

## Primary Source Reading 5-1



### Muckraking

#### ★ About the Selection

Upton Sinclair's most famous novel, *The Jungle* (1906), exposed the shocking working and living conditions of the urban poor. It also showed the effects of poverty on the spirit of the poor through a fictionalized immigrant family from Lithuania. The passage below highlights the inequalities of city life both in the factory and at home.

#### Reader's Dictionary



**Dante:** Italian poet and author of the *Divine Comedy*. Its most famous part—*The Inferno*—depicts a journey through Hades. Over the gates of Hades hangs a sign that reads, "Abandon Hope, All Ye Who Enter Here."

**tubercular:** diseased

#### GUIDED READING

As you read, take note of the conditions under which the characters have to work and live. Then answer the questions that follow.

During this time that Jurgis was looking for work occurred the death of little Kristoforas. . . .

. . . Perhaps it was the smoked sausage he had eaten that morning—which may have been made out of some of the tubercular pork that was condemned as unfit for export. At any rate, an hour after eating it, the child had begun to cry with pain, and in another hour he was rolling about on the floor in convulsions. . . . Jurgis announced that as far as he was concerned the child would have to be buried by the city, since they had no money for a funeral; and at this the poor woman [mother] almost went out of her senses, wringing her hands and screaming with grief and despair. Her child to be buried in a pauper's grave! . . . He had never had a fair chance, poor little fellow, she would say. He had been handicapped from his birth. If only she had heard about it in time, so that she might have had the great doctor to cure him of his lameness! . . . Some time ago . . . a Chicago billionaire had paid a fortune to bring a great European surgeon over to cure his little daughter of the same disease from which Kristoforas suffered. And because this surgeon had to have bodies to demonstrate upon, he announced that he would treat the children of the poor, a piece of magnanimity over which the papers became quite eloquent. . . . Perhaps it was as well, for just then they would not have had the carfare to spare to go every day to wait upon a surgeon, nor for that matter anybody with the time to take the child.

All this while he was searching for work, there was a dark shadow hanging over Jurgis; as if a savage beast were lurking somewhere in the pathway of his life, and he knew it, and yet could not help approaching the place. There are all stages of being out of work in Packingtown, and he faced in dread the

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prospect of reaching the lowest. There is a place that waits for the lowest man—the fertilizer plant.

The men would talk about it in awe-stricken whispers. . . . There were some things worse than even starving to death. They would ask Jurgis if he had worked there yet, and if he meant to; and Jurgis would debate the matter with himself. As poor as they were, would he dare to refuse any sort of work that was offered to him? . . . He was a man and he would do his duty; he went and made application—but surely he was not also required to hope for success!

The fertilizer works of Durham's lay away from the rest of the plant. Few visitors ever saw them, and the few who did would come out looking like Dante, of whom the peasants declared that he had been to hell.

To this part of the yards came all the "tankage" and the waste products of all sorts; here they dried out the bones—and in suffocating cellars where the day-light never came you might see men and women and children bending over whirling machines and sawing bits of bone into all sorts of shapes, breathing their lungs full of the fine dust, and doomed to die, every one of them, within a certain definite time. . . . In the corridors and caverns where it was done you might lose yourself as in the great caves of Kentucky. In the dust and the steam the electric lights would shine like far-off twinkling stars. . . . For the odors . . . there might be words in Lithuanian, but there are none in English. The person entering would . . . put his handkerchief over his face, and begin to cough and choke; and then, if he were still obstinate, he would find his head beginning to ring, and the veins in his forehead to throb, until finally he would be assailed by an overpowering blast of ammonia fumes, and would turn and run for his life, and come out half-dazed.

It was to this building that Jurgis came daily, as if dragged by an unseen hand. The month of May was an exceptionally cool one, and his secret prayers were granted; but early June there came a record-breaking hot spell, and after that there were men wanted in the fertilizer mill.

Source: *The Jungle*. Cutchogue, New York: Buccaneer Books, 1984.

**READER RESPONSE**

**Directions:** Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What does Jurgis believe is his duty?
2. What is the likely cause of Kristoferas's death?
3. What three images does Sinclair use to make the reader feel the horror of working in the fertilizer plant?
4. **Critical Thinking** How does Sinclair contrast the lives of the rich and the poor in this passage?