

KS3 Bookclub

The last Chance Hotel, Nicki Thornton
The Call of the Wild, Jack London

The Last Chance Hotel - Nicki Thornton

Genre: murder mystery

Person: 3rd

We are looking in on the story. Casting our eye over all the event to try and work out the mystery before Seth does.

Perspective: from Seth's

Tense: Past

Often makes for a more fluid, easier read. BUT, it tends to take away any question of how the book will end - you are left with the distinct impression that the lead character will survive relatively unscathed, and all shall be well. This makes it a bit harder to add twists to the end of the story.

When you let a story unfold, you show how things fit into place. To tell how things fit, changes it from story telling to reporting (like journalists do). Writing in the past tense makes it easier to accidentally slip into reporting than story-telling.

Narrative: linear (one event follows on from the next in chronological time)

This lets the story unfold at the same rate for us as the main character.

Themes:

- Magic
- Mysteries
- Secrets and Lies
- Survival and determination
- Truth/knowledge/wisdom/learning
- Dominance and violence
- Morality
- Belonging and love

• What did you think to the characters and their names?

Some names suit their characters, e.g. Inspector Pewter [grey, rather boring, does a job, reliable, strong - like a pewter tankard], Angelique Squerr [a mixture of square (booking, intelligent) and queer (strange, not quite like anyone else)]

Some contradict their characters, e.g. Count Marred [impaired, spoilt, flawed, generally a negative force]

• Does this remind you of any other books or authors? Charles Dickens, Pilgrim's Progress,

• Is this an original story?

The author said that she gathered all the elements she liked in books and put them together to make a story she would have loved to have read.

• Is there ever such a thing as an 'original book'?

Many of Shakespeares plays are based on mythological or historical stories.

- It is often said that there are only seven story plots: rags to riches, overcoming the monster, the quest, voyage and return, rebirth, comedy and tragedy. **What would this book be classed as?**

- **Does the book remind you of any other book you might have read?**

Harry potter - magical

boy in the attic, boy in the cupboard under the stairs

philosopher's stone also a whodunit feel

boy just discovering magic

humble child finding out that they are actually quite rich in their own right

orphan, cared for by someone who is exploiting them

a very intelligent female help him work it out

a natural ability for magic

A magical item left by family - invisibility cloak/black book

Thick but ambitious aunt and uncle

Tiffany Bunn Vs Dudley Dursley

- **Do you think Seth was a realistic depiction of a boy?**

- **Would the character have worked equally well if Seth were a girl?**

- Murder mysteries need red herrings. It is a really old trick to keep people glued to the book. Often it is hard to work out which is which right up until the end.

- **Which got you, and which did you see for what they were?**

- **Which clues stood out for you?**

- **Why is the book broken into three parts?**

Part 1: intro to characters, scene set, Seth accused of crime and left in cellar.

Part 2: many minor complications, climaxes and suspense to take us on the wrong tracks

Part 3: final complication of the firefly cage, the realisation of who really did it, pulling everything together and finishing off the story

To try and build up the suspense, to give cliff hangers like in television series, to show we are moving through a new phase of the main characters thinking - it symbolises how the character is developing

List of story ingredient:

the initial situation, boy in abusive situation feeling there was no way out, magic world in conflict, mysterious people turn up to the hotel

conflict, murder, Seth accused of the death of Thallomius, everyone keeping secrets, no one can see a way into a sealed room

(main) complication, (Mr Bunn) Tiffany and the firefly cage

climax, Seth works out who did it,

suspense, Seth, Kingfisher and Tiffany all fighting for the firefly cage

denouement, Seth and Pewter pull everything (the why's, who's, how's, where's and whats) together at the end, Wich Wracht mystery solved

and **conclusion.** Everyone going their separate ways, Seth starting on his journey to magic

(lots of minor complications, climax and suspense moments added, so more oscillating than a perfect arc)

(<https://drive.google.com/file/d/18uhIFMA9hGWE5IdxAnKHUIdFrW9g8Q9a/view>
<http://www.nickithornton.co.uk/p/nicki-thornton-book-activities.html>)

Call of the Wild - Jack London

Genre: animal fiction/adventure

Person: 3rd

Perspective: Bucks

Tense: Past

Narrative: linear (one event follows on from the next in chronological time)

This lets the story unfold at the same rate for us as the main character.

Themes:

- What it means to be wild/civilised
- nature/nurture - are strong characters made or born
- What it means to be truly alive - on the edge of death
- Over-coming/living in the natural elements
- Survival and determination
- knowledge/wisdom/learning
- Dominance and violence
- Belonging, Loyalty and Love
- Strength and Pride
- Friendship and Competition
- Submission and defeat
- Morality

- **Is this an original story?**

The author travelled all over in search of new stories, including the places mentioned in the book. The dog is based on his friends's dog and he himself was a prospector going up the Yukon river for a while, but he also read fact books on the area.

- **Does buck sound like a real dog?**

Anthropomorphism - giving human characteristics and behaviour to an animal, God or inanimate object

- Mercedes is a fascinating character: ill-equipped in mind and body for where she is going, but full of determination - more so than Hal and Charles.

- **How does her determination compare to Buck's?**

- **How does her journey to come accustomed to the wild compare with Buck's?**

- **What part did they both find hardest?**

- Her possessions (and loss of them) symbolise that what you need in the wild is very different to what you need in civilisation, in fact if you hold on to civilisation you will end up dying for it. **Did Buck lose anything by becoming wild or did he gain something?**

- (I have unreliably 'discovered' that) The call of the wild was originally going to be called 'the sleeping wolf'.

- **Why do you think someone would chose one over the other?**

- **which do you prefer?**

- **This book can be thought of as being 4 parts.**

Part 1: Buck struggles with surviving in a new life

Part 2: Buck learns how to thrive in this environment of men, other dogs and extreme climate, becoming pack leader

Part 3: Buck is almost broken by the way he is treated, but survives because of John Thornton

Part 4: Buck loses John and becomes the 'wolf' he was always meant to be

- **Which part 'makes' Buck?**

- The philosopher, Nietzsche, said that it was through struggle we become great. **What do you think?**

- **Which version of Buck do you prefer?**

List of story ingredient:

the initial situation,	Pet sold for a working dog
conflict,	struggle with changing settings, physical work and relationships with man, change from a tame dog to a wild animal
(main) complication,	Men not respecting the unwritten contract between man and working dog - to the point of sled dogs dying.
climax,	Buck being pushed right to the edge, John Thornton saving Bucks life
suspense,	The tests of Buck's loyalty to John Thornton - will this relationship go the same way as all the others? Will the call of the wild be stronger than love?
denouement,	Buck gets his revenge for the loss of John Thornton, all Bucks connections with the 'civilised' world are wound up.
and conclusion.	Buck joins the wolves

[\(https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/call/character/buck/](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/call/character/buck/)

<https://www.shmoop.com/study-guides/literature/call-of-the-wild/characters>

[https://jacklondonpark.com/jack-london-biography/\)](https://jacklondonpark.com/jack-london-biography/)

Compare and contrast texts

- what are the similarities and differences between our two protagonists?

Buck: proud; determined; it is not enough not to be beaten, he wants to be king; calculating, happy to bide his time for the bigger victory; trusts very slowly; follows the rules (the law of club and fang); integrity; wants to survive, physically strong and massive - traditional depiction of a male hero... e.g. Sharpe, Thor, Zeus

Seth: overly humble; slightly inadequate; a bit of a victim; impetuous; doesn't always think things through; trusts too easily; determined; breaks the rules; sneaky; doesn't want to die, small, skinny - traditional depiction of a female hero... e.g. Northanger Abbey or pretty much any other Jane Austin heroine.

- Do you have a preference between Buck and Seth?
- Do you think if the books were written by people of the opposite sex, the lead characters would have the same characteristics?
- Which protagonist/hero developed the most throughout their story?
- Do the other characters help or hinder our protagonists on their respective journeys?
- Which book would you describe as romantic? Why?
- One book focuses on the wonder/power of the natural world, the other on the wonder/power of the supernatural world. Which is your preference?
- How did the stories make you feel when you read them?
- Did either story give you a sense of place and time?
- Which story did you prefer? Why?
- Would you read any other stories by the same authors?
- Would you recommend either texts to your friends?