CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

White Fang

Jack London · *1906 · original English text*

In the frozen Northland a cub is born to a wolf-dog mother and learns the law of meat: kill, or be meat. Bondage, cruelty, and a "love-master" follow. London's story is harder than a tame dog-book; it is about whether a creature shaped by the Wild can learn a different law.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

If a wolf-dog is raised under the law of meat, then under the club, can another kind of mastery—patient, just, and affectionate—teach him something other than killing?

"And in his own dim way he learned the law of meat. There were two kinds of life—his own kind and the other kind."

Part II, Chapter V, The Law of Meat

White Fang learns the Wild, then Gray Beaver's fire and rule, then Beauty Smith's hate. He becomes a fighting dog, "a killer," almost past reclaiming. Weedon Scott, the love-master, takes him south and will not give him up. The ending is not a denial of the Wild: it is a wounded dog, drowsing in the sun, permitting puppies to clamber over him. The law of meat is not the last word the book allows.

KEY CHARACTERS

White Fang
The wolf-dog whose life is the book: cub, slave, fighter, and, at last, a creature capable of love.

Kiche
His mother, the she-wolf of Part I, his first protection and first law.

Gray Beaver
The Indian master who rules by the right of fire and club, not by tenderness.

Beauty Smith
A cruel man who buys White Fang to make a killer for sport.

Weedon Scott
The mining expert and "love-master" who claims him and takes him south.

Bill and Henry
The two men of the opening trail, who first show what the Wild costs.

Collie
The sheep-dog of Sierra Vista, jealous and, at the end, the mother of the puppies he suffers to play on him.

ANOTHER LAW

> *"And in his own dim way he learned the law of meat. There were two kinds of life—his own kind and the other kind."*
>
> Part II, Chapter V

> *"It was the masterful and incommunicable wisdom of eternity laughing at the futility of life and the effort of life."*
>
> Part I, Chapter I

Grades 6–8
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

The Trail of the Meat

PART I

Two men hauling a coffin through the North are hunted by a pack and a she-wolf. The Wild is introduced as something older and colder than human purpose.

- Bill and Henry pay in dogs, then in a life, for their passage.
- The she-wolf is half-dog, cunning, and hungry.
- The opening is not yet White Fang's; it is the world into which he will be born.

> *"It was the masterful and incommunicable wisdom of eternity laughing at the futility of life and the effort of life."*
>
> Part I, Chapter I, of the Northland Wild

02

The Grey Cub

PART II

In a lair, a grey cub lives, sees the wall of the world open, and learns what may be eaten and what will eat him. Kiche, his mother, is his first law.

- His development is rapid and single-purposed.
- The law of meat divides life into his own kind and the other kind.
- Play, hunger, and the first killings teach him more than any speech.

> *"He was a killer. His only food was meat, live meat, that ran away swiftly before him, or flew into the air, or climbed trees, or hid in the ground, or faced him and fought with him"*
>
> As the cub's education in the Wild is summed up

03

The Makers of Fire

PART III

Men, the makers of fire, take the cub into an Indian camp. Gray Beaver is his god and master; famine, bondage, and an outcast's place among dogs shape him.

- He learns that men's hands may feed or club, and that they must be obeyed.
- Lip-lip and the camp-dogs teach him to be a devil in a small world.
- The covenant with Gray Beaver is not affection; it is rule.

04

The Reign of Hate

PART IV, CHAPTERS I–V

Sold to Beauty Smith, White Fang is baited into becoming a fighting dog. The "Clinging Death" and the pits nearly finish him; he remains indomitable and almost lost.

- Beauty Smith's mastery is cruelty, and it works a change London does not pretty up.
- Other dogs and men come to see a monster they have helped to make.
- Weedon Scott appears in the mining town and will not look away.

05

The Love-Master, and the Southland

PART IV, CHAPTER VI – PART V

Scott buys him, endures his mistrust, and takes him to California. The "call of kind" and a last fight with a convict test the new law. White Fang lives, and lies in the sun with puppies.

- The love-master can disappear for a time; White Fang's grief shows what has begun to grow.
- Sierra Vista is a softer country, not a denial of his teeth.
- The last image is patience, not the law of meat only.

Law and Mastery · The Wild · Cruelty · Loyalty and Love · A Changed Creature

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 6–8

1. The hosted text is the original English of Project Gutenberg #910, in five parts with chapter titles such as "The Law of Meat," "The Love-Master," and "The Call of Kind."
2. The law of meat is stated: "And in his own dim way he learned the law of meat. There were two kinds of life—his own kind and the other kind."
3. The opening's sentence about the Wild is: "It was the masterful and incommunicable wisdom of eternity laughing at the futility of life and the effort of life."
4. The book is violent. Beauty Smith's pits and the fighting dog are meant to be judged, not enjoyed as sport.
5. London's "gods" are the men, as the dog knows them. That is the animal's point of view, not a theology. The moral movement is from the law of meat toward a just master's love.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #910, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/white-fang/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.