A baby boy is abandoned deep in the jungle and is taken in by a she-wolf to be raised as one of her own.

Topics: Animals, Wolves; Classics, Classics (All); Family Life, Babies; Natural Environments, Jungles

Main Characters

Akela  the great gray Lone Wolf, Leader of the Pack and a true friend to Mowgli
Bagheera  a black panther who is cunning, bold, reckless and respected
Baloo  a sleepy brown bear who takes responsibility for raising Mowgli, the man-cub
Buldeo  the old hunter of the Man-village who fears Mowgli
Kaa  another of Mowgli’s teachers; a Rock python who helps save Mowgli from the Bandar-Log
Kotick  a pure white seal who wants to find a better life for his fellow seals
Kotuko  an Inuit boy who saves his village from famine
Little Toomai  the ambitious, rambunctious son of Big Toomai, famed elephant handler
Messua  a kind village woman who lost a baby son to a tiger
Mowgli  a boy raised by a bear and a panther who, after following the Law of the Jungle, has a difficult time relating to man
Mugger of Mugger Ghaut  an old and much-feared crocodile whom the locals call a "godling"
Purun Bhagat  a holy man, formerly Sir Purun Dass, and important government man
Rikki-tikki-tavi  a mongoose who endears himself to a family
Shere Khan  a tiger who vows to someday kill the man-cub he considers his rightful prey

Vocabulary

Aleut  a member of a group of native people who live in northern North America
Caste  a social class system used in India
Inuit  a group of people who live in northern North America and Greenland; also called Eskimos
Shoal  a sandbar creating a shallow place in the water
Sorcerer  one who uses magic
Verandah  a long, covered porch

Synopsis

Through a series of stories, the tale of Mowgli, the man-cub, is told. Beginning with his arrival in the jungle, he is taken into the Wolf-Pack after being sponsored by Bagheera, the panther, and Baloo, the brown bear. Mowgli has many teachers in the jungle including a python, monkeys, a Bengal tiger and an elephant. Through his experiences, he comes to learn the Law of the Jungle. His brief interludes in the Man-village leave him disgusted, yet intrigued by these strange creatures.

Interspersed between Mowgli’s story are other stories featuring animals with distinctive personalities. There is a white seal who dreams of a safe haven for his brethren, a mongoose who saves a family from a menacing pair of cobras, and an old crocodile with a last wish. In other stories, the son of an elephant handler wishes to see an elephant-dance, an Inuit boy leaves his village to save his people from certain death, and a much-decorated government official gives up his city life to become a holy man.

The book ends as Mowgli becomes a man and makes the difficult, yet inevitable decision to return to the Man-Pack.
Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding
What did Akela mean when he said that Mowgli should drive Mowgli back to the Man-Pack?

One day Mowgli would realize that he needed to be among his own kind. At the end of the story, he feels a strong pull toward the Man-Pack, but does not understand why.

Literary Analysis
In what ways were the animals of the jungle like the Man-Pack? In what ways were they different?

The animals obeyed the Law of the Jungle. They had a definite hierarchy. Their class system was based on hunting skill and strength. Some were friendly and likeable; others were cruel, weak or simple.

Inferential Comprehension
Why did Mowgli leave the jungle when it was clearly so difficult for him to do so?

He feels physically drawn to the Man-Pack, yet he must remember how he was treated by most of them. He had reached the age of seventeen, and seemed mesmerized by the girl who came down the path. He had become a man, and he needed to return to his own kind.

Constructing Meaning
What did Mowgli learn from each of his teachers that might help him when he returned to the Man-Pack?

From Baloo he learned kindness and patience, from Bagheera stealth and wariness. From Kaa he learned to trust with hesitation, and from the Bandar-Log he learned about foolishness and sloth.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting  Mowgli's stories take place in the jungles of India. The stories that do not include Mowgli take place in a variety of places including an Aleutian village, a mountain village in India, and the Arctic Sea. Mowgli occasionally returns to a village at the edge of the jungle. In the jungle setting, the Law of the Jungle is a strictly-followed, many-faceted way of life. The animal hierarchy is clearly illustrated through actions, legends and fables. The jungle setting is contrasted with the man village when Mowgli makes one of his infrequent trips to satisfy his curiosity. Also discussed briefly is the caste system of India. Students might compare the jungle hierarchy with the Indian caste system. Students can discuss the comparison between human laws and the Law of the Jungle, and some of the differences between the village and the jungle.

Understanding Literary Features  The central theme of the The Jungle Book is that a harmonious existence occurs when the jungle inhabitants abide by the laws of the jungle. The ancient laws have been in effect longer than anyone can remember. The laws are simple and efficient, and are amended when necessary. An underlying theme in the story deals with the "birds of a feather concept," as Mowgli discovers that although he was raised in the jungle, he really belongs with the humans in the man village. The conflict is illustrated when Mowgli makes his brief forays into the village and finds the humans ignorant and foolish, save for the kind and motherly Messua. A discussion or writing topic could compare the jungle laws to the local political structure. Another idea would be to consider the order or ranks that might occur among farm animals, forest animals or domestic pets.

Understanding Characterization  Each jungle animal has human characteristics, from the protective Mother Wolf, to the teachers, Baloo and Kaa, to the moronic Bandar-Log. Every

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animal has a status as well as a purpose in the
jungle. Mowgli's arrival briefly throws off the
balance and jungle law, but he is raised by the
Wolf Pack and strictly adheres to the ancient
ways. Conflict occurs when Mowgli realizes he is
a human, and attempts to live as one. Most of the
humans are portrayed as ignorant fools, save for
Messua, a kind motherly woman. Discussion
topics can include a comparison of jungle laws
with the local political structure. As a writing
activity, students could figure out a probable
hierarchy of domestic pets, or describe what
Mowgli might have been like had he been
adopted by the Monkey People instead of the
Wolf Pack.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors  The
author took a group of animals and made them
into a society with rules, laws and a social
structure. Choose a group of inanimate objects
and create a society. It could be a group of fruits
and vegetables, toys in a toybox, books on a
shelf, or a basket of dirty laundry. Write a
dialogue in which the objects explain some laws
and where things rank in the social structure.