characteristics) and how much does he stay an animal?
6. What do the color red, the fang and the club symbolize?
7. What emotions did you experience during the show and what stirred them? For example: How did you feel when Manuel sold Buck to the man in the red sweater?
8. Do you think Buck’s story is happy or sad overall? Explain your answer?
9. How was the experience of watching the performance different than the experience of reading the book?
10. How do you think the visual projections changed the performance for the viewer?
11. Was there anything that you would do differently if you were the director of the performance?

TALK BACK!

We’d love to hear about your experience at the performance. Write a letter to Des Moines Performing Arts or to Theatre Heroes Company.

Once completed, mail the letters to us and we’ll make sure they get to the right people.

Des Moines Performing Arts
Attn: Education Department
221 Walnut Street
Des Moines, IA 50309

If you’d prefer to email us a batch of letters, that’d be great too! Our email address is: education@desmoinesperformingarts.org

We’ll do our best to send your class a reply!

DATE

Dear

Write a sentence or two about you – your name, age or grade to introduce yourself!

(If you get stuck, here are some sentence starters to get you thinking: )

What stuck with you after seeing the performance?
What questions do you still have?
What was the part you liked best?

Sincerely,
(your name)
RESOURCES AND SOURCES

WEBSITES

Theatre Heroes:
https://www.theatreheroes.org

Holden & Arts Associates
https://www.holdenarts.org/call-of-the-wild

The Paramount Theater:

Call of the Wild Trailer:
https://vimeo.com/268707938

Gold Rush History:
https://www.soundboard.com/sb/Gold_Rush_history_audio

The Klondike Gold Rush:

National Parks Service:
https://www.nps.gov/klgo/learn/goldrush.htm

Grayline Alaska
https://www.graylinealaska.com/blog/8-things-didnt-know-klondike-gold-rush/

Goldrush Timeline
http://www.timelineindex.com/content/view/3953

Dog Breeds
https://www.akc.org/dog-breeds/

How Smart Are Animals
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asoJyZYrNx0

Sled Dogs
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6nVfFNbxX7s

Why Don’t Sled Dogs Ever Get Tired
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HDG4GSypcIE

Padlet
https://padlet.com/
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