

OLYMPIADS SCHOOL/GRADE 10 ENGLISH/HOMEWORK 3

NAME (FIRST AND LAST): _____ GRADE: _____

DAY/TIME/TEACHER: _____

We read a part of Jack London's short story, "To Build a Fire," while working on Homework 1 and 2. For Homework 3, we will finish reading it. The questions in the left column would help you follow the story. Respond to them in the blank space. Responses may be in point form, but try to be as clear as you can because your instructor will assess them. Write legibly.

"TO BUILD A FIRE" BY JACK LONDON

After a time he was aware of the first faraway 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 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 the 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 leg. 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.

Why does the man hail the excruciating pain with satisfaction?

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

Who experienced “controlled despair”? Why is the despair “controlled”?

Why does the man have to lift the fuel with the heels of his hands?

At this point, does the man know that he is in great danger?

Suppose you were in the man's position, would you implement the “wild idea”? Why, or why not?

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 whip-lashes 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 threshing 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

Why does the man want to stay calm?

Why does the man's upright position cause the dog to become less suspicious? Briefly explain the dog's point of view.

Why can't he do it?

Which sense does the man rely on to compensate for the loss of touch?

Before the man finally starts panicking, a "certain fear of death, dull and oppressive, came to him." Why is the fear dull and oppressive initially? Why is it "dull"? Why is "oppressive"?

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 anaesthetic. Freezing was not so bad as people thought. There were lots worse ways to die.

What does the man try to repress, and why does he do so?

Who is Mercury? Why would Jack London bring in Mercury at this point in the short story?

Is the narrator interested in portraying the man as a stoic person? Explain.

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 any more, 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.

– *End*

How is the ending of the short story ironic?

Vocabulary

Find three words from the selection that you are unfamiliar with and explain why you are curious about them.

1. I am curious about the word, " _____," because _____

_____.

2. I am curious about the word, " _____," because _____

_____.

3. I am curious about the word, " _____," because _____

_____.

LITERARY ANALYSIS

Respond to one of the following questions.

1. If you were to give the short story an alternative title or a subtitle, what would it be? Explain your choice.
2. Would the short story be better written from a first-person perspective, instead of a third-person perspective? Explain.

1 or 2 (Circle)

Question 1 grading rubric

| Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 | Level 4 |
|--|--|---|---|
| The alternative title or subtitle does not seem to have anything at all do with the story. The story/question might have been misread. | The alternative title or subtitle seems disconnected from the short story. | The alternative title or subtitle is relevant. | The alternative title or subtitle is very apt. |
| There is minimal engagement with the text. | There needs to be more engagement with the short story. | There is a discussion of specific moments in the short story. | The discussion of the alternative title or subtitle is grounded in evidence from the short story. |
| There are severe grammatical errors. | Grammatical errors sometimes block comprehension. | The grammatical errors are minor. | There are essentially no grammatical errors. |

Question 2 grading rubric

| Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 | Level 4 |
|---|---|---|---|
| The explanation is unclear. The story/question might have been misread. | There is an explanation of the first and/or third-person narrative, but it needs to be clearer. | There is an explanation of first and/or third-person narrative. | There is a careful explanation of the first <u>and</u> third-person narratives. |
| There is minimal engagement with the text. | There needs to be more engagement with the short story. | The discussion is grounded in a moment or moments in the short story. | The discussion is grounded in a well-chosen moment in the short story. |
| There are severe grammatical errors. | Grammatical errors sometimes block comprehension. | The grammatical errors are minor. | There are essentially no grammatical errors. |

GRAMMAR

SUBJECTS AND PREDICATES

- Every sentence has two main parts, a **complete subject** and a **complete predicate**.
- The **complete subject** includes all the words that tell who or what the sentence is about, including a noun or pronoun.
 EXAMPLES: The corner store rents videos.
 This plastic moose wallet reminds me of home.
- The **complete predicate** includes all the words that state the action or condition of the subject, including a verb.
 EXAMPLES: The corner store rents videos.
 This plastic moose wallet reminds me of home.

A. Draw a vertical line between the complete subject and the complete predicate in each sentence.

1. Shakespeare wrote many plays.
2. My dog likes to eat cereal for breakfast.
3. Cotton-candy-flavoured potato chips never really caught on.
4. The Rocky Mountains rose up suddenly before us.
5. The girl over there with the great batting arm is Marissa.
6. Several of us near the front of the roller coaster lost our lunch.
7. I thought long and hard about your kind offer before refusing it.
8. The books on the table need to be put away.
9. Your cousin Inigo would like to be a cartoonist.
10. Her big, blue, saucer-shaped eyes gazed back at me.

B. Add words to the subject and/or the predicate to expand the sentences that follow. Then draw a vertical line between the complete subject and the complete predicate in each sentence.

1. The thunder roared. _____

 2. My stomach growled. _____

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- The **simple subject** of a sentence is the main noun or pronoun in the complete subject. All other words in the complete subject modify or describe the simple subject.
EXAMPLE: A friend of Rohan's | dyed his hair blond.
- In commands, the subject is usually not stated, but *you* is the implied subject.
EXAMPLE: (You) | Let me see.
- The **simple predicate** of a sentence is a verb within the complete predicate. The simple predicate may be a one-word verb or a verb of more than one word.
EXAMPLES: That guy | dyed his hair blond.
He | will wash it out tomorrow.
- Sometimes the simple subject or predicate is also the complete subject or predicate.
EXAMPLES: Julian | dyed his hair blond.
My mother | grinned.

C. Draw a vertical line between the complete subject and complete predicate in each of the following sentences. Underline the simple subject once and the simple predicate twice. If the subject is implied, indicate the simple predicate only.

1. James Bond movies drive me crazy.
2. The school will be closed this week.
3. My oldest friend on earth might visit next month.
4. We have not seen each other for three years.
5. Su Mei's first ball landed out of bounds.
6. The walls in my room need painting.
7. Drum lessons would cost very little at that school.
8. The last house on the street has been sold.
9. Cover your mouth while yawning, young man!
10. This trivia game about Canada is teaching me a lot.

D. Add words to the simple subject and simple predicate given below. Draw a vertical line between the complete subject and the complete predicate in your finished sentences.

1. Grandmother skated. _____

2. Children sneezed. _____

THE END