

Lesson 1

American Dream to American Nightmare

Objective

- To become acquainted with the characters and plot of the first half of *The Jungle*

Notes to the Teacher

"You Have Lost the Strike! And Now What Are You Going to Do About It?"

So ran a headline in the socialist weekly, *Appeal to Reason*, following the failure of a strike in the Chicago meatpacking plants in 1904. The author of the article was a young socialist convert named Upton Sinclair, a man who soon decided what he was going to do about it! A short time later, Sinclair arrived in Chicago with the intention of writing a novel depicting the lives of the city's working class. He had been advanced funds by the Macmillan Company (publisher of his recent Civil War novel *Manassas*) and by the editor of *Appeal to Reason*, who challenged Sinclair to write as good a novel as *Manassas* on the subject of wage slavery. This challenge was accompanied by a promise to serialize such a work.¹

Sinclair stayed in Chicago several weeks, visiting the packinghouses and living with its workers. Early in 1905, Sinclair announced the coming of *The Jungle* to readers of *Appeal to Reason*, promising it would bear more than a superficial resemblance to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: "Fundamentally it will be identical with it-or try to be."² One trait *The Jungle* already shared with Harriet Beecher Stowe's antislavery classic was its introduction as a newspaper serial, beginning in the February 25, 1905, issue of the *Appeal*. Founded in 1895, *Appeal to Reason* was printed in Girard, Kansas, but boasted a nationwide circulation of nearly a quarter million, giving Sinclair's serial a wide and sympathetic audience.

By the end of 1905, however, *The Jungle* had proved such a sensation that Sinclair's intended publisher, Macmillan, backed down for fear of a possible libel suit. Four more book publishers

rejected Sinclair's novel before Doubleday, Page, and Company released the hardcover edition in February, 1906. Having taken the precaution of sending an investigator to Chicago to authenticate Sinclair's facts, Doubleday billed the novel as "a searching expose of . . . the whole machinery of feeding a nation."³ Coming closer to the author's intention, Jack London had already endorsed the work for socialists, promising that it would do for wage slaves "what *Uncle Tom's Cabin* did for black slaves."

This lesson will aid students in reviewing characters and events of the first half (chapters 1-16) of *The Jungle*, in which Upton Sinclair portrays the descent of Jurgis Rudkus from hopeful immigrant to exploited proletarian. Instruct students to read chapters 1-16 of *The Jungle* in preparation for this lesson. Also, give students copies of **Handouts 4, 5, and 6** to accompany their reading. (See procedures 1, 2, and 3.) Each student may need more than one copy of **Handout 5**.

Procedure

1. Discuss **Handout 4** which students have completed in preparation for this lesson. Suggested Responses:

¹William A. Bloodworth, Jr., *Upton Sinclair* (Boston: Twayne Publish

²Leon Harris, *Upton Sinclair: American Rebel* (New York: Thomas Y. C

³Ibid., 48. ⁴Ibid., 57.

Introducing the Cast of Characters

Directions: As you read *The Jungle*, enter descriptions of the major characters in the spaces provided. After each name, indicate the number of the chapter in which the character was introduced.

Name _____ Ch. _____

Station in Society _____

Relation to Other Characters _____

Description _____

Name _____ Ch. _____

Station in Society _____

Relation to Other Characters _____

Description _____

Name _____ Ch. _____

Station in Society _____

Relation to Other Characters _____

Description _____

Name _____ Ch. _____

Station in Society _____

Relation to Other Characters _____

Description _____

Name _____ Ch. _____

Station in Society _____

Relation to Other Characters _____

Description _____

Name _____ Ch. _____

Station in Society _____

Relation to Other Characters _____

Description _____

Name _____ Ch. _____

Station in Society _____

Relation to Other Characters _____

Description _____

Name _____ Ch. _____

Station in Society _____

Relation to Other Characters _____

Description _____

Lesson 3

Strangers in a Strange Land

Objective

- To relate the main characters of *The Jungle* to the historical movement which they represent

Notes to the Teacher

Upton Sinclair's Jurgis Rudkus is a literary representative of the more than eight million immigrants who entered America in the first decade of the twentieth century. *The Jungle* was completed, in fact, the year before 1907, the peak year of American immigration. In the words of one historian, "The whole history of the United States during the past three and a half centuries has been molded by successive waves of immigrants who responded to the lure of the New World and whose labors, together with those of their descendants, have transformed an almost empty continent into the world's most powerful nation." Having determined to write a novel about the urban working class of his time, Sinclair perforce found himself writing about the immigrant experience.

Coming when and whence he did, Sinclair's hero was a personification of that classic phase of the transatlantic migration known as the New Immigration. Not only were the raw numbers of immigrants higher after 1890, but the newcomers themselves seemed cut from notably different stock than their predecessors. Whereas previous immigrants had typically come from the British Isles and the nearby countries of Northwestern Europe, the new immigrants tended to come from the countries of Southeastern Europe. That made them different not only in language but also in religion. They were mainly Catholic and Jewish rather than Protestant. Immigration scholars such as Oscar Handlin have also noted significant differences in social background, the communal peasants of Southeastern Europe being poorly prepared to succeed in the competitive urban environment into which they found themselves funneled once they arrived. Bernard Weisberger stated, "Most Eastern and Southern European immigrants were uneducated, poorly dressed, easy marks for disease, superstitious, unskilled- and terrified."

As if they hadn't enough problems already, the newer immigrants also faced a hardening bias against foreigners on the part of nativeborn Americans. Yet they were not quite as helpless and friendless as Jurgis Rudkus in *The Jungle*. In his zeal to press his own solution to the plight of the workers, Sinclair largely ignored the support network American immigrants were establishing for themselves in **hundreds** of urban ghettos. The ethnic church **was** the **axis** of this support structure, reinforced by foreign-language newspapers, unions, and mutual aid societies.

Through such sources as numerical data and historical descriptions, students in this lesson can relate the experience of Jurgis Rudkus to the overall odyssey of American immigration.

Procedure

1. Instruct students to define the following the **night before you** present this lesson: acculturation, **adaptation**, alien, **assimilation**, communal, emigrant, extended family, immigrant, maladjustment, and peasant. Discuss these terms in class at the beginning of the lesson.

Suggested Responses:

¹Maldwyn Alen Jones. *American immigration* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960). I.

²Bernard A. Weisberger. *The American Heritage History of the American People* (New York: American Heritage Publishing Co., Inc., 1971). M.

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Immigration: Old and New Part 1

Immigration historians have long recognized a division in their subject between what they have designated the Old Immigration and the New Immigration. Some of the principal differences between the two may be found in the following chart which shows the total number of immigrants by country for the peak years before (1854) and after (1907) the Civil War. Study the chart in order to complete the work sheet that follows.

Sources of American Immigration

Country	1854	1907
Great Britain	58,647	79,037
Ireland	101,606	34,530
Scandinavia	4,222	49,965
Other Northwestern Europe	23,070	26,512
Germany	215,009	37,807
Poland	208	
Other Central Europe		338,452
Russia & Baltic	2	258,943
Other Eastern Europe	7	36,510
Italy	1,263	285,731
Other Southern Europe	1,508	52,079
Turkey in Asia		8,053
China	13,100	961
Japan		30,226
Other Asia		1,284
Canada & Newfoundland	6,891	19,918
Mexico	446	1,406
Other America	1,196	20,438
Africa		1,486
Australia & New Zealand		1,947
Other Pacific		42
All Other Countries	658	22
Total	427,833	1,285,349

Counted in totals for Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Russia

Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Statistical History of the United States from Colonial Times to the Present* (Stanford, Connecticut: Fairfield Publishers, Inc., 1965), **88-114**.

1. List the three highest sources of immigration by country in the Old Immigration (1854).

a. _____ b. _____ c. _____

2. List the three highest sources of immigration by country in the New Immigration (1907).

a. _____ b. _____ c. _____

3. Does any source appear in the top three of both periods? _____

4. What is the principal source by geographic region for each period?

a. Old Immigration (1854) _____

b. New Immigration (1907) _____

5. In the eyes of native-born Americans, can you think of how old and new immigrants might have differed in the areas of language and religion?

a. Language (old) _____ Language (new) _____

b. Religion (old) _____ Religion (new) _____

6. Would the Rudkus group have been representative of the Old or the New Immigration? List two reasons for your decision.

The Power of Adaptation

Part 1

Like the majority of immigrants of his time, Jurgis Rudkus left a small agricultural village in Europe to come to a large industrial city in America. Some of the adjustments he and others had to make are described in the following passage from Oscar Handlin's history of immigration, *The Uprooted*. After reading it, answer the questions that follow.

The crossing in all its phases was a harsh and brutal filter. On land in Europe, in the port of embarkation, on the ocean, in the port of arrival, and on land in America, it introduced a decisive range of selective factors that operated to let through only a few of those who left the Old World. In part these factors were physical: the hardier survived the dangers and the difficulties, the weaker and more dependent fell by the side. In part, however, these factors were more than physical, for they measured also the power of **adaptation**: only those who were **capable** of adjusting from peasant ways to the needs of new conditions and new challenges were able to absorb the successive shocks of migration.

For the crossing involved a startling reversal of roles, a radical shift in attitudes. The qualities that were desirable in the good peasant were not those conducive to success in the transition. Neighborliness, obedience, respect, and *sWus* were valueless among the masses that struggled for space on the way. **They succeeded who put aside the old preconceptions**, pushed in, and **took care of themselves**. This experience would certainly bring into **question** the validity of the **old guides** to action.

Perhaps that was the most luminous lesson of the crossing, that a totally new kind of life lay ahead. Therein was the significance of the unwillingness of the peasants to undertake the journey in the old traditional communal units. Despite the risks entailed, they preferred to act as individuals, each for himself. Somehow they had been convinced that the village way which had been inadequate to save them at home would certainly prove inadequate away from home.

Not that they derived much joy or comfort from the conviction. In any case they suffered. The separation itself had been hard. The peasants had been cut off from homes and villages, homes and villages which were not simply places, but communities in which was deeply enmeshed a whole pattern of life. They had left the familiar fields and hills, the cemetery in which their fathers rested, the church, the people, the animals, the trees they had known as the intimate context of their being.

Thus uprooted, they found themselves in a prolonged state of crisis-crisis in the sense that they were, and remained, unsettled. For weeks, and often for months, they were in suspense between the old and the new, literally in transit. Every adjustment was temporary and therefore in its nature bore the seeds of maladjustment, for the conditions to which the immigrants were adjusting were strange and ever changing.

As a result they reached their new homes exhausted-worn out **physically** by lack of rest, by poor food, by the constant strain of close, cramped quarters, worn out emotionally by the succession of new situations that had crowded in upon them. At the end was only the dead weariness of an excess of novel sensations.

Yet once arrived, the immigrants would not take time to recuperate. They would face instead the immediate, pressing necessity of finding a livelihood and of adjusting to conditions that were still more novel, unimaginably so. They would find then that the crossing had left its mark, had significantly affected their capacity to cope with the problems of the New World they faced.'

Part 2

1. Describe the sort of world that most peasants were leaving behind them.
2. From your knowledge of American history and reading of *The Jungle*, describe the sort of world the immigrants would find in America.
3. Name some of the personal qualities associated with peasants in the Old World. _____

4. What sort of qualities would peasants need to cultivate in order to succeed in the New World?
5. What popular scientific theory of the late nineteenth century does Handlin suggest through his use of such terms as "selective factors"?
6. Explain how well the word "uprooted" might describe the condition of Jurgis and his family in *The Jungle*.

Excerpt from *The Uprooted* by Oscar Handlin. Copyright 1951 by Oscar Handlin. By permission of Little, Brown and Company.

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Lesson 4

Climbing the Social Ladder

Objective

- To compare the American social scene as described in *The Jungle* with the popular conception of a mobile society shared by nineteenth-century Americans

Notes to the Teacher

If the attraction held by America for so many millions of immigrants were to be summed up in one word, the one provided by Edward Bok, opportunity would be the word. "Whatever short-comings I have found during my fifty-year period of Americanization," said Bok, "however erica may have failed to help my transition from a foreigner into an American, I owe to her the most priceless gift that any nation can offer, and that is opportunity." Few immigrants may have taken literally the fable about the gold-paved streets of America. but most of them probably harbored a vague belief that a pot of gold might await at the end of the road fort those with enough perseverance to reach it.

It was, after all, an age in which thousands of Americans had already shown the way. Most of the millionaires of the Gilded Age were self-made individuals, headed in the popular imagination by Andrew Carnegie. the Scottish immigrant who had forged a steel empire. Carnegie's rags to riches rise was the epitome of the American success story, a formula turned into a series of juvenile novels by Horatio Alger, Jr.. who preached through fiction that individuals willing to keep their noses to the grindstone would reap handsome material rewards. This is a lesson somehow absorbed by Jurgis Rudkus: his reaction to the reverses he encounters in the first half of *The Jungle* is a naive determination to "work harder."

For most, however, it didn't seem to work that way. This was explained in pseudoscientific terms by the fashionable theory of Social Darwinism. which held that only a select few were endowed with the ability to rise from the mass of humanity to the rewards of success. John D. Rockefeller, the first billionaire, provided a classic

metaphor when he described the inevitability of his rivals' failures: The growth of a large business is merely a survival of the fittest... . The American Beauty Rose can be produced in the splendor and fragrance which brings cheer to its beholder only by sacrificing the early buds which grow up around it."²

Upton Sinclair believed he had discovered a better alternative to Rockefeller s harsh dictum. During the writing of his Civil War novel *Manassas*. he had become interested in the political doctrine of socialism as a solution for the wage slavery which seemingly had replaced chattel slavery. Joining the Socialist party in 1904. he brought all the zeal of the recent convert to the writing of *The Jungle*. The conversion of Jurgis to socialism is described in terms of a born-again experience, and the last third of the book is more a primer on economic theory than a conventional literary denouement. In this lesson, students are encouraged to contrast Sinclair's view of American society with the popular. contemporary. "strive and succeed" belief.

Procedure

1. Instruct students to define the following the night before you present this lesson: exploitation, free enterprise, initiative. laissez-faire. Protestant work ethic. Social Darwinism. and socialism. Discuss these terms In class at the beginning of the lesson. Suggested Responses:

¹ Edward Bok, *The Americanization of Edward Bok The Autobiography of a*, Sons, 1923), 448.

²Hatvey Wish, *Society and T ought in Modem America* (New York: David

4. a. Why couldn't Jurgis get back into the packinghouse after his return?

b. Relate what other Jobs he gets, with the outcome of each.
5. What is the ultimate blow dealt to Jurgis, and how does he react to it?
6. How does Jurgis exemplify a **philosophy** of "selfish individualism" during his flight and upon his return?
7. Explain in your own words what point Sinclair was trying to make in the episode involving Jurgis and Master Freddie Jones.
8. What role does Jurgis play in the great "Beef Strike," and what is the outcome of that event?
9. Describe the turning point that occurs in Jurgis's life and the philosophy which he adopts as a result.
10. How satisfactory did you find the ending of *The Jungle*? Explain what might have happened differently had you written the novel.