

Vocabulary: Lesson 3

"To Build a Fire" by Jack London

1. **agitation** (*n.*)- state of being shaken, stirred up, disturbed, or excited
2. **avalanche** (*n.*)- a large mass of snow, ice, earth, rock, etc. that suddenly falls
3. **capsize** (*v.*)- to overturn; to upset
4. **directly** (*adv.*)- in a straight line; by the shortest course; without anything blocking the way
5. **fault** (*n.*)- cause of failure; error
6. **folly** (*n.*)- foolishness; lack of sense
7. **freighted** (*adj.*)- loaded; burdened
8. **numb** (*adj.*)- unable to feel or move
9. **remote** (*adj.*)- far away; not connected directly
10. **sheath** (*n.*)- a case for a sword, dagger, etc.; hence anything like such a covering

Exercise 2: Using Vocabulary in Context

Select **five** weekly vocabulary words to use in your own sentences. You must utilize each sentence pattern at least once (simple, complex, compound, compound-complex).

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

LESSON 3

from **To Build a Fire** (fiction)
by Jack London

The fire was a success. He was safe. He remembered the advice of the old-timer on Sulphur Creek, and smiled. The old-timer had been very serious in laying down the law that no man must travel alone in the Klondike after fifty below. Well, here he was; he had had the accident; he was alone; and he had saved himself. Those old-timers were rather womanish, some of them, he thought. All a man had to do was to keep his head, and he was all right. Any man who was a man could travel alone. But it was surprising, the rapidity with which his cheeks and nose were freezing. And he had not thought his fingers could go lifeless in so short a time. Lifeless they were, for he could scarcely make them move together to grip a twig, and they seemed **remote** from his body and from him. When he touched a twig, he had to look and see whether or not he had hold of it. The wires were pretty well down between him and his finger-ends.

All of which counted for little. There was the fire, snapping and crackling and promising life with every dancing flame. He started to untie his moccasins. They were coated with ice; the thick German socks were like **sheaths** of iron halfway to the knees; and the moccasin strings were like rods of steel all twisted and knotted as if by fire. For a moment he tugged with his **numb** fingers, then, realizing the **folly** of it, he drew his sheath knife.

But before he could cut the strings, it happened. It was his own **fault** or, rather, his mistake. He should not have built the fire under the

spruce tree. He should have built it in the open. But it had been easier to pull the twigs from the brush and drop them **directly** on the fire. Now the tree under which he had done this carried a weight of snow on its boughs. No wind had blown for weeks, and each bough was fully **freighted**. Each time he had pulled a twig he had given a slight **agitation** to the tree—an agitation scarcely noticeable, so far as he was concerned, but an agitation sufficient to bring about the disaster. High up in the tree one bough **capsized** its load of snow. This fell on the boughs beneath, capsizing them. This process continued, spreading out and involving the whole tree. It grew like an **avalanche**, and it descended without warning upon the man and the fire, and the fire was blotted out!

The man was shocked. It was as though he had just heard his own sentence of death. For a moment he sat and stared at the spot where the fire had been. Then he grew very calm. Perhaps the old-timer on Sulphur Creek was right. No man should travel alone in the Klondike after fifty below. If he had only had a trail mate he would have been in no danger now. The trail mate could have built the fire. Well, it was up to him to build the fire over again, and this second time there must be no failure. Even if he succeeded, he would most likely lose some toes. His feet must be badly frozen by now, and there would be some time before the second fire was ready.

Exercise I: Context Clues

Read the passage above, paying special attention to the words in dark type. These are the Master Words you will study in this lesson. As you read, look for context clues in the sentences and paragraphs around each Master Word. Circle any words and phrases that give clues to the meaning of the Master Words.

Master Words

Place a check by words you feel you know; underline words you don't know.

agitation

capsize

fault

freighted

remote

avalanche

directly

folly

numb

sheath

Exercise 3: Synonyms and Antonyms

Use the synonyms and antonyms in the word list to fill in the blanks except where you see an X.

	Synonyms	Antonyms
1. remote	_____	_____
2. sheath	_____	X
3. numb	_____	_____
4. folly	_____	_____
5. fault	_____	_____
6. directly	_____	_____
7. freighted	_____	_____
8. agitation	_____	_____
9. capsize	_____	_____
10. avalanche	_____	X

Word List	
balance	indirectly
burdened	landslide
case	lightened
connected	overturn
deadened	peace
distant	sensitive
disturbance	straight
error	virtue
foolishness	wisdom

Exercise 4: Sentence Completion

From the Master Words, choose the appropriate word for the blank in each of the following sentences. Write the word in the space provided at the right.

- Natalie caused her canoe to ...?... when she stood up too quickly. _____
- Alyssa admitted that it was her ...?... that she and Katlyn were late for gym. _____
- The scrapbook that Peter discovered in the attic was ...?... with memories. _____
- During the huge parade, (a, an) ...?... of confetti fell from somewhere above. _____
- The ...?... village in Alaska is accessible only by plane. _____
- Before Dr. Wilkinson began stitching, he gave Ted a drug to kill the pain and make his arm ...?... . _____
- Striking for higher wages caused much ...?... among the miners. _____
- Kathy's parents insisted that she go ...?... home after the school dance and not stop to eat. _____
- The frightened man shook as he drew his sword from its ...?... . _____
- People made fun of the *Clermont*, a steamship built by Robert Fulton in 1807, referring to it as "Fulton's ...?... . _____

Exercise 5: Metaphor and Simile

In the passage, Jack London uses figurative language, including metaphor and simile, to help create mood or atmosphere. A *metaphor* is a figure of speech that compares essentially unlike things to focus on an important similarity. A *simile* is a comparison that uses the words *like* or *as*. In the last line of the first paragraph, London writes, "The wires were pretty well down between him and his finger-ends." In this metaphor, he compares the connection between the man and his fingers to a broken electrical connection to describe vividly how detached the man felt from his fingers.

In the chart below, write other examples of figurative language from the passage. Then explain each one in the second column. An example has been done for you.

Text of Personification	Explanation
socks were like sheaths of iron	The socks were frozen hard and cold like iron cases around his legs.

Exercise 6: Analogies

Determine the relationship between the first pair of words below. Then write the Master Word on the blank that would create a similar relationship with the second pair of words. The types of analogies used in this activity are synonyms, antonyms, and category/item. (See page 158 for a guide to analogy types.)

- diffident : confident :: common sense : _____
- touching : tender :: unrest : _____
- build : fire :: _____ : boat
- flower : rose :: container : _____
- enlist : volunteer :: unfeeling : _____

Write About It: Learning from Mistakes

The man in "To Build a Fire" makes a mistake when building a fire in the wilderness in extremely cold conditions and suffers serious consequences. **Write a brief narrative** about a time when you made a mistake and had to face the consequences. What did you learn from the experience? Use at least four Master Words or words related to the Master Words. Craft a clear beginning, middle, and ending, and use transitions to help the story flow smoothly. Whenever possible, use verbs in the active voice to make the strongest possible impact.