Your Name

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Essay: To Build a Fire

This is the story of a young minor who starts his journey to build a fire for him. He has only a dog to accompany him. He fights the cold and harsh weather to fulfill his determination. The story has a tragic end leaving a lesson for the readers.

# ***Setting***

This short story, written by Jack London, revolves around a young man whose name has not been mentioned. The protagonist begins a venture through the forests that stood at the Yukon River in Canada. It is a very cold winter day where the temperature is much below -50 °C. The man is followed by a dog who is unwilling by instinct to keep up with him. The young man is warned by a seasoned, old man to leave his idea of hiking through the forest. He cannot estimate precisely the whereabouts of his travel and the adverse weather conditions of the territory.

On his way, there comes a stream of water covered with thin ice hidden beneath the snow. He passes by it carefully. He has to reach the other minors by the evening who are at their camp. He takes a break right after the noon, lit a fire, and takes his meals. During his journey afterward, he slips through the ice into the cold water and gets his legs wet. Since the temperature is significantly low, he is in a life-threatening condition. He tries many times to build a fire but to no avail. All his matchbox is finished and his hands are swollen due to frost. He strives hard to run to the prospectors’ camp, but he tumbles down again and again. He dies of hypothermia and the dog moves on in search of food and shelter.

# ***Irony***

“To Build a Fire” demonstrates both the dramatic irony as well as the situational irony. The man cannot realize the real harshness of weather and the freezing temperature below -50 °C, whereas the reader knows this reality. The reader is in suspense whether the protagonist shall live or die at the end. This creates dramatic irony in the story. Further, the man finally succeeds in building a fire for him, but the snow starts falling down the tree on the fire at the same time. "The fire is dead". This is the situational irony encountered by the poor minor.

The irony in the story strengthens when we consider some other things. The man shows he has no reason. He trusts his skills overconfidently. He embarks a journey that is not reasonable pursuing it at any cost. Even the dog can sense the inherent dangers of the hike. Thus, a conflict is developed between the arrogant reason of the man and the instinct. Moreover, the man is unaware of the brutality of nature. He finally fails to withstand the cruelties of natural forces and freezes to death in the biting cold forests of Yukon.

# ***Symbolism***

Symbolism in the story has been created through the fire, man’s hands, and the dog. First, the fire symbolizes life as the man struggles to build a fire most of the time of his hike. The protagonist’s hope is tied to the fire. When he succeeds in lighting the fire, he feels certain about his survival. Whereas, he thinks he is done for when the fire is blotted out because of the snow falling down the tree.

The hands of the hiker also symbolize life. They also point out to the resources man has at his disposal. The numbness of the protagonist’s hands shows that life is in danger and the available resources for survival are near to finish. The knowledge, skills, and technology of the mankind ascertain their comfort, success, and survival. Finally, the dog symbolizes the instinct that must not be ignored while making crucial decisions of life.