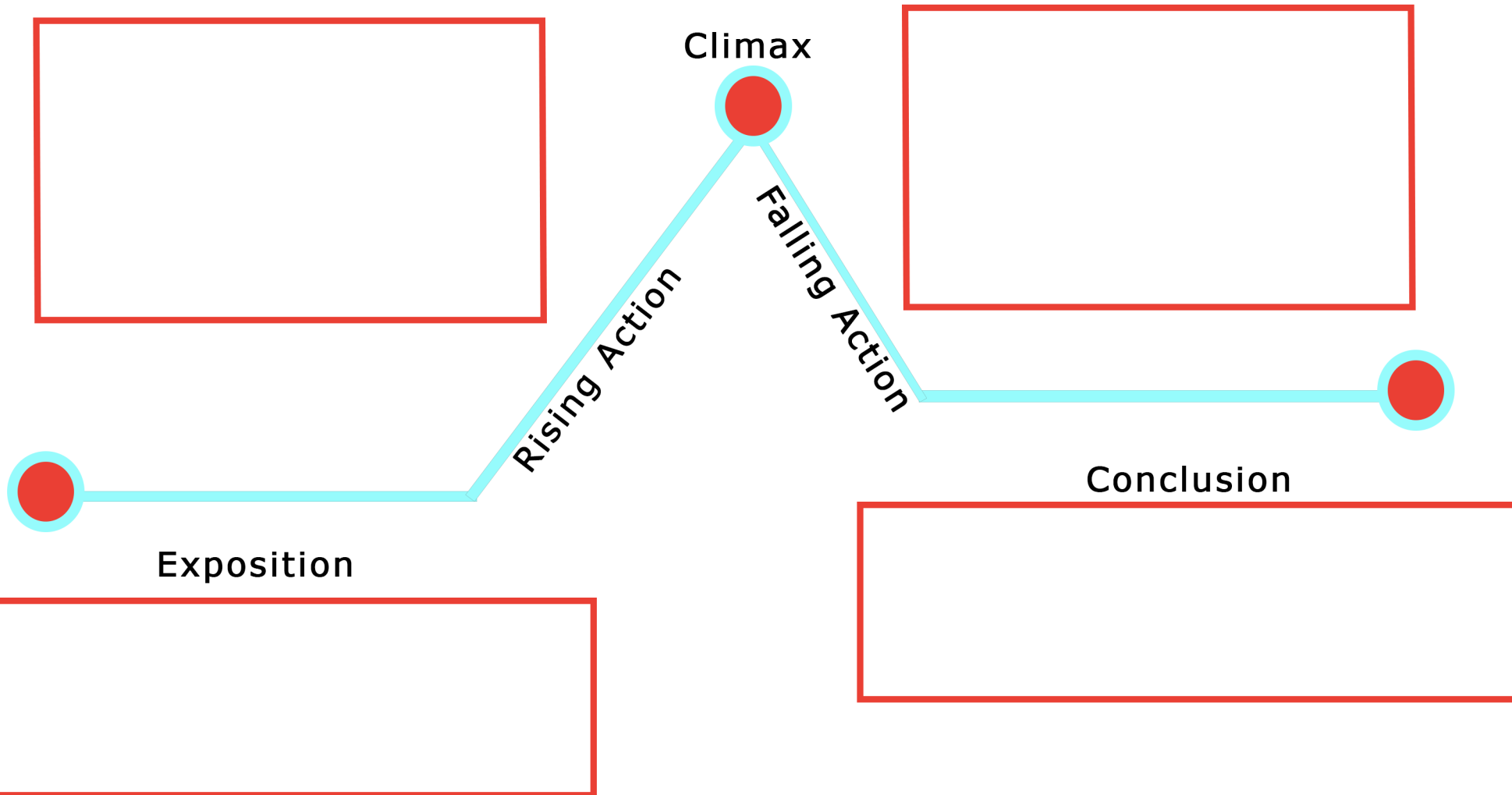


Analyzing Theme Development in "To Build A Fire" by Jack London

1

Use a plot diagram to review important events of the story. Fill in the boxes with the events.



2

Keep track of specific details within each event to see a theme developing. Underline key sentences. Write your notes in the box.

Main Character/ Introduction

Day had broken cold and grey, exceedingly cold and grey, when the man turned aside from the main Yukon trail and climbed the high earth-bank, where a dim and little-travelled trail led eastward through the fat spruce timberland. It was a steep bank, and he paused for breath at the top, excusing the act to himself by looking at his watch... It was a clear day, and yet there seemed an intangible pall over the face of things, a subtle gloom that made the day dark, and that was due to the absence of sun. This fact did not worry the man...The man flung a look back along the way he had come. The Yukon lay a mile wide and hidden under three feet of ice. On top of this ice were as many feet of snow...But all this—the mysterious, far-reaching hairline trail, the absence of sun from the sky, the tremendous cold, and the strangeness and weirdness of it all—made no impression on the man...The trouble with him was that he was without imagination. He was quick and alert in the things of life, but only in the things, and not in the significances...It did not lead him to meditate upon his frailty as a creature of temperature, and upon man's frailty in general

2

Keep track of specific details within each event to see a theme developing. Underline key sentences. Write your notes in the box.

At the man's heels trotted a dog, a big native husky, the proper wolf-dog, grey-coated and without any visible or temperamental difference from its brother, the wild wolf. The animal was depressed by the tremendous cold. It knew that it was no time for travelling. Its instinct told it a truer tale than was told to the man by the man's judgment.

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. Each time he had pulled a twig he had communicated a slight agitation to the tree—an imperceptible agitation, so far as he was concerned, but an agitation sufficient to bring about the disaster.

Rising Action

Climax

2

Keep track of specific details within each event to see a theme developing. Underline key sentences. Write your notes in the box.

But it was all he could do, hold its body encircled in his arms and sit there. He realized that he could not kill the dog. There was no way to do it. With his helpless hands he could neither draw nor hold his sheath-knife nor throttle the animal. He released it, and it plunged wildly away, with tail between its legs, and still snarling. It halted forty feet away and surveyed him curiously, with ears sharply pricked forward. The man looked down at his hands in order to locate them, and found them hanging on the ends of his arms. It struck him as curious that one should have to use his eyes in order to find out where his hands were.

"You were right, old hoss; you were right," the man mumbled to the old-timer of Sulphur Creek.

Falling Action

Conclusion

3

Ask: "How does each detail add to the big idea, or theme?" Do you see specific wording and/or character development that adds to the author's theme?

4

Make connections between your answers,
then ask: "What is the theme of the story?"

There are other themes to explore in this story as well.
Use the space below to write which of the following themes
are displayed in "To Build A Fire" and if so, how:

Man vs. Nature

Wisdom

Human-Animal Relationships

Death