

American Stories

“The Law of Life,” Part One, by Jack London

Lesson Plan

This lesson plan is to accompany Part One of the American Stories series episode “The Law of Life” by Jack London.

A transcript of the story is included at the end of this lesson to print so students can read as they listen. Teachers who cannot play the audio from the website can read the story aloud or have students read it.

American Stories lesson plans are based on the CALLA approach. See the end of each lesson for more information and resources on teaching with the CALLA approach.

CALLA has five lesson elements:

Prepare: Engage students in the topic and identify objectives for the lesson. Find out what students already know about it and motivate them to learn more. Teach new vocabulary.

Present: Present new information. Explain the target learning strategy for the lesson. Model what the students are asked to do. Discuss connections to students’ prior knowledge.

Practice: Give students an authentic, active task that they can do in a small group or in pairs. Remind students to use the target learning strategy.

Self-Evaluate: Question students so they will reflect on their own learning. Ask students to evaluate their own learning rather than wait for the teacher to assess them. Find out if using the learning strategy helped students’ understanding.

Expand: Guide students on how to apply what they learned to their own

lives. Point out other contexts where the learning strategy may help. Make connections between content and language or to the student's first language. When appropriate, request that parents contribute to learning.

And now for today's lesson:

Prepare

Introduce the story, "Today, we will read Part One of 'The Law of Life,' by Jack London. The story is about a Native American tribe traveling through the wilderness of Canada during winter. The old man, Koskoosh, is the main character. And, the story events show us that the tribe has traditions that come with age."

Continue, "In your culture or religion, are there customs or traditions that take place for people at different times in their lives? What are they? For example, what happens when a family has a new baby? What happens when children finish school or religious study? What kinds of customs are there for adults and older adults? Tell the person next to you."

Give students a few minutes to discuss this. Then, ask several volunteers to share their responses with the class. Some examples may be: circumcision (babies), shaving the baby's head, school graduations (children), celebrations for finishing religious studies (children or young adults), and weddings (adults), milestone birthdays (older adults).

If most students in your class are tradition examples for each age group: babies, children, adults and older adults.

Then say, "How do you feel about these traditions? Do you like them? Is there something you'd like to change about them? Tell someone *e/*se sitting near you (in front, back or on the other side of you)."



Figure 1: An example of a pattern

Then say, "In human culture and in nature, we can find many patterns – things that happen in a predictable way or repeat."

To help students understand the idea of a pattern, you can show the pattern image above as an example. And, you can ask students to look around the classroom for more examples.

As we read the story today, we will look for these patterns in the lives of the people and the natural world around them. But first, let's learn the new vocabulary."

Hand out copies of the vocabulary sheets and then teach the vocabulary. The sheet can found on the page following the transcript. If you have multimedia capability, show the images of some of the vocabulary words on a shared screen. These images can also be found on the pages following the transcript.

If you find it helpful, use gestures or draw images on the board or shared screen to help students understand word meanings. You might even try

gesturing the word first (for example, *forehead*) and then asking students, in pairs, to find that word on the vocabulary list.

Present

Introduce the task to students: "As we read the story today, we will practice the learning strategy Find and Apply Patterns to help us understand the story better. I'll show you how to do this. I'm going to read / play the first few paragraphs and look for patterns."

Play or read the first three paragraphs aloud. Then, model the strategy: "The main character, Koskoosh, is very old. He is also nearly blind. He probably does not have good health because his tribe is leaving him behind, alone. And, I see that there is another person who does not have good health: the child. So, we can say that being or becoming ill or weak is one pattern in the story."

Practice

Then say, "Now, it's your turn. You are going to find and apply patterns in the story."

Hand out copies of the story transcript to students.

Put the students into groups of three. Try to ensure that the groups are evenly divided based on language skill levels. Also, be sure that each person has a piece of blank paper with them to write notes on, if needed.

Continue, "As we listen to the next part of the story, listen for patterns in the things, events or people in the story. You can underline words or sentences on the transcript when you think you see a pattern."

Play or read aloud to the end of the story. (This story is rather short and there will be an opportunity to play one part of it again in today's lesson.) Then, ask the groups to discuss patterns they found.

Give students time to work together. Then, ask volunteers from each group to discuss one or two examples of patterns that they found in the story. This is to ensure that all groups get the chance to share different examples. As students share, be sure that they briefly explain how these are part of a pattern in the story.

The main patterns are: being left behind or dying due to old age and weakness; and the idea of becoming ill and dying. The author uses both humans and the natural world to express these ideas.

Examples from the natural world for these patterns are: the rabbit, the bear, the tree leaves and the clouds. The human symbols for these patterns are: Oskoosh, his father, the child, the woman (young girl who becomes an old woman) and the missionary. If you have a board or shared screen, you can list the examples students give, like this:

Natural World Examples	Human Examples
rabbit	Koskoosh
bear	Koskoosh's father
tree leaves	sick child
clouds	woman

After students have shared the patterns they found, ask the class to think about the following question: "What are Oskoosh's beliefs about the relationship between humans and the natural world? Let's listen once more to one part of the story and then you can discuss this in your groups." Play the very long paragraph from the story (starts with "He did not murmur."). Then, give students a few minutes to discuss their answers. Afterward, ask volunteers from each group to share what they came up with.

Answers may include something along the following theme: Oskoosh believed humans were a part of nature / the cycle of life/ the cycle of

nature; he believed that nature was not cruel and that it was natural for the flesh (or leaves, et cetera) to fall away and be lost; and he believed nature was doing its job to preserve humanity / the human race and the natural world as a whole rather than saving one single individual.

Self-Evaluate

Now, ask students to return to their desk, then say the following: "Now, I'd like to ask, what do you think about using this strategy, Find and Apply Patterns, when you read? Did it help you understand the story? How did it help? Tell the person sitting next to you."

Give students time to discuss their reactions to using the strategy. Then, ask volunteers to share their responses.

Expand

Ask students, "Are there other times when you can find and apply patterns in your school work or outside of school?"

Continue, "This strategy is helpful in both reading and listening. Finding patterns helps us to recognize the structure of a story or presentation, for example. It helps us to notice how information is organized. And, our minds are programmed to notice patterns. We can see patterns every day in our lives. For example, do you ever notice when many people in many separate places are wearing the same colors? Do you ever notice that, when you look at your mobile phone, you notice the same numbers every day, such as '3:12'? We can see patterns in many places in our lives. Try using this strategy tonight when you do your homework, or in your next class. Let me know how it goes!"

"The Law of Life," Part One

by Jack London

Old Koskoosh listened **greedily**. Although his sight had failed, his hearing remained good. The slightest sound was recognized by a mind yet active behind the aged **forehead**. Ah! That was Sit-cum-ha shouting curses at the dogs as she beat them into the **harnesses**. Sit-cum-ha was his daughter's daughter, but she was too busy to waste a thought upon her old grandfather, sitting alone there in the snow. Camp must be broken. The long **trail** waited while the short day refused to delay. Life called her, and the duties of life, not death. And he was very close to death now.

The thought frightened the old man for the **moment**. He stretched forth a shaking hand which **wandered** over the small **pile** of dry wood beside him. **Reassured** that it was indeed there, his hand returned to the shelter of his old, worn furs. He again began to listen. He heard the noise of half-frozen animal skins being moved. He knew that even then the chief's moose-skin **tent** was being packed. The chief was his son, leader of the tribesmen, and a mighty hunter. As the women worked, his voice rose, exclaiming at their slowness. Old Koskoosh **strained** his ears. It was the last time he would hear that voice. There went Geehow's tent! And Tusken's! Seven, eight, nine; only the medicine man's could yet be standing. There! They were at work upon it now. He could hear the **medicine man** struggling loudly as he **piled** it on the **sled**. A child cried and a woman calmed it with gentle singing. Little Koo-tee, the old man thought. That child was always **weeping**, and it was sickly. It would die soon, perhaps, and they would burn a hole through the frozen ground and pile rocks above to keep the wolves away. And what difference would it make? A few years at best, and as many an empty stomach as a full one. And in the end, death waited, ever-hungry and hungriest of them all.

What was that? Oh, the men **binding** the sleds together and **drawing** tight the ropes. He listened, he who would listen no more. The whips whistled among the dogs. Hear them howl! How they hated the work and the trail through the snow! They had started! Sled after sled moved slowly away into the silent forest. They were gone. They had passed out of his life, and he faced the last **bitter** hour alone. No. The step of a **moccasin** broke the snow's surface. A man stood beside him; upon his head a hand rested gently. His son was good to do this thing. He remembered other old men whose sons had not waited after the tribe had gone. But his son had. The old man's thoughts wandered away into the past, until the young man's voice returned him to the present.

"It is well with you?" he asked.

And the old man answered, "It is well."

"There is wood beside you," the younger man continued, "and the fire burns bright. The morning is gray, and the cold has lessened. It will snow presently. Even now it is snowing."

"Yes, even now is it snowing."

"The tribesmen hurry. Their loads are heavy and their stomachs empty with lack of **feasting**. The trail ahead is long and they travel fast. I go now. It is well?"

"It is well. I am as a last year's leaf, hanging lightly on a **branch**. When the first wind blows, I fall. My voice has become like an old woman's. My eyes no longer show me the way of my feet, and my feet are heavy, and I am tired. It is well."

He **bowed** his head in **contentment** until the last noise of the moccasin on the snow died away. He knew his son was beyond recall. Then his hand moved out from the furs to touch the wood. It alone stood between him and what **lay** beyond the death that opened before him. Now the measure of his life was a handful of sticks. One by one they would go to feed the fire, and just so, step by step, death would come closer to him. When the last stick had given all of its heat, the frost would begin to gather strength. First his feet would yield, then his hands; and the lack of feeling would travel, slowly, to his body. His head would fall forward upon his knees, and he would rest. It was easy. All men must die.

He did not **murmur**. It was the law of life, and it was **just**. He had been born close to the earth and close to the earth had he lived. Its law was not new to him. It was the law of all **flesh**. Nature was not kindly to the flesh. She had no concern for that single thing called the individual. Her interest lay in the race of man as a whole. He **grasped** this idea firmly. He saw its truth displayed everywhere. The awakening of life in a tree, the bursting greenness of its branches, the fall of the yellow leaf—in this alone was told the whole history. But one task nature did give the individual. Did he not perform it, he died. Did he perform it, it was all the same—he died. Nature did not care; there were plenty who would obey. It was only the need that this duty be obeyed, not the man who obeyed it, which lived and lived always. The tribe of Koskoosh was very old. The old men he had known when he was a boy had known old men before them. Therefore, it was true that the tribe lived, that it represented the obeying of all its members,

whose final resting places were unremembered. They were not important; they were chapters in life's story. They had passed away like clouds from a summer sky. He also would pass away. Nature did not care. To life she gave one task and one law. To continue the race was the task of life; its law was death. A young girl was a good creature to look upon, full-breasted and strong, with a lightness to her step and a shine in her eyes. But her task was yet before her. The light in her eyes brightened and her step quickened. She laughed with the young men, then she turned away. She passed on to them her own unrest. And she grew **fairer** and yet fairer to look upon. Finally, some hunter took her to his tent to cook and work for him and to become the mother of his children. And with the coming of her children her beauty left her. She **dragged** her legs and arms when she walked. Her eyes lost their brightness. Then only the little ones found **joy** in the old, lined face. Her task was done. In a little while, in the first **famine** or in the first long trail, she would be left, as he had been left, in the snow, with a little pile of wood. Such was the law.

He placed a stick carefully upon the fire and returned to his thoughts. It was the same everywhere, with all things. The **insects** disappeared with the first frost. When age settled upon the **rabbit** it became slow and heavy and could no longer run faster than its enemies. Even the big **bear** grew old and blind, to be dragged down at last by a small group of **barking** sled dogs. He remembered how he had left his own father along the Klondike River one winter. It was the winter before the **missionary** came with his books and his box of medicines. Many times Koskoosh had recalled with pleasure the taste of those medicines. The one called "painkiller" was especially good. But now his mouth refused to **moisten**. He remembered that the missionary had become a worry to them. He brought no meat into the camp, and he ate much. The hunters did not like this. Then when they were near the Mayo, he became ill. And afterward, the dogs pushed the stones away and fought for his bones.

New Vocabulary

greedily – *adv.* in a way that shows a selfish desire to have more of something

forehead – *n.* the part of the face above the eyes

harness – *n.* a set of straps placed on an animal so it can pull something heavy

trail – *n.* a path through a forest or field

moment – *n.* a very short period of time

wander – *v.* to move around or go to different places usually without having a particular purpose or direction

reassure – *v.* to make someone feel less afraid, upset or doubtful

tent – *n.* a portable shelter that is used outdoors, is made of cloth and leather, and is held up with poles and ropes

strain – *v.* to try very hard to do or get something

medicine man – *n.* among North American Indians and some other peoples, a person believed to have magical powers of healing and of seeing into the future; a shaman

pile – *n.* a group of things that are put one on top of another

pile – *v.* to put something in a pile

sled – *n.* a small vehicle that has a flat bottom or long, narrow strips of metal or wood on the bottom and that is used for moving over snow or ice

weep – *v.* to cry because you are very sad or are feeling some other strong emotion

bind – *v.* to tie or wrap something with a rope or string

draw – *v.* to move something by pulling

bitter – *adj.* causing painful emotions

moccasin – *n.* a flat shoe that is made of soft leather and is similar to a shoe originally worn by some Native Americans

feasting – *n.* (gerund) the act of eating large amounts of food

branch – *n.* a part of a tree that grows out from the trunk

bow – *v.* to bend forward at the neck or waist as a formal way of greeting someone or showing respect

contentment – *n.* the state of being happy and satisfied

murmur – *v.* a quiet expression of an opinion or feeling

just – *adj.* fair; agreeing with what is considered morally right or good

flesh – *n.* the soft parts of a body of an animal or person

lie – *v.* to be or remain in a specified state or condition (**past tense: lay**)

grasp – *v.* to understand something that is complicated or difficult

unrest – *n.* a state of feeling restless, troubled or uneasy

fair – *adj.* good-looking or beautiful

drag – *v.* to force yourself to move or to go to a place when you are tired, busy, etc.

joy – *n.* a feeling of great happiness

famine – *n.* a situation in which many people do not have enough food to eat

insect – *n.* a very small animal that has six legs and a body formed of three parts and that may have wings

rabbit – *n.* a small animal that usually lives in holes in the ground and has long ears, soft fur, and back legs that are longer than its front legs

bear – *n.* any one of a group of large and heavy animals that have thick hair and sharp claws and that can stand on two legs like a person

barking – *n.* (gerund) the act of making the short, loud sound a dog makes

missionary – *n.* a person who is sent to a foreign country to do religious work, such as to convince people to join a religion or to help people who are sick or poor

moisten – *v.* to become slightly wet

Figure 2: Moccasins



Figure 3: Medicine Man



Figure 4: Sled



About the CALLA Approach

This lesson is based on the CALLA approach. The Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) is an instructional model for second and foreign language learners based on cognitive theory and research.

CALLA integrates instruction in priority topics from the content curriculum, development of the language skills needed for learning in school, and explicit instruction in using learning strategies for academic tasks.

The goals of CALLA are for students to learn essential academic content and language and to become independent and self-regulated learners through their increasing command over a variety of strategies for learning in school. CALLA can be used in ESL, EFL, bilingual, foreign language, and general education classrooms.

A list of CALLA learning strategies follows. These strategies were researched by J. Michael O'Malley and Anna Uhl Chamot.

See a list of language learning strategies below.

METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES

Plan / Organize

Before beginning a task:

Set goals.

Plan the task or content sequence.

Plan how to accomplish the task (choose strategies).

Preview a text.

Monitor / Identify Problems

While working on a task:

Check your progress on the task.

Check your comprehension as you use the language. Do you understand? If not, what is the problem?

Check your production as you use the language. Are you making sense? If not, what is the problem?

Evaluate

After completing a task:

Assess how well you have accomplished the learning task.

Assess how well you have used learning strategies.

Decide how effective the strategies were.

Identify changes you will make the next time you have a similar task to do.

Manage Your Own Learning

Determine how you learn best.

Arrange conditions that help you learn.

Look for Ways to Practice.

Focus your attention on the task.

TASK-BASED STRATEGIES - USE WHAT YOU KNOW

Use Background Knowledge

Think about and use what you already know to help you do the task.

Make associations between new information and your prior knowledge.

Use new information to clarify or modify your prior knowledge.

Make Inferences

Use context and what you know to figure out meaning.

Read and listen between the lines.

Go beyond the text to understand its meaning.

Make Predictions

Anticipate information to come.

Make logical guesses about what will happen in a written or oral text.

Make an estimate (math).

Make a hypothesis (science).

Personalize

Relate new concepts to your own life, to your experiences, knowledge, beliefs and feelings.

Transfer / Use Cognates

Apply your linguistic knowledge of other languages (including your native language) to the target language.

Recognize cognates.

Substitute / Paraphrase

Use a synonym or descriptive phrase for unknown words or expressions.

TASK-BASED STRATEGIES - USE YOUR SENSES

Use Images

Use or create an actual or mental image to understand and/or represent information.

Use or draw a picture or diagram.

Use Sounds

Say or read aloud a word, sentence, or paragraph to help your understanding.

Sound out/vocalize.

Use your "mental tape recorder" to remember sounds, words, phrases, and/or conversations.

Use Your Kinesthetic Sense

Act out a role, for example, in Readers' Theater, or imagine yourself in different roles in the target language.

Use real objects to help you remember words, sentences, or content information.

TASK-BASED STRATEGIES - USE YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

Find/Apply Patterns

Apply a rule.

Make a rule.

Recognize and apply letter/sound, grammar, discourse, or register rules.

Identify patterns in literature (genre).

Identify patterns in math, science, and social studies.

Classify/Sequence

Categorize words or ideas according to attributes.

Classify living things; identify natural cycles.

Identify order and sequences in math, science, and social studies.

Sequence events in history.

Take Notes

Write down important words and ideas while listening or reading.

List ideas or words to include in speaking or writing.

Use Graphic Organizers

Use or create visual representations (such as Venn diagrams, time lines, webs, and charts) of important relationships between concepts.

Summarize

Create a mental, oral, or written summary of information.

Use Selective Attention

Focus on specific information, structures, key words, phrases, or ideas.

TASK-BASED STRATEGIES - USE A VARIETY OF RESOURCES

Access Information Sources

Use the dictionary, the internet, and other reference materials.

Seek out and use sources of information.

Follow a model

Ask questions

Cooperate

Work with others to complete tasks, build confidence, and give and receive feedback.

Talk Yourself Through It (Self-Talk)

Use your inner resources. Reduce your anxiety by reminding yourself of your progress, the resources you have available, and your goals.