

The Jungle Book Study

Introduction:

For years, many Americans bought meat from butcher shops and grocery stores, never thinking about the type of conditions under which livestock had been butchered and the meat had been processed. Then in 1906, author Upton Sinclair wrote *The Jungle*, an exposé of the Chicago meat-packing industry.

Millions of people who read the book were shocked by the unsanitary practices Sinclair described. His work led to sweeping reforms in the meat-packing industry, along with federal regulations regarding sanitary practices in the industry. As Sinclair said, "I aimed for the public's heart, and hit it in the stomach instead."

REQUIRED VOCABULARY

Adulterate	Hopper
Borax	Menagerie
Chameleon	Packingtown Jest
Consumption Germs	Packingtown Swindle
Economy	Pickles
Glycerin	Prestidigitator
Home Consumption	Progressivism

REQUIRED QUESTIONS

1. Describe what Sinclair called "Bubbly Creek."
2. How does Sinclair describe the hands of the men who worked in the "pickle room"?
3. According to Sinclair, what was the "special disease" of those who worked in the "chilling rooms"?
4. What was the "time limit a man could work in the chilling rooms"?
5. Speculate as to why men might have continued working in the packing houses under such conditions.
 - Why do you think they didn't seek other employment, or seek to unionize at this point?
6. How does Sinclair describe how "rejected sausage from Europe" would be used?
7. How does Sinclair describe the meat that "tumbled onto the floor"?
8. How did Sinclair describe how meat could become contaminated by rats?
9. What does Sinclair say regarding cleaning the waste barrels?
10. Describe what was often in the barrels. What would happen with the materials from the barrels?
11. Do you think that after publication of *The Jungle* meat-packing companies would have been willing to eliminate the problems Sinclair wrote about? Why or why not?
12. Do you think Sinclair's descriptions of the conditions in the meat-packing plants were exaggerated or sensationalistic? In your opinion, would *The Jungle* have been as effective if Sinclair had hit the public's "heart" instead of its "stomach"? Explain.
13. Define progressivism.
14. What do you find most surprising in Upton Sinclair's account of the meatpacking industry around the turn of the century? Why?
15. What do you think was Sinclair's purpose for writing this piece?
16. How do you think readers reacted to *The Jungle* when it first came out?
17. What connection do you see between the public's reading *The Jungle* and subsequent progressive legislation, like the Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Act, which were passed within six months of its publication?
18. Do you think this legislation would have passed without the public attention these issues received after the publication of articles and books like this one? Why or why not?
19. What does the publication of *The Jungle* tell you about the progressive movement?
20. In the style of Upton Sinclair, write a paragraph describing an issue that you think must be addressed in today's society. Ideas may include gas prices, sweatshop labor, or climate change, but it is recommended that you come up with your own creative issue.