Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

American Studies English

**American Authors Research: Jack London**

Literary criticism can be generally defined as the practice of evaluating interpreting works of literature. The main purpose of literary criticism is to help us resolve a problem, question, or difficulty in the reading. To enrich your understanding of “To Build a Fire,” actively read the critical overview of the story, as well as the essays in your criticism packet by Jill Widdicombe, Joan D. Hedrick, and James I. McClintock, and answer the discussion questions below.

**Critical Overview**

1. How was “To Build a Fire” received by critics?
2. Why was London’s collection of short stories, *Lost Face*, criticized?

**Literary Criticism: Jill Widdicombe**

1. According to Widdicombe, what makes “To Build a Fire” “such a powerful story” (345)? Explain your response.
2. Evaluate the assertion that Widdicombe makes at the top of pg. 346. What does she argue is the main function of the cold in the story?
3. Cite an example from the story that Widdicombe uses to support her assertion about the cold.

**Literary Criticism: Joan D. Hedrick**

1. Which three London stories does Joan D. Hedrick compare in her piece of criticism?
2. The idea of death is common in the three stories. According to Hedrick, what does London suggest about death in his works?
3. According to Hedrick, what does London suggest about comradeship, or friendship, in his stories?
4. According to Hedrick, how is the man able to “meet death with dignity” (354) in “To Build a Fire”?

**Literary Criticism: James I. McClintock**

1. According to McClintock, what does London suggest is necessary for survival?
2. What does McClintock consider the man’s fall through the snow to be a symbol of?
3. What is the man’s “tragic flaw,” according to McClintock?