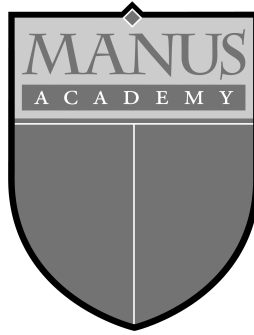


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- *Short Stories, Grades 6-8*

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- *Short Stories, Grades 9-12*

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Short Story Samples

Middle Grades
through High School

PUBLISHED BY

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rosanne Manus, M.A.: Rosanne is the founder of Manus Academy. She and her staff work with students from kindergarten through college who experience learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder and other neurological and developmental difficulties. Their services include a middle and high school accredited by the Southern Association for Colleges and Schools, after-school tutoring services for K-12 students who attend other schools, testing, consultation and parent and teacher training.

In 1979, Rosanne received her master's degree in special education at Columbia University and has been working in the field of special education since then. She has developed, tested and published training programs and curriculums for almost every subject and skill from kindergarten through grade twelve. In addition, she has developed a proprietary business operations model and staff training program that ensure the consistent delivery of high quality services.

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PRACTICE PACK

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- understand stories and examine their elements, such as plot, character, setting and theme
- write story summaries

CONTAINS:

- guided analyses, or questions, about the stories that help students learn about the main elements
- guided outlines for the written summaries
- short stories by Chekov, Saki, Stockton, Alcott and O. Henry

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Short Stories

Grades 6-8

BUILDING READING

COMPREHENSION THROUGH

LITERATURE

Student: _____

Teacher: _____

Date started: _____

Date finished: _____

“A Piece of Red Calico”

by Frank R. Stockton

Story summary: This story is about a young man who tries to find some red calico that matches the piece his wife gave him that morning. When he first shops for the calico, he expects it to be a simple task; however, he soon discovers that it is anything but simple.

Before beginning the relation of the following incidents, I wish to state that I am a young married man, doing business in a large city, in the suburbs of which I live.

I was going into town the other morning, when my wife handed me a little piece of red calico, and asked me if I would have time, during the day, to buy her two yards and a half of calico like it. I assured her that it would be no trouble at all, and putting the piece of calico in my pocket, I took the train for the city.

At lunch-time I stopped in at a large dry-goods store to attend to my wife’s commission. I saw a well-dressed man walking the floor between the counters, where long lines of girls were waiting on much longer lines of customers, and asked him where I could see some red calico.

“This way, sir,” and he led me up the store. “Miss Stone,” said he to a young lady, “show this gentleman some red calico.”

“What shade do you want!” asked Miss Stone.

I showed her the little piece of calico that my wife had given me. She looked at it and handed it back to me. Then she took down a great roll of red calico and spread it out on the counter.

“Why, that isn’t the shade!” said I.

“No, not exactly,” said she. “But it is prettier than your sample.”

“That may be,” said I. “But, you see, I want to match this piece. There is something already in my house, made of this kind of calico, which needs to be made larger, or mended, or something. I want some calico of the same shade.”

The girl made no answer, but took down another roll.

“That’s the shade,” said she.

“Yes,” I replied, “but it’s striped.”

“Stripes are more worn than anything else in calicoes,” said she.

“Yes. But this isn’t to be worn. It’s for furniture, I think. At any rate, I want perfectly plain stuff, to match something already in use.”

“Well, I don’t think you can find it perfectly plain, unless you get Turkey red.”

“What is Turkey red?” I asked.

“Turkey red is perfectly plain in calicoes,” she answered.

“Well, let me see some.”

“We haven’t any Turkey red calico left,” she said, “but we have some very nice plain calicoes in other colors.”

“I don’t want any other color. I want stuff to match this.”

“It’s hard to match cheap calico like that,” she said, and so I left her.

I next went into a store a few doors farther up Broadway. When I entered I approached the “floorwalker,” and handing him my sample, said:

“Have you any calico like this?”

“Yes, sir,” said he. “Third counter to the right.” I went to the third counter to the right, and showed my sample to the salesman in attendance there. He looked at it on both sides. Then he said:

“We haven’t any of this.”

“The floorwalker said you had,” said I.

“We had it, but we’re out of it now. You’ll get that goods at an upholsterers.”

I went across the street to an upholsterer’s.

“Have you any stuff like this?” I asked.

“No,” said the salesman, “we haven’t. Is it for furniture?”

“Yes,” I replied.

“Then Turkey red is what you want.”

“Is Turkey red just like this?” I asked.

“No,” said he, “but it’s much better.”

“That makes no difference to me,” I replied. “I want something just like this.”

“But they don’t use that for furniture,” he said.

“I should think people could use anything they wanted for furniture,” I remarked, somewhat sharply.

“They can, but they don’t,” he said quite calmly. “They don’t use red like that. They use Turkey red.”

I said no more, but left. The next place I visited was a very large dry-goods store. Of the first salesman I saw I inquired if they kept red calico like my sample.

“You’ll find that on the second story,” said he.

I went up-stairs. There I asked a man:

“Where shall I find red calico?”

“In the far room to the left,” and he pointed to a distant corner.

I walked through the crowds of purchasers and salespeople, around the counters and tables filled with goods, to the far room to the left. When I got there I asked for red calico.

“The second counter down this side,” said the man. I went there and produced my sample.

“Calicoes down-stairs,” said the man.

“They told me they were up here,” I said.

“Not these plain goods. You’ll find them downstairs at the back of the store, over on that side.”

I went down-stairs to the back of the store.

“Where can I find red calico like this?” I asked.

“Next counter but one,” said the man addressed, walking with me in the direction pointed out. “Dunn, show red calicoes.”

Mr. Dunn took my sample and looked at it. “We haven’t this shade in that quality of goods,” he said.

“Well, have you it in any quality of goods?” I asked.

“Yes. We’ve got it finer.” He took down a piece of calico, and unrolled a yard or two of it.

“That’s not this shade,” I said.

“No,” said he. “The goods is finer and the color’s better.”

“I want it to match this,” I said.

“I thought you weren’t particular about the match,” said the salesman. “You said you didn’t care for the quality of the goods, and you know you can’t match without you take into consideration quality and color both. If you want that quality of goods in red, you ought to get Turkey red.”

I did not think it necessary to answer this remark, but said:

“Then you’ve got nothing to match this?”

“No, sir. But perhaps they may have it in the upholstery department, in the sixth story.”

I got into the elevator and went up to the top of the house.

“Have you any red stuff like this?” I said to a young man.

“Red stuff? Upholstery department—other end of this floor.”

I went to the other end of the floor.

“I want some red calico,” I said to a man.

“Furniture goods?” he asked.

“Yes,” said I.

“Fourth counter to the left.”

I went to the fourth counter to the left, and showed my sample to a salesman. He looked at it, and said: “You’ll get this down on the first floor—calico department.”

I turned on my heel, descended in the elevator, and went out on Broadway. I was thoroughly sick of red calico. But I determined to make one more trial. My wife had bought her red calico not long before, and there must be some to be had somewhere. I ought to have asked her where she bought it, but I thought a simple little thing like that could be procured anywhere.

I went into another large dry-goods store. As I entered the door a sudden tremor seized me. I could not bear to take out that piece of red calico. If I had had any other kind of a rag about me—a pen-wiper or anything of the sort—I think I would have asked them if they could match that.

But I stepped up to a young woman and presented my sample, with the usual question.

“Back room, counter on the left,” she said.

I went there.

“Have you any red calico like this?” I asked of the lady behind the counter.

“No, sir,” she said, “but we have it in Turkey red.”

Turkey red again! I surrendered.

“All right,” I said. “Give me Turkey red.”

“How much, sir?” she asked.

“I don’t know—say five yards.”

The lady looked at me rather strangely, but measured off five yards of Turkey red calico. Then she rapped on the counter and called out, “Cash!” A little girl, with yellow hair in two long plaits, came slowly up. The lady wrote the number of yards; the name of the goods; her own number; the price; the amount of the bank-note I handed her; and some other matters—probably the color of my eyes and the direction and velocity of the wind—on a slip of paper. She then copied all this in a little book which she kept by her. Then she handed the slip of paper, the money, and the Turkey red to the yellow-haired girl. This young girl copied the slip in a little book she carried, and then she went away with the calico, the paper slip, and the money.

After a very long time—during which the little girl probably took the goods, the money, and the slip to some central desk, where the note was received, its amount and number entered in a book; change given to the girl; a copy of the slip made and entered; girl’s entry examined and approved; goods wrapped up; girl registered; plaits counted and entered on a slip of paper and copied by the girl in her book; girl taken to a hydrant and washed; number of towel entered on a paper slip and copied by the girl in her book; value of my note and amount of change branded somewhere on the child, and said process noted on a slip of paper and copied in her book—the girl came to me, bringing my change and the package of Turkey red calico.

I had time for but very little work at the office that afternoon, and when I reached home I handed the package of calico to my wife. She unrolled it and exclaimed:

“Why, this doesn’t match the piece I gave you!”

“Match it!” I cried. “Oh no! it doesn’t match it. You didn’t want that matched. You were mistaken. What you wanted was Turkey red—third counter to the left. I mean, Turkey red is what they use!”

My wife looked at me in amazement, and then I detailed to her my troubles.

“Well,” said she, “this Turkey red is a great deal prettier than what I had, and you’ve bought so much of it that I needn’t use the other at all. I wish I had thought of Turkey red before.”

“I wish from my heart you had!” said I.

“A Piece of Red Calico”

by Frank R. Stockton

Guided Analysis

1. **(Character-narrator)** How does the narrator introduce himself in the beginning of the story? Who is he?

2. **(Plot)** What does the narrator’s wife ask him to do that day?

3. **(Character-narrator)** What is the narrator’s perception of the task when he leaves the house?

4. **(Plot)** When does the narrator shop for the calico? Does he have unlimited time in which to look for this fabric?

5. **(Plot)** Where does the narrator first search for matching calico? What is wrong with the first roll of calico that the sales girl shows him?

6. **(Character-narrator)** As he tries to explain to the sales girl why he needs an exact match of the calico, the narrator says, “. . . But, you see, I want to match this piece. There is something already in my house, made of this kind of calico, which needs to be made larger, or mended, or something. I want some calico of the same shade.” What does this quote reveal about the narrator?

7. **(Plot)** What shade of red does the sales girl recommend that he buy? Can he buy it in that store?

8. **(Plot)** Name the next place the man goes to search for the calico. Whom does he first meet? Where does this person direct him? Where does the next person direct him?

9. **(Plot)** What does the upholsterer recommend?

10. **(Plot)** When the narrator searches in the next very large dry-goods store, he is directed to multiple places within the store. List these places in order by filling in the blank spaces.

The first salesman directs the narrator to the second _____.

The next man directs him to the far room on the _____.

The next man directs him to the second counter down the _____.

The next man directs him downstairs to the back of the _____.

The next man directs him to another counter.

A man named Mr. Dunn tells the narrator that, if he wants to match his piece of calico, he should look in the _____ department on the _____ floor.

The man on the _____ floor directs him to the other end of the _____.

The man at the other end of the _____ directs him to the fourth _____ on the left.

The man at the _____ counter on the left directs the narrator to the _____ department on the _____ floor.

11. **(Character-narrator)** As the narrator enters yet another dry-goods store, he is seized with a tremor. Why?

12. **(Plot, character-narrator)** What does the narrator do when the next saleswoman says that she has the calico available in Turkey red? Why do you think he responds this way?

13. **(Character-narrator)** The narrator describes how the saleswoman measures five yards of the calico, writes details of the order on a slip of paper and has a little girl take the material and order information somewhere else for processing. From the narrator's descriptions, how can readers tell that the narrator is getting highly annoyed by the shopping errand?

14. **(Character-wife)** What is the wife's reaction when she unwraps the package of calico?

15. **(Character-narrator)** Because the narrator bought so much of the new calico, what did he actually have no need to do?

16. **(Author's style)** What method of telling the events does the author mostly use to keep the story moving at a fast pace?

17. **(Point of view)** By using the first person point of view, the author has us experience the story through the narrator’s eyes and to feel his frustration and annoyance as he shops. Imagine the narrator’s wife retelling the story of her husband’s shopping trip to some of her friends. How might she tell the story? How might we view the narrator and his adventures as she retells his story?

18. **(Humor)** The author uses dry humor throughout this funny story. Dry humor is humor that is delivered in an unemotional tone of voice. It tends to be implied, or suggested, rather than stated outright. While the author has the narrator say one thing, we sense that he may mean another. One example of the author’s use of dry humor is in this dialogue between the narrator and the first salesgirl. Notice the author’s play with the words “perfectly plain.”

“Well, I don’t think you can find it perfectly plain, unless you get Turkey red.”
“What is Turkey red?” I asked.
“Turkey red is perfectly plain in calicoes,” she answered.

The conversation continues with more dry humor in this exchange between the narrator and the salesgirl:

“I don’t want any other color. I want stuff to match this.”
“It’s hard to match cheap calico like that,” she said, and so I left her.

In a very matter-of-fact, no-offense-intended tone of voice, the salesgirl insults the narrator by noting that his wife’s calico is cheap. Describe at least two other instances in which the author uses dry humor in this story.

“A Piece of Red Calico”

by Frank R. Stockton

Guided Outline for a Written Summary

Directions: Complete this outline of “A Piece of Red Calico.” Next, verbally compose your summary by talking through the outline, speaking in full sentences. Then write and proofread your summary.

1. Introduction – Write a main idea sentence telling the title, author and what the story is about.

Example: “[Title of story] by [author] is about a young [who?] whose wife asks him to [buy what?] that matches [what?].”

2. When and where does the story take place?

Example: “The story takes place [when?] and in the various [what?] that he enters to find [what?].”

3. First event – Describe the first main event that reveals and develops the situation. What does the narrator first encounter as he tries to buy matching calico?

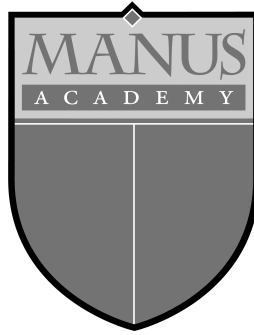
4. Second event – Describe the second main event that reveals and develops the problem or situation. Tell what the narrator does next.

5. Third event – Describe the third main event that reveals and develops the problem or situation. What further ordeals does the narrator face?

6. Conclusion – Tell what you think of the story.

Example: “A Piece of Red Calico” is [what kind of story? unusual? interesting? disturbing, suspenseful?] because [why?]. I was especially amused by [what?].”

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ANSWER KEY

STUDENTS LEARN TO:

- understand stories and examine their elements, such as plot, character, setting and theme
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CONTAINS:

- answers to the guided analyses questions, which prompt students to examine the main elements of the story
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Short Stories

Grades 6-8

BUILDING READING
COMPREHENSION THROUGH
LITERATURE

Teacher _____

“A Piece of Red Calico”

by Frank R. Stockton

Guided Analysis

1. **(Character-narrator)** How does the narrator introduce himself in the beginning of the story? Who is he?

The narrator introduces himself as a young married man, who lives in the suburbs but works in a large city.

2. **(Plot)** What does the narrator’s wife ask him to do that day?

The narrator’s wife gives him a scrap of red calico and asks him to buy some more just like it.

3. **(Character-narrator)** What is the narrator’s perception of the task when he leaves the house?

The narrator thinks the task of buying matching calico will be easy.

4. **(Plot)** When does the narrator shop for the calico? Does he have unlimited time in which to look for this fabric?

The narrator shops for the calico during his lunch hour when he has only a short time before he must return to work.

5. **(Plot)** Where does the narrator first search for matching calico? What is wrong with the first roll of calico that the sales girl shows him?

The narrator first stops at a large dry-goods store to look for the calico. The first roll that he is shown is in the wrong shade of red.

6. **(Character-narrator)** As he tries to explain to the sales girl why he needs an exact match of the calico, the narrator says, “. . . But, you see, I want to match this piece. There is something already in my house, made of this kind of calico, which needs to be made larger, or mended, or something. I want some calico of the same shade.” What does this quote reveal about the narrator?

This quote reveals how the narrator knows very little about his household. He doesn’t even know where the red calico is used in his own house.

7. **(Plot)** What shade of red does the sales girl recommend that he buy? Can he buy it in that store?

The sales girl recommends that, if he wants the plain calico, then he should get it in Turkey red. Unfortunately, the store doesn’t have any Turkey red in stock.

8. **(Plot)** Name the next place the man goes to search for the calico. Whom does he first meet? Where does this person direct him? Where does the next person direct him?

The narrator enters a store a few doors up the street. He speaks with the floorwalker who directs him to the salesman at the third counter on the right. This salesman directs him to an upholsterer’s shop.

9. **(Plot)** What does the upholsterer recommend?

The upholsterer recommends Turkey red calico.

10. **(Plot)** When the narrator searches in the next very large dry-goods store, he is directed to multiple places within the store. List these places in order by filling in the blank spaces.

The first salesman directs the narrator to the second *story*.

The next man directs him to the far room on the *left*.

The next man directs him to the second counter down the *side*.

The next man directs him downstairs to the back of the *store*.

The next man directs him to another *counter*.

A man named Mr. Dunn tells the narrator that, if he wants to match his piece of calico, he should look in the *upholstery* department on the *sixth* floor.

The man on the *sixth* floor directs him to the other end of the *floor*.

The man at the other end of the *floor* directs him to the fourth *counter* on the left.

The man at the *fourth* counter on the left directs the narrator to the *calico* department on the *first* floor.

11. **(Character-narrator)** As the narrator enters yet another dry-goods store, he is seized with a tremor. Why?

As he enters another dry-goods store, the narrator is seized with a tremor because he has now gone to many places to find a matching piece of calico. What he originally thought was a simple task is now intensely frustrating. He is afraid to ask the next sales person about the calico.

12. **(Plot, character-narrator)** What does the narrator do when the next saleswoman says that she has the calico available in Turkey red? Why do you think he responds this way?

When the saleswoman says that she has the calico available in Turkey red, the narrator orders five yards of it. He gives up trying to match the piece of calico his wife gave him and, because he's so flustered, he orders double the yardage that his wife requested.

13. **(Character-narrator)** The narrator describes how the saleswoman measures five yards of the calico, writes details of the order on a slip of paper and has a little girl take the material and order information somewhere else for processing. From the narrator's descriptions, how can readers tell that the narrator is getting highly annoyed by the shopping errand?

Readers can tell that the narrator is highly annoyed by the shopping errand because he is sarcastic in some of his telling of the events. For instance, he flippantly remarks that the saleswoman probably noted the color of his eyes and the direction and velocity of the wind. He implies that she is holding him up over ridiculous details.

14. **(Character-wife)** What is the wife's reaction when she unwraps the package of calico?

The wife first remarks that the calico doesn't match the scrap the narrator gave her; however, she is pleased with the fabric.

15. **(Character-narrator)** Because the narrator bought so much of the new calico, what did he actually have no need to do?

Because the narrator bought so much of the new calico, he didn't need to match it with the scrap his wife gave him. All of his efforts to match the scrap were for nothing.

16. **(Author's style)** What method of telling the events does the author mostly use to keep the story moving at a fast pace?

To keep the story moving at a fast pace, the author uses much dialogue between the narrator and the many salespeople he meets.

17. **(Point of view)** By using the first person point of view, the author has us experience the story through the narrator's eyes and to feel his frustration and annoyance as he shops. Imagine the narrator's wife retelling the story of her husband's shopping trip to some of her friends. How might she tell the story? How might we view the narrator and his adventures as she retells his story?

Students' answers will vary.

18. **(Humor)** The author uses dry humor throughout this funny story. Dry humor is humor that is delivered in an unemotional tone of voice. It tends to be implied, or suggested, rather than stated outright. While the author has the narrator say one thing, we sense that he may mean another. One example of the author's use of dry humor is in this dialogue between the narrator and the first salesgirl. Notice the author's play with the words "perfectly plain."

"Well, I don't think you can find it perfectly plain, unless you get Turkey red."

"What is Turkey red?" I asked.

"Turkey red is perfectly plain in calicoes," she answered.

The conversation continues with more dry humor in this exchange between the narrator and the salesgirl:

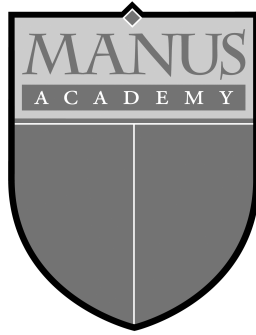
"I don't want any other color. I want stuff to match this."

"It's hard to match cheap calico like that," she said, and so I left her.

In a very matter-of-fact, no-offense-intended tone of voice, the salesgirl insults the narrator by noting that his wife's calico is cheap. Describe at least two other instances in which the author uses dry humor in this story.

Students' answers will vary.

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Short Stories

Grades 9-12

BUILDING READING

COMPREHENSION THROUGH

LITERATURE

Student: _____

Teacher: _____

Date started: _____

Date finished: _____

“To Build a Fire”

Jack London

Story summary: This story tells of an overconfident man traveling alone in the bitter cold of the Yukon with his dog. Prior to his trip, an old-timer gave him advice about the dangers of this environment, all of which the man fails to heed. He is supposed to meet his fellow workers at a camp that night. Will he overcome his trials along the way and make it there safely, or will he learn a hard lesson about nature and man’s limitations?

Day had broken cold and gray, exceedingly cold and gray, when the man turned aside from the main Yukon trail and climbed the high earth-bank, where a dim and little-traveled trail led eastward through the fat spruce timberland. It was a steep bank, and he paused for breath at the top, excusing the act to himself by looking at his watch. It was nine o’clock. There was no sun nor hint of sun, though there was not a cloud in the sky. It was a clear day, and yet there seemed an intangible pall over the face of things, a subtle gloom that made the day dark, and that was due to the absence of the sun. This fact did not worry the man. He was used to the lack of sun. It had been days since he had seen the sun, and he knew that a few more days must pass before that cheerful orb, due south, would just peep above the skyline and dip immediately from view.

The man flung a look back along the way he had come. The Yukon lay a mile wide and hidden under three feet of ice. On top of this ice were as many feet of snow. It was all pure white, rolling in gentle undulations where the ice jams of the freeze-up had formed. North and south, as far as his eye could see, it was unbroken white, save for a dark hair-line that curved and twisted from around the spruce-covered island to the south, and that curved and twisted away into the north, where it disappeared behind another spruce-covered island. This dark hair-line was the trail—the main trail—that led south five hundred miles to the Chilcoot Pass, Dyea, and salt water; and that led north seventy miles to Dawson, and still on to the north a thousand miles to Nulato, and finally to St. Michael, on Bering Sea, a thousand more.

But all of this—the mysterious, far-reaching hair-line trail, the absence of sun from the sky, the tremendous cold, and the strangeness and weirdness of it all—made no impression on the man. It was not because he was long used to it. He was a newcomer in the land, a *chechaquo*, and this was his first winter. The trouble with him was that he was without imagination. He was quick and alert in the things of life, but only in the things, and not in the significances. Fifty degrees below zero meant eighty-odd degrees of frost. Such fact impressed him as being cold and uncomfortable, and that was all. It did not lead him to meditate upon his frailty as a creature of temperature, and upon man’s frailty in general, able only to live within certain narrow limits of heat and cold; and from there on it did not lead him to the conjectural field of immorality and man’s place in the universe. Fifty degrees below zero stood for a bite of frost that hurt and that must be guarded against by the use of mittens, ear-flaps, warm moccasins, and thick socks. Fifty degrees below zero was to him just precisely fifty degrees below zero. That there should be anything more to it than that was a thought that never entered his head.

As he turned to go on, he spat speculatively. There was a sharp explosive crackle that startled him. He spat again. And again, in the air, before it could fall to the snow, the spittle crackled. He knew that at fifty below spittle crackled on the snow, but this spittle had

crackled in the air. Undoubtedly it was colder than fifty below—how much colder he did not know. But the temperature did not matter. He was bound for the old claim on the left fork of Henderson Creek, where the boys were already. They had come over across the divide from the Indian Creek country, while he had come the roundabout way to take a look at the possibilities of getting out logs in the spring from the islands in the Yukon. He would be in to camp by six o'clock; a bit after dark, it was true, but the boys would be there, a fire would be going, and a hot supper would be ready. As for lunch, he pressed his hand against the protruding bundle under his jacket. It was also under his shirt, wrapped up in a handkerchief and lying against the naked skin. It was the only way to keep the biscuits from freezing. He smiled agreeably to himself as he thought of those biscuits, each cut open and sopped in bacon grease, and each enclosing a generous slice of fried bacon.

He plunged in among the big spruce trees. The trail was faint. A foot of snow had fallen since the last sled has passed over, and he was glad he was without a sled, travelling light. In fact, he carried nothing but the lunch wrapped in the handkerchief. He was surprised, however at the cold. It certainly was cold, he concluded, as he rubbed his numb nose and cheek-bones with his mittened hand. He was a warm-whiskered man, but the hair on his face did not protect the high cheek-bones and the eager nose that thrust itself aggressively into the frosty air.

At the man's heels trotted a dog, a big native husky, the proper wolf-dog, gray-coated and without any visible or temperamental difference from its brother, the wild wolf. The animal was depressed by the tremendous cold. It knew that it was no time for traveling. Its instinct told it a truer tale than was told to the man by the man's judgment. In reality, it was not merely colder than fifty below zero; it was colder than sixty below, than seventy below. It was seventy-five below zero. Since the freezing-point is thirty-two above zero, it meant that one hundred and seven degrees of frost obtained. The dog did not know anything about thermometers. Possibly in its brain there was no sharp consciousness of a condition of very cold such as was in the man's brain. But the brute had its instinct. It experienced a vague but menacing apprehension that subdued it and made it slink along at the man's heels, and that made it question eagerly every unwonted movement of the man as if expecting him to go into camp or to seek shelter somewhere and build a fire. The dog had learned fire, and it wanted fire, or else to burrow under the snow and cuddle its warmth away from the air.

The frozen moisture of its breathing had settled on its fur in a fine powder of frost, and especially were its jowls, muzzle, and eyelashes whitened by its crystallized breath. The man's red beard and mustache were likewise frosted, but more solidly, the deposit taking the form of ice and increasing with every warm, moist breath he exhaled. Also, the man was chewing tobacco, and the muzzle of ice held his lips so rigidly that he was unable to clear his chin when he expelled the juice. The result was that a crystal beard of the color and solidity of amber was increasing its length on his chin. If he fell down it would shatter itself, like glass, into brittle fragments. But he did not mind the appendage. It was the penalty all tobacco chewers paid in that country, and he had been out before in two cold snaps. They had not been so cold as this, he knew, but by the spirit thermometer at Sixty Mile he knew they had been registered at fifty below and at fifty-five.

He held on through the level stretch of woods for several miles, crossed a wide flat, and dropped down a bank to the frozen bed of a small stream. This was Henderson Creek, and he knew he was ten miles from the forks. He looked at his watch. It was ten o'clock. He was making four miles an hour, and he calculated that he would arrive at the forks at half past twelve. He had decided to celebrate that event by eating his lunch there.

The dog dropped in again at his heels, with a tail drooping discouragement, as the man swung along the creek-bed. The furrow of the old sled-trail was plainly visible, but a dozen inches of snow covered the marks of the last runners. In a month no man had come up or down that silent creek. The man held steadily on. He was not much given to thinking, and just then particularly he had nothing to think about save that he would eat lunch at the forks and that at six o'clock he would be in camp with the boys. There was nobody to talk to; and, had there been, speech would have been impossible because of the ice-muzzle on his mouth. So he continued monotonously to chew tobacco and to increase the length of his amber beard.

Once in a while the thought reiterated itself that it was very cold and that he had never experienced such cold. As he walked along he rubbed his cheek-bones and nose with the back of his mittened hand. He did this automatically, now and again changing hands. But rub as he would, the instant he stopped his cheek-bones went numb, and the following instant the end of his nose went numb. He was sure to frost his cheeks; he knew that, and experienced a pang of regret that he had not devised a nose-strap of the sort Bud wore in cold snaps. Such a strap passed across the cheeks, as well, and saved them. But it didn't matter much, after all. What were frosted cheeks? A bit painful, that was all; they were never serious.

Empty as the man's mind was of thoughts, he was keenly observant, and he noticed the changes in the creek, the curves and bends and timber-jams, and always he sharply noted where he placed his feet. Once, coming around a bend, he shied abruptly, like a startled horse, curved away from the place where he had been walking, and retreated several paces back along the trail. The creek he knew was frozen clear to the bottom—no creek could contain water in that arctic winter, —but he knew also that there were springs that bubbled out from the hillsides and ran along under the snow and on top of the ice of the creek. He knew that the coldest snaps never froze these springs, and he knew likewise their danger. They were traps. They hid pools of water under the snow that might be three inches deep, or three feet. Sometimes a skin of ice half an inch thick covered them, and in turn was covered by the snow. Sometimes there were alternate layers of water and ice-skin, so that when one broke through he kept on breaking through for a while, sometimes wetting himself to the waist.

That was why he had shied in such panic. He had felt the give under his feet and heard the crackle of a snow-hidden ice-skin. And to get his feet wet in such a temperature meant trouble and danger. At the very least it meant delay, for he would be forced to stop and build a fire, and under its protection to bare his feet while he dried his socks and moccasins. He stood and studied the creek-bed and its banks, and decided that the flow of water came from the right. He reflected awhile, rubbing his nose and cheeks, then skirted to the left, stepping gingerly and testing the footing for each step. Once clear of the danger, he took a fresh chew of tobacco and swung along at his four-mile gait.

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. Once again, however, he had a close call; and once, suspecting danger, he compelled the dog to go on in front. The dog did not want to go. It hung back until the man shoved it forward, and then it went quickly across the white, unbroken surface. Suddenly it broke through, floundered to one side, and got away to firmer footing. It had wet its forefeet and legs, and almost immediately the water that clung to it turned to ice. It made quick efforts to lick the ice off its legs, then dropped down in the snow and began to bite out the ice that had formed between the toes. This was a matter of instinct. To permit the ice to remain would

mean sore feet. It did not know this. It merely obeyed the mysterious prompting that arose from the deep crypts of its being. But the man knew, having achieved a judgment on the subject, and he removed the mitten from his right hand and helped tear out the ice particles. He did not expose his fingers more than a minute, and was astonished at the swift numbness that smote them. It certainly was cold. He pulled on the mitten hastily, and beat the hand savagely across his chest.

At twelve o'clock the day was at its brightest. Yet the sun was too far south on its winter journey to clear the horizon. The bulge of the earth intervened between it and Henderson Creek, where the man walked under a clear sky at noon and cast no shadow. At half-past twelve, to the minute, he arrived at the forks of the creek. He was pleased at the speed he had made. If he kept it up, he would certainly be with the boys by six. He unbuttoned his jacket and shirt and drew forth his lunch. The action consumed no more than a quarter of a minute, yet in that brief moment the numbness laid hold of the exposed fingers. He did not put the mitten on, but, instead, struck the fingers a dozen sharp smashes against his leg. Then he sat down on a snow-covered log to eat. The sting that followed upon the striking of his fingers against his leg ceased so quickly that he was startled. He had had no chance to take a bite of biscuit. He struck the fingers repeatedly and returned them to the mitten, baring the other hand for the purpose of eating. He tried to take a mouthful, but the ice muzzle prevented. He had forgotten to build a fire and thaw out. He chuckled at his foolishness, and as he chuckled he noted the numbness creeping into the exposed fingers. Also, he noted that the stinging which had first come to his toes when he sat down was already passing away. He wondered whether the toes were warm or numb. He moved them inside the moccasins and decided that they were numb.

He pulled the mitten on hurriedly and stood up. He was a bit frightened. He stamped up and down until the stinging returned into the feet. It certainly was cold, was his thought. That man from Sulphur Creek had spoken the truth when telling how cold it sometimes got in the country. And he had laughed at him at the time! That showed one must not be too sure of things. There was no mistake about it, it *was* cold. He strode up and down, stamping his feet and threshing his arms, until reassured by the returning warmth. Then he got out matches and proceeded to make a fire. From the undergrowth, where high water of the previous spring had lodged a supply of seasoned twigs, he got his fire-wood. Working carefully from a small beginning, he soon had a roaring fire, over which he thawed the ice from his face and in the protection of which he ate his biscuits. For the moment the cold of space was outwitted. The dog took satisfaction in the fire, stretching out close enough for warmth and far enough away to escape being singed.

When the man had finished, he filled his pipe and took his comfortable time over a smoke. Then he pulled on his mittens, settled the ear-flaps of his cap firmly about his ears, and took the creek trail up the left fork. The dog was disappointed and yearned back toward the fire. This man did not know cold. Possibly all the generations of his ancestry had been ignorant of cold, of real cold, of cold one hundred and seven degrees below freezing-point. But the dog knew; all its ancestry knew, and it had inherited the knowledge. And it knew that it was not good to walk abroad in such fearful cold. It was the time to lie snug in a hole in the snow and wait for a curtain of cloud to be drawn across the face of outer space whence this cold came. On the other hand, there was no keen intimacy between the dog and the man. The one was the toil-slave of the other, and the only caresses it had ever received were the caresses of the whip-lash and of harsh and menacing throat-sounds that threatened the whip-lash. So the dog made no effort to communicate its apprehension to the man. It was not concerned in the welfare of the man; it was for its own sake that it yearned back toward

the fire. But the man whistled, and spoke to it with the sound of whip-lashes, and the dog swung in at the man's heels and followed after.

The man took a chew of tobacco and proceeded to start a new amber beard. Also, his moist breath quickly powdered with white his mustache, eyebrows, and lashes. There did not seem to be so many springs on the left fork of the Henderson, and for half an hour the man saw no signs of any. And then it happened. At a place where there were no signs, where the soft, unbroken snow seemed to advertise solidity beneath, the man broke through. It was not deep. He wet himself halfway to the knees before he floundered out to the firm crust.

He was angry, and cursed his luck aloud. He had hoped to get into camp with the boys at six o'clock, and this would delay him an hour, for he would have to build a fire and dry out his foot-gear. This was imperative at that low temperature—he knew that much; and he turned aside to the bank, which he climbed. On top, tangled in the underbrush about the trunks of several small spruce trees, was a high-water deposit of dry fire-wood—sticks and twigs, principally, but also larger portions of seasoned branches and fine, dry, last-year's grasses. He threw down several large pieces on top of the snow. This served for a foundation and prevented the young flame from drowning itself in the snow it otherwise would melt. The flame he got by touching a match to a small shred of birch bark that he took from his pocket. This burned even more readily than paper. Placing it on the foundation, he fed the young flame with wisps of dry grass and with the tiniest dry twigs.

He worked slowly and carefully, keenly aware of his danger. Gradually, as the flame grew stronger, he increased the size of the twigs with which he fed it. He squatted in the snow, pulling the twigs out from their entanglement in the brush and feeding directly to the flame. He knew there must be no failure. When it is seventy-five below zero, a man must not fail in his first attempt to build a fire—that is, if his feet are wet. If his feet are dry, and he fails, he can run along the trail for half a mile and restore his circulation. But the circulation of wet and freezing feet cannot be restored by running when it is seventy-five below. No matter how fast he runs, the wet feet will freeze the harder.

All this the man knew. The old-timer on Sulphur Creek had told him about it the previous fall, and now he was appreciating the advice. Already all sensation had gone out of his feet. To build the fire he had been forced to remove his mittens, and the fingers had quickly gone numb. His pace of four miles an hour had kept his heart pumping blood to the surface of his body and to all the extremities. But the instant he stopped, the action of the pump eased down. The cold of space smote the unprotected tip of the planet, and he, being on that unprotected tip, received the full force of the blow. The blood of his body recoiled before it. The blood was alive, like the dog, and like the dog it wanted to hide away and cover itself up from the fearful cold. So long as he walked four miles an hour, he pumped that blood, willy-nilly, to the surface; but now it ebbed away and sank down into the recesses of his body. The extremities were the first to feel its absence. His wet feet froze the faster, and his exposed fingers numbed the faster, though they had not yet begun to freeze. Nose and cheeks were already freezing, while the skin of all his body chilled as it lost its blood.

But he was safe. Toes and nose and cheeks would be only touched by the frost, for the fire was beginning to burn with strength. He was feeding it with twigs the size of his finger. In another minute he would be able to feed it with branches the size of his wrist, and then he could remove his wet footgear, and, while it dried he could keep his naked feet warm by the fire, rubbing them at first, of course, with snow. The fire was a success. He was safe. He remembered the advice of the old-timer on Sulphur Creek, and smiled. The old-timer had been very serious in laying down the law that no man must travel alone in the Klondike after

fifty below. Well, here he was; he had had the accident; he was alone; and he had saved himself. Those old-timers were rather womanish, some of them, he thought. All a man had to do was to keep his head, and he was all right. Any man who was a man could travel alone. But it was surprising, the rapidity with which his cheeks and nose were freezing. And he had not thought his fingers could go lifeless in so short a time. Lifeless they were, for he could scarcely make them move together to grip a twig, and they seemed remote from his body and from him. When he touched a twig, he had to look and see whether or not he had hold of it. The wires were pretty well down between him and finger-ends.

All of which counted for little. There was the fire, snapping and crackling and promising life with every dancing flame. He started to untie his moccasins. They were coated with ice; the thick German socks were like sheaths of iron halfway to the knees; and the moccasin strings were like rods of steel all twisted and knotted as by some conflagration. For a moment he tugged with his numb fingers, then, realizing the folly of it, he drew his sheath-knife.

But before he could cut the strings, it happened. It was his own fault, or, rather, his mistake. He should not have built the fire under the spruce tree. 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. Now the tree under which he had done this carried a weight of snow on its boughs. No wind had blown for weeks, and each bough was fully freighted. Each time he had pulled a twig he had communicated a slight agitation to the tree—an imperceptible agitation, so far as he was concerned, but an agitation sufficient to bring about the disaster. High up in the tree one bough capsized its load of snow. This fell on the boughs beneath, capsizing them. 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! Where it had burned was a mantle of fresh and disordered snow.

The man was shocked. It was as 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. Then he grew very calm. Perhaps the old-timer on Sulphur Creek was right. If he had only had a trail-mate he would have been in no danger now. The trail-mate could have built the fire. Well, it was up to him to build the fire over again, and this second time there must be no failure. Even if he succeeded, he would most likely lose some toes. His feet must be badly frozen by now, and there would be some time before the second fire was ready.

Such were his thoughts, but he did not sit and think them. He was busy all the time they were passing through his mind. He made a new foundation for a fire, this time in the open, where no treacherous tree could blot it out. Next, he gathered dry grasses and tiny twigs from the high-water flotsam. He could not bring his fingers together to pull them out, but he was able to gather them by the handful. In this way he got many rotten twigs and bits of green moss that were undesirable, but it was the best he could do. He worked methodically, even collecting an armful of the larger branches to be used later when the fire gathered strength. And all the while the dog sat and watched him, a certain yearning wistfulness in its eyes, for it looked upon him as the fire-provider, and the fire was slow in coming.

When all was ready, the man reached in his pocket for a second piece of birch-bark. He knew the bark was there, and, though he could not feel it with his fingers, he could hear its crisp rustling as he fumbled for it. Try as he would, he could not clutch hold of it. And all the time, in his consciousness, was the knowledge that each instant his feet were freezing. This thought tended to put him in a panic, but he fought against it and kept calm. He pulled on his mittens with his teeth, and threshed his arms back and forth, beating his hands with

all his might against his sides. He did this sitting down, and he stood up to do it; and all the while the dog sat in the snow, its wolf-brush of tail curled around warmly over its forefeet, its sharp wolf-ears pricked forward intently as it watched the man. And the man, as he beat and threshed with his arms and hands, felt a great surge of envy as he regarded the creature that was warm and secure in its natural covering.

After a time he was aware of the first far-away signals of sensation in his beaten fingers. The faint tingling grew stronger till it evolved into a stinging ache that was excruciating, but which the man hailed with satisfaction. He stripped the mitten from his right hand and fetched forth the birch-bark. The exposed fingers were quickly going numb again. Next he brought out his bunch of sulphur matches. But the tremendous cold had already driven the life out of his fingers. In his effort to separate one match from the others, the whole bunch fell in the snow. He tried to pick it out of the snow, but failed. The dead fingers could neither touch nor clutch. He was very careful. He drove the thought of his freezing feet, and nose, and cheeks, out of his mind, devoting his whole soul to the matches. He watched using the sense of vision in place of that of touch, and when he saw his fingers on each side of the bunch, he closed them—that is, he willed to close them, for the wires were down, and the fingers did not obey. He pulled the mitten on his right hand, and beat it fiercely against his knee. Then, with both mittened hands, he scooped the bunch of matches, along with much snow, into his lap. Yet he was no better off.

After some manipulation he managed to get the bunch between the heels of his mittened hands. In this fashion he carried it to his mouth. The ice crackled and snapped when by a violent effort he opened his mouth. He drew the lower jaw in, curled the upper lip out of the way, and scraped the bunch with his upper teeth in order to separate a match. He succeeded in getting one, which he dropped on his lap. He was no better off. He could not pick it up. Then he devised a way. He picked it up in his teeth and scratched it on his legs. Twenty times he scratched before he succeeded in lighting it. As it flamed he held it with his teeth to the birch-bark. But the burning brimstone went up his nostrils and into his lungs, causing him to cough spasmodically. The match fell into the snow and went out.

The old-timer on Sulphur Creek was right, he thought in the moment of controlled despair that ensued: after fifty below, a man should travel with a partner. He beat his hands, but failed in exciting any sensation. Suddenly he bared both hands, removing the mittens with his teeth. He caught the whole bunch between the heels of his hands. His arm-muscles not being frozen enabled him to press the hand heels tightly against the matches. Then he scratched the bunch along his leg. It flared into flame, seventy sulphur matches at once! There was no wind to blow them out. He kept his head to one side to escape the strangling fumes, and held the blazing bunch to the birch-bark. As he so held it, he became aware of sensation in his hand. His flesh was burning. He could smell it. Deep down below the surface he could feel it. The sensation developed into pain that grew acute. And still he endured it, holding the flame of the matches clumsily to the bark that would not light readily because his own burning hands were in the way, absorbing most of the flame.

At last, when he could endure no more, he jerked his hands apart. The blazing matches fell sizzling into the snow, but the birch-bark was alight. He began laying dry grasses and the tiniest twigs on the flame. He could not pick and choose, for he had to lift the fuel between the heels of his hands. Small pieces of rotten wood and green moss clung to the twigs, and he bit them off as well as he could with his teeth. He cherished the flame carefully and awkwardly. It meant life, and it must not perish. The withdrawal of blood from the surface of his body now made him begin to shiver, and he grew more awkward. A large piece of green moss fell squarely on the little fire. He tried to poke it out with his fingers, but his

shivering frame made him poke too far, and he disrupted the nucleus of the little fire, the burning grasses and tiny twigs separating and scattering. He tried to poke them together again, but in spite of the tenseness of the effort, his shivering got away with him, and the twigs were hopelessly scattered. Each twig gushed a puff of smoke and went out. The fire-provider had failed. As he looked apathetically about him, his eyes chanced on the dog, sitting across the ruins of the fire from him, in the snow, making restless, hunching movements, slightly lifting one forefoot and then the other, shifting its weight back and forth on them with wistful eagerness.

The sight of the dog put a wild idea into his head. He remembered the tale of the man, caught in a blizzard, who killed a steer and crawled inside the carcass, and so was saved. He would kill the dog, and bury his hands in the warm body until the numbness went out of them. Then he could build another fire. He spoke to the dog, calling it to him; but in his voice was a strange note of fear that frightened the animal, who had never known the man to speak in such way before. Something was the matter, and its suspicious nature sensed danger—it knew not what danger, but somewhere, somehow, in its brain arose an apprehension of the man. It flattened its ears down at the sound of the man's voice, and its restless, hunching movements and the liftings and shiftings of its forefeet became more pronounced; but it would not come to the man. He got on his hands and knees and crawled toward the dog. This unusual posture again excited suspicion, and the animal sidled mincingly away.

The man sat up in the snow for a moment and struggled for calmness. Then he pulled on his mittens, by means of his teeth, and got upon his feet. He glanced down at first in order to assure himself that he was really standing up, for the absence of sensation in his feet left him unrelated to the earth. His erect position in itself started to drive the webs of suspicion from the dog's mind; and when he spoke peremptorily, with the sound of whiplashes in his voice, the dog rendered its customary allegiance and came to him. As it came within reaching distance, the man lost his control. His arms flashed out to the dog, and he experienced genuine surprise when he discovered that his hands could not clutch, that there was neither bend nor feeling in the fingers. He had forgotten for the moment that they were frozen and that they were freezing more and more. All this happened quickly, and before the animal could get away, he encircled its body with his arms. He sat down in the snow, and in this fashion held the dog, while it snarled and whined and struggled.

But it was all he could do, hold its body encircled in his arms and sit there. He realized that he could not kill the dog. There was no way to do it. With his helpless hands he could neither draw nor hold his sheath knife nor throttle the animal. He released it, and it plunged wildly away, with tail between its legs, and still snarling. It halted forty feet away and surveyed him curiously, with ears sharply pricked forward.

The man looked down at his hands in order to locate them, and found them hanging on the ends of his arms. It struck him as curious that one should have to use his eyes in order to find out where his hands were. He began thrashing his arms back and forth, beating the mittened hands against his sides. He did this for five minutes, violently, and his heart pumped enough blood up to the surface to put a stop to his shivering. But no sensation was aroused in the hands. He had an impression that they hung like weights on the ends of his arms, but when he tried to run the impression down, he could not find it.

A certain fear of death, dull and oppressive, came to him. This fear quickly became poignant as he realized that it was no longer a mere matter of freezing his fingers and toes, or of losing his hands and feet, but that it was a matter of life and death with the chances

against him. This threw him into a panic, and he turned and ran up the creek-bed along the old, dim trail. The dog joined in behind and kept up with him. He ran blindly, without intention, in fear such as he had never known in his life. Slowly, as he ploughed and floundered through the snow, he began to see things again, the banks of the creek, the old timber-jams, the leafless aspens, and the sky. The running made him feel better. He did not shiver. Maybe, if he ran on, his feet would thaw out; and anyway, if he ran far enough, he would reach camp and the boys. Without doubt he would lose some fingers and toes and some of his face; but the boys would take care of him, and save the rest of him when he got there. And at the same time there was another thought in his mind that said he would never get to the camp and the boys; that it was too many miles away, that the freezing had too great a start on him, and that he would soon be stiff and dead. This thought he kept in the background and refused to consider. Sometimes it pushed itself forward and demanded to be heard, but he thrust it back and strove to think of other things.

It struck him as curious that he could run at all on feet so frozen that he could not feel them when they struck the earth and took the weight of his body. He seemed to himself to skim along above the surface, and to have no connection with the earth. Somewhere he had once seen a winged Mercury, and he wondered if Mercury felt as he felt when skimming over the earth.

His theory of running until he reached camp and the boys had one flaw in it: he lacked the endurance. Several times he stumbled, and finally he tottered, crumpled up, and fell. When he tried to rise, he failed. He must sit and rest, he decided, and next time he would merely walk and keep on going. As he sat and regained his breath, he noted that he was feeling quite warm and comfortable. He was not shivering, and it even seemed that a warm glow had come to his chest and trunk. And yet, when he touched his nose or cheeks, there was no sensation. Running would not thaw them out. Nor would it thaw out his hands and feet. Then the thought came to him that the frozen portions of his body must be extending. He tried to keep this thought down, to forget it, to think of something else; he was aware of the panicky feeling that it caused, and he was afraid of the panic. But the thought asserted itself, and persisted, until it produced a vision of his body totally frozen. This was too much, and he made another wild run along the trail. Once he slowed down to a walk, but the thought of the freezing extending itself made him run again.

And all the time the dog ran with him, at his heels. When he fell down a second time, it curled its tail over its forefeet and sat in front of him, facing him, curiously eager and intent. The warmth and security of the animal angered him, and he cursed it till it flattened down its ears appeasingly. This time the shivering came more quickly upon the man. He was losing in his battle with the frost. It was creeping into his body from all sides. The thought of it drove him on, but he ran no more than a hundred feet, when he staggered and pitched headlong. It was his last panic. When he had recovered his breath and control, he sat up and entertained in his mind the conception of meeting death with dignity. However, the conception did not come to him in such terms. His idea of it was that he had been making a fool of himself, running around like a chicken with its head cut off—such was the simile that occurred to him. Well, he was bound to freeze anyway, and he might as well take it decently. With this new-found peace of mind came the first glimmerings of drowsiness. A good idea, he thought, to sleep off to death. It was like taking an anesthetic. Freezing was not so bad as people thought. There were lots worse ways to die.

He pictured the boys finding his body next day. Suddenly he found himself with them, coming along the trail and looking for himself. And, still with them, he came around a turn in the trail and found himself lying in the snow. He did not belong with himself anymore, for

even then he was out of himself, standing with the boys and looking at himself in the snow. It certainly was cold, was his thought. When he got back to the States he could tell the folks what real cold was. He drifted on from this to a vision of the old-timer on Sulphur Creek. He could see him quite clearly, warm and comfortable, and smoking a pipe.

“You were right, old hoss; you were right,” the man mumbled to the old-timer of Sulphur Creek.

Then the man drowsed off into what seemed to him the most comfortable and satisfying sleep he had ever known. The dog sat facing him and waiting. The brief day drew to a close in a long, slow twilight. There were no signs of a fire to be made, and besides, never in the dog’s experience had it known a man to sit like that in the snow and make no fire. As the twilight drew on, its eager yearning for the fire mastered it, and with a great lifting and shifting of forefeet, it whined softly, then flattened its ears down in anticipation of being chidden by the man. But the man remained silent. Later, the dog whined loudly. And still later it crept close to the man and caught the scent of death. This made the animal bristle and back away. A little longer it delayed, howling under the stars that leaped and danced and shone brightly in the cold sky. Then it turned and trotted up the trail in the direction of the camp it knew, where were the other food-providers and fire-providers.

“To Build a Fire”

Jack London

Guided Analysis

1. **(Plot-introduction)** How do the events of the story begin?

2. **(Setting)** What is the time and place of the story’s action? What role does the setting play? How does the setting change over time through the main character’s eyes?

3. **(Character-man)** Describe the main character and the traits that make him unique. How does he feel about himself?

4. **(Character-man)** Why is the man traveling in the Yukon? Why is he traveling alone, despite the danger?

5. **(Foreshadowing)** Foreshadowing is when the author gives the reader hints of events to come. What does the man realize when he spits and the spit starts to freeze in the air? What might this foreshadow?

6. **(Character-man)** How does the man respond to the realization that it is colder than fifty below? What does his response tell you about him?

7. **(Character-dog)** Describe the dog in the story that accompanies the man. How is it different from the man? How is this dog important to the story?

8. **(Plot-conflict, character-the man)** How does the man initially feel about his task of getting to the boys' camp by six o'clock? What type of conflict does he face, internal or external? Explain.

9. **(Setting)** What potential danger does the man face as he walks along the creek bed?

10. **(Setting)** What happens to the man's hand when he removes his mitten for a brief moment to help the dog remove the ice from between its toes?

11. **(Character-the man)** What is suggested about the man when he forgets to build a fire before he tries to eat lunch?

12. **(Characters-the man and his dog)** What kind of relationship exists between the man and his dog? How does the man sometimes treat his dog? Do your feelings for the man change knowing this? Why or why not?

13. **(Character-the man)** How does the man’s situation become more complicated? How do his feelings change about his situation? How does he try to deal with his conflict?

14. **(Plot-climax)** What is the highest point of the story in which the man’s situation permanently changes? How does the story’s title reveal the climax?

15. **(Plot-resolution)** Describe the resolution of the story. What does the man finally realize about the old timer’s advice? What suggestions does the story make about how humans interact with nature?

16. **(Plot-foreshadowing)** Explain what London foreshadows at the beginning of the story when he writes: “There was no sun nor hint of sun, though there was not a cloud in the sky. It was a clear day, and yet there seemed an intangible pall over the face of things, a subtle gloom that made the day dark, and that was due to the absence of the sun.”

17. **(Theme)** What message does London convey in this story?

“To Build a Fire”

Jack London

Guided Outline for a Written Summary

Directions: Complete this summary outline of “To Build a Fire.” Next, verbally compose your summary by talking through the outline, speaking in full sentences. Then write and proofread your summary.

1. Introduction – Write a main idea sentence telling the title, author and what the story is about.

Example: “[Title of story] by [author] is about [main character] who [does or experiences what?].”

2. When and where does the story take place? What is the weather like? How might the setting pose a conflict for the main character?

Example: “The story takes place in [name and description of place]. The weather is [what?].”

3. First event – Describe the first main event that reveals and develops the problem or situation. Tell how the main character initially feels about his problem.

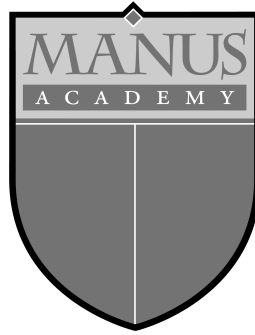
4. Second event – Describe the second main event that reveals and develops the problem or situation. Tell how the main character’s response to his problem changes.

5. Third event – Describe the third main event that reveals and develops the problem or situation.

6. Conclusion – Tell what you think of the story.

Example: “To Build a Fire” is [what kind of story? unusual? interesting? sobering?] because [why?]. I was especially taken by [what?].”

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ANSWER KEY

STUDENTS LEARN TO:

- understand stories and examine their elements, such as plot, character, setting and theme
- write story summaries

CONTAINS:

- answers to the guided analyses questions, which prompt students to examine the main elements of the story
- guided outlines for the written summaries
- short stories by Irving, O. Henry, Poe, London, Crane, Doyle, Lovecraft, Hawthorne, de Maupassant, Hale and Alcott

COMPANION PIECES:

- *How to Teach Reading Comprehension and Literature*
- *How to Teach Grammar, Usage and Writing Mechanics*
- *How to Teach Vocabulary*
- *How to Teach Written Expression*
- practice packs for grammar, usage and writing mechanics; vocabulary; and written expression
- Guided analyses for selected novels, dramas, short stories, folktales and poems

Short Stories

Grades 9-12

BUILDING READING
COMPREHENSION THROUGH
LITERATURE

Student: _____

Teacher: _____

Date started: _____

Date finished: _____

“To Build a Fire”

Jack London

Guided Analysis

1. **(Plot-introduction)** How do the events of the story begin?

The events of the story begin with a man traveling along a little traveled trail in the Yukon. He dismisses danger signs, such as the absence of the sun and the tremendous cold. The only items with him are his dog and his lunch wrapped in a handkerchief. He has no sled or traveling companion.

2. **(Setting)** What is the time and place of the story’s action? What role does the setting play? How does the setting change over time through the main character’s eyes?

The story takes place in the snowy, icy Yukon and begins in the morning. There is no sun and it is seventy-five degrees below zero (although the man believes it is only fifty degrees below zero). It begins on a little-traveled trail upon which a foot of new snow has fallen. There are springs that hide water under the snow for which the man must watch. The setting serves as a source of conflict in the story. In the beginning, the man sees the setting as an inconvenience he can handle but, by the end of the story, he realizes it is to be feared and respected.

3. **(Character-man)** Describe the main character and the traits that make him unique. How does he feel about himself?

The main character is a newcomer to the Yukon and this is his first winter there. He has knowledge about many things in life yet does not understand their value or significance. The man is warmly dressed in mittens, earflaps, moccasins and thick socks. He has a red beard and mustache and chews tobacco. He is a confident man and feels he can handle any situation. Unfortunately, he does not realize his limits.

4. **(Character-man)** Why is the man traveling in the Yukon? Why is he traveling alone, despite the danger?

The man is taking a roundabout path to look at the possibilities of getting out logs in the spring from the islands in the Yukon. He is on his way to meet his workers at camp. He travels alone, despite the danger, because he feels he can handle any problems that may arise.

5. **(Foreshadowing)** Foreshadowing is when the author gives the reader hints of events to come. What does the man realize when he spits and the spit starts to freeze in the air? What might this foreshadow?

When the man’s spit freezes in the air, he realizes it is colder than fifty below. At fifty below, spit crackles in the snow but not while it is still in the air. This foreshadows possible danger as the man continues to travel in the extreme cold.

6. **(Character-man)** How does the man respond to the realization that it is colder than fifty below? What does his response tell you about him?

The man is not very concerned about the temperature being colder than he originally thought. He is confident that he can make it to the boys’ camp by six o’clock. The boys will have a fire going and a hot supper ready. The man’s unconcerned response suggests he is foolhardy and careless.

7. **(Character-dog)** Describe the dog in the story that accompanies the man. How is it different from the man? How is this dog important to the story?

The dog is a big, gray-coated, native husky. In contrast to the man, its survival instincts are keen. It senses the danger of walking in the extreme cold. The dog is important in the story because it provides a sharp contrast to the man.

8. **(Plot-conflict, character-the man)** How does the man initially feel about his task of getting to the boys' camp by six o'clock? What type of conflict does he face, internal or external? Explain.

At first, the man feels he can easily accomplish his task and meet the boys by six o'clock that evening without difficulty. Although he does not realize it until later in the story, he faces the conflict of surviving the extreme cold. He faces an external conflict with nature.

9. **(Setting)** What potential danger does the man face as he walks along the creek bed?

Along the creek bed are hidden pools of water under the snow. If he were to fall into one of them and get his feet wet, he would be in great danger of getting frostbite on his feet, or worse, of freezing to death.

10. **(Setting)** What happens to the man's hand when he removes his mitten for a brief moment to help the dog remove the ice from between its toes?

As soon as the man removes his mitten and exposes his hand to the cold, it becomes numb.

11. **(Character-the man)** What is suggested about the man when he forgets to build a fire before he tries to eat lunch?

The man forgetting to build a fire before he eats his frozen lunch indicates that he is very inexperienced in surviving in a wilderness of extreme cold. He doesn't practice the most basic laws of survival.

12. **(Characters-the man and his dog)** What kind of relationship exists between the man and his dog? How does the man sometimes treat his dog? Do your feelings for the man change knowing this? Why or why not?

The man and his dog do not have a close relationship. The dog performs much heavy labor for the man. The man yells at his dog and sometimes whips it. Students' answers to the last two questions will vary.

13. **(Character-the man)** How does the man's situation become more complicated? How do his feelings change about his situation? How does he try to deal with his conflict?

The man's situation becomes more complicated when he falls into a spring trap and is wet halfway up to his knees. To dry out, he builds his second fire of the day under a tree, but snow from the tree's branches falls to the ground and smothers the fire. The man then realizes he is in danger. He knows he must build another fire, but it is so cold he begins to lose control of his hands. Try as he might, he cannot build another fire. The man begins to panic and tries to kill the dog so he may find warmth within its carcass. Unfortunately, he is too frozen to grab the dog.

14. **(Plot-climax)** What is the highest point of the story in which the man's situation permanently changes? How does the story's title reveal the climax?

The highest point of the story is when the man realizes he may soon die. He runs around like a madman, trying to regain some feeling in his limbs. The title of the story, “To Build a Fire,” reveals the man’s desperate need to build a fire to survive.

15. **(Plot-resolution)** Describe the resolution of the story. What does the man finally realize about the old timer’s advice? What suggestions does the story make about how humans interact with nature?

The man finally realizes he will die and sits down to go to sleep, deciding that it may not be such a bad way to go. He mumbles to himself that he should have heeded the old-timer’s advice, especially the advice about not traveling alone in such cold temperatures. This story suggests the importance of respecting the power of nature. Humans cannot control it.

16. **(Plot-foreshadowing)** Explain what London foreshadows at the beginning of the story when he writes: “There was no sun nor hint of sun, though there was not a cloud in the sky. It was a clear day, and yet there seemed an intangible pall over the face of things, a subtle gloom that made the day dark, and that was due to the absence of the sun.”

London foreshadows the man’s death with descriptions of the environment, such as “intangible pall” and “subtle gloom that made the day dark.”

17. **(Theme)** What message does London convey in this story?

London conveys the message that people must respect the forces of nature, such as snow and extreme cold. If they feel too confident of themselves and try to compete with nature, they may die.