



## The Jungle Upton Sinclair

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# Introduction

Since its first publication in 1906, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* has stirred generations of readers to outrage. It is the story of an economic system that destroys Jurgis Rudkus and his family, treating them no better than the cattle that are slaughtered and vivisected in the book's most horrific and memorable scenes. The novel is not only taught in English classes, as a powerful example of early-twentieth century naturalism, but it is also a perennial favorite of sociology teachers, who use it to convey just how terrible conditions for workers were a hundred years ago and how dangerous the threat of food contamination really was before corporate greed was put in check by government regulation. *The Jungle* is a rare example of a work of fiction that is so true to its source and so powerfully written that it changed the course of government regulation: it is generally credited with getting the 1906 Pure Food and Drug Act passed. The story starts with a family of Lithuanian immigrants moving into the Packingtown district of Chicago, hoping to find a decent place to live and to find jobs to support themselves. They are foiled at these basic requirements: everything costs more than it should, especially since real estate agents and merchants take advantage of their ignorance, and work, when it is available, is brutal and degrading. The book's first half is packed with the gruesome descriptions that have become its legacy, with details of diseased meat shoveled off dirty floors into sausage grinders and sick or injured people preparing meat. In the second half, Jurgis Rudkus, having lost his house and family, strikes out on his own, nearly starving on the streets, unable to find work. Stepping into a meeting-hall to get warm, he is enlightened to the Socialist Party's philosophy, and he goes on to read more and attend more meetings, confident that socialism is the solution to society's problems. By the end, the character of Jurgis is just barely significant, as his function is limited to just occasional agreement with the speeches that the author presents for the readers.

# Overview

Sinclair became a devotee of socialism in 1903 and considered *The Jungle* a forum for examining capitalism's exploitation of working men and women.

The narrative follows its protagonist, the Lithuanian immigrant Jurgis Rudkus, as he wrestles with a harsh environment where only the ruthless survive. The novel opens at Jurgis's *vesilija*, or Lithuanian wedding feast--a ceremony expressing individual hope and the reaffirmation of traditional values. Jurgis struggles against external conditions native to the Chicago stockyard but representative of an entire society dedicated to the values of capitalism. Sinclair introduces a political alternative and effective antidote to capitalistic excesses by describing Jurgis's eventual conversion to socialism. Although Sinclair was not completely satisfied with the mixture of rhetorical techniques he employed in *The Jungle*, his vivid descriptions of outrageous industrial practices quickly attracted public attention to the novel and stimulated social reform.

# Author Biography

Upton Sinclair is best known today as the author of *The Jungle*, which is probably a legacy he would accept, since it is true that this novel did indeed affect society in the way he wanted all of his books to do. He was a prolific writer throughout his long life, and everything he wrote was written with the intent of changing society. Sinclair was born in 1878 with a volatile social background: his mother came from a wealthy and respected Baltimore family, and his father, a salesman, struggled without much success to give her the lifestyle she had been accustomed to. One of the reasons his father was unsuccessful at business was that he was an alcoholic, which is why Sinclair, when he grew up, supported laws that prohibited the sale and use of alcohol (this cause was popular enough to be passed into federal law from 1920 to 1933, a period referred to as “Prohibition”). The first stories and books Sinclair published were not political in nature. When he was eighteen, he started selling stories to Street and Smith, a well-known publisher that printed popular fiction which was inspirational and usually poorly written. His first novels, published when he was in his early twenties, were romances, with titles like *Springtime Harvest* and *Prince Hagen*. Sinclair’s writing took a sharp turn toward social realism in 1904, with the publication of *Manassas*: in researching the history of slavery for this novel about a plantation owner’s son, he grew more and more outraged with the unfairness of American social structure, and his anger showed in his work.

After reading *Manassas*, Fred Warren, the publisher of the radical newspaper *Appeal to Reason*, issued a challenge to Sinclair to write a novel about current social problems: as a result, Sinclair went to Chicago in the autumn of 1904 to research the meat packing industry, and his research produced *The Jungle*. The book became a best-seller, and its graphic descriptions of the horrible sanitary conditions in the industry led to calls for government action. The huge companies that were obviously the models for the book, such as Swift, Armour, and Nelson Morris, claimed that Sinclair made up the horrors he described, but independent investigations confirmed conditions to be just as bad as he said, if not worse. In the end, government standards

for the handling of all food products became tougher because of *The Jungle*.

Sinclair went on to support changes in all aspects of American life. He arranged a communal living experiment in New Jersey, which lasted from 1906 until it burned down in 1914. In 1914 he used the same method that had worked for *The Jungle* when he went to Colorado to investigate a violent coal miners' strike and the oppressive conditions that caused it, resulting in the novel *King Cole*. Also written in this same way was his most successful novel, *Oil!*, published in 1927 and credited with weakening John D. Rockefeller's monopoly in the petroleum industry. In the 1920s Sinclair was one of the founders of the American Civil Liberties Union, which to this day provides support to people whose Constitutional rights are violated. In 1934 he was the candidate for Governor of California on the Democratic ticket: although he did not win, his strong showing brought national attention to his Socialist views. He continued writing throughout all of his social activity, winning a Pulitzer Prize in 1943 for *Dragon's Teeth*, a novel about Germany under the Nazis' control that was part of his eleven-book series about wealthy secret agent Lanny Budd. He died in 1968, having written ninety books of fiction, political history, social criticism and autobiography throughout his ninety-year life.

# About the Author

One of the most prolific writers in the history of American letters, Upton Beall Sinclair published ninety books and thousands of essays over the course of his career, most of his work focusing on the need for social and political reform. Born on September 20, 1878, in Baltimore, Maryland, Sinclair entered City College of New York at the age of fourteen and published pieces in several magazines while still an undergraduate.

He began work toward a master's degree at Columbia University but left in 1901 without completing the program. That same year his first novel, *Springtime and Harvest*, was published, but neither it nor any of his three subsequent novels met with favorable critical response.

With the publication of his fifth novel, *The Jungle*, in 1906, Sinclair suddenly established a reputation as one of America's preeminent writers and crusaders for reform; his expose of the meat-packing industry won him an audience with President Theodore Roosevelt and prompted the passage later that year of the U.S. Pure Food and Drugs Act.

While *The Jungle* focused on the destructive effect of capitalism on the lower classes, later works such as *The Metropolis* (1908) and *The Moneychangers* (1908) examined its corrupting influence on the upper class. *King Coal* (1917) targeted the atrocities of the mining industry much as *The Jungle* had focused on the meat-packing industry, but the public received the book with little enthusiasm. During the 1930s Sinclair was active in California politics, and in 1934 he ran for governor on the Democratic ticket. None of his Depression-era books contributed to his reputation as a novelist. Between 1940 and 1953 Sinclair published eleven novels about the adventures and shifting political allegiances--from Socialist to anti-Communist--of a character named Lanny Budd; one of them, *Dragon's Teeth* (1942), won a Pulitzer Prize. When Sinclair died in Bound Brook, New Jersey, on November 25, 1968, he left behind an awe-inspiring

volume of work: the depository of his writings at Indiana University's Lily Library weighs more than eight tons.

The Jungle's impact on early twentieth-century American society has insured its continued popularity among students of that period's social history.

Ironically, Sinclair's position in world literature--few American authors have been so widely translated--is the result of this one work's social effect rather than critical appraisal of its literary merit. Sinclair at his best was a muckraker, a propagandist who used his writing as a means toward achieving social progress. Although none of his other works proved as popular, *The Jungle* brought Sinclair the kind of honor he sought: the satisfaction of having changed society for the better.

# Plot Summary

## Life in Packingtown

The novel's first seventeen chapters, roughly half of its length, examine the struggles and compromises faced by one extended family from the eastern European country of Lithuania. They attempt to settle into a comfortable life in America, only to find themselves destroyed by the economic system. The book starts with hope, with the marriage of Jurgis Rudkus to Ona Lukoszaite. At the wedding, the key people in their lives are introduced--his father, her cousin, her stepmother who has six children, and so on. The wedding scene also introduces a sense of how strict their budget is and how greatly they fear unemployment. The narrative then slips backward by a year to explain their situation by presenting their courtship in the Imperial Forest in Lithuania, the financial disaster that occurred when her father died, and the decision to move to America. It soon becomes clear that this is Jurgis Rudkus' story, since most of the details related are about him. On first immigrating, Jurgis is ecstatic and confident, and by the time of his marriage he still feels able to fend for his family, although responsibilities make his life difficult. A major financial burden is the house that the family buys: although they take much caution before signing for it, the real estate agent takes advantage of their poor grasp of English and the monthly payments turn out to be considerably more than the sum that they had to struggle to meet. To meet expenses, Ona goes to work sewing casings on hams, Jurgis' father Antanas takes a lowly job sweeping floors, Cousin Maria paints cans, and Ona's stepmother has to leave her children unsupervised to work in a sausage factory. With all of them working at different jobs in the meatpacking industry, the book is able to present the horrible details that are the book's main claim to fame: the methods of disguising tainted meat with brine, or putting it in sausage; the rats and vermin that crawl across the meat and are packaged with it; the bribes to inspectors. The family's financial situation continues to worsen, and their fear of losing their home increases. Jurgis twists his ankle and has to be bedridden, forcing him to later take a job in the toxic fertilizer plant. Cousin Marija loses her position for complaining that she has been

cheated on her pay, and takes a job trimming rancid meat. Ona develops “womb trouble” from going back to work too soon after their son’s birth. When Ona is pregnant with a second child, she fails to come home one snowy night, and Jurgis finds out that the foreman where she works has forced her to work in a house of prostitution downtown, threatening the jobs of all of her family if she refused. Jurgis rushes to the plant, finds the man, and beats him bloody, for which Jurgis is sent away to jail for a month.

## **Travelling Alone**

Jurgis has trouble finding his family upon his release from jail, because they have been evicted and the house has been sold to new owners. After asking around, he finds them living in an unheated attic, where, the very night he arrives, Ona is giving birth. Without money they cannot get adequate medical help, and Ona and the baby die. Because the man he assaulted was influential, Jurgis’ name is blacklisted by meatpackers throughout the country. With considerable trouble he finds a job at a harvester plant, but it shuts down nine days after his hiring. A social worker gets him a job at a steel mill near the Indiana border. When he finds out that his young son has drowned while playing in a flooded street, Jurgis feels no more bond to city life, and he leaves town on a freight train, travelling the countryside in the fresh air and sleeping in fields and barns. This life reminds him of his home country, and he is happy with it, but when winter comes he returns to Chicago. Working briefly at digging tunnels under the city for the subway system, his arm is broken in an accident, leaving him in danger of freezing in the streets. He runs into a rich drunk man who takes him home to supper: this man gives Jurgis a hundred-dollar bill to pay the cab driver and then, forgetting, has his butler pay the cab. After dinner, when the rich man falls asleep at the table, the butler throws Jurgis out, and when he tries to cash the hundred-dollar bill at a saloon, the bartender will only give him change for a dollar, denying that he brought in anything more. Jurgis assaults the man and ends up in jail again.

## Life of Crime

In jail Jurgis renews his acquaintance with Jack Duane, whom he met during his last jail term; this time, however, he agrees to become Duane's partner in crime. When they are released they perform a simple, vicious street mugging, cracking a man's skull and taking his wallet and leaving him to freeze. Jurgis' life of crime progresses quickly, from street crimes to gambling to political graft. The political boss of the Packingtown district enlists Jurgis to assure that a weak politician of the opposing political party will defeat the Socialist candidate that their own party has nominated, and so he arranges a job for Jurgis at the same packinghouse that he used to work at, because party regulars cannot campaign for the opposition. With the election won, Jurgis stays on, and when the workers go out on strike the political bosses offer him the chance to become a foreman by staying and working with the scab laborers that they bring in. Jurgis is richer than ever, thanks to his life of crime. It all falls apart when he runs into the man who raped his wife and forced her into prostitution: he assaults the man again, losing his job and political connections, and it costs him the three hundred dollars he has saved to stay out of jail.

## Socialism

Alone and on the street again, Jurgis runs into an old friend who tells him where to find Cousin Marija, giving him an address that turns out to be a house of prostitution. Marija explains that she is taking care of what is left of the family with her wages as a prostitute, and that she would not quit her job, even if Jurgis could support them all financially, because she is addicted to opium. One day, Jurgis goes into a meeting hall to warm up, not caring about the meeting being held, but a beautiful woman behind him notices him dozing and suggests that he might be interested if he paid attention. He listens, and he becomes enthralled with socialist philosophy. After the speech he goes to talk with the meeting chairman and is assigned to a party member who tutors him, giving him readings and explaining them to him. When he finally lands a job as a porter at a hotel, his surprised mentor explains that the hotel owner is one of the state's

leading socialists. Jurgis is then able to sit in on conversations when famous socialists pass through town. The book ends with Jurgis and his socialist friends gathering in a hall on election night, exuberant about the huge increase in votes that Socialist candidates are gathering all across America in the 1904 elections.

# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

The story begins by introducing a Lithuanian family en route to a family wedding reception being held in the Chicago stockyards (a wedding reception is called a *veselija* in Lithuania.) The character of Marija, who is in charge of details for her cousin's marriage, is introduced first. She is a tough woman, and as she scurries around making last-minute preparations, the sixteen year-old bride, Ona, makes her appearance. Ona has just married Jurgis, who is as tall and broad as Ona is small and delicate-boned.

This wedding reception is being held in the Chicago stockyards. Ona and her family do not have much money, but they hold fast to their Lithuanian tradition of a large wedding party. The food and music are plentiful and no one is denied entry to the reception. Ona's stepmother Elzbieta is there, and she is helping to serve food.

There is lively music by a three-person band, and the leader of this band is Tamoszius, an exceptionally talented violin player. Everyone seems to be exceedingly drunk and happy. The first few pages hint at nothing that could be a cause of worry for these people. It seems like a normal wedding reception.

The first hint of tragedy is told in the form of a story about two wedding guests, Jadvyta and Mikolas. They have been engaged five years, but Mikolas has hurt himself working as a beef-boner. He keeps getting blood poisoning from his hazards at work, and so they have not been able to raise enough money for a marriage.

The wedding reception continues in a flurry of activity, and as the band winds down and starts again anew, Marija threatens them and bids them not to stop. There is a distinct feeling of "capturing the moment" at this reception, as if the people do not get to have this much fun very often.

A *veselija* comes with a sort of unwritten law in Lithuania. People are expected to chip in money to cover the expenses. This *veselija* is being held in America, however, and evidently, that means that all bets are off, including the payment tradition. The families of Ona and Jurgis do not receive enough money to pay for the wedding. Jurgis responds to this the way he responds to most hardships throughout the novel. He says that he will "work harder" to pay off the money.

The celebration goes on into the wee hours of the morning, even though no one has been allowed to take a day off work the next day. There are so many people willing to work in their places that people in the meatpacking district are viewed as expendable. If Ona had wanted to take a day off the day after she was married, she would return the next day to find her job gone.

The night ends, and Jurgis carries Ona home in his arms. She is exhausted, and he tells her that she does not have to go to work the next day. Ona refuses to accept this. She says that she cannot afford to miss work.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

An emotion of optimism pervades Chapter 1 as we witness a wedding reception that seems exceptionally lavish. Sinclair begins the story with a description of a Lithuanian family trying to hold fast to their old-world traditions in the Chicago meatpacking district. Closed up in a reception hall, it is easy for the guests to pretend that they are carefree and that their days are not full of hardship.

During this chapter, we begin to sense the seeming futility that is this Chicago meatpacking world. Ona and Jurgis have just gotten married, and instead of continuing to celebrate, they are left lamenting on how they will pay for their celebration. When the family was in Lithuania, this worry would never have entered their minds. Back then, a *veselija* was paid for by those who attended it.

Even through this joyous event, we as readers see the dark shroud that American society has placed over these peoples' lives. We will find out in later chapters just how dark that shroud is.

# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

Jurgis is young, strong, and full of optimism. Though people have warned him about the hardships of his new life in America, he thinks that everyone needs to stop complaining. After all, he is strong and can do anything. So, when he stands outside of Brown and Company's "Central Time Station" looking for a job, he is picked quickly. At this point, this is his second day in Chicago.

Jurgis is from a part of Lithuania called Brelovicz, which is also known as the Imperial Forest. He fell in love with Ona about a year and a half before their marriage, and when her father died and Ona's family met with financial hardship, he was able to have her. Ona's brother Jonas decided they should all journey to America. The list of the family who go to America is: Ona, Jonas, Jurgis, Elzbieta (Ona's stepmother), Antonas (Jurgis's father) and Elzbieta's six children.

The family was excited to leave Lithuania at first. After all, people were saying that one could get rich in America. They set off for America in the summertime and almost immediately met with misfortune. Someone who called himself an "agent" swindled them out of a good deal of money.

Jonas had heard of an old friend who found his fortune in the Chicago stockyards, so that's where the family was headed. They smelled the stench of the stockyards before they could see them. As they rode on a train and looked out the windows, they noticed that the land became more and more desolate the closer they came to Chicago.

One of the first things they noticed when they arrived were the strange sounds. The noise turned out to be the virtual screams of thousands of cattle and pigs. Elzbieta quickly finds a friend she remembered from Lithuania, a man who was making his living as a delicatessen owner. He takes the family to a boardinghouse.

The scenery is bleak, dark, and depressing. Rows of brick buildings line the streets. So many people clutter the streets that it is difficult for the family to walk. Flies are buzzing on everything. The odor of the place is so strong and pervading that it is almost overwhelming. Still, the family is extremely excited to be in America.

Ona and Jurgis go for a walk to examine their new home. What they find is a huge garbage dump with children climbing all over it and a huge hole filled with dirty water that is cut up and sold for ice in the winter. Jurgis cannot believe how lucky he and his family are. He rejoices in being in "the land of the free."

## Chapter 2 Analysis

Jurgis is not unlike the mythical tragic hero. The reader "sees" the bad situation Jurgis and his family are in long before he does. As he and Ona tour the city, they are in awe of the vast manpower that seems to be making such a difference. Jurgis in particular is filled with pride to be a part of the vast human "machine" that keeps the stockyards running.

The false sense of security that comes with "The American Dream" is a main theme of this chapter. Jurgis and his family truly have no idea what they are getting into by moving to America. All they have heard is hearsay about how a man who works hard can live as he please in this foreign land.

Jurgis blindly praises capitalism as he is awed by the sheer massiveness of the stockyards. To undertake such massive projects seems an amazing feat to him. Little does he know that this "American Dream" is to tear his family apart.

It was so simple for the family to move to Chicago. What becomes difficult, and later obviously impossible, is ever leaving again.

# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Jurgis's friend, the delicatessen owner, guides Jurgis to find his first job. It is not a big problem that Jurgis doesn't speak English. The jobs at the stockyards are pretty equal to that of a cog in a machine. Every person has one particular task that they perform over and over again. Knowledge of the English language is not a requirement. During the early part of this chapter, the family takes a visit to the heart of the stockyards and sees some horrible events unfurl.

A line of cattle strung out as far as they can see is being methodically killed. They then go to "the killing floor," where pigs are being killed, and the line of these animals never seems to stop. The whole thing is shocking, but very business-like, as the employees go about their jobs methodically and with seemingly no regard to the death of the animals.

The narrator (which really is Sinclair) mentions the cruelty of slaughtering the innocent animals, likening them to creatures that have wants and desires, just like a man does. Jurgis echoes this thought, for, as he watches the seemingly endless slaughter, he mentions that he is very glad that he is not a hog. One of the most shocking passages of the book can be found on page 43 of this chapter, as the narrator describes exactly what happens to an animal that reaches the killing bed.

A government inspector stops to talk with the visitors, and it does not seem to bother him that a whole line of carcasses are going by on a conveyor belt without being checked while he is conversing. Jurgis notices the vast efficiency of the whole operation. Every bit of the pig is used; even the entrails are turned into sausage casings. He swells with pride to be a part of this important operation.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

This chapter is exceedingly shocking in its description of the killing of animals. Jurgis and his family quickly learn what they are in for if they are to be stockyard employees. The graphic nature of the killing lends a reader the feeling of the horrible quickness of nature; the animals were going about their business one day, feeling just fine as individual beings with their own thoughts and wishes, when they were suddenly round up and slaughtered.

The theme of nature as a horrible, relentless thing is present throughout this novel. Truly, survival of the fittest is a main concern in the stockyards for the humans who dwell there. However, the animals are not even given a choice. They are mercilessly slaughtered.

Sinclair gives the animals human-like qualities in this chapter, mentioning that they have their own minds and their own agendas before they are ruthlessly murdered. However, this is really the only time he does that in terms of the animals. This is not an anti-meat-eating book. It is, however, an expose of the filthy and disgusting practices that happened in the slaughterhouses.

Jurgis and his family still have stars in their eyes at this point. They are shocked by the enormity of the killings in the slaughterhouses, but the excitement of being in America does not escape them. Jurgis finds a job, the rest of the family (except for the children) will begin to look for work soon, and life is looking rosy, though a little bloody and violent.

# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

As mentioned before, the language barrier does not pose a huge roadblock to Jurgis in terms of getting a job. However, when he shows up for his first day of work, he does not understand that he is to go inside the factory and locate the boss. Instead, he waits outside with the rest of a huge throng of unemployed workers. When he does figure out what to do, it takes him about two minutes to learn his job. He sweeps the entrails from steer carcasses into a steel trap. There is so much blood that Jurgis is virtually swimming in it.

When Jurgis returns home, he hears the good news that Jonas and Marija have secured employment. Jurgis is adamant that Elzbieta and Ona stay home with the children. In addition, he hopes that the oldest child, Stanislovas, will go to school with the rest of the children. He does not want the kids to work. Now that they are in this land of opportunity, they need to get an education.

One sad truth is that Jurgis's father Antonas cannot find work, as he is too old and no one will hire him. The family comes across a pamphlet about buying a house, and they begin to think about inquiring about it. At the end of the week, Jurgis feels confident that the family may be able to afford the venture. It turns out that Ona and Elzbieta have to meet with the housing agent, as the men and Marija cannot miss work.

Ona and Elzbieta do not understand the wording on the contract, and though they sign it, they are sure they are being cheated. When Jurgis returns home from work, he goes to the agent and demands to know the truth. The agent calls a lawyer (who obviously has been hired by the agent) and the lawyer tells the family what they want to hear.

The paper says the house is to be considered "rented" for nine years until the mortgage is paid off. What the lawyer does not tell them, and the reader finds this out in later

chapters, is that the mortgage payments accrue interest each month, growing higher and higher until it seems impossible that a family could pay them.

#### Chapter 4 Analysis

Trouble is brewing in the air as soon as the family follows the directions on a circular that says buying a house is better than renting. Though the chapter ends with a lawyer's assertion that the wording on the contract is completely legal and fine, something is not right.

Ona and Elzbieta give the money to the agent because they fear he will think they do not believe his words. This gullible innocence of the immigrant was completely maligned in the meatpacking industries. People like the agent preyed upon trusting people like Jurgis's family.

Even though the family tries hard to make sure they are doing the correct thing by placing a down payment on the house, how are they to know? They only speak and understand a few English words, and one has to have a roof over one's head in order to work. They are trapped.

The chapter ends on an optimistic note. How much hope these people have! A reader cannot help but wonder how far people like this family could have gone in American society if the society had not been so corrupt.

# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

Now the family has a new house, and they furnish it by renting a selection of modest chairs and tables. They find it very helpful that there are advertisements everywhere "helping" them make the right decisions. Jurgis and Ona have a great time shopping for necessities for the house. There is not enough money available to buy luxuries, but they enjoy themselves as they buy everyday things.

Jurgis is beginning to realize that his is the most demanding work he has ever done in his life. He likes it, though. He is young and strong and seems to have endless energy. It is during this chapter that Jurgis is first approached to become part of a union, and he declines, thinking that a union goes directly against the American ideal of individuality. Why would he want to join a collective society when his very presence makes the "machine" work better?

Jurgis starts to make friends with some of his co-workers, and they tell him horrible stories about workers who slip and kill themselves and of men who slip and fall into vats and are rendered into yard. Jurgis is horrified, of course, and he can't decide if the stories are true or not. It turns out that Marija got her job because of the misfortune of another woman, and Jurgis soon learns that the man who worked his job before him had been smashed and virtually destroyed.

Jurgis sees a gruesome practice during his work as a "shoveler of guts." He describes how pregnant cows are slaughtered right along with the rest of them, and their unborn calves are as well.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

A little bit of the innocence is gone from the family during this chapter, as Marija and Jurgis learn the reasons that they have their jobs. Jurgis still holds tight to his optimism, however, and sees the grumbling of other men as worthless complaining.

The mention of how "helpful" the family finds the advertisements is yet another example of their innocence. Advertisements are propaganda for a certain purpose, usually to sell a product. Jurgis's family sees these as helpful suggestions, not as misleading statements.

It is interesting to note that the narrator remarks on how innocent the family was to this propaganda. Remember that *The Jungle* is a sort of political propaganda itself, with its socialist themes.

The killing of the pregnant cows serves to illustrate the ruthless nature of the killing beds at the slaughterhouses. In the name of time, the slaughterers choose not to let the calf be born. The meat of a pregnant cow is described as "unfit to eat," but the packers order their workers to process it anyway. No one is spared.

# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

Though the novel starts with the scene of Jurgis and Ona's wedding, at this point we are still dealing with the flashback of the family's first weeks in America. Ona wants very much to get married as soon as possible, and she brings up the idea of her seeking employment. This way, she says, they will be able to afford the wedding quicker. Jurgis can't argue against that. He loves Ona and can't wait to marry her.

During this time, another Lithuanian family befriends them. This family tells them about the family who used to live in the house Jurgis and his family have just moved into. It turns out that the house is not brand-new, as the agent had said. In fact, it was cheaply made and was freshly painted every time another family moved in. They learn that almost every family who has lived in the house before them has had a family member die of consumption (tuberculosis.)

As if this isn't shocking enough, the family then learns the reason people cannot seem to pay off the house. Interest is charged on the mortgage payments. At this point, it becomes obvious that Ona is going to have to work, and so is little Stanislovas. Both of them get jobs, and then the optimism comes back again as Ona and Jurgis figure that now they will be able to get married sooner than they thought.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

A reader cannot think of the futility of Jurgis's family's toil to remain alive without thinking of John Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. No matter how many times they think they are coming out ahead, something always happens to shoot their hopes down. This chapter, the news about the interest on their mortgage is the bad news.

To make matters worse, they seem to inhabit a very unlucky residence. To hear how many families lived in their house before them is not a heartening thing. The news of the "consumption curse" does not make it any better.

# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Finally, Ona and Jurgis experience the joy of their wedding. Then they are faced with the horror of the debt that accrued from the event. Ona and Jurgis would have been fine without a lavish wedding, but Elzbieta would have none of it. The tradition in Lithuania was to have that type of event, and so they had it.

The day after the wedding is horrible. The adults are sick with worry about the debt they now owed, and little Stanislovas has indulged too much and feels physically ill. Still, they have to go to work. Knowing that interest has to be paid drives them all. Jurgis feels a deep need to deliver Ona from this life of hardship.

The house becomes totally infested with bugs. The family doesn't have enough money to buy effective means of controlling them, so they swarm everywhere and make life miserable. When they do give in and buy some insect poison, the family is swindled and given bait that does nothing.

Rain pours down for weeks, and the family does not own any waterproof clothing. Soon winter approaches, and with it the line of the unemployed that besieges the factories each day. If a man or woman cannot make it to work, there are many people to take their place. Therefore, Jurgis's family must persevere. They truly have no choice.

During this time, Stanislovas witnesses a boy whom he works with have his ears broken off due to frostbite. From that point on, it is difficult for Jurgis to get the boy to leave the house in the morning. Jurgis often carries him on his broad shoulders to keep him out of the snow.

The narrator tells of the men on the killing beds, about how the blood that stuck to them froze solid because there were no means of heating the slaughterhouses. This is when Jurgis first starts to drink.

There are many places, saloons and such, that advertise hot meals. The problem is that a diner is required to buy at least one drink when he comes in. Usually, that leads to two or three, because people usually saw someone they knew who would buy him a drink, and then the person would have to reciprocate. At this point in the story, Jurgis only has the one drink he is required to take. He does not become drunk.

The winter threatens to kill the entire family, and they often go to sleep with all of their clothes on, shivering through the night until it is time for work yet again.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

The undoing of this family happens stage-by-stage, bit-by-bit, until they are literally torn apart. Winter has come, and with it a whole new slew of misfortune. The family were beginning to think that they were living hard lives a few weeks after they arrived in America, but this is a completely different hell.

During this chapter, optimistic emotions are not referenced. There seems to be only one goal here: staying alive until the snow melts. An event that leaves Stanislovas permanently scarred reminds us of the need for child labor laws. If the boy could have stayed in school instead of having to go out and support his family, he would never have been privy to the sight of a poor boy's ears falling off because of frostbite.

A reader is reminded of the uncaring nature of the bosses of the slaughterhouses. So many men and women are virtually freezing to death out on the streets that there is no reason for them to improve working conditions. Still, Jurgis does not consider joining a union. He does, however, start drinking regularly. Even though he is only drinking one drink at a time at this point, it is a start. Eventually, deeper into the story, drinking will become more and more of a crutch. Now it is simply a means for him to get a hot

meal and to stay warm.

# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

In the midst of the winter misery, Marija comes upon a good time in her life regardless of the weather. She falls in love with Tamoszius, the violin player, and he takes her with him to the events that he is commissioned to play. During these events she is compelled to eat the lavish food and to bring some home for the people shivering inside her house.

Tamoszius and Marija become engaged and decide to marry in the Spring. Jurgis worries about losing Marija's income. Times are looking good for Marija. She is getting paid well for painting cans. Then tragedy happened. Marija's canning factory shut down.

There is now a slump in the work all around the slaughterhouses. Many times Jurgis only is called upon to work a few hours a day. He begins making less and less money. The bosses of the slaughterhouses cheat the men badly; they round down their hours of work. Now is the time when Jurgis finds the idea of a union to be favorable. He joins, and is heartened by the collective sentiment of the disgruntled men.

Then Marija's canning factory is shut down. Jurgis turns to the Union with renewed fervor, seeing himself as part of a brotherhood that can change the horrible conditions under which he and his family live.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Every time life seems to get better for these people, it quickly gets worse than it was before. Marija sees renewed reason for optimism when she meets and gets engaged to Tamoszius, but the loss of her job puts a damper on her enthusiasm.

It is in this chapter that we first see the obvious mention of capitalism in the form of the union that Jurgis and his family join. Jurgis mentions that he now lives in "a free country," and therefore that means that a group may join together and have an impact on how their lives are lived. He soon will discover that being in the right group makes a big difference on whether things get done or not.

Sinclair's display of capitalism as antagonistic to the workingman and woman in the stockyards is obvious. In further chapters, we discover the extent of this American system, which took immigrants in, chewed them up to use every last bit of their energy and life force, and spit them out with no regard to their well being.

# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Jurgis has had it with being swindled, and he wants to understand what is transpiring in his union meetings. He decides that it is now time for him to learn English. The children who are still in school help him, and he understands democracy for the first time as part of the union. He starts to understand politics.

Jurgis decides to sign naturalization papers, which entitle him to vote, and he soon learns that his vote is very valuable. Different politicians offer to buy it, and he takes the offer of the one who offers the most money. Jurgis began to understand the whole American system of voting and democracy in this way.

Jurgis begins to learn of many of the corrupt practices of the packers. He finds out that the Democratic party always wins local elections, and that Mike Scully, the leader of this party, owns many of the despicable parts of Packingtown, including the dump Ona and Juries had seen their first day in Chicago, the one that had children climbing over it like ants in search of crumbs.

Some of the most diseased meat were sent to pickle rooms, and it was in one of these rooms that Antanas, Jurgis's father, worked until he died one night in his sleep. If a man had a sore on his hand and got the pickling brine on it, it would develop into a debilitating sore and he would be put out of work.

Jurgis also learns of the abhorrent, unhygienic nature of the food he is helping to produce. He speaks of waste products being sold as premium foodstuffs, and garbage scraps passed off as edible. The men who work in the cooking and fertilizer rooms cannot even come near those in the general population, because the smell of them is so pungent and disgusting. Perhaps most shocking is the account Jurgis heard of the men who fall into vats and are rendered into lard. The machine of the slaughterhouses

evidently stops for no man's fall.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

Jurgis realizes that his ignorance of the English language makes him susceptible to deception. As he learns the language, and as he listens to his fellow union members, he becomes enraged and disgusted at what he hears. The blatant disregard of the bosses for their employees is evident. The disasters that happen on the job are many and horrible.

This chapter is all about Jurgis and his internal struggle. It is difficult to find optimism in the midst of so many tales of horror, but Jurgis still has the union as his source of hope. When he sells his vote, he begins to understand the way America works. Unfortunately, his family needs money so badly that he cannot exert his own influence and vote the way he'd like.

He has to sell his vote to the highest bidder, which seems hypocritical because he is a member of a union that denounces the officials who are being elected. What can he do, though? He has no choice at this point but to try and survive.

One is reminded of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. When one's basic needs are met, a person may achieve self-realization. Right now Jurgis cannot afford such luxuries as fully asserting his own opinion. Survival is the number one object to him and his family.

# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

Spring has come, and with it no increase in work. Marija still has not found another job since the can factory has closed, and has had to give up the idea of marrying Tamoszius. The family is desperate and going broke. The house is falling apart and there is now insurance to be paid on the house, which they had not been informed of until this moment.

Now, instead of the cold, they has to deal with a heat wave that was causing men to drop dead on the killing beds of sunstroke. There is no place for the men to wash their hands, so when they eat their lunches and suppers, they swallow as much blood as they do food.

When Marija's workplace finally re-opens, Marija promptly loses her job because she fought for her rights. To add to all the misery, Ona became pregnant and had to continue working. Finally, Marija gets another job as a beef-trimmer, and Jurgis starts swearing that if he has to stop eating so they could afford a doctor for the birth of his and Ona's child, that's what he will do.

Ona gives birth to a large baby boy whom she and Jurgis name "Antonas," after his dead father. Jurgis falls in love with the little baby. He can't wait to get home after work to see him, and mourns the time he has to stay away.

As for Ona, she has to go back to work immediately. Elzbieta stays home and feeds Antonas milk bought at the local store; milk they do not know is adulterated and thinned out so that the sellers can make a profit. Ona has to go back to work so quickly that she never has time to fully recover from the birth. For the rest of her life, she will have physical troubles stemming from her quick return to toil.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

Springtime is supposed to be a time of renewal, of fresh starts and new chances. This is not the case for Jurgis's family. The stockyards have had a drought of business for a while now, and the family is barely getting by. The one bright note in their dark world is Ona's baby, Antonas.

The horrible, non-compromising way that nature has to bring misery upon men is examined in this chapter, as just as quickly as the winter leaves, the horrible heat begins. The social injustice of a society that mistreats its workers comes to light when Marija loses her job.

Marija notices an injustice, and she speaks out about it. When she is fired, she cannot believe it. Even at this point in time, when her family has endured so much hardship, she still believes in the power of one voice. After all, this is America, where everyone has a chance at freedom, right? Not in this place.

# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

Finally, summer comes again, and with it more business. Jurgis begins to make more money. The bosses keep speeding up the assembly lines as much as they can, and the work is brutal and hot. Marija gets her wages as a beef-trimmer cut in half, and there is really nothing she can do about it. A girl at the place where she works decides to rally the workers, and raises a red flag and marches out in the street to rebel. She loses her job, and nothing happens.

Jurgis learns around this time that the place he lives in, this Packingtown, as it is called, is not made out of just singular businesses. Every one of them is part of something called The Beef Trust. All of the business leaders get together and fix prices and wages, so no worker can ever find much higher wages anywhere.

Marija starts to save money again, and starts to hope that she and Tamoszius can get married. She invests her money at a bank, and when there is a run on this same bank, she hurries to get her money out. It turns out to only be a scare, and Marija now must keep the money at home.

Voting time comes again, and even though Jurgis now knows that selling his vote is wrong, he still must do it to buy food for the family. And then winter comes again. Stanislovas gets wrapped up in blankets and thrown over Jurgis's shoulder every morning so he can get to work without freezing to death.

One day a steer gets lose and Jurgis twists his ankle badly. He is out of work, just like that. The company doctor says that he has to be out of work for at least a month. The only good part of this whole ordeal is that Jurgis now can sit at home and watch his baby, Antonas.

Sinclair tells of the food the family buys as a big expense to them. They don't know any better, but the smoked sausages that they buy often are stuffed with potato-flour, which is the waste of the potato, and barely have any nutritional value. Everyone in the house is constantly hungry, because they aren't getting enough nutrients.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

Jurgis is told he cannot file for money from his company (a sort of worker's compensation) when he hurts his ankle, and of course, no one at the company is going to admit to him if he really does deserve it. Therefore, he finds himself at home, unable to help support his family, and this is very frustrating for him.

In this chapter, another aspect of the meatpacking industry is revealed: that of the doctored food that was sold illegally. The use of potato flour in the family's smoked sausages is just one example of the disgusting ways the packers stretched their dollars to the max. The entrails that Jurgis shoveled every day were used in different foods.

Often, Jurgis would see rats and rat droppings on piles of food, and the food was packed and sold just like that. The meatpacking industry was truly "pulling the wool over the eyes of the American public," and their workers were suffering the most from it.

# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

Jurgis goes back to Brown's after three weeks and gets his job back only because his boss throws out the man who had taken his place. By the end of the day, he can't stand the pain anymore, and has to go back to the doctor. He had twisted a tendon and was ordered to remain in bed for two months. The family at this point is scared to death that they will not survive.

Stanislovas gets a horrible case of frostbite soon after Jurgis tries to go back to work. From that moment on, Jurgis has to beat the boy to get him to go to work. Jurgis becomes angry and restless having to stay at home.

The kids start making money, and Jurgis starts to like his confinement. After all, he hasn't had a break in a while. When Jurgis finally goes back to work, he finds that his job has been given to someone else. This time the boss does not fire the man to give Jurgis back his job.

Jurgis becomes an unemployed wanderer, going about the city every day looking for work, and then coming home to play with the baby. He tries to use his union ties, but no one can seem to help him get a job. He begins to realize that now that Brown's has gotten the best of his youth and vitality, they are throwing him away, discarding him like a piece of trash for someone younger and stronger.

In the midst of all this tragedy, Jonas deserts the family and they never hear from him again. The family has to send the young children out to work, and they never return to school again. The kids get jobs selling papers, and sometimes they don't come home at night. This worries Elzbieta, but there is no other choice but to let the young ones work.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

This is the chapter where Jurgis really begins to become undone. Bit by bit, all of his hopes for his family are being dashed. When the kids have to go to work, it is almost the last straw. Though it adds more income to the family coffers, Jurgis cannot get work now and therefore the family is no better off than they were before. It's not that Jurgis is not trying to find work; it's just that there are so many other unemployed immigrants in the city that he no longer stands out. He has lost a lot of his muscle during his confinement at home, so he no longer looks like a strong man.

# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

Immediately at the beginning of this chapter, one of Elzbieta's children dies. The narrator suspects that the death is due to the sausage that he ate the morning of his death, which may have contained tuberculosis. The rest of the family honestly doesn't care that much, as the child was a nuisance, but Elzbieta is crushed.

Jurgis finally gives in and gets a job at a fertilizer plant. The noxious odors he encounters during his work never leave his skin. He oozes fertilizer and phosphates and vomits often because of the horrible odors seeping into him. When he came home, the whole family had to vomit because of it. A fertilizer worker is on the very lowest of the totem pole of workers.

Elzbieta leaves her youngest child at home to take care of the baby, and she goes and gets work at a sausage factory. Sinclair discusses the sausage making as a very efficient business that was impressive if you didn't look at the poor people who had to operate the machinery.

Elzbieta's factory deals with spoiled hams, which they turn into sausages. The people who buy the sausages are never told how rancid the ham is that makes them. She hates her work. It is tedious and horrible. In addition, the family still has six years before they can even pay off their house!

Jurgis starts to crave alcohol as a form of escape. Antanas gets chicken pox and is miserable. Ona becomes pregnant again, and she becomes troubled, exhausted, and sick.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

This is one of the most depressing chapters of this book. Finally, a member of the family dies as a direct result of the meatpacking industry. The tubercular pork that the child of Elzbieta eats most likely is the reason for his death.

Jurgis must stoop to the lowest of the low in taking a job at a fertilizer plant. Those who work in fertilizer are described as facing certain death after a matter of time. Their bodies become full of the noxious chemicals and there is no saving them.

Elzbieta finally sees with her own eyes how horrible and corrupt the meatpacking industry is. So far, she has stayed home and taken care of the children. Now, she is exposed to the horrors firsthand. This chapter showcases the true undoing of Jurgis, as he begins to crave alcohol as a release from his daily life. Ona seems to be dying of exhaustion and depression.

# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

Packingtown workers had a saying that "everything was used of the pig except the squeal." By this, they meant that every last bit of the pig was used to make food. Even rotten, rancid meat was passed off as normal. "Smoked" sausages were doctored with borax and other chemicals instead of really being smoked, because smoking was expensive.

Elzbieta becomes completely depressed from working in the cellar of the sausage-making area, and when she meets Jurgis and Ona to walk home, none of them say a word. Sinclair mentions in the chapter, though, that none of the souls of the workers in this family are dead. They are merely buried under great exhaustion.

Jurgis continues to drink — it's the only way he can escape the horrors of his everyday life. Ona falls into a deeper despair than before. Sinclair describes theirs as "a battle that has no end." Ona develops a cough like the one that killed old Antanas, Jurgis's father. Plus, she is pregnant again. Jurgis is overcome with worry about her, and he cannot help weeping at night.

## Chapter 14 Analysis

Conditions for this family continue to worsen, though Sinclair makes note that "their souls are not dead." What a horrible thing it is to squash such strong souls as these people have? To them, it seems only right that if they do everything they can to stay alive, they should be able to at least exist.

It is becoming readily apparent that "doing their best" in this society of Packingtown is just not good enough. Ona is becoming progressively worse, and every time Jurgis drinks he is reminded that if he were a single man, he would have enough money to

keep himself alive. With a family, though, there seems to be no chance. He feels guilty for feeling like this, and so he weeps at night.

# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

Ona begins having what seem to be panic attacks, times when she cannot control her weeping. Elzbieta tries to convince Jurgis that she is acting this way because she is pregnant, but Jurgis does not believe her, and for good reason. Winter beckoned again, and everyone worked late into the night. After all, more food had to be processed for Christmas dinners.

A bad snowstorm happens one night, and Ona does not come home. Jurgis is crazy with worry and inquires everywhere about her. Finally, she returns home and it is discovered that she was pressured into prostituting herself. It turns out that her boss, Connor, told her that she would lose her job and he would make sure the rest of the family lost theirs if she did not give in to him. Jurgis listens to the whole story, and then, in an uncontrollable furor, storms out, finds Connor and beats him to a bloody pulp. The night ends with Jurgis getting arrested.

## Chapter 15 Analysis

This shocking chapter can be called the climax of the book. Here Ona has gone the lowest she could possibly go, and it's because she feels as if she has no choice if she wants to help her family. Nothing good can come from Jurgis's reaction as he leaves the house with full intent to kill Connor. The reader finds out that this is not the first time Ona has had to submit to Connor. This explains the anxiety attacks she has been having.

# Chapter 16

## Chapter 16 Summary

For this family, it's taken two and a half years of life in Packingtown for everything horrible to come to a head. Jurgis now finds himself in jail. At first, Jurgis is exceedingly proud of himself for beating Connor up. Then he realizes that he will certainly lose his job while he is in jail, and plus, nothing is going to repair Ona's sense of well being.

In his heart, Jurgis knows they will lose the house, and more, he knows now that Ona will die. He is sure that things will never be the same between them again, no longer how much he pleads with her and says that the situation was not her fault.

Christmas comes while Jurgis is in jail. Jurgis realizes that "their" Christmas, the Christmas of those who have money enough to feed their families, is not meant for him. What does he have to celebrate? Jurgis feels wild with desperation and contempt for the laws that are killing him and his family.

## Chapter 16 Analysis

At this point, Jurgis basically "rages against the machine" that is the law in Packingtown. He realizes that this place is the reason for all his family's misery, and he even denounces Christmas, because it is a holiday he is not privileged enough to enjoy. After all, before he got arrested, the entire family had to work ridiculous hours to supply the meat for these same peoples' Christmas tables. The memory of better times brings him to tears. He is sure that the family has been evicted from the house, and guesses they are all dying somewhere.

# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary

Jurgis gets a visitor the next day—a fellow cellmate named Jack Duane. You might call Duane a white-collar criminal. Basically, he's a con man. He and Jurgis get along very well, and Duane passes the time by telling him all about the different cons he has pulled. Duane seems out of place in this prison, where men who had to steal nickels and dimes to feed their families are being oppressed by those who are making millions of dollars off their misery.

When it is time for his court date, he sees Elzbieta and one of her children in the courtroom, but not Ona. He ends up getting sentenced to thirty days in prison. Stanislovas comes to visit him in the prison, and tells him that Ona is very sick, Marija has cut her hand and cannot work, and the snow has been so bad that he and Elzbieta have loosed their places because they haven't been able to get to work. Helpless to do anything else, Jurgis gives him ten cents, the only money he has in the world.

## Chapter 17 Analysis

When Stanislovas comes to visit Jurgis, all of his worst fears are realized. Up until then, he has been able to focus on his own misery. Now, he sees the truth so clearly. His wife is dying. The rest of the family has not been evicted, but they are just about to be thrown out. In addition, there's nothing he can do. Despair is not a strong enough word for the feeling he has right now. After all, the society has deemed him not worthy enough to live, that's for sure.

Jurgis is completely disenchanted by the laws of this land. At this point, he is too focused on the misery of his family to think of anything else, but he is feeling a great well of discontent well up in him. He feels like fighting back.

# Chapter 18

## Chapter 18 Summary

Jurgis is finally released (and later than he thought, because he had to work off court costs as well,) and then he has to walk all the way home. When he gets there, he realizes his family has been evicted. He hears from a neighbor that his family has gone to Aniele's, a boarding house where the family stayed when they first came to America. He walks two more miles to get there.

The injustice of it all washes over him. He clearly sees the relentless force that is killing his entire family. When he reaches the boardinghouse, he hears Ona screaming, and he tries to run up the stairs. The women there stop there and tell him that the second baby is coming. The baby is being born too early. Jurgis begs someone to get a doctor. Aniele gives him the last few cents she has, and he runs out into the night to find one.

## Chapter 18 Analysis

Jurgis's release from prison imprisons him in a new hell: Ona's childbirth. He is not surprised to find that they have lost the house. Perhaps if he had found the family intact, he would have been able to cope. However, here his wife lay on her deathbed, giving birth to her child too early, and he does not even have enough money for a doctor.

The helping nature of the human spirit is evidenced over and over again in this book. Even at their lowest point, there is usually some spark or kind word or deed to make the family feel a bit better, if only for a while. This time, the respite comes from Aniele's offering of just a bit of money. To Jurgis, this gesture is one that will make him feel that at least he has tried to get help for his wife.

# Chapter 19

## Chapter 19 Summary

The midwife Jurgis finds is crabby and constantly negotiates the price of her services. The woman goes upstairs in Aniele's house and tries to help Ona, but she emerges soon afterward, covered in blood and saying that nothing can be done. The baby has died, and Ona is very close to death at this point.

Jurgis ran upstairs and grabbed her hand. He screams for her to open her eyes. She opens them wide for one instant, and a flicker of recognition flashes in them. Jurgis can see it. She then dies. Jurgis is out of his mind with grief. Just then, the children come home from selling papers, and he takes their money and runs away to buy himself some whiskey.

## Chapter 19 Analysis

Jurgis has done everything that he can do. The midwife is so matter-of-fact about Ona's death; she represents the small difference man can make in the face of nature. Without proper care, Ona died. Nature had its way. It is interesting that one of the themes of this book is the horrifying power of nature to do its will on people.

When people treat each other well, that horrifying power can be diminished greatly. If everyone were given better care, we would all have the similar chances at survival. This is a tenet of socialism: making conditions more equal. Up until this point, socialism has only loosely been referred to throughout the family's plight. That theme is about to come to the forefront.

# Chapter 20

## Chapter 20 Summary

After he gets drunk, Jurgis comes down to earth and realizes the common sense truth: Ona is gone, but the rest of them must figure out a way to stay alive. Jurgis is filled with a sense of obligation. After all, he's got his son, Antanas, to take care of. So he goes back to the fertilizer mill, and is turned down. He has been blacklisted because of Connor. He gets a job at a packing yard, but then the boss finds out who he is, and takes the job back. Finally, he gets a job in the harvest-works through a friend he had met when he was in the union. He finds the work to be easier, and decides to teach himself how to read. He goes to the library often. Just when life seemed to be almost secure again, the plant closes, and Jurgis loses his job.

## Chapter 20 Analysis

Jurgis has to look harder than ever before for a job after what he did to Connor. The blacklist is real and even if he had changed his name, "spotters" were all around the meatpacking district, ready to find men who were doing just that. Just as so many times before, things get better and then they take a turn for the worse. Jurgis starts to read, though, and this is a highlight of this stage in his life.

# Chapter 21

## Chapter 21 Summary

Jurgis cannot find more work, and one night he decides to fight just to get to sleep in the warm police station. The children begin to scour the dump all day to find food that they can eat, and that's the only reason Jurgis does not starve. Jurgis ends up getting another job, but it is two hours away. He secures the job through Elzbieta, who tells a rich young lady her family's plight. The young lady then pressures her fiancé to give Jurgis a job.

Jurgis's two joys during this time are his son, Antanas, and the weekly newspaper he buys in order to practice his reading and learn the news. Then one day he returns home from work, and people tell him not to go upstairs. Little Antanas has died.

## Chapter 21 Analysis

What can be said about this chapter other than life is total hell at this point? Jurgis just starts to get back on his feet, and then his child is taken away from him. Antanas was his one reason for staying with the family and trying for a better life. Throughout all his hardships, he has enjoyed seeing Antanas grow. Antanas symbolizes innocence, and just as the innocence of the family is completely gone since they first entered America, so too is their innocent child.

# Chapter 22

## Chapter 22 Summary

Jurgis does not take the news of Antanas' death the same as he did Ona's. (Antanas fell off the sidewalk in front of the boardinghouse and drowned in the water there.) Jurgis takes one look at his dead son and then breaks out into the street, resolving to himself that this is no world for a child to grow up in anyway.

Jurgis walks, walks, and finds himself out in the country, where he roams around as a hobo for a while. He even gets offered work, but declines. Finally, Jurgis joins a band of men who go to work during the harvest. He gains a good deal of money this way, but one day, as he is eating a supper in a house with a family, he meets the couple's young son. All his memories come flooding back, and he becomes inconsolable.

## Chapter 22 Analysis

Everything Jurgis loves is gone. To cope, he becomes a wanderer. Still, he cannot escape the memories that haunt him. In addition, he exposes the inconsistencies of bosses in the country. When one asks him if he would like a job, Jurgis replies that the man would only turn him away to die when winter came and there was no more need for him.

The man cannot answer that he would not turn him out into the snow. Being driven by money, people seem to be blinding themselves to the plight of those whom they lay off during this time.

# Chapter 23

## Chapter 23 Summary

Jurgis goes back to Chicago for the summer and gets a job in a mine. He gets injured and spends a good deal of time in the hospital. When he gets out, no one bothers to care that he does not have a bit of money to support himself with. No one even asks. Therefore, he wanders the street and begs.

It turns out that Jurgis is a lousy beggar. There are people who make their living begging, and they have it down to a science. At this point Jurgis seems to simply exist until the warm weather can come and he can go to the country again.

Then it is January of 1904, and there are so many people who are out of work that the streets are filled with them. Jurgis still has some money left over from his work harvesting in the country, but the sum is quickly diminishing.

## Chapter 23 Analysis

Jurgis was doing fine in the country. Unfortunately, winter came, and he had no place for shelter. He is biding his time in Chicago, taking whatever he can get for work until the weather turns and he can once again become a hobo. Jurgis is only concerned about making it day-to-day at this point.

# Chapter 24

## Chapter 24 Summary

Jurgis hits on what he thinks could finally be a stroke of luck in this chapter. He meets a drunk young man who befriends him and bids him to come to his home for dinner. The man is so drunk that he is barely coherent, and after he and Jurgis get to the house, which is in fact a lavish mansion, he drunkenly tells Jurgis that the house is owned by a Mr. Jones. Jurgis worked for Mr. Jones in the stockyards.

A few times during their lavish meal at the mansion, Jurgis thinks about stealing something, or maybe robbing his new benefactor. He decides not to, however, and when he is eventually thrown out by the butler, he screams back in indignation because he had not taken a cent.

However, the drunken young man had given him a wad of money that turns out to be a hundred dollars. Finally, he feels as if his luck is changing. Even though he is miles away from town and is freezing in the piles of snow, he still has some hope.

## Chapter 24 Analysis

The example of the young drunk man shows the denial of the richer generation toward those who were less fortunate. However, he is drunk and therefore at a loss of his inhibitions, this man cannot believe that his new companion is one of the unfortunate souls who worked for his father in the stockyards. How blind the fortunate were to the plight of those who were starving by the thousands and doing backbreaking labor daily?

The butler is closer in class to Jurgis but still elevated above him, because he works in a great house and Jurgis is simply a dirty hobo. The elitism felt by the butler is evident. He believes he knows exactly what Jurgis is like as a person. So does the

drunken man. Which one is right? They are each examples of how society viewed those of the low immigrant class who worked in the Chicago stockyards.

These characters are also examples of how power is distributed and internalized in a capitalist society. In a socialist society, privilege is more equal across the board.

# Chapter 25

## Chapter 25 Summary

As you've probably guessed because of the tragic nature of this story, Jurgis does not keep his hundred dollars for long. He has to find somewhere to change it into smaller bills, so when he goes and buys a drink he asks for the change. The barkeep insists that Jurgis only gave him one dollar. Jurgis subsequently gets in a fight, gets arrested, and loses his money.

It's back to jail for Jurgis, where he encounters Jack Duane, his old cellmate, again. Duane and Jurgis decide to partner together when each of them get out of jail, and Jurgis feels very thankful to Duane for this kindness.

The first crime they commit is to rob a man in an alley. Jurgis feels some remorse about this, but Duane simply remarks that it is either that man's life or their own lives, and who would not chose to help his own life? Through Duane, Jurgis begins to learn about the high-class criminal world of Chicago.

Soon Jurgis joined the ranks of the workingmen again, having gotten a job easily through his new connections. He re-joins the union and meets up with new friends. Soon he is volunteering with a Republican committee and he becomes steeped in politics.

## Chapter 25 Analysis

Jurgis begins to adopt a "me or him" attitude as he works with Jack Duane. Duane has absolutely no regard for anyone other than himself, though he does help Jurgis because he is fond of him. Jurgis is beginning to open his eyes to the political realities before him, and he begins to try to make a difference in the Republican sector.

# Chapter 26

## Chapter 26 Summary

After the elections, Jurgis continues his work in the yards. At this point, he has three hundred dollars in the bank. He inquires about Elzbieta and the family and learns they have gone downtown, and he gives no more thought to them. He begins to gamble and drink heavily.

Then a strike happens. Jurgis keeps going to his job anyway, after asking a political boss whom he has met named Scully for another job. Jurgis feels disloyal in going to his job, but he soon becomes a boss, and then he doesn't mind.

The workmen are kept within the stockyards because the angry mobs of workmen outside would have torn them to pieces. Soon, new men arrive, shipped from all over, to do the jobs that the workmen will not. One day, Jurgis encounters Connor, and he beats him up again and lands in jail. He ends up having to pay all of his three hundred dollars to leave as a free man.

## Chapter 26 Analysis

Though it seems as if Jurgis is becoming more established, he cannot outrun his past. When he encounters Connor at a whorehouse, he beats him to a bloody pulp. All of his memories come rushing back and he wants vengeance.

At this point, Jurgis has turned his back on the union by staying at his job. Proving once again that the workers were expendable to them, the packers simply import thousands of men from all over the country to do the job the picketers refuse to do.

# Chapter 27

## Chapter 27 Summary

Jurgis is now not only a hobo again, but he has had a taste of the good life and it is difficult for him to go back to being dirt poor. He feels always one step away from freezing or starvation, and one day, after he has spent the entire daytime begging, he hears a political meeting beginning. He discovers that the man speaking is a familiar Senator whom he knew during his more prosperous days. Ironically, the man is speaking of protection, an idea that a workingman should LET his boss charge him higher prices, for he in return will receive higher wages, etc, etc. Jurgis cannot help but fall asleep, and he is cast out back into the street after he keeps snoring.

Outside, he recognizes a girl who had attended his and Ona's wedding feast, and she tells him where to find Marija. Jurgis journeys to find her, and it turns out that Marija is prostituting herself. They talk, and Jurgis discovers that Stanislovas died a horrible death, by being eaten to death by rats.

Stanislovas had gotten a job getting workingmen their beer, and he always drank some of it. One day he drank too much, fell asleep in a corner and was locked inside the building all night. In the morning, he was found, torn apart by rats. Jurgis and Marija both get arrested, as Jurgis had been talking with Marija in a whorehouse.

## Chapter 27 Analysis

Perhaps it would have been better for Jurgis if he had never had the chance to see what it means to be well fed and relatively secure. Now, he feels even more strongly how much he does not have.

It is interesting to note that this Senator whom he listens to speaks of something Jurgis cannot seem to understand, no matter how hard he tries. The ideas he speaks of just

don't seem to make any sense to him. After all, he goes straight from this man's speech on "protection" to being thrown out into the street. What kind of protection is that?

Finding Marija, Jurgis cannot believe how far she has fallen. To be a prostitute is one thing, but Marija acts like it was inevitable. Jurgis tries in vain to get her to show some sort of emotion, but Marija's soul is hard as rock.

# Chapter 28

## Chapter 28 Summary

After Jurgis gets out of prison, he happens on another political meeting. Again he falls asleep. Someone whispers to him, calling him "comrade," and says that if he listens, he might "learn something." The speaker seems to be speaking directly to Jurgis. He is lamenting the workingman's fate. Jurgis is entranced.

The rest of the chapter is an impassioned speech for socialism. The combination of the speaker's extreme zeal and the words which directly correlate to Jurgis's situation in life leave him nearly speechless..

## Chapter 28 Analysis

This is Socialism. Jurgis can directly relate to what the speaker is saying, and he understands. Unlike the lecture he went to before, where he was confused about the speaker's message, this one seems to be written just for him. He feels a sense of possibility. This man is on the workingman's side!

# Chapter 29

## Chapter 29 Summary

Jurgis approaches the speaker after the talk is over, and he is directed to a man named Ostrinski, who takes him to his home and teaches him the tenets of socialism.

Basically, Ostrinski tells him that Packingtown should be put in the hands of the workmen, who are the reason for its success.

Jurgis is totally enamored with the idea of socialism, and he imagines a total takeover of Packingtown. The unions haven't seemed to do enough, Ostrinski says, so men all over are joining the socialist party.

## Chapter 29 Analysis

This socialist party makes total sense to Jurgis. He has seen how the unions work, and has watched time and time again how nothing comes of their strikes but more misery. There seems to be no power at all for the workingmen to yield. But now there is this socialist party, and as Ostrinski explains it, the party is growing rapidly in size and in influence.

# Chapter 30

## Chapter 30 Summary

Jurgis tries to convert the remainder of the family to socialism, and has no luck. They are only focused on base survival and have no time for radical notions. Jurgis gets a job at a hotel, and the owner is a socialist (or comrade, as the socialists call each other.) Jurgis becomes totally immersed in the party, and he helps in every way he can. He grows jubilant as he sees the influence of the party grow in Packingtown.

## Chapter 30 Analysis

Jurgis has "seen the socialist light," and he now has something else to focus on other than base survival. His family will have none of it, though. They have been teased with the possibility of prosperity and have been disappointed time and time again. They have closed themselves off to the possibility of any better life.

# Chapter 31

## Chapter 31 Summary

As soon as Jurgis gets the job at the hotel, he goes to tell Marija that she can quit her job now that he has his. She says that she will not that this is the only thing she knows, the only place for her. It seems the whole family has either literally died or had their souls die within them. Jurgis is the only one striving for a better existence.

Jurgis goes about his way, telling everyone he can about socialism, and during the next local election, the socialist vote gets more than ever before. He sees a real future for the party. This last chapter is basically a place for Sinclair to argue for the common sense choice of socialism. Jurgis ends the story with complete faith in socialism.

# Characters

## Marija Berczynskas

Ona's cousin, an orphan, Marija decided to join the family in coming to America just before they left on their journey. She is a big, strong, loud woman who just starts to find happiness in her courtship with Tamoszius Kuszkeika when the canning factory that she works in shuts down after the holidays, when the demand is slow. When she attends a union meeting, Marija is not too shy to stand up and complain about the way she has been treated, even though the meeting is conducted in English and she only speaks Lithuanian. When the cannery starts up again, Marija is fired almost immediately: she says that it is for belonging to the union, although others know that she has also been arguing with her boss. The only place she can find work is in trimming the meat of diseased cattle, at half the pay she was making before. While Jurgis is in jail, it is reported to him that Marija has gangrene from a cut she received at work, and that the company doctor says she might have to lose her hand. She survives that injury, though. Near the end of the novel, Jurgis runs into a friend who tells him where to find Marija, whom he has not seen in over a year. She is living and working in a house of prostitution and supporting Teta Elzbieta with the money that she makes. Jurgis offers to make enough money to allow her to move out, but Marija explains that she really does not mind the life of a prostitute and that she is bitter about the way that people are taken advantage of in legal jobs. The main reason that she wants to stay at the house is that she is hooked on morphine, which she started taking when she came to the house, and she would not make enough money to support her habit anywhere else.

## Phil Connor

Connor is the boss of the ham packaging department that Ona works in. When Ona is pregnant with her second child, Connor tries seducing her, and then rapes her one

night when everyone else is gone. Then, with a combination of threats and promises, he convinces her to work as a prostitute at the house run by her forelady, Miss Henderson. When Jurgis finds out, he goes to the plant, beats Connor, and is sent to jail. Later, after finding success in politics, Jurgis runs into Connor again and again attacks him, only to find that his political connections cannot help him out of trouble because Connor's political connections are stronger.

## **Dede Antanas**

*See Antanas Rudkus*

## **Jack Duane**

Jurgis meets Duane when he is in jail for beating Connor up. Duane takes a liking to Jurgis, and offers to help him make money, but Jurgis is not interested in illegal activity. Later, after Jurgis runs into Duane the second time he is in jail, he is eager to earn money, no matter what it takes. He finds Duane when he is released, and together they mug a man and leave him with a concussion, freezing on the street. He introduces Jurgis to a high-moneyed life of crime, and to other criminal connections.

## **Tommy Hinds**

Tommy Hinds is a hotel owner, and, although Jurgis does not know it when he applies for a job as the hotel's porter, he is also one of the state's most prominent Socialists. He hires Jurgis to replace the old porter, who was a Socialist but drank too much, and is delighted to find that Jurgis is studying Socialism: “‘By Jove!’ he cried, ‘that lets me out. I didn’t sleep at all last night because I had discharged a good Socialist!’ ” Hinds’ hotel is staffed by other Socialists, and he takes Jurgis around to party meetings and teaches him about the Socialist philosophy.

## **Alena Jasaityte**

During the wedding scene at the beginning of the novel, Alena is young and good-looking, but pompous: “she would really be beautiful if she were not so proud,” the narrator says. She is engaged to a well-paid delivery-truck driver and spends a half-week salary on her dress. Much later, Jurgis runs into her on the street when he is desperate for food and shelter. Alena is well-dressed, but cannot give him anything because, she says, she left her purse at home. She is the one who tells him to find Marija at the house of prostitution.

## **Freddie Jones**

One of the most colorful characters in the novel, Freddie’s dialogue is written in drunken half-words and incoherent statements. He is a son of a wealthy family who meets Jurgis begging on the street one night and takes a liking to him. Because he is drunk, Freddie is full of self-pity, and when Jurgis explains that he has no money, Freddie says that he does not have much either, because his parents have sailed to Europe and he has almost spent what they left him and they have not responded to his telegram asking for more. He gives Jurgis a hundred-dollar bill to pay a cab to take them to his house, but he forgets it and has the butler pay the cab when they arrive. When Freddie falls asleep at the dinner table, the butler throws Jurgis out.

## **Tamoszius Kuszleika**

The fiddler at Jurgis and Ona’s wedding, he is a popular figure in Packingtown, invited to parties by people too poor to hire a musician because they know that he will not be able to resist playing for free while he is celebrating. After a while, a courtship develops between Tamoszius and Marija, but the economic troubles of the family continually distract them: first, when Marija loses her job, and then when Jurgis goes to jail and the house is lost. When Jurgis runs into Marija near the end of the novel,

she says that Tamoszius had contracted blood poisoning and lost a finger, so he could not play his violin any more. He “went away,” and she had not seen him in over a year.

## **Elzbieta Lukoszaite**

Ona’s step-mother, who brought her six young children to America with her. At first, she stays home to keep house while the other adults work. Soon financial troubles become so bad that the family relies on the money that her boys make by selling newspapers on street corners. They are spending time with rough characters and prostitutes, and the only way they can quit working and go back to school is if Elzbieta goes to work, so she obtains a job in the sausage plant.

## **Jonas Lukoszaite**

Jonas is the brother of Ona’s step-mother Elzbieta, the one who has the idea to come to America in the first place because he knows of a man who moved to Chicago and became rich. After living with the family for a few years and contributing to the household expenses, Jonas disappears one spring day--there is speculation that, since he was single and unattached, he might have gone to find a better life. It is also suggested that if he had died in the meat-processing plant the company might just have disposed of his body, rather than paying death benefits: “When, for instance, a man had fallen into one of the rendering tanks and had been made into pure leaf lard and peerless fertilizer, there was no use letting the fact out and making his family unhappy.”

## **Stanislovas Lukoszaite**

The oldest of Teta Elzbieta’s six children, Stanislovas goes to work at age fourteen in the lard-canning department at Durham’s, where he puts cans on the conveyor belt for

ten hours a day. In the winter, he becomes lost in a snowstorm on his way home from work, and his fingers freeze at the first joint. After that, he is terrified of going out in the snow, and has to be threatened and beaten to go to work on snowy days. Jurgis finds out near the end of the book how Stanislovas died: fetching beer for workers in an oil factory, he drank some and fell asleep, and when he was locked inside of the factory overnight, rats killed him and ate his flesh.

## **Antanas Rudkus**

Jurgis' old father ("Dede" means "Grandfather" in Lithuanian) had one other son in Lithuania, but he went into the army ten years before the novel began and was never heard from again. After they move to America, Jurgis does not want his father to work, but Antanas is still in the habit of working hard for many years, and he would not feel good about being idle while the rest of the family is struggling so hard to pay the bills. He has trouble finding a job because no one wants to hire an old man who is incapable of much physical labor, but, by agreeing to pay one-third of his salary to a man with business connections, he is hired as a "squeedgie man" at the Durham factory. There it is his job to push around brine on the floor of the room where beef is pickled. The pickling solution leaks through his boots and infects a sore on his foot, but Antanas stays at his work until one day he collapses on the floor, and two fellow workers have to carry him home. As he lies in bed, sick, Jurgis hires a worker to come to the house and tell him that Durham's is holding his job until he is well enough to return, although it is not true. Antanas dies a few days later.

## **Jurgis Rudkus**

Jurgis is the protagonist, or main character, of this story: after the extended wedding scene which introduces all of the characters, the narrative stops on Jurgis and stays with his experiences throughout the book. In the beginning, he is a tall, strong young man, although by the novel's end a few years later his health is ruined by his experiences. Jurgis comes from *Brelovicz*, "The Imperial Forest," in Lithuania, which

is where he met Ona and fell in love with her. In America, he initially feels that his salary, along with the rent paid by relatives in his house, should cover the family's expenses, so that his elderly father and petite bride will not have to go to work. When expenses mount, Jurgis' first reaction is, "I shall have to work harder." He soon finds that circumstances will always rise to keep him from addressing problems with hard work alone. When the demand for beef slackens, Jurgis' hours are cut, and when he injures his leg at work, he has to stay home and let it heal, or he will be crippled forever. When his leg heals, the only job Jurgis can find is in the fertilizer plant, where the smell of chemicals and animal remains permeates his skin so badly that the stench is on him for months after he leaves. After assaulting the man who raped Ona and forced her into prostitution, Jurgis goes to jail: while he is there, the bank forecloses on his house, and the day he is released Ona dies during childbirth. With the help of a social worker, Jurgis lands a clean, well-paying job at a steel mill in South Chicago, but he breaks his shoulder at work and is left unemployed. When his little son dies, drowned in a flooded street, Jurgis leaves Chicago and takes off on the road, stopping to work on farms only when he really needs money and sleeping out under the open sky. This is the only section of the novel that shows Jurgis as content, even happy. When winter comes, he returns to the city, but still cannot find a job. A rich person gives him a hundred-dollar bill, but when he tries to change it a bartender cheats him: the commotion Jurgis raises lands him in jail again. This time he is disillusioned with the world, and cultivates his connections with criminals. Upon his release he makes a good wage in crime, rising from mugging to politics. In order to move from political work to steady work he becomes a strike breaker in a meat plant, doing the jobs of his former coworkers, who are out on strike, but he loses his job and his political connections when he once again assaults the man who raped his wife. In the last section of the book, Jurgis stumbles across Socialism and realizes that it is the one true way, the answer to all of the questions he ever had. He attends lectures and reads Socialist literature at every opportunity. He lands a job at a hotel that is, coincidentally, owned by one of the state organizers of the party. This man takes Jurgis to meetings with other socialists from all walks of life, so that they can learn what the working life is like from someone who has suffered economic oppression.

## Ona Rudkus

Ona is very small and young when she comes to America. Although the book opens with her wedding to Jurgis, the next chapter tells the reader what happened before the wedding: they were actually not married until more than a year after arriving. Jurgis waits before marrying her because he wants to own the house Ona will live in and have a job so he can provide for her. She does not have a very striking role in the story, but Ona's function in the novel is important: she is an emblem of decency, and she provides Jurgis with a reason to struggle against the corruptive elements of poverty while she is alive (a function that is carried over after her death by little Antanas, their child). His love for her is so strong and pure, and she is so small and frail, that when the snow is high he carries her to work at the factory in his arms. After the birth of little Antanas, Ona develops "womb-trouble," and she is ill all of the time, although she is unwilling to admit this to Jurgis. Ona works in the cellar at Brown's, sewing casings on hams. When she is carrying their second child, Ona begins having fits of hysteria, coming home at night crying and shuddering. One snowy night she does not come home at all, explaining that she stayed with a friend, and when it happens again Jurgis confronts her and finds out the truth. The boss of her department, Connor, forced her to have sex with him, she explains, and then he forced her to work downtown as a prostitute by threatening not just her job, but Jurgis' and Marija's too. Jurgis goes to jail for assaulting Connor, and he returns to the family to find Ona in labor in an unheated attic. She dies during childbirth.

## Mike Scully

Scully is the legendary political boss who runs the Packingtown district on behalf of the owners of the big packing houses. Scully has the power to give out political favors to the rich and jobs to the poor through an organization he started called the "War-Whoop League." At the end of his spree as a criminal, Jurgis works for Scully to elect a weak member of the opposing party, but when he is sent to jail Scully refuses to help him.

# Teta Elzbieta

*See Elzbieta Lukoszaite*

# Setting

The *Jungle* takes place in the meatpacking plants, stockyards, and settlement houses of Chicago during the opening years of the twentieth century.

As much a work of journalism as of fiction, the novel grew out of Sinclair's firsthand observations of life in the "Yards" and his interviews with workers, foremen, and politicians. Although Sinclair wanted his novel to focus on the merits of socialism, its impact stemmed from its raw depiction of the inhumane working conditions at the packing plants and the health hazards posed by filth in the slaughterhouses. The novel's naturalistic setting thus proved far more important to its success than did its political content.

# Social Sensitivity

Upton Sinclair's overwhelming concern was the betterment of society; art served as a tool for improving conditions among the working classes. First conceived of as an analogy between the wage slavery imposed on workers and the slavery earlier imposed on blacks, *The Jungle* graphically exposed the brutality that capitalism allows the privileged to inflict on the poor. Sinclair spent two months in and around Chicago's packing houses disguised as a worker, observing the squalor, filth, and despair spawned by an economic system designed to promote personal gain. Returning to his home in New Jersey, Sinclair wrote his novel in less than six months. At first rejected by major publishing houses for fear of libel, *The Jungle* was published by Doubleday in 1906 after the publishing company investigated and verified Sinclair's claims.

Sinclair's gruesome descriptions of rats, children's fingers, and tubercular steers being ground up into canned meats, and hogs diseased with cholera or men drowned in cooking vats being processed into lard brought worldwide attention to meat-packing practices.

The horror of these details caused so much public outcry that Congress passed the Pure Food and Drugs Act less than a year after the book's publication.

The filth in the industry that feeds the nation was the thrust of Doubleday's marketing and the object of the readers' horror, but Sinclair's concerns also included the exploitation of workers, the dangers of unsafe machinery, the abuses of child labor, and the degrading effects of slum existence. Critics of the book have labeled it melodramatic and sensationalistic, and as a work of literature *The Jungle* is indeed flawed. Most accusations are effectively countered, however, by the fact that Sinclair dared to delve--no matter how crudely--into problems frequently whitewashed or overlooked entirely, and in doing so forced others to take action as well. *The Jungle* did not change everything that its author would have changed, but its responsibility for

significant improvement in the food industry merits its reputation as the most effective expression of social concern in American fiction.

# Techniques

Sinclair saw *The Jungle* as a narrative setting forth the effects of "a system which exploits the labor of men and women for profits." He wished to avoid journalistic exposition: "What Socialism there will be in this book, will, of course, be imminent; it will be revealed by incidents -- there will be no sermons." For most of the novel, Sinclair is true to his planned technique. The narrative follows the adventures of the protagonist in a naturalistic environment where only the ruthless survive. Vivid description of outrageous industrial practices insured audiences' reception of the story as actual fact and produced at least some of the social reform hoped for by the author. The novel begins with the *vesilija*, a Lithuanian wedding feast, an expression of individual hope and confidence in a society directed by traditional values. Jurgis, the central character, is then bombarded by episode after episode, each constructed to demonstrate that hope is vain in a society dedicated to the values of capitalism. Having made that point, Sinclair was then faced with the problem of introducing socialism as the best alternative. Jurgis is brought full circle to another kind of hope in his political conversion, but seeming to rush to the end, Sinclair changes his technique and pours in his measure of socialism in the form of lectures and discussions for which Jurgis, like the reader, serves little more purpose than to sit as an audience. Sinclair himself was not completely satisfied with this mixture of rhetorical techniques that produced an uneven but still powerful story.

# Thematic Overview

Before the publication of *The Jungle*, Sinclair commented in the *Appeal*, a socialist journal, that his novel would "set forth the breaking of human hearts by a system which exploits the labor of men and women for profits. It will shake the popular heart and blow the roof off of the industrial tea-kettle."

Critics have generally viewed his success in this plan as at least as mixed as his metaphor. Breaking human hearts requires more skill in characterization than Sinclair possessed, but blowing off roofs (or lids) is essential to effective propaganda, and in this he succeeded most admirably.

Still, Sinclair's theme, or intended theme, was clearly broader than his novel's effect. Concerned with all the evils suffered by wage earners under a capitalistic system and the certain lessening of those evils under socialism, Sinclair devoted only a few pages to his description of the shocking procedures in the packing houses, and this only as one more example of the callousness of the system and the danger to the workers. Unfortunately for his broader intentions, the public was already sensitive to the food issue due to the reports over several years by several less successful investigators.

Citing an issue about which readers already had some knowledge might have helped the development of the general theme by the addition of a measure of known reality. However, this bit of reality was one of very immediate and direct concern to all readers and thus of considerably more interest than the adventures of a fictional Lithuanian immigrant. As Sinclair later remarked, the packing house episodes quite took over the novel and moved an element of setting into the position of central theme.

In the assessments of most critics, Sinclair achieved his double end of depicting "the breaking of human hearts" and the saving power of socialism with less than complete success.

The protagonist's breaking heart is overshadowed by the readers' turning stomachs, and salvation through socialism is unconvincingly inserted into the novel in the didactic and journalistic closing chapters. Sinclair's novel fired at many targets in the jungle of social ills. That it scored even one direct hit, which resulted in significant reform, certainly entitles it to its respected place in American letters.

# Themes

## American Dream

The novel explains that after the death of Ona's father in Lithuania his farm was sold, and the family paid two-thirds of their inheritance to a local magistrate in order to avoid losing all of it. That was when Ona's brother Jonas suggested that they all move to America. He had heard about a friend who went to America and became rich (the friend later turns out to actually be making just a modest living with his delicatessen in Chicago). In calculating the money he could earn in America, Jurgis Rudkus does not account for the fact that, while the pay rate is higher, the cost of living is greater too. But the promise of wealth is not even as important in their decision-making as the promise of social equality. The book explains their thinking: "In (America), rich or poor, a man was free, it was said; he did not have to go into the army, he did not have to pay out his money to public officials,--he might do as he pleased, and count himself as good as any other men. So America was a place of which lovers and young people dreamed." The central theme of this book focuses on this particular group finding the American Dream of wealth and freedom to be an illusion. They are not free to do as they wish, but instead spend all of their time and energy trying to meet their financial needs, destroying themselves physically and morally in the process. The clearest example of this is the fact that Ona has to work as a prostitute in order to assure that her family members can keep their dangerous, mind-numbing jobs at the packing house. One of the greatest lures of the American Dream has always been the promise of land ownership, which is related to freedom, but that is denied the Rudkus family too, when they lose their house and all they have put into it after missing a few payments. In the end, Jurgis finds that socialism offers him more prosperity and freedom than the competitive American system, because it focuses its attention on the good of all, rather than making the rich and poor opponents.

# Class Conflict

Most of the problems faced by Jurgis' family are caused by the fact that they have nothing, and that those who do have things actively strive to keep them from benefiting from their own hard work. Not only do the packinghouse owners benefit from the workers' labor, but they also benefit from promoting hostility among the workers, because resentment toward each other keeps them from organizing into unions. The plant managers are forced by the people above them to eke more and more work out of the low-level employees. European laborers look down on black workers from the south, whom they see as lazy and wild. After the deaths of his wife and child, and after he has been out from the bottom of the social ladder and experienced the freedom of the countryside, Jurgis becomes determined to be a winner in his struggle in society, even if it means taking advantage of his fellow men. The mugging that starts his life of crime bothers his conscience, but his partner helps him rationalize it as fair because the victim probably deserved it: Jurgis points out that the man had never done them any harm and his friend explains, "He was doing it to someone as hard as he could, you can be sure of that." His subsequent descent into the criminal world leads him to gambling and crooked politics, crimes that are more and more abstract, taking advantage of those at the bottom of society (where Jurgis so recently was) while keeping him blind to the cost they are paying for his luxury. The final irony is when he becomes a strike breaker, creating the same near-impossible conditions that destroyed his family when he was in the lower class. Abuse of the social order is captured most keenly when Jurgis and two policemen, trying to suppress striking workers, go into a tavern, and the policemen empty the cash register, with no moral justification, simply because they have the power to do it. After that, the book turns its attention to socialism's philosophy of classlessness, espousing a system where merit is given to people for working hard and helping society, not for taking advantage or for holding tight to the privileges of their social class.

# Individualism

From the start, Jurgis' response to financial difficulty is, "Leave it to me; leave it to me. I will earn more money--I will work harder." He is young and strong, and, as the novel explains, "he could not even imagine what it would feel like to be beaten." This attitude also shows in his old, ailing father, Dede Antanis, who is so determined to fend for himself that he pays a substantial part of his salary back to the man who arranges his brutal job, which eventually sends him to his grave. The novel shows all of these immigrants to be mistaken in their belief that they are in control of their fates, but it is just as harsh toward those who refuse to take individual responsibility. There are numerous examples of characters who feel that living within a corrupt system permits an individual to loosen his or her morals, and their individual corruption serves to make society harsher, which leads to even more corruption, and so forth. Even when someone in the novel tries to help another person for selfless reasons, such as the social worker in Chapter 21 who arranges for her fiancé at the steel works to hire Jurgis, the gesture is never powerful enough to overcome the heartless competitiveness of society at large. The only time Jurgis is able to celebrate his own individuality is when he is roaming through the countryside, but that is not necessarily a good thing, since his freedom is due to the fact that those closest to him are dead. The message conveyed by the book's socialist ending is that individualism does not have to mean isolation, as it does in a competitive capitalist system: it can mean individual progress put to use for the common good. Unlike other collectivist philosophies which have sought to ignore or even crush individual thought, the type of socialism advocated in *The Jungle* supports a combination of individualism with voluntary cooperation.

# Style

## Narration

Most of this book is told from Jurgis Rudkus' point of view, giving readers information that Jurgis would have experienced or heard about and providing access to his feelings and opinions. The book's first chapter provides the most obvious exception to its overall narrative structure. Chapter 1 has an omniscient narrator who is not identified with any particular character, shifting attention from one wedding participant to the next, like a movie camera panning a crowd scene. A reader who was only familiar with the first chapter would not be able to tell that this is a book about Jurgis: the characters who receive the most attention in that part of the book are Ona's cousin Marija Berczynskas and the fiddler Tamoszius Kuszleika, who in fact only receives passing mention throughout the rest of the tale. Once the narration settles on Jurgis, from Chapter 2 on, its hold is loose, slipping every so often into the point of view of another character. For example, in the course of describing the work situations of other characters, such as Ona or Elzbieta, the narration will say what these characters thought, which is actually a violation of the pattern established in the rest of the book, which only gives access to Jurgis' mind.

## Plot

*The Jungle* was written the way that was most common in the nineteenth century, the way that Charles Dickens and Mark Twain produced novels: as a continuing serial for a newspaper, with new installments in each edition. As a result, the plot of the book is choppy and uneven, with less care taken in connecting one chapter to the next than is taken to ensure that each individual chapter is solid within itself. The impression that readers retain about Jurgis' life is not necessarily about his growth from bright-eyed innocent to dedicated socialist, but of the individual situations that he passes through in moving from the beginning to the end. While it is true that the turmoil of each step,

such as going to jail, being injured, or becoming a political operative, might be important in molding Jurgis into the man he eventually becomes, each episode is important because it is an interesting story in itself, apart from the rest of the work. The individual pieces work well separately, each with a structure that makes it satisfying. The connection between the book's parts is so weak that, as Sinclair himself explained, the preachy, long-winded speeches in the final chapters are not the fulfillment of some overall design: they were written hastily simply to finish the book by his publisher's deadline.

## Setting

*The Jungle* is most often examined as a book about the Chicago stockyards, in spite of the fact that the main character quits being a part of stockyard life before the book is half over. The vivid details of the packinghouse scenes had much to do with the book's overall social significance. In 1906, when it was published, this book delivered the news of just what conditions were like, performing a function that is now expected from the news media. The packinghouse scenes are still powerful today, even though the conditions described in the book no longer exist in the United States. Modern readers can relate to the dehumanizing effects of boring, repetitive assembly-line labor and of employers who put profits before the health of their workers. Even though these packinghouses and their particular methods are gone, the drive to get employees to do more work for less money still exists, as does the practice of handling merchandise, whether it is meat or information, as expediently as the law allows. By symbolically linking the fates of the immigrants with the treatment of the butchered food products, the book establishes a nearly perfect link between setting and theme, which, even more than the sheer mass of gruesome details, accounts for the impact of the stockyard setting upon the minds of readers throughout the decades.

# Naturalism

This book is a classic example of the Naturalist movement in literature, which developed in the nineteenth century with the writings of French novelist Emile Zola. Naturalist theories do not separate man from nature, as many ways of thought do, but they explain man's behavior as being a result of environment, and thus they explore the social environment for the weaknesses that cause bad behavior. Because it looks at the world in terms of external causes and effects and does not account for the effect that free will can have on a person's situation, Naturalist literature is often considered depressing and hopeless. Writers like Upton Sinclair, who intend their works to produce social change, have traditionally used Naturalist techniques to shock their readers about what is happening in the world. The problem with combining social dedication with impartial description is that, with the number of incidents required to make a novel, writers tend to strain credibility in their attempt to make the world look as harsh as possible. Independently, the brutal and oppressing events that happen to Jurgis Rudkus in this book might serve to stir readers to outrage, but collectively they raise the question of whether the "nature" presented in the story is not manipulated to give Jurgis more bad luck than any one person would normally have.

# Historical Context

## Immigration

*The Jungle* was written specifically to draw attention to the working conditions faced by laborers in America, specifically the immigrants who came, mostly from Europe, and had no choice but to work long hours for whatever meager pay they could get. Throughout the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, their situation became increasingly difficult. One reason was that a great number of unskilled laborers came to America at the time, so that employers could offer low wages for miserable jobs and always find someone willing to do the work. The United States population more than doubled, for instance, between 1850 and 1880, growing from 23 million to 50 million people; twenty years later, it was up by fifty percent more, to 76 million. Some of this was due to the country's expansion and acquisition of new western territories, but much of it was due to the fact that Europeans left hard conditions at home for the abundance of the new land. For example, the Irish potato famine of 1845-1847 caused millions of Irish people to leave their land in search of a new life. The first wave of immigrants came from western Europe. As word about America's strong economy spread deeper into the continent and travel became easier (by locomotives across land and steamships across oceans), people came from more distant countries, including Lithuania, where the Rudkus family of the novel came from. As the number of unskilled workers grew, urban areas bulged with their increased populations, and industries developed machines that simplified and standardized tasks so that workers could handle them without much skill or training or grasp of the language. In the early part of the twentieth century, the United States government passed new laws that severely limited immigration, which had been growing every year, reaching a high in 1910, when fifteen percent of the population was foreign-born.

# Organization of Labor

It was in the early part of the twentieth century that unions began their rise to power, eventually reaching a level of influence in national politics that many people in the second half of the century took for granted. Because of the violent uphill struggles faced by unionization, such as the one described in *The Jungle*, it sometimes seems as if unions are a twentieth-century development. Actually, the impulse for workers to band together in fighting for rights, and for employers to try to isolate and manipulate the workers, is as old as the country itself, practically required by the American system of capitalism. The concept extends back to the twelfth century in Europe, where workers in specific trades banded together with one another to form guilds: these organizations kept wages secure by limiting the number of people who could work at the trade, and they assured the quality of goods by assuring that the guild members were properly trained. Through the centuries the formal organization of the guild declined, although the concept of people in one profession banding together for the common good has lived on. In the early 1800s, there were unions among shoemakers, printers, and other crafts persons. In 1827, a collection of these smaller unions banded together in Philadelphia to form the Mechanics Union of Trade Associations; though it was only in existence for a few years, it provided a basic design for unions of the future, enabling its members to use the power of several professions in one location, rather than calling out a strike of one profession spread out across the country. At the same time, workers in the country's coal mines found their conditions so perilous and their chances of surviving without the mines so hopeless that they brought unionization to rural settings. Early union activity almost always led to violence if it was not called off quickly: the government generally sided with employers, denied the unions' right to exist, and provided police or armed militia squads to break up demonstrations. Notable events in the struggle for unionization are the Hay-market Massacre in Chicago in 1886, during which police fired into a crowd of striking workers, setting off a chain reaction of violence, and the Homestead strike of 1892 that resulted when a Pittsburgh steel works cut wages and fired workers and sent 300 armed thugs to prevent a strike. The brutality of the company owners and the

cooperation of the government against its citizens in cases like these swayed public opinion toward unionization.

## Socialism

With its emphasis on the rights of the workers and on the sins of the property owners, it is only natural that many activists in the labor movement, like Upton Sinclair, would be supporters of socialist philosophies. Early on, the goals of socialism and communism were closely linked, because both supported the equal distribution of wealth and the breaking down of the social class system. Since the United States' chief rival throughout much of the twentieth century was the communist Soviet Union, many Americans have tended to block out the ideas of socialism as a threat. When Sinclair was writing, however, the Russian Revolution was still ten years in the future, and the cause of socialism was supported by Americans of all backgrounds, although its support was chiefly within the labor movement. In 1877 the Socialist Labor Party was formed in the United States, and in 1901 the Socialist Party was formed by one of the key historical figures of the century, Eugene V. Debs, who ran for president five times, once while in prison on a charge of "pacifism." In 1904, while Sinclair was in Chicago researching *The Jungle*, labor leader "Big Bill" Haywood called workers and socialists from around the world to Chicago for what he called a "Continental Congress of the working class." Out of that convention came an Industrial Workers Manifesto and the seeds of a new socialist labor union, the Industrial Workers of the World. The I.W.W. was more driven by political beliefs than other unions, and it reached a peak membership of 100,000 before America joined World War I in 1917. Its membership shrank considerably when the government arrested socialists during the war, on charges of treason. Though the I.W.W. never regained the height of its political power, it still exists today.

# Critical Overview

Critics have never shown much agreement about the depth of Upton Sinclair's talent as a writer. Some feel that he was, at best, a weak storyteller, who hid his inability to create believable characters behind his sincere effort for political reform, while others have suggested that it was his political agenda that made it hard to see just how talented he really was. Most critics admit that he was fairly talented, though not exceptionally so, and almost all grant that he was scrupulously faithful to the details he wrote about. Sinclair's friend George Bernard Shaw, the Nobel Prize-winning playwright, suggested to people who asked what had happened in his lifetime that they should not look to newspapers but rather should read Upton Sinclair's novels. Bernard Dekle, who repeated the Shaw story in a 1969 article called "Upton Sinclair: The Power of a Courageous Pen," considered the author a "superb journalist": though that opinion says nothing of his ability as a novelist, Dekle goes on to quote Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (creator of Sherlock Holmes), calling Sinclair, "one of the greatest novelists in the world." Important literary critic Walter B. Rideout described the books of Upton Sinclair as comprising "one of the great information centers in American literature." Another much-admired critic, Granville Hicks, centered in on the quality that gave Sinclair the ability to be such a detailed and credible recorder of the world around him: "Sinclair," Hicks wrote, "has always had the ability to withdraw himself from the struggle and to write with an astonishing degree of objectivity."

But even those critics who praised his ability to capture events in words still acknowledge what Rideout referred to as his "artistic limitations." Rideout pointed out a discrepancy between Sinclair's fictional structure and his social message, explaining that they were separated from one another, instead of complimenting each other the way they should in a good work of art. Hicks, after marveling at his objectivity, recognized that Sinclair's writing, "if seldom downright bad ... is not very distinguished." Even though he wrote his review during Sinclair's lifetime, he considered the author's works to be "historical fiction" because of the way they were meant to leave a record of the times. That, in Hicks' view, was the source of the

problem: as he explained, “flatness of character is, I think, an inherent defect in the genre in which Sinclair is writing.” In other words, even a really great writer would have trouble creating well-rounded characters if limited by the facts of history, and Sinclair was even more limited by his undistinguished talent.

One last area of contention comes from those who have disagreed about the level of objectivity in Sinclair’s writing, and about how well it served the causes he supported. Few writers have openly criticized Sinclair for his support of the workers against people of privilege, and many have been willing to overlook the problems with his writing because they have considered him to be an overall positive influence. One critic who refused to give him any consideration for good intentions, however, was Van Wyck Brooks. Brooks rejected the claim that Sinclair’s books recorded objective reality, pointing out that complete objectivity is impossible: “Mr. Sinclair, like the rest of us, has seen what he wanted to see and studied what he wanted to study.” Since the world Sinclair presented to his reader could not be exactly the same as the real world, Brooks tried to describe what Sinclair’s world was really like, characterizing it as one where “all the workers wear halos of pure golden sunlight and all the capitalists have horns and tails.” Sinclair’s supporters might still claim that it was his right to present reality as he saw it, but Brooks went even further, explaining that Sinclair’s greatest failure was in not doing what he himself had set out to do: instead of showing workers to be proud and independent, Brooks claimed, Sinclair’s over-simplifications made them look helpless and naive, like infants. The implication of Brooks’ critique is that he personally supported the working class as much as Sinclair did, but that he did not think it did any good to overstate their problems or to understate their abilities to cope.

# Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

# Critical Essay #1

*In the following essay, Woodress explores Sinclair's motivation and methods in writing *The Jungle*, and notes of this novel, which provoked action from a figure no less influential than President Theodore Roosevelt, "No book ever published in the United States produced such an immediate response."*

*The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair's one claim to a place in literary history, was not so much a novel as it was a tract for the times. Sinclair intended it not as a work of art but as an instrument for changing people's minds. He thought of it as an expendable round of ammunition in the battle for social justice. The novel is better judged as propaganda than as literature, but it has compelling power and interests readers today long after the circumstances under which it was written passed into history. Sinclair's considerable ability as a storyteller, coupled with the fierce indignation of a born reformer, made *The Jungle* perhaps the most memorable document of the muckraking movement. He was incensed by the appalling conditions he observed among the workers in the Chicago stockyards and was determined to do something to improve them.

Sinclair recalled the novel's provenance in 1946 when he wrote an introduction for a new edition. He remembered being sent in 1904 by the *Appeal to Reason*, a socialist magazine, to investigate conditions in the meat-packing industry. This was at a time when American business answered to no one for safety, sanitary conditions, product reliability, or working conditions. Unions were weak or non-existent, and business squeezed as much profit as it could from low wages. A good many magazines, chief of which was *McClure's*, were then busily publishing exposes of corruption and malpractice in both industry and government. After the scandal of lethal "embalmed beef" sold to the army during the Spanish-American War, the meatpacking industry seemed a prime subject for investigative reporting.

Sinclair spent seven weeks in Chicago living among and interviewing the stockyard workers and studying conditions in the packing plants. He found that he could go anywhere in the stockyards provided he wore old clothes and carried a lunch pail. One day outside the slaughter-houses he chanced upon a Lithuanian wedding supper and dance, spent the afternoon and evening watching and talking to the newly married couple and their relations, and realized that this immigrant group could provide his point of view for his propaganda novel. He invented Jurgis Rudkus and his family and depicted their lives in and about the stockyards. The story, which begins with the happy wedding scene, moves from joy to ever-increasing misery, as the Lithuanians are exploited inside the packing plant and cheated outside of it. The novel is never dull, at least the early chapters that involve the slaughterhouse and life behind the stockyards are not. Here the novel has all the melodrama of a soap opera, and Jurgis suffers more disasters than the early Christian martyrs. Later Sinclair couldn't resist writing a polemic for the Socialist Party, and the novel even ends with a speech that Sinclair had delivered himself at a mass meeting in Chicago on behalf of Eugene V. Debs, the perennial socialist candidate for President in that era.

*The Jungle* was written in a one-room cabin outside Princeton, New Jersey. He offered the book to Macmillan, publisher of the romances he had written earlier, but that firm would not publish it unless some of the more lurid details about the packing industry were deleted. Meantime, it had been appearing in the *Appeal to Reason* where it was creating a sensation. Sinclair published the book himself with aid from Jack London and others, following which Doubleday Page took it over. Sinclair's purpose in writing the book was to improve the lot of the packinghouse workers, but his account of the lack of proper sanitation, the processing of spoiled and diseased meat, particularly the report of men who fell into the lard vats and were rendered into lard, shocked the public. Sinclair said of his book: "I aimed at the public's heart and by accident hit it in the stomach."

No book ever published in the United States produced such an immediate response. Sinclair remembered being summoned to the White House by Theodore Roosevelt to tell his story, after which the President ordered an investigation of the Chicago

slaughterhouses. Consumers shuddering over what they might be eating bombarded their senators and representatives with demands for action. Before the year was out Congress passed its first law to regulate the meat, food, and drug industries. No politician could ignore the outcry for reform produced by *The Jungle*.

The contemporary reader finds the socialist propaganda ladled generously into the novel hard to get through, and even the most dramatic chapters are written in a pedestrian style. The organization of the story, moreover, is loose and rambling. But despite its faults the novel has the air of truth and conveys a sense of terrible urgency. This, of course, is the result of its being true. Sinclair was writing a kind of work that might be called the reportorial novel or the novel of social protest, of which there have been many more recent examples. There is relatively little work of the creative imagination in *The Jungle*, for the bulk of it consists of closely observed detail and innumerable facts. Today the same material probably would be cast in the form of non-fiction, the sort of multi-part documentary that often appears in the *New Yorker*. Any student of American history and cultures owes it to himself to read *The Jungle* in order to understand more clearly the impulse behind the labor movement, the drive for regulatory agencies, and the need for social conscience on the part of all citizens.

**Source:** James Woodress, *The Jungle*, in *Reference Guide to American Literature*, third edition, St. James Press, 1994, pp. 995-96.

## Critical Essay #2

*In the following excerpt, Wade examines the fallacies upon which Sinclair based his disturbing novel The Jungle.*

There is no doubt that *The Jungle* helped shape American political history. Sinclair wrote it to call attention to the plight of Chicago packinghouse workers who had just lost a strike against the Beef Trust. The novel appeared in February 1906, was shrewdly promoted by both author and publisher, and quickly became a best seller. Its socialist message, however, was lost in the uproar over the relatively brief but nauseatingly graphic descriptions of packinghouse “crimes” and “swindles.” The public’s visceral reaction led Senator Albert Beveridge of Indiana to call for more extensive federal regulation of meat packing and forced Congress to pay attention to pending legislation that would set government standards for food and beverages. President Theodore Roosevelt sent two sets of investigators to Chicago and played a major role in securing congressional approval of Beveridge’s measure. When the President signed this Meat Inspection Act and also the Food and Drugs Act in June, he graciously acknowledged Beveridge’s help but said nothing about the famous novel or its author.

Teachers of American history and American studies have been much kinder to Sinclair. Most consider him a muckraker because the public responded so decisively to his accounts of rats scurrying over the meat and going into the hoppers or workers falling into vats and becoming part of Durham’s lard. Many embrace *The Jungle* as a reasonably trustworthy source of information on urban immigrant industrial life at the turn of the century. Few raise questions about Sinclair’s credentials as either a journalist or historical novelist. If doubts arise, they are quickly dismissed....

Drawing on old records and new scholarship, this article looks first at Sinclair’s motives for writing the novel, then compares what he says about packers, packinghouse products, immigrant workers and their community with the historical

evidence. In concludes that contrary to the author's 1906 claim that it was "so true that students may go to it, as they would a work of reference," *The Jungle* often strays quite far from the truth. As a result, the book misinforms readers about life in what Sinclair called "Packingtown" but which residents and reporters knew as "Back of the Yards." ...

Capitalist packers were the most fearsome monsters in Sinclair's jungle. They were "the incarnation of blind and insensate Greed... devouring with a thousand mouths, trampling with a thousand hoofs." They could live in the lap of luxury because they cheated cattle raisers, set high market prices on their meat products, bribed federal inspectors to pass diseased animals, and chiseled on workers' wages. To them [as Sinclair records in his *Autobiography*] "a hundred human lives did not balance a penny of profit." Their plants were "honeycombed with rottenness": "bosses grafted off the men" who in turn were "pitted against each other." As a result, Packingtown "was simply a seething cauldron of jealousies and hatreds; there was no loyalty or decency anywhere." Female employees, "mostly foreign, hanging always on the verge of starvation," were at the mercy of foremen "every bit as brutal and unscrupulous as the old-time slave drivers." Things "quite unspeakable" went on in the packinghouses and "were taken for granted by everybody; only they did not show ... because there was no difference in color between master and slave." ...

Those in the path of the Chicago packers fought a noisy rear guard action. Dairy farmers called margarine a "cheap, nasty grease" capable of transmitting tuberculosis and trichinosis. Congress placed a modest tax on it in 1886, but the Department of Agriculture's Division of Chemistry pronounced it safe and nutritious. As Chicago chilled beef invaded eastern markets, local slaughterers and butchers dubbed it "stale" or "dead" meat, implying that it absorbed ammonia from cooling machinery or was chemically "embalmed" to prolong its life. Customers liked its superior taste and lower price and thus ignored the warnings. Opponents then accused Chicago packers of using diseased animals and said only local inspection in their own states at the time of slaughter could safeguard consumers. Several states banned Chicago beef, but the Supreme Court overturned these laws in 1890. Meantime, European countries banned

American pork products until the federal government certified that they were free of trichinae. Congress in 1890–91 authorized the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Animal Industry to inspect livestock before and after slaughter and, at the request of packers or foreign governments, conduct microscopic examinations of pork before certifying it. The large packers quickly availed themselves of this service, and by 1900 federal meat inspectors, graduates of veterinary colleges and protected by civil service, were working in 149 packinghouses in 46 cities.

Criticism of Chicago meat products surfaced again during the Spanish-American War. General Nelson A. Miles, still smarting from the packinghouse workers' insolence to his soldiers during the Pullman strike, blamed the sickness of American troops in Cuba and Puerto Rico on the canned meat and chilled beef prepared in Chicago. He told [as noted by Louise Carroll Wade in "Hell Hath No Fury Like a General Scorned," in *The Illinois Historical Journal*, Autumn, 1986] the War Investigating Commission that the former was defective, the latter what "you might call embalmed beef." Major General Leonard Wood, trained at Harvard Medical School, testified that the chilled beef was nutritious and wholesome, while academic and government chemists (including Dr. Harvey W. Wiley, chief of the Division [later Bureau] of Chemistry from 1883 to 1912) gave clean bills of health to samples of the canned beef. After visits to the packinghouses and voluminous testimony, the Commission declared that the canned beef was "generally of good quality" and that "no refrigerated beef ... was subjected to or treated with any chemicals." Undaunted, General Miles asked for a military court of inquiry into his beef charges. It ruled that Miles had no justification for "alleging" that the beef was "embalmed" or "unfit for issue." These two investigations revealed that careless handling of the refrigerated beef and the practice of eating canned meat opened days before contributed to intestinal illnesses, but drinking contaminated water was the major factor. Medical doctors and researchers soon tracked typhoid to poor sanitation and pinned malaria and yellow fever on mosquitos. Despite exoneration of Chicago meat and scientific explanations for the illnesses, historian Graham A. Cosmas [in his book *An Army for Empire*, 1971] concedes that the "sensational charges, not the sober refutations, stuck in the minds of thousands of ordinary citizens."

Foes of the packers kept the rotten beef charges alive, and, as Floyd Dell noted, this “more or less prepared” the public for *The Jungle*. Simons rejoiced that “the world knows now the story of the infamous part played ... by the packers of Chicago.” Charles Edward Russell asked “How did they manage to emerge unharmed from the terrible ‘embalmed-beef’ revelations of the Spanish War? How did they escape prosecution when more American soldiers fell before their deadly beef than were hit by all the Spanish guns?” *The Jungle* claimed “the ‘embalmed beef’ ... killed several times as many United States soldiers as all the bullets of the Spaniards.” And in May 1906 Sinclair issued a press release stating that Philip Armour’s 1901 death was due--not to pneumonia--but to “worry incidental” to hushing up the company’s responsibility for those deaths....

Another aspect of food safety was the question of whether meat and milk from tubercular cattle could infect people. When Dr. Robert Koch discovered the bacillus in 1882, he thought it caused the same disease in man and beast. No one knew how tuberculosis was transmitted, but veterinarians advocated stringent livestock inspection as a public health measure. While doctors did not rule out infection through meat or milk, they thought cooking meat and boiling milk could eliminate the risk. Since they suspected the White Plague spread through lung discharges of sick individuals, they emphasized disinfection of premises and careful disposal of sputum so it could not dry out, pulverize and travel through the air. Disagreement sharpened after Koch declared in 1901 that bovine and human tuberculosis were caused by different bacilli and conjectured that people seldom if ever contracted tuberculosis from cattle. American doctors generally supported Koch, and some even suggested that money spent on livestock inspection be used to identify and treat patients. Most veterinarians and many British doctors disputed Koch, and insisted, as did Dr. Daniel E. Salmon, head of the Bureau of Animal Industry from 1884 until 1905, that “No slaughter-houses should be allowed to operate without inspection.” Ironically, there was widespread agreement that thorough cooking rendered all meat safe, even pork, and the Bureau of Animal Industry began phasing out microscopic examination for trichinae in 1902, abandoning it completely by 1907.

Meantime, those seeking environmental factors in the transmission of tuberculosis decided that it was endemic in dark, crowded slums and workplaces and spread from there. Explained Robert Hunter, the germs “live for months in darkness or in places artificially lighted” and eventually become “pulverized dust which is blown about through tenements, theatres, street cars, railway trains, offices, and factories.” Dr. Alice Hamilton of Hull House also fingered “germ-laden dust ... whirled in the air by gusts of wind.” Back of the Yards physician Dr. Caroline Hedger insisted that in the interior packinghouse rooms with electric lights “germs could live almost indefinitely unless removed.” She found it “revolting to think of the chances for infection of food in a situation like this.” Adolphe Smith believed that the “sharp angles, nooks, and corners” of the packinghouses harbored “sputum of tuberculous workers ... for weeks, months, and years” and that the disease was “especially prevalent” among packinghouse workers. There was a distinct possibility, therefore, that the packers were exporting “the bacilli in the provisions ... sent from Chicago all over the world.”

*The Jungle* effectively heightened fears about contamination and adulteration of packinghouse products. In the novel men and women labor in “dark holes, by electric light.” Many cough incessantly, spit at random, and stack meat in sputum on the floor. The packers are said to prefer tubercular cattle because they “fatten more quickly.” They hire “regular alchemists” to concoct meat products out of knuckle joints, gullets, skins, moldy scrap ends and those poisoned rats, appropriately spiced, colored and preserved. Other illustrations were excised by Doubleday. One involved an unmarried worker who gave birth in a “dark passage” and dropped the baby “into one of the carts full of beef, that was all ready for the cooking-vats.” Black strike-breakers (with “woolly heads” and “savages” for ancestors) spread “diseases of vice” in the canned meat, “loathsome” afflictions which caused fingers and parts of the faces “to rot away and drop off.” In *The Brass Check*, Sinclair professed “bitterness” when he finally realized that he “had been made into a ‘celebrity’ ... simply because the public did not want to eat tubercular beef.” But in September 1905, when he was trying to persuade Macmillan to publish the manuscript, he assured them that “with the spoiled meat sensations that are in it ... you can count upon making the book a success.”

President Roosevelt, supplied with advance copies of *The Jungle* by Marcossion and Sinclair, was concerned about the accusations against federal inspectors and the implications for public health. He asked the Department of Agriculture to investigate, and early in March a committee visited eighteen Chicago plants that used federal inspection and three that did not. Its report provided detailed information about the inspection service and the physical conditions within the plants. The investigators found good, fair and bad conditions, often within the same plant and sometimes in the same room. In one establishment, for example, there were dirty windows and unpainted walls in the hog-killing area but clean workbenches and a clean vitrified brick floor. The cattle-killing area had “good light and ventilation,” tiled side walls, but dirty overhead beams. The beef-canning section was “well whitewashed, lighted, and ventilated, and was clean,” although the cooking room had dirty meat receptacles and no fans to carry off the steam. There were dressing rooms, lockers and wash basins for some but not all employees. Some toilets were “clean, well flushed, painted, and whitewashed,” others “dark and insanitary.” The plants not using federal inspection were generally unsanitary throughout [as recorded in “Report of the Department Committee on the Federal Meat-Inspection Service at Chicago,” by the Bureau of Animal Industry, in *Annual Report*, 1906].

Annoyed by the report’s detail and refusal to generalize about sanitary conditions, the President felt that it did not give him “clear, definite answers.” So he asked the same men to address specific criticisms in Smith’s *Lancet* articles, Sinclair’s novel and Hedger’s forthcoming article. The committee tried again to explain to Roosevelt that sanitary conditions were uneven. Hedger’s charge of excessive dirt fit “certain rooms of certain establishments, but it is absolutely unfair as a generalization.” Sinclair “selected the worst possible condition which could be found in any establishment” and “willfully closed his eyes to establishments where excellent conditions prevail.” The novelist’s assertion that poisoned rats went into the meat hoppers was a “deliberate misrepresentation of fact [according to the “Supplemental Report on Certain Publications Reflecting on the Meat Inspection,” Bureau of Animal Industry, *Annual Report*, 1906].” They also took this opportunity to call attention to Adolphe Smith’s statement: “When a carcass, or a portion of a carcass, is condemned, in spite of

stockyard gossip and scandal, I believe that it is conscientiously destroyed.” Smith also had “some difficulty in believing” stories about the use of bruised hams and defective meat.

The President sequestered both of these April reports, for he had dispatched Commissioner of Labor Charles P. Neill and James B. Reynolds to make yet another investigation. Interestingly, both men had toured the stockyard and packinghouses on previous occasions without registering any complaints about procedure. Neill and Reynolds spent several weeks in Packingtown but delayed writing their report until commanded to do so the first weekend in June. In [the U.S. Congress, House Documents, No. 873 “Conditions in the Chicago Stock Yards”] the authors say they verified everything by “personal examination.” They did find dirty windows, floors, workbenches and meat receptacles, some toilets improperly located and unsanitary, and many rooms that were poorly ventilated. They were critical of the use of electric lights: “Most of the rooms are so dark as to make artificial light necessary at all times.” They did not mention rats. But they departed from their own guidelines to hypothesize that aged meat “might be treated with chemicals” and to say that unidentified physicians thought tuberculosis “disproportionately prevalent” among packinghouse workers.

Briefly and grudgingly they acknowledged seeing clean brick and cement floors, model cooling and meat storage facilities, and eating rooms for the women in the packinghouses. Federal agents conducted the post-mortem inspections “carefully and conscientiously” and examined hog flesh under microscopes with “great care.” In a section of the report headed “Uncleanliness in handling products” they buried their approval of the entire chilled-meat operation:

After killing, carcasses are well washed, and up to the time they reach the cooling room are handled in a fairly sanitary and cleanly manner. The parts that leave the cooling room for treatment in bulk are also handled with regard to cleanliness.

When called before the House Agriculture Committee, both Neill and Reynolds said their criticisms applied only to the canning and preservation of meat. Packinghouse workers were “a strong, sturdy class of foreigners,” not tubercular wrecks, and they saw clean rooms and sanitary metal carts, tubs and cutting tables “in quite a number of places.” Asked about their relationship to Sinclair, Reynolds replied, “We had letters from Mr. Sinclair, and he sent parties to us to give evidence.” We “made an attempt to verify certain statements, but found it impossible to do so.”

During the last week of May, Sinclair fed his scary version of what would be in the Neill-Reynolds [May 26, 27, and 28, 1906] report to the *New York Times*--plants “overrun with rats,” lard made from hogs that had died of cholera, food prepared by “ignorant foreigners or negroes” who had “no knowledge” of sanitation. Roosevelt’s June 4 letter accompanying the actual report stressed the negative and ignored the positive observations because “legislation is needed ... to prevent the possibility of all abuses in the future.” The House Agriculture Committee finally forced the President to release the two Department of Agriculture reports, but the newspapers gave them short shrift. Nor did anyone ask why Dr. Wiley had found “so little to criticize and so much to commend” in Packingtown, or why so many visitors and journalists trooped through the plants without mentioning unsanitary conditions, or how millions could consume Chicago meat without ill effects. Said the *Outlook* [on June 9, 1906], “the suspicion that poisoned, diseased, and putrid meat is packed and distributed for the use of the American people has ... spread widely--not to say wildly. Even if this suspicion is unfounded, nothing but Federal legislation can allay it.” And so Congress bowed to public opinion and the President’s wishes and endorsed the essence of the Beveridge bill extending federal inspection to all parts of the packinghouses.

If *The Jungle* misrepresents packers and packinghouse products, it is even more misleading about the workers and their community. In order to prove that they exist in an “inferno of exploitation,” Sinclair lets bosses, realtors, merchants, politicians, priests, saloon keepers and the midwife cheat the Rudkus clan. Jurgis is “helpless as a wounded animal, the target of unseen enemies,” his wife too child-like to cope, and stolid Elzbieta, the linchpin of the group, reminds him of “the angleworm, which goes

on living though cut in half ... she asked no questions about the justice of it, nor the worthwhileness of life in which destruction and death ran riot." Little wonder the journal published by the packinghouse workers' union called the novel "greatly overdrawn" and objected to a plot in which the immigrants experience "only slavery, injustice and death" [as reported in "Amalgated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen, *Official Journal*, May, 1906].

Sinclair wanted readers to believe that packinghouse workers were "rats in a trap," that prostitutes fared better than "decent" girls, and that "if you met a man who was rising ... you met a knave." John R. Commons of the University of Wisconsin studied the Chicago packinghouse workers in 1904 and described the great variety of jobs commanding wages from 15 cents an hour for new unskilled hands to 50 cents an hour for the highly skilled "butcher aristocracy." He found [as noted in his article "Labor Conditions in Meat Packing and the Recent Strike," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, November, 1904] that Irish and German newcomers in the 1880s had moved up, "accumulated money," and were fanning out into other jobs. Bohemians dominated the skilled ranks, while newly-arrived Slovaks and Lithuanians filled the lower positions. He did meet one Slovak who had been in Packingtown for ten years and "worked himself up to a 50-cent job." Another academic investigator, Carl William Thompson, studied the district in 1906 and came to similar conclusions. Even laborers were able to save part of their earnings, and "Slovak and Lithuanian girls working ... at the low wage of five dollars a week also save a considerable fraction of their income." A recent study of Chicago's low-wage women workers who chose to live apart from family and relatives found that most managed to do so. Ernest Poole's protagonist [in Antanas Kaztauskis's autobiography dictated to Ernest Poole from "Lithuania to the Chicago Stockyards," advanced from five dollars per week in his first job to eleven dollars per week and said that was "very common. There are thousands of immigrants like me." ...

The novel's impact upon readers in 1906 assures its place in American history. As John Brae-man so aptly said, "During the excitement aroused by Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, the federal government stepped forward as the defender of the public

well-being.” But is the book “journalistic novel writing,” as Sinclair claimed? Mark Sullivan rejected it as muckracking journalism and referred to the author as a “propagandist.” Stockyards area resident Ralph Chaplin considered it “very inaccurate.” And Mary McDowell, more familiar with the packinghouses and neighborhood than either Sullivan or Chaplin, said the novel “was filled with half-truths.” In a review [published in the *New Republic* on September 28, 1932] of Sinclair’s first autobiography, Edmund Wilson ventured the opinion that he chose sides “before he knew what it was all about” and the resulting “vision of good and evil at grips in all the affairs of the world ... would always have prevented Sinclair from being a first-rate newspaper man.”

Does *The Jungle* have value as historical fiction? While novelists have the right to give free rein to their imaginations, the historical novelist needs what Cushing Strout calls a “veracious imagination.” Sinclair does not meet Stout’s criteria[as found in his book *The Veracious Imagination*, 1981]--respect for “both the documentable and the imaginative without sacrificing either to the other.” Turn of the century evidence buttressed by recent scholarship exposes the many ways in which Sinclair loaded the dice to convince readers that packinghouse workers led heart-breaking lives in a capitalist jungle. In the process he distorted the truth about the packers and their product and about immigrant workers and their community....

**Source:** Lewis Carroll Wade, “The Problem with Classroom Use of Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*,” in *American Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2, Fall, 1991, pp. 79–101.

# Critical Essay #3

*In his essay, Rideout explains how Jurgis's conversion to Socialism by the end of The Jungle is believable, despite scholarly discussion of the system being out of place in the gritty novel.*

Lincoln Steffens tells in his *Autobiography* of receiving a call during the early years of muckraking from an earnest and as yet little-known young writer.

One day Upton Sinclair called on me at the office of McClure's and remonstrated.

"What you report," he said, "is enough to make a complete picture of the system, but you seem not to see it. Don't you see it? Don't you see what you are showing?"

Having just been converted to Socialism, Sinclair was sure he "saw it," and in the late autumn of 1905 his friend Jack London was writing to the Socialist weekly *The Appeal to Reason* in praise of a new book which it was serializing.

Here it is at last! The book we have been waiting for these many years! The *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of wage slavery! Comrade Sinclair's book, *The Jungle!* and what *Uncle Tom's Cabin* did for black slaves, *The Jungle* has a large chance to do for the wage-slaves of today....

*The Jungle* is dedicated "To the Workingmen of America." Into it had gone Sinclair's heartsick discovery of the filth, disease, degradation, and helplessness of the packing workers' lives. But any muckraker could have put this much into a book; the fire of

the novel came from Sinclair's whole passionate, rebellious past, from the insight into the pattern of capitalist oppression shown him by Socialist theory, and from the immediate extension into the characters' lives of his own and his wife's struggle against hunger, illness, and fear. It was the summation of his life and experience into a manifesto. The title of the book itself represented a feat of imaginative compression, for the world in which the Lithuanian immigrant Jurgis and his family find themselves is an Africa of unintelligibility, of suffering and terror, where the strong beasts devour the weak, who are dignified, if at all, only by their agony.

After their pathetically happy marriage, the descent of Jurgis and Ona into the social pit is steady. They are spiritually and, in the case of Ona, physically slaughtered, more slowly but quite as surely as the cattle in the packing plant. Disease spread by filthy working and living conditions attacks them, they endure cold in winter and clouds of flies in summer, bad food weakens their bodies, and seasonal layoffs leave them always facing starvation. When illness destroys Jurgis's great strength, he realizes that he has become a physical cast-off, one of the waste products of the plant, and must take the vilest job of all in the packing company's fertilizer plant. The forced seduction of his wife by her boss leads him to an assault on the man and thirty days in jail. Released without money, he returns to his family evicted from their home and Ona dying in childbirth. After being laid off from a dangerous job in a steel plant, Jurgis becomes successively a tramp, the henchman of a crooked politician, a strikebreaker in the packing plant strike of 1904, and finally a bum. Having reached the bottom of the social pit, he wanders into a political meeting to keep warm and hears for the first time, though at first unaware that he is listening to a Socialist, an explanation of the capitalist jungle in which he has been hunted. The sudden realization of truth is as overwhelming to Jurgis as it had been to Jurgis's creator. He at once undertakes to learn more about Socialism, is given a job in a hotel owned by a Socialist, and is eventually taken to a meeting of radical intellectuals where he hears all the arguments for the Industrial Republic which Sinclair wants his readers to know. Jurgis throws himself into the political campaign of 1904, the one in which the Party actually made such astonishing gains, and the book concludes exultantly with a speech first given by Sinclair himself, proclaiming the coming victory of the Socialists, at

which time Chicago will belong to the people.

The “conversion” pattern of *The Jungle* has been attacked as permitting too easy a dramatic solution; however, aside from the recognized fact that many conversions have occurred before and since Paul saw the light on the road to Damascus, it should be noted that in *The Jungle* Sinclair carefully prepares such an outcome by conducting Jurgis through all the circles of the workers’ inferno and by attempting to show that no other savior except Socialism exists. Perhaps a more valid objection to the book is Sinclair’s failure to realize his characters as “living” persons, a charge which, incidentally, may be brought against many nonconversion novels. Jurgis is admittedly a composite figure who was given a heaping share of the troubles of some twenty or thirty packing workers with whom Sinclair had talked, and the author’s psychology of character is indeed a simple one. Although in the introductory wedding scene Jurgis and the other major characters are sharply sketched as they had appeared to the writer at an actual wedding feast in Packingtown, during the remainder of the book they gradually lose their individuality, becoming instead any group of immigrants destroyed by the Beef Trust. Yet paradoxically, the force and passion of the book are such that this group of lay figures with Jurgis at their head, these mere capacities for infinite suffering, finally do come to stand for the masses themselves, for all the faceless ones to whom things are done. Hardly individuals, they nevertheless collectively achieve symbolic status.

Sinclair’s success in creating this jungle world emphasizes by contrast what is actually the book’s key defect. Jurgis’s conversion is probable enough, the Socialist explanation might well flash upon him with the blinding illumination of a religious experience; but practically from that point onward to the

conclusion of his novel Sinclair turns from fiction to another kind of statement. Where the capitalist damnation, the destruction of the immigrants, has been proved almost upon the reader’s pulses, the Socialist salvation, after its initial impact, is intellectualized. The reader cannot exist imaginatively in Jurgis’s converted state even if willing, for Jurgis hardly exists himself. What it means to be a Socialist is given, not

through the rich disorder of felt experience, but in such arbitrarily codified forms as political speeches, an essay on Party personalities, or the long conversation in monologues about the Cooperative Commonwealth which comprises most of the book's final chapter. *The Jungle* begins and lives as fiction; it ends as a political miscellany.

The fact that Jurgis's militant acceptance of Socialism is far less creatively realized than his previous victimization is indicative of how Sinclair's outraged moral idealism is attracted more to the pathos than the power of the poor, and suggests his real affinity for the mid-Victorian English reform novelists. More specifically, *The Jungle* is reminiscent of the work of the humanitarian Dickens, whose social protest had "thrilled" the young rebel. There are frequent resemblances between the two writers in narrative method, in presentation of character, in the tendency of both to intrude themselves with bubbling delight or horrified indignation into the scene described. Whole paragraphs on the wedding feast of Jurgis Rudkus and Ona recall, except for the Lithuanian, the manner of Dickens with the Cratchits' Christmas dinner, and Madame Haupt, fat, drunken, and filthy, might have been a midwife in *Oliver Twist's* London. Finally, the temper of Sinclair's protest is curiously like that of Dickens. Where the latter urges only the literal practice of Christianity as a remedy for the cruelties he describes, Sinclair, to be sure, demands the complete transformation of the existing order of things by the Socialist revolution; yet the revolution that the orator so apocalyptically envisages at the conclusion to *The Jungle* is to be accomplished by the ballot and not by the bullet. Sinclair's spirit is not one of blood and barricades, but of humanitarianism and brotherly love.

**Source:** Walter B. Rideout, "Realism and Revolution," in his *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900–1954: Some Interrelations of Literature and Society*, Harvard University Press, 1956 pp. 19–46.

# Media Adaptations

An audio recording of *The Jungle* was made by Blackstone Audio Books in 1994, read by Robert Morris.

An unabridged recording of *The Jungle*, narrated by George Guidall, was released by Recorded Books, Inc. in 1998.

Audio Book Contractors released an audio version entitled *Upton Sinclair's The Jungle* in 1998.

# Topics for Further Study

Many of the incidents included in *The Jungle* are based on actual events. Research the 1904 beef strike in Chicago and other cities, the International Harvester Trust created in 1902, the settlement house movement, or the Socialist movement in the early years of the twentieth century, and report on the background of Sinclair's fictionalized events.

What steps are taken by the government to assure that meat sold today is sanitary and safe to eat? Examine the inspection process and explain it visually with a chart that shows the steps of the process.

Music often helps people to understand the mood of a different time or culture. Find some songs that would have been popular in Chicago in 1905, and explain how their lyrics and melodies reflect the way of life described in *The Jungle*.

# Compare & Contrast

**1906:** The Pure Food and Drug bill introduced, in part, as a result of revelations made in *The Jungle*, was opposed by conservative politicians. Republican Senator Nelson W. Aldrich, 64, asked, “Is there anything in the existing condition that makes it the duty of Congress to put the liberty of the United States in jeopardy? ... Are we going to take up the question as to what a man shall eat and what a man shall drink, and put him under severe penalties if he is eating or drinking something different from what the chemists of the Agricultural Department think desirable?”

**Today:** The debate still continues about whether government safety standards are an infringement of manufacturers’ freedom.

**1906:** The worst earthquake to hit an American city shook San Francisco, registering 8.3 on the Richter scale. The resulting fire lasted three days. In the end, 2,500 died, 250,000 were left homeless, and damages were estimated at over \$400 million.

**1989:** An earthquake crippled San Francisco, measuring 7.1 on the Richter scale (which means that its impact was one-tenth of the 1906 quake). The quake killed 90 people and caused \$6 billion in property damage, mostly due to the collapse of the double-deck Nimitz Highway and the buckling of the Bay Bridge.

**Today:** A growing number of scientists are convinced that a major tremor, greater than any on record, is due to shake California’s San Andreas Fault within the next fifty years.

**1906:** Investigation of an outbreak of typhoid fever in a private kitchen lead researchers to the discovery that similar outbreaks occurred in places where Mary Mallon had previously worked. “Typhoid Mary,” as she came to be called, was put into virtual solitary confinement from 1906-1910 because of her ability to infect others.

**1981:** Scientists started noticing symptoms of abnormalities in the immune systems of gay American men, mirroring the symptoms of Ka-posi's sarcoma, a form of cancer found often in Africa but rare in the rest of the world. Their findings eventually came to be known as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, or AIDS.

**1985:** The first blood test for the HIV virus, which causes AIDS, was approved for use in the United States. Unsafe sharing of needles among intravenous drug users is recognized as a significant cause in spreading the virus.

**Today:** The spread of AIDS has been so prevalent that it is no longer dismissed as the problem of just a few social groups. Inhibitors have been developed that can prolong the lives of AIDS victims, but it is still considered a terminal disease.

**1906:** On Christmas Eve, radio operators on ships off of the Atlantic seaboard heard the first broadcast of a human voice. Inventor Reginald Fessenden read the Christmas story from the gospel of St. Luke over the airwaves that had only been used up to that time to broadcast Morse code. Previous radio transmissions had been to specific receivers.

**1920:** The world's first radio station, KDKA in East Pittsburgh, began transmission. Only about 5000 Americans had radio receivers. The following year 75,000 sets were sold.

**1948:** The technology boom that followed the end of World War II led to the growth of television: in 1945 there were only 5000 television sets in America, but by 1948 there were over a million.

**Today:** Information media are increasingly carried over wires, as in the cases of the Internet and cable television, while personal communication devices like telephones and pagers send signals through the air.

# What Do I Read Next?

In 1962, a few years before his death, Sinclair published his view of his long life and many accomplishments in *The Autobiography of Upton Sinclair* (Harcourt, Brace). While *The Jungle* and the social changes that resulted from it are clearly the most notable accomplishments in his life, his life was filled with other publications and deeds that make it notable, including the founding of the American Civil Liberties Union and breaking the Rockefeller oil trust with his novel *Oil!*.

Leon Harris' biography *Upton Sinclair: American Rebel*, published in 1975 by Thomas Y. Crowell Company, is a thorough picture of the author's life. It paints a generally positive picture of the author's life, a picture that his critics might find a little too rosy.

Theodore Dreiser's book *Sister Carrie* was published a few years earlier than *The Jungle*, in 1900. It shocked readers of the day with its grim realism and frank sexuality, presenting what might be the best example of the realistic style that Sinclair used to make his social message powerful. Dreiser's later and more famous book, *An American Tragedy* (1925), about a famous murder in Chicago, also reflects Sinclair's style and social concerns.

James R. Barrett's book *Work and Community in the Jungle: Chicago's Packinghouse Workers, 1894-1922* is an explanation of the social situation that Sinclair wrote about. Published in 1987, this book makes an excellent companion piece to *The Jungle*, and was published along with the authoritative 1988 version of the novel (for which Barrett wrote the notes) by the University of Illinois Press.

Emile Zola is considered the father of the Realist movement, and was certainly one of the most dedicated social critics to ever write novels. Much of Sinclair's style can be seen in the work of Zola. Almost all of his books are considered classics and are read today, but in particular *The Dram Shop* from 1877, concerning alcoholism, might

interest Sinclair readers, since it is a theme that is visited frequently in *The Jungle*.

Another follower in the Realistic vein was James T. Farrell, who wrote a trilogy of books about an Irish-Catholic boy growing up in Chicago. The books were published throughout the 1930s, and then collected together in 1938, in a volume called *Studs Lonigan*, with a new introduction by the author.

# Topics for Discussion

1. What elements in the plot have caused critics to accuse *The Jungle* of being too melodramatic to be classified as good literature?
2. "Muckraking" is a term applied to investigative journalism intent on effecting social change, often to the point of abandoning any pretext at objective reporting. Why have some critics called *The Jungle* a muckraking novel?
3. Does Sinclair consider Jurgis moral or immoral? In Sinclair's view is it sinful to become a thief or prostitute?
4. Most "naturalistic" fiction ends on a pessimistic note and suggests that man has little control over his environment. Is there any reason to think that Jurgis's life will improve?
5. Do any of the characters in *The Jungle* seem to be unique individuals, or are they all simply two-dimensional figures whose experiences serve only to convey Sinclair's political message?

# Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Research the Socialist movement in America at the turn of the twentieth century.
2. Along with French and Russian writers, Sinclair helped establish the tradition of naturalism. Research the characteristics of the "naturalistic novel" and analyze how *The Jungle* fits into the movement.
3. Read Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) and compare it to *The Jungle*.
4. The meat-packing industry remains controversial today. Research some of the practices that people find unacceptable.
5. Research the Pure Food and Drugs Act passed by Congress in 1906 and explain why it was necessary.

# Literary Precedents

Critics commonly remark on *The Jungle's* naturalistic elements and so have drawn comparisons to the great novels that have depicted humanity as a species like all others directed by uncontrollable biological or social factors. To the extent that *The Jungle* shows pessimistic determinism, its precedent can be seen in Emile Zola.

*The Jungle* is polemical; so sometimes was Leo Tolstoy. If *The Jungle* is seen as journalistic and propagandistic, the search for precedents can look as far back as Thomas Paine. Before the book was written, Sinclair remarked, "The novel will not have any superficial resemblance to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* [1852]. Fundamentally it will be identical with it -- or try to be." Indeed, Jack London, himself a naturalistic writer and Sinclair's friend, called *The Jungle* the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of wage slavery.

Precedents ranging from Paine to Tolstoy seem like a mixed list, and *The Jungle* itself is a mixed bag, employing narration and exposition in the tempering of naturalistic pessimism with socialistic optimism.

# For Further Study

William A. Bloodworth Jr., *Upton Sinclair*, Twayne, 1977.

A brief, comprehensive, scholarly look at the author's career and how his political activities intertwined with his social goals.

Floyd Dell, *Upton Sinclair: A Study in Social Protest*, Doran, 1927.

Dell was a prominent writer and social activist in Sinclair's time, and his critical study tends to view Sinclair and his achievements favorably.

Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World*, Quadrangle Books, 1969.

Over five hundred pages is given to examination of the politicized union that few readers know about today, but that influenced labor relations throughout the twentieth century.

Thomas J. Jablonsky, *Pride in the Jungle: Community and Everyday Life in Back of the Yards Chicago*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

A full-spectrum look at the area, keeping readers current with the changes that have taken place in the stockyard neighborhood since Sinclair's book was published, and as a result of it.

Harvey Swados, "The World of Upton Sinclair," in *The Atlantic Monthly*, December, 1961, pp. 96-102.

A look at Sinclair as a social force, apart from his literary worth, from a poet and short story writer who, though not a household name, was himself important in the literature of his day.

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## **Introduction**

### **Purpose of the Book**

The purpose of *Novels for Students (NfS)* is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to

information about the work. Part of Gale's For Students Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on classic novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

## Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of classic novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members educational professionals helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

### How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.

- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as *The Narrator* and alphabetized as *Narrator*. If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name *Jean Louise Finch* would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname *Scout Finch*.
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the *Subject/Theme Index*.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the *Glossary*.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first

received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.

- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).
- **Sources:** an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- **Further Reading:** an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- **Media Adaptations:** a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- **Topics for Further Study:** a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- **Compare and Contrast Box:** an at-a-glance comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- **What Do I Read Next?:** a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures,

and eras.

## Other Features

NfS includes *The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature*, a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how *Novels for Students* can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

## Citing *Novels for Students*

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of *Novels for Students* may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

Night. *Novels for Students*. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the *Criticism* subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. *Critical Essay on Winesburg, Ohio*. *Novels for Students*. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. *Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition*, *Canadian Literature* No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in *Novels for Students*, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. *Richard Wright: Wearing the Mask*, in *Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography* (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in *Novels for Students*, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

## We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of *Novels for Students* welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: [ForStudentsEditors@gale.com](mailto:ForStudentsEditors@gale.com). Or write to the editor at:

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