

AP Language/Composition – Rumfelt
Realism and Naturalism

Analysis Questions for “To Build a Fire”

Read the short story (in your literature book) and complete the following questions for class on Friday. Use examples from the story to support your responses.

Character Analysis

- How would you describe the man in London's story?
- How experienced is the man? Is he a novice? Prepared?
- What does the man seem to think of his own abilities?
- How does the man behave in relation to his environment?

Setting

- How would you describe the setting in the opening paragraph? Use examples from the text to support your response. Identify some of the adjectives in this opening scene and discuss their effect.
- Choose three other paragraphs and discuss the mood created. Use examples from the text to support your response.

Narrator

Identify 2 passages in the story where the narrator either has knowledge unknown to the characters themselves or where the narrator provides his own commentary. Then answer the following questions:

- How would you describe the tone of the narrator?
- Does the narration foreshadow subsequent events? How?
- How does the narrator feel about the character(s) at this point in the story?
- What point-of-view the narrator is adopting in this story—first or third person?
- How would this passage be different if it were narrated via first person point of view? Would the story change?

Relationship between the man and the dog

- How is the relationship between the man and the dog discussed at first?
- What did the dog instinctively understand that the man did not?
- How does the man and dog's relationship symbolize the man's relationship to his environment?

After you finish reading

- What does the man's failure to "build a fire" symbolize?
- Does the man have either knowledge or instinct?
- Did the man finally gain knowledge at the end of the story?
- What is the significance of the dog's final movement towards civilization at the end of the story? What does this suggest about the dog's relationship to nature? Is instinct driving this movement?
- What is suggested about the relationship between man and nature? Give examples from the story to support your response.