

In the Classroom with ....

# JASON'S GOLD

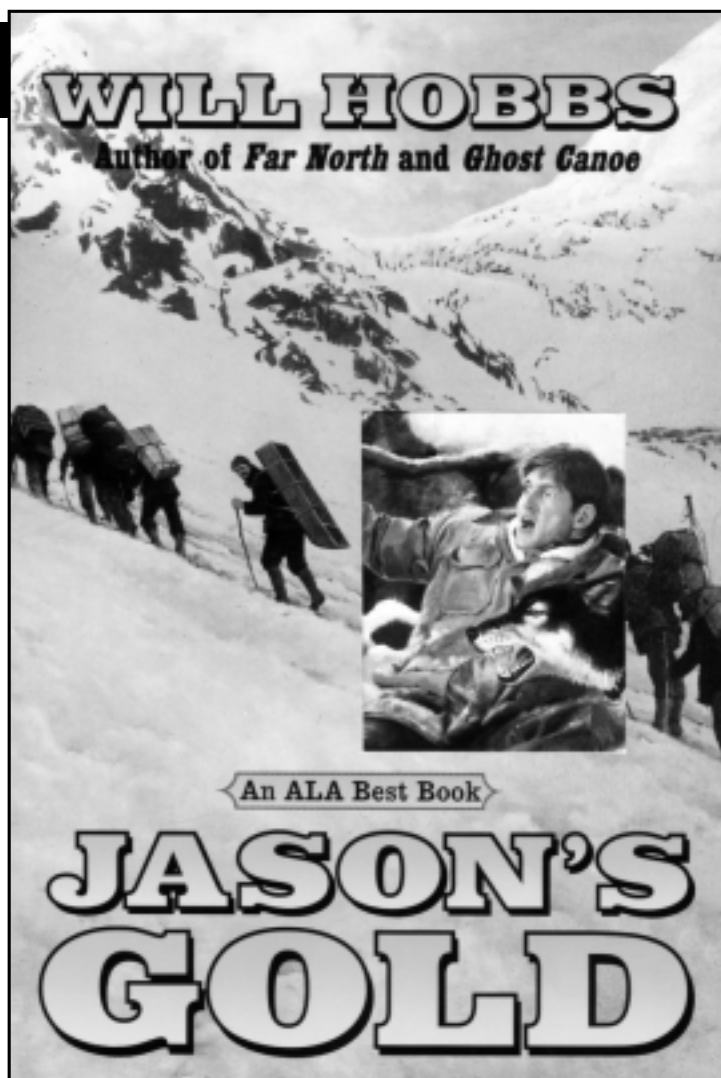
by Will Hobbs

## About the Book

**T**he rush for Klondike gold is on, and true to his Greek namesake, Jason undertakes a quest that will certainly lead him to adventure and hopefully to fortune. This first-rate historical adventure story will have readers riding the rails, stowing away on steamers, sloshing along muddy mountain trails, packing over steep mountain passes, canoeing icy waters, and shooting treacherous rapids as they travel with Jason on his exciting 5,000-mile journey to the Canadian Yukon.

### Summary

Fifteen-year-old Jason Hawthorn has only been in New York City five days when he turns around and heads back to Seattle. Rushing to reach the Klondike gold field before the other prospectors stake out all the gold, he crosses the continent in eight days instead of the ten months it took him to work his way east. When he reaches Seattle, he discovers that his brothers have already left for the gold fields, taking his inheritance money with them. Anxious to join his brothers, Jason stows away on a steamer bound for Skagway, Alaska, but is thrown off the ship in Juneau. He meets Jack London and travels with him by canoe to Dyea, Alaska. Jason creeps along White Pass, called the Dead Horse Trail, but must retreat and take the steeper Chilkoot Pass. He loses over a week on White Pass, but gains a husky that he names King. He loses another five days in Skagway to food poisoning, but meets a beautiful raven-haired girl named Jamie Dunavant. Jason and King make it over the summit of Chilkoot Pass, but having no boat, they must retreat once again. They meet Jack London a second time, and London supplies Jason with a complete mining outfit. Jason purchases a canoe and races the ice down the Yukon to Dawson City, Canada. A brutal encounter with a moose means Jason must hole up for the winter and does not reach Dawson City until spring 1898. He is finally reunited with his brothers, Jack London, and Jamie Dunavant in Dawson City. He is rich in family, friends, and experiences, if not in gold.



## INTRODUCTION

The sheer adventure in *Jason's Gold* will hold readers spellbound, but like the great Yukon River, Jason's story has many tributaries worthy of exploration. History of the Klondike gold rush, Greek mythology, and American adventure-writer Jack London all converge to make *Jason's Gold* an informative as well as entertaining story. It is also inspirational to read about a protagonist who is fiercely independent and determined, yet honest and compassionate. The following suggestions are offered to help students delve more deeply into the story so they may come away with many gold nuggets of knowledge and insight. Activities are meant to be selected or adapted in accordance with individual teaching styles, curricular circumstances, and student interests. They may also serve as starting points for teachers or students interested in designing their own learning activities.

## THE READING EXPERIENCE

### Before Reading the Novel

Ask students if they are familiar with the story of Jason and the Golden Fleece. If they have not heard of this Greek hero, read them a version of his story that they will understand and enjoy. This will help them grasp the connection between the Jason in *Jason's Gold* and the Jason associated with Greek mythology.

### Reading *Jason's Gold*

The three sections into which *Jason's Gold* is divided make natural stopping points when reading the novel. Encourage students to be active partners in the reading process by working in small groups called literature circles. Give the class a date by which they must finish reading *Jason's Gold* and let each literature circle set its own goals for the completion of each section. They may decide to divide the sections, particularly the first one, into smaller chunks. As they read, they may come to see a similarity between themselves and Jason or Jack London, both of whom devised small goals in order to accomplish their larger goal.

### During and Immediately After Reading the Novel

Although *Jason's Gold* is not told from a first-person point of view, we have a clear idea about how Jason perceived the situations around him. Have students record their perceptions as they read each section of *Jason's Gold*. What questions arise as they are reading? What do they think about the events Jason sees and experiences? Would they do the same things Jason does? Would they make the same judgments he does? What do they think will happen? They may want to share their questions and observations with a partner, literature circle members, or the class as a whole.

When students finish reading the novel, have them record their responses to the book. Did they find it interesting reading? What emotions did the book elicit? What do they think about the characters? Can they make any personal associations with the characters or situations found in the book? Were questions they had while reading the story answered by the end? Does the story raise any new questions? What topics mentioned in the book would they like to know more about? After students have completed the book and discussed their responses to it in literature circles and whole class discussions, have them engage in some of the activities suggested here.

## READING

Jason buys a copy of *The Seven Seas* by Rudyard Kipling from a pushcart dealer in New York and reads it as he is riding the rails cross country on his way back to Seattle. He enjoys this story so much that he intends to read it a second time. If students are unfamiliar with this classic adventure story, they may want to read it to see what Jason found so exciting and inspirational about this book and why Jack London was pleased to receive it in trade for the supplies and equipment he gave Jason.

## WRITING

Jack London kept detailed accounts of his journey to the Klondike, and many of the places, people, and situations he encountered later show up in his short stories and novels. Suppose he really had met Jason Hawthorn. Have students pretend they are Jack London and either write a journal entry describing Jason and his experiences in the Klondike or a short story based on the stories Jason tells London about himself and his adventures.

The character of Homer Dunavant is inspired by Robert W. Service, who wrote poetry about the Yukon, such as *The Spell of the Yukon* and *The Cremation of Sam McGee*. Suggest that interested students read some of Service's poetry and write poems of their own inspired by the grandeur of nature.

## LANGUAGE STUDY

Hobbs' writing abounds with fascinating words that may be new to the readers. Unfamiliar words can usually be figured out in the context of the sentence, but to really know a word it is often necessary to look up its meaning in the dictionary. Have students prepare for a class vocabulary bee by locating sophisticated words used in *Jason's Gold*, copying down the sentence, and memorizing a dictionary definition.

# Across The Curriculum

## LITERATURE STUDY

### Themes

Jason's father dreamed of breaking the bonds of "wage slavery" and becoming his own boss. Mr. Hawthorn's dream becomes a major theme both in Jason's life and in the story of *Jason's Gold*. Supposing Jason's father knew all that Jason had undertaken and accomplished, ask students with an interest in dramatics to compose a monologue for Jason's father and deliver it to the rest of the class.

The story the old prospector tells Jason about seeing the elephant forms an underlying theme in the novel and illustrates that an adventurous attitude can lead to great satisfaction. When Jason is an old man, how might he incorporate the phrase "But I've seen the elephant" into a story he could tell his grandchildren about his adventures? Several students may want to collaborate to write this story.

A central idea in *Jason's Gold* is that family and friends are more important than gold. Jason always appreciated other people, but as he travels, he sees many examples of those who care more about money than people or animals. Suggest that a small group of students locate passages that speak to the importance of family and friends and organize them into a reader's theater to perform for the class.

### Motifs

The quest is a popular and prominent motif in literature. Ask students to list stories, from folk tales to contemporary movies, in which the main character undertakes a journey in search of something important. Suggest that they read another young adult novel with a quest motif (see related titles) and write a letter to a classmate comparing it to *Jason's Gold*. Ask them to discuss why the quest motif remains popular with adolescents.

### Character Development

Hobbs writes that Jason had been born with a "ferocious independent streak" and since he was a child his battle cry has always been "I can do it on my own!" (p.15). Ask students to pretend they are Jason and write a journal entry in which he analyzes himself and the way his strong need to be independent affects the life decisions he makes.

### Mythology

Jason reads a newspaper article that refers to the Klondike as a haven for "untold numbers of argonauts, like modern Jasons,...ready to pursue their Golden Fleeces" (p.4). Jason quickly sees the connection between the name his father gave him and the "treasure-seeking hero from Greek mythology" (p.4). Assuming they have already read or heard this classic tale, invite the class to discuss parallels between the adventures of the archetypal Jason and his modern counterpart Jason Hawthorn.

Hobbs refers to the scow pilot who transported prospectors the three miles from Dyea to Skagway as "Alaska's version of Charon, sentenced to ferry people across the river to hell" (p.46). Suggest that students find out more about Charon and encourage them to discuss why Hobbs chose to use this particular reference to Greek mythology at this point in the story. Have them do the same for Hobbs's reference to Charybdis when he describes the "monstrous whirlpool" at Miles Canyon (p.107).

### Dramatic Interpretation

Hobbs begins *Jason's Gold* by capturing the frenzy of excitement caused by news of gold discovered in the Klondike. Encourage students with a flare for the dramatic to act out the scenes Hobbs describes as people across the continent succumb to Klondike fever.



### Literary Devices

Hobbs incorporates similes into his descriptions of people, settings, and events. Starting with Jason's consideration of the word Klondike when he says "the word itself was heavy and solid and dazzling, like a bar of shiny gold" (p.3), have students conduct a simile hunt and share their findings with members of their small groups. Then have the whole class compile a list of Hobbs's similes for a class booklet entitled "Similes Worth Their Weight in Gold."

### Jack London

Encountering Jack London is one of the pleasures of reading *Jason's Gold*. Using the information provided by Hobbs, have several students piece together a biographical sketch of this famous American author. Students interested in knowing more about Jack London may want to read his complete biography.

## HEALTH

Scurvy, a disease generally associated with sailors, was also a threat to prospectors in the Klondike. Jack London suffered from scurvy, but Jason was able to avoid it because he took Jamie Dunavant's advice and drank rose hip tea. Suggest that a few students conduct research on scurvy to learn why rose hips are effective against scurvy and what else can be used to cure or prevent it. Encourage these students to design a broadsheet that could have been passed out to miners to help them know how to prevent and treat this deadly disease.



## SCIENCE

### **Biology**

The flora and fauna of the Yukon are important elements in *Jason's Gold*. Have students create a poster display which includes pictures and descriptions of trees (such as the spruce, willow, aspen, cottonwood) and animals (moose, grizzly bears, black bears, salmon) mentioned in the novel.

### **Geology/Geography**

Using the definitions Hobbs provides within the context of the story or definitions found in the dictionary, students can create a glossary of geological terms relevant to *Jason's Gold* such as archipelago, fjord, tidal flat, gorge, and basalt.

Jason listens carefully as others talk about Alaska and the Yukon. If he were to meet an expert on the rivers and mountains and of the Pacific Northwest, what kind of overview of the region would he give? Suggest that students pair up and role-play this situation. Encourage them to use the maps provided in the novel as well as others found in atlases.

Mining for gold requires knowledge of the geology and geography of a region, as well as specific skills and equipment. Ask for volunteers to research the science of mining and present their information to the class via a lecture a mining engineer might give to students studying the history of mining for gold.

## MATH

Students often want to know how the math they are required to study will help them in the real world. Have them address this question by finding examples in the novel when calculating correctly could mean the difference between life and death.

## SOCIAL STUDIES

### **History**

Several references are made to the panic of '93 and a nationwide depression. Have three or four students research these historical events and participate in a panel in which they become characters who lived through these circumstances. One student can interview them to help the rest of the class understand what life was like during these times and why the Klondike goldfields seemed like an answer to so many prayers.

The Klondike is one of several gold rushes that occurred in the nineteenth century. Suggest that students read all they can about gold strikes in what are now California, Colorado, and South Dakota in the USA; British Columbia in Canada; New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia, and Queensland in Australia; North Island in New Zealand; and the Republic of South Africa. Then stage a campfire setting and ask representatives from the various continents to swap prospecting and mining stories.

The Northwest Mounted Police, the forerunners of today's Royal Canadian Mounted Police, did much to maintain law and order in the Yukon. Students might be interested in exploring the history of the Mounties or "Yellow Legs" and presenting the information they find in a radio play or television script reminiscent of the Sargent Preston programs popular in the 1950s.

Jason has brief associations with the Tlingit Indians when he travels in their canoes with Jack London, as he passes their villages in his own canoe, and as they help the prospectors carry their gear over the mountain passes. Encourage students to investigate the history

and culture of this tribe and share their findings in a classroom symposium. Symposium topics might include the language, social structure, customs, daily living, ancestry, and contemporary status of the Tlingit and other Athabaskan tribes.

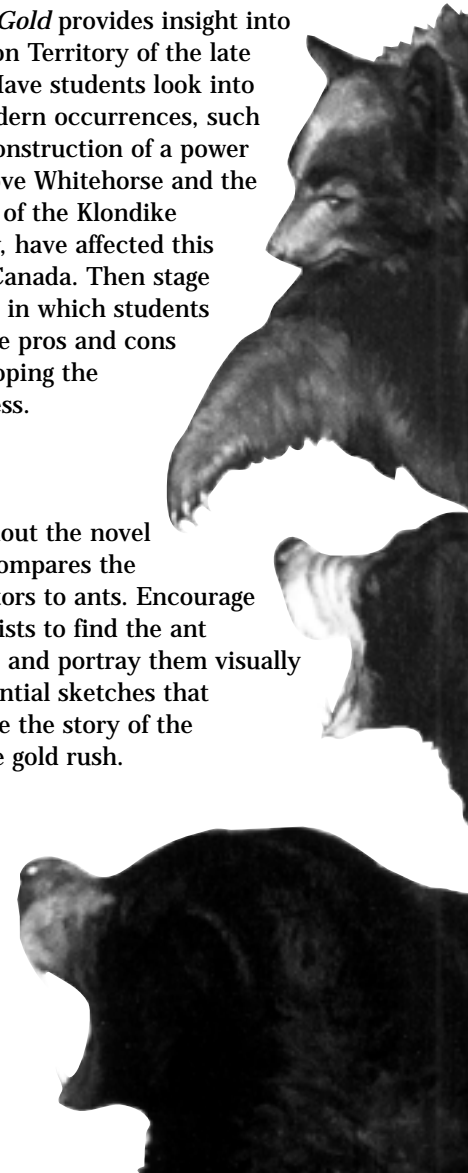
### **Current Events**

1997 marked the 100th anniversary of the Klondike gold rush. Suggest that students mine the internet for newspaper and magazine articles about how this event was celebrated in the Pacific Northwest. Invite them to create a newscast featuring the centennial of the last great gold rush.

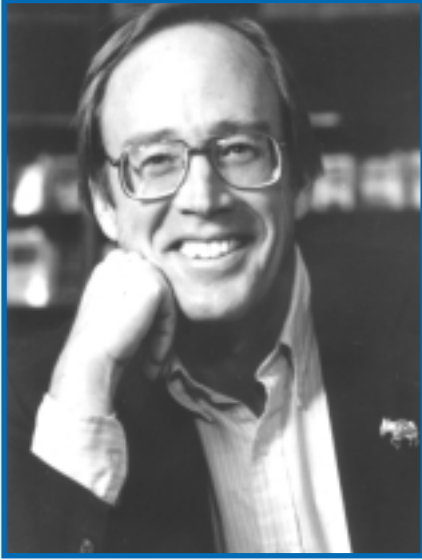
*Jason's Gold* provides insight into the Yukon Territory of the late 1800s. Have students look into how modern occurrences, such as the construction of a power dam above Whitehorse and the building of the Klondike Highway, have affected this part of Canada. Then stage a debate in which students argue the pros and cons of developing the wilderness.

## ART

Throughout the novel Hobbs compares the prospectors to ants. Encourage class artists to find the ant passages and portray them visually in sequential sketches that chronicle the story of the Klondike gold rush.



## Talking with Will Hobbs



Which of Jason's experiences have you had yourself?

Jason's feeling for the North comes from my own. In my childhood years in Alaska, I was spellbound by the vastness and wilderness: the rivers, the glaciers, the mountains, the salmon runs, the moose and the bears, the northern lights and the winter darkness, the gold rush history. A lifetime of backpacking carrying heavy loads over mountain passes helped me to describe Jason's struggles on the Chilkoot Pass. My canoeing and rafting experiences, including those in Canada's Yukon and Northwest Territories, come in handy as I described Jason's journey by canoe down the upper Yukon River. My winter camping experiences at twenty below at high altitude in Colorado helped me to write the winter scenes.

Why did you choose to dedicate *Jason's Gold* to your brothers?

After dedicating *Kokopelli's Flute* to my sister, I've been waiting for just the right book to dedicate to my three brothers. *Jason's Gold* was perfect. We've always been close, and I knew from the outset that making this a "brothers story" would add layers of emotional reality for me. Like me, Jason has two older brothers. At the same time that he is adamant about establishing his independence from them, he feels a very powerful connectedness to them. In my story, Jason is trying to catch up with his brothers, who've left Seattle for the Klondike three days before him. As a kid, I remember always hustling to catch up with my brothers, whether it was on the baseball field, in school, or learning to ice skate and ski while we were living in Alaska.

In what ways did writing *Jason's Gold* differ from writing your other novels?

It was very different because it's an out-and-out historical novel, which was new for me. *Ghost Canoe* had a historical setting, but it was mostly a mystery. This one involved a mountain of research visiting Klondike museums in Seattle, Skagway, and Dawson City, then reading many books and personal histories. Before, I've made up most of the incidents for my novels "from scratch." With this story, I wanted the sort of realism that could only be achieved by basing incidents in the novel on actual incidents from the Klondike gold rush. For the same reason the reader will encounter many actual historical figures, like the con man Soapy Smith, and of course, the 21-year-old, not-yet-famous Jack London.

What type of experience would you hope readers derive from reading *Jason's Gold*?

As with *Far North*, I hope they get a good case of virtual frostbite! I hope they are astounded to find out what people very much like themselves did a century ago. A hundred thousand people experienced this great adventure, and forty thousand made it to Dawson City. What those people endured is almost beyond belief. I hope readers come away with the sense that history can be incredibly exciting, and that life in any era is filled with adventure, heroism, courage, and love.

# Related Reading & Reference Materials

## REFERENCES

### *Jason and the Golden Fleece*

Green, Roger Lancelyn. "The Quest of the Golden Fleece" and "The Return of the Argonauts," in *Tales of The Greek Heroes*. New York: Penguin, 1995. pp. 199-225.

Hamilton, Edith. "The Quest of the Golden Fleece," in *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes*. New York: New American Library, 1942. pp.117-130.

### **Jack London**

Dyer, Daniel. *Jack London: A Biography*. New York: Scholastic Press, 1997. (Chapter Five, "1897-1898: Gold! Gold! Gold!" tells of Jack London in the Klondike gold fields and includes three photographs taken by Eric Hegg, the photographer mentioned in *Jason's Gold*.)

### **Yukon**

London, Jack. *The Call of the Wild*. New York: Library of America, 1903. (The Whole Story edition, illustrated by Philippe Munch and published by Viking in 1994 supplies supplementary information about the Yukon Territory, the Klondike gold rush, and the science of mining.)

Lourie, Peter. *Yukon River: An Adventure in the Gold Fields of the Klondike*. Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills, 1992. (This informational picture book contains historical and contemporary photographs of the Yukon.)

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## TOPICALLY RELATED READING

### **Stowaways and Hoboes**

*Beyond the Western Sea, Book 2: The Escape from Home* by Avi

*Hoboes: Wandering in America, 1870-1940* by Richard Wormser

*Nowhere to Call Home* by Cynthia DeFelice

### **Fictional Meetings with Famous Authors**

*Alice Rose & Sam* by Kathryn Lasky

*The Bird's Christmas Carol* by Kate Douglas Wiggin

*Emily* by Michael Bedard; illustrated by Barbara Cooney (picture book)

### **Winter Survival in Alaska and Canada**

*Brian's Winter* by Gary Paulsen (sequel to *Hatchet*)

*Dogsong* by Gary Paulsen

*Far North* by Will Hobbs

*Julie of the Wolves* by Jean Craighead George

*Running North: A Yukon Adventure* by Ann Maria Cook

### **Treasure Seeking**

*Beardance* by Will Hobbs

*Bearstone* by Will Hobbs

*Beyond the Divide* by Kathryn Lasky

*The Call of the Wild* by Jack London

*Ghost Canoe* by Will Hobbs

*Gold Fever* by Verla Kay; illustrated by S.D. Schindler (picture book)

*Holes* by Louis Sachar

*Kokopelli's Flute* by Will Hobbs

*Women of the Gold Rush* by Clare Rudolph Murphy

### **Adapting to Life in Mining Towns**

*Alice Rose & Sam* by Kathryn Lasky

*The Ballad of Lucy Whipple* by Karen Cushman

*Leaving Eldorado* by Joann Mazzio

### **Amiable Brothers**

*The Big Wander* by Will Hobbs

*Changes in Latitudes* by Will Hobbs

### **Orphans**

*The Apprenticeship of Lucas Whitaker* by Cynthia DeFelice

*Nowhere to Call Home* by Cynthia DeFelice

The Harry Potter books by J.K. Rowling

### **Quests**

*The Golden Compass and The Subtle Knife* by Philip Pullman

*Parzival: The Quest of the Grail Knight* by Katherine Paterson

*Vision Quest* by Terry Davis

*Walk Two Moons* by Sharon Creech

## Other Books by Will Hobbs

*Changes in Latitudes*

*Bearstone*

*Downriver*

*The Big Wander*

*Beardance*

*Kokopelli's Flute*

*Far North*

*Ghost Canoe*

*The Maze*

*River Thunder*

*Howling Hill*



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