

The Jungle

by Upton Sinclair



ABOUT THE READING *The Jungle* focused the nation's attention on immigrant workers in the meatpacking industry. Upton Sinclair's novel showed bosses forcing human beings to live and work like jungle animals. He also described, in shocking detail, how meat was handled. Sinclair published his book in 1906. Later that same year, the government passed the Pure Food and Drug Act and the Meat Inspection Act. Many Americans even gave up eating meat for a while.



As you read note how the details affect your senses.

There was never the least attention paid to what was cut up for sausage; there would come back from Europe old sausage that had been rejected, and that was mouldy and white—it would be dosed with **borax** and **glycerine**, and dumped into **hoppers**, and made over again for home **consumption**. There would be meat that had tumbled out on the floor, in the dirt and sawdust, where the workers had tramped and spit uncounted billions of consumption germs. There would be meat stored in great piles in rooms and the water from leaky roofs would drip over it, and thousands of rats would race about on it. It was too dark in these storage places to see well, but a man would run his hand over these piles of meat and sweep off handfuls of the dried dung of rats. These rats were nuisances, and the packers would put poisoned bread out for them and they would die, and then rats, bread, and meat would go into the **hoppers** together . . . There was no place

VOCABULARY

borax white powder used in manufacturing and cleaning

glycerine sweet, sticky liquid

hoppers containers

consumption the process of eating or consuming

ladled added with a large spoon

gelatine material obtained from animal tissues; gelatin

Consumption has another meaning in addition to the one in the Vocabulary box above. *Consumption* was once used to refer to tuberculosis, a highly contagious disease that usually affects the lungs. Now tuberculosis is treated with antibiotics, but years ago it was often fatal.

Source: From *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair. New York Doubleday, Page & Company 1906, pp. 161-162.

The Jungle, continued

Literature

for the men to wash their hands before they ate their dinner, and so they made a practice of washing them in the water that was to be **ladled** into the sausage.

There were the butt-ends of smoked meat, and the scraps of corned beef, and all the odds and ends of the waste of the plants, that would be dumped into old barrels in the cellar and left there. Under the system of rigid economy which the packers enforced, there were some jobs that it only paid to do once in a long time, and among these was the cleaning out of the waste barrels. Every spring they did it; and in the barrels would be dirt and rust and old nails and stale water—and cartload after cartload of it would be taken up and dumped into the hoppers with fresh meat, and sent out to the public's breakfast. Some of it they would make into "smoked" sausage—but as the smoking took time, and was therefore expensive, they would call upon their chemistry department, and preserve it with borax and color it with **gelatine** to make it brown. All of their sausage came out of the same bowl, but when they came to wrap it they would stamp some of it "special," and for this they would charge two cents more a pound.

List at least three improvements in working conditions that would result in safer meat.

The Meat Inspection Act required the federal government to inspect all meat that was shipped across state lines.

ANALYZING LITERATURE

1. Main Idea What details does Sinclair use to support his main idea about unhealthy working conditions?

ANALYZING LITERATURE, continued

2. Critical Thinking: Analyzing Information *The Jungle* helped bring about the passage of food inspection laws. Sinclair commented, "I aimed at the public's heart and by accident I hit it in the stomach." What do you think he meant?

3. Activity Write a speech for President Theodore Roosevelt announcing the Pure Food and Drug Act, which Congress passed in 1906.