

# Rudyard Kipling

## Introduction

*"If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten."*

—Rudyard Kipling

Page created by Kristin Anderson, Annette Allard, Kimberly Elam, and Jennifer Hackendahl

## Topics for Discussion

### RACE

**In what ways do Kipling's short stories from this collection characterize colonial India?** Today we think of this book as children's literature, but do the racial implications in the text undermine this? In what way do the interactions between the animal characters mimic the racial hierarchy outside the jungle?

### GENDER

**There are few female characters present in the stories and nearly all the ones who appear are mothers.** In what ways do Kipling's characterizations of Mother Wolf and Messua challenge or participate in these stereotypical representation of "the mother" figure? How does the description of Kaa's wife compare to the two mother figures in Mowgli's life? What about the mothers present in Rikki-Tikki-Tavi- how does the representation of the white mother differ from the representation of Rikki-Tikki's mother?

### POLITICS

**In what way is Kipling's Jungle representative of the politics of his time?** In what ways are the characters in the jungle representative of politics of today? How does the representation of the Indian community in "Tiger Tiger" and "Letting in the Jungle" reflect British anxiety about Indians disregarding British authority? In what way does the portrayal of leaders in the jungle society differ from the portrayal of leaders in the human societies within the novel?

### SOCIETY

**The wolves are very representative of order in Kipling's book.** In what ways do the monkeys represent the opposite of order? Why are the monkeys the only animal group excluded from the jungle society? Think about the way the wolves' society is structured. How does this structure compare to the Indian village's societal structure? How does it differ from the structuring of society in Victorian England?

## Form is Content

### Mowgli's Brothers

**"Even the tiger runs and hides when little Tabaqui goes mad, for madness is the most disgraceful thing that can overtake a wild creature." pg. 1**

*In this quote, Kipling indirectly notes the similarity between human views on emotion and animal codes regarding emotion. During the Victorian era, a substantial anxiety surrounded insanity and split personalities. This quote showcases the negative Victorian views that accompany madness. Specifically, this quote located madness below being an animal. In other words, while wild animals were seen to be much lower than humans, madness was even below wildness. This also connects to anxieties over degeneration and reverse natural selection because it creates an intellectual connection between humans and animals.*

**"'He is our brother in all but blood,' Akela went on; 'and ye would kill him here! In truth, I have lived too long. Some of ye are eaters of cattle, and of others I have heard that, under Shere Khan's teaching, ye go by dark night and snatch children from the villager's door-step. Therefore I know ye to be cowards, and it is to cowards I speak... I can save ye the shame that comes of killing a brother against whom there is no fault—a brother spoken for and bought into the Pack according to the Law of the Jungle.'" pg. 17**

*This quotation clearly explains the strong separation that exists between humans and animals because of the constant violence and retaliation between the groups. Even though most of the short stories create parallels between humans and animals, there are also always background reminders of the threats that each pose to one another. While humans threaten animal livelihood, this quote shows how animals also pose a threat to humans through their strength. The animals who do kill humans, however, are called "cowards," while humans who kill animals are viewed as powerful heroes. Further, it is interesting that animals are breaking the laws of the jungle by killing humans and their brothers, while again humans are exalted for their hunting and warring.*

### Kaa's Hunting

**"Listen, man-cub," said the Bear, and his voice rumbled like thunder on a hot night. "I have taught thee all the Law of the Jungle for all the peoples of the jungle--except the Monkey-Folk who live in the trees. They have no law. They are outcasts. They have no speech of their own, but use the stolen words which they overhear when they listen, and peep, and wait up above in the branches. Their way is not our way. They are without leaders. They have no remembrance."** pg. 26

*In one of the more well-known passages in Kipling's stories, Baloo the bear paints an unflattering picture of the Bandar-log, or the monkeys. This passage is very significant when compared with the descriptions of the villagers in later stories such as "Letting in the Jungle," as the chaotic monkeys and the bureaucratic villagers represent the two possible extremes of human society. By characterizing the monkeys as lawless and silly, Kipling highlights the lowest possible level of human existence, which is childlike and foolish. In the villagers he creates the "highest" possible level of human existence, where laws exist for their own sake and not for the value inherent in them. In describing these poles, Kipling is able to further his stance that just law is best for everyone.*

**"One of the beauties of Jungle Law is that punishment settles all scores. There is no nagging afterward."** pg. 46

*This quotation also furthers Kipling's belief in firm laws that exist for the sake of maintaining order, not for their own sakes or for any other hollow reason. Kipling's use of the word "beauty" in a sentence about the Law provides an interesting contrast between the harshness of punishment and the gentleness of beauty. This dichotomy is one way of textually representing the idea that even something as cold as a law can have warm effects, if used for the right reasons and in the right way.*

### Tiger! Tiger!

**"Of course, in playing together, the cubs had often nipped Mowgli harder than they intended, and there were white scars all over his arms and legs. But he would have been the last person in the world to call these bites, for he knew what real biting meant."** pg. 49

*Kipling's concise writing style is clearly illustrated in the above quote. Kipling has a way of saying so much with so little words, and that is because his subject matter holds strong underlying themes. This quote shows how animal culture is misinterpreted by outside humans. What most humans would see as violence Mowgli understands to be friendly play.*

**"'Oho! It is the jungle brat, is it?' said Buldeo. 'If thou art so wise, better bring his hide to Khanhiwara, for the Government has set a hundred rupees on his life. Better still, do not talk when thy elders speak.'" pg. 53**

*This quote shows how humans try (unsuccessfully) to govern the jungle. Specifically, it shows the outdated ways in which humans view animals. Mowgli, who is the most connected to the jungle, is shunned by older humans who think that they know better. The tone of this quote also leads the readers to view older humans as acting with misguided notions of human-animal relationships. Also, the human laws cannot adequately deal with problems relating to the jungle and animals.*

### The White Seal

**"The beach is disgracefully crowded this season. I've met at least a hundred seals from Lukannon Beach, house-hunting. Why can't people stay where they belong?"** pg. 69

**"He was going to find Sea Cow, if there was such a person."** pg. 78

*In both of these quotations Kipling uses human terms- people and person- to denote animals, which is one of many ways that he blurs the boundaries between the two groups. By characterizing seals as people, Kipling effectively brings the animals more to life, but more striking is the use of it in the mouth of a seal. A seal referring to fellow seals as people is very odd and strikes the reader right away, perhaps as whimsical, but this technique allows Kipling to jolt the reader out of the story and think about the question: "Are animals people, too?" or, conversely, "Are people animals, too?"*

**"But none of the other seals had seen the killing, and that made the difference between him and his friends. Besides, Kotick was a white seal."** pg. 77

*This passage is significant in that it brings to light the difference between seeing and believing. Kotick asserts that his friends would have felt differently about leaving home if they had seen the danger they were in, but characters in Kipling's other tales (the Shere-Khan following wolves and Buldeo in "Tiger! Tiger!") do not believe even though they see. This assertion then shows a certain naivete on Kotick, our hero's, part, adding to his persona of purity that is enhanced by his white coat. The whiteness of Kotick's coat could be a commentary on race, but it seems more likely that it is simply an unlikely but natural color for a seal.*

### Rikki-Tikki-Tavi

**"'Good gracious,' said Teddy's mother, 'and that's a wild creature! I suppose he's so tame because we've been kind to him.'" pg. 88**

*Rikki-Tikki's tame actions are assumed by the family to be a result of their interaction with him. This clearly shows how humans feel superior to animals and view animals as wild. In this case, wildness also correlates to a lack of intelligence and character. In a way, tame can also be viewed negatively because it implies some sort of coercion to humans. Thus, Rikki-Tikki almost seems to be a slave to the humans.*

**"Rikki-tikki was rather amused at all the fuss, which, of course, he did not understand."** pg. 93

*In connection to the previous quote, this quote further illustrates the human notion that animals lack emotion and intellectual capabilities. What is particularly interesting about this quote is the insertion of "of course." This aspect means that there is an assumption that the reader will know and think it is obvious that animals are not as advanced as humans. Kipling clearly wrote these short stories understanding Victorian views on Darwin's theory of natural selection and evolution. Due to fears of degeneration, Victorians wanted to be reassured that they were more advanced than animals, and Rikki-Tikki would comfort Victorians.*

#### Toomai of the Elephants

**"So I sit at my ease, as befits a malhout, not a mere hunter, a malhout, I say, and a man who gets a pension at the end of his service. Is the family of Toomai of the Elephants to be trodden underfoot in the dirt of a Keddah? Bad one! Wicked one! Worthless son!"** pg. 109

*Spoken by Little Toomai's father, this is a terrible scolding in which the father encourages his son to be content with the bureaucratic position he will be expected to fill some day--without regard to what Little Toomai feels compelled to do. This story, separate from the Mowgli stories, underscores the idea that children should neither be discouraged nor underestimated. The quick, choppy, run-on sentences in this phrase characterize the father as brash and undereducated, which furthers the unflattering portrait Kipling likes to paint of unkind adults. Although this speech is mean, its style makes the reader pay less attention to the warnings of the father.*

**"They were standing head to head, or walking to and fro across the ground in couples, or rocking and swaying all by themselves--scores and scores of elephants."** pg. 118

*This enchanting line is a great example of form and function. It takes place as Little Toomai witnesses the elephants dancing, and the simple syntax mirrors the simple rhythm of the elephants' steps. Furthermore, the symmetric "head to head", "to and fro", and "rocking and swaying" are musical in quality, which adds splendidly to the magical feeling of the scene.*

#### How Fear Came

**"The Law of the Jungle which is by far the oldest law in the world has arranged for almost every kind of accident that may befall the Jungle People, till now its code is as perfect as time and custom can make it."** pg. 149

*The opening sentence of this short story makes it clear that the jungle operates by very distinct laws. The idea that the jungle, a location that humans have defined as wild, has laws that they abide by correlates again to the lack of human understanding regarding the jungle and animals. Further, this passage foreshadows the problems with the laws that will occur in the story. Human laws have never been perfect, and especially in the Victorian era English citizens were wondering how to modernize their laws and apply them to colonies, such as India. The short story illustrates how humans, as well as animals, need to have dialogue regarding the development of laws and ethics.*

**"'Ye know, children,' he began, 'that of all things ye most fear Man'; and there was a mutter of agreement."** pg. 158

*One thing that the laws of the jungle make clear is that humans must be feared. The capitalization of "Man" notes the animals view of man as superior and threatening. Also, the speaker is addressing children, which shows that this law of the jungle is passed down from generation to generation, just like human ethics and morals.*

#### Letting in the Jungle

**"'Does Man trap Man?' said Bagheera."** pg. 189

*This line from the panther is indicative, again, of the ways in which The Jungle Books deftly navigate ethics in law. The animals, who choose their new leader via battle to the death, are horrified that humans would trap one another. The idea of trapping is repulsive, perhaps, because it is an underhanded and covert method of dealing with conflict. The Jungle Law continually promotes quick, honest resolution of differences. It is always fair, if at times violent. This quotation underscores both the animals' belief in fair play.*

**"I do not wish even their bones to lie on the clean earth. Let them go and find a fresh lair. They cannot stay here. I have seen and smelled the blood of the woman that gave me food--the woman they would have killed but for me. Only the smell of the new grass on their door-steps can take away that smell. It burns in my mouth. Let in the Jungle, Hathi!"** pgs. 204-5

*This line of Mowgli's comes at the climax of the story, and although it showcases his anger at the villagers it also highlights his wish to avoid bloodshed. Mowgli feels such disdain for the villagers that he does not want their blood to be on his hands, showing a levity beyond his years. The extensive use of "earthy" words (bones, earth, blood, grass) here lends to the organic aura Kipling is trying to create for the purging of the village from the Jungle. These same words can also be somewhat ritualistic in connotation--perfect for the quasi-exorcism that is about to take place.*

Kipling, Rudyard. *The Jungle Books*. New York: Oxford UP, 2008. Print. Oxford World's Classics.

## Additional Materials

Uncover something interesting about Kipling?

The Kipling Society publishes quarterly the *Kipling Journal*, which is happy to receive comments and articles on Rudyard Kipling.

[Check it Out](#)

[Timeline of Important Events in Kipling's Life](#)

1865: Kipling born on December 30th in Bombay

1871: Kipling's parents again travel to India

1878: Kipling is admitted to the United Services College at Westward Ho! in Devon. Kipling also travels to France (will travel to France many more times)

1882: Kipling sails to India to work as assistant-editor of the *Civil and Military and Gazette*

1894: Publishes *The Jungle Book*

1889: Kipling travels to San Francisco, Rangoon, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Japan. Kipling also crosses the United States on his own and makes his debut in London literature

1895: Publishes *The Second Jungle Book*

1899: Kipling has a horrible visit to the United States. During his trip, he contracts a horrible case of pneumonia and Josephine dies. Kipling never again returns to the United States.

1907: Kipling wins the Nobel Prize for Literature and travels to Canada

1911: Kipling's father dies

1913: Kipling travels to Egypt

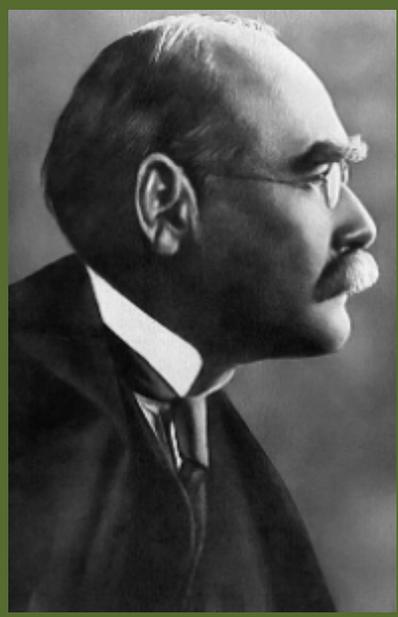
1915: John Kipling, Kipling's son, is reported missing in action on his first day with the Irish Guards in the Battle of Loos on October 2nd. His body was never found.

1927: Kipling travels to Brazil

1936: Kipling's death, January 18th

(Information from: Kipling, Rudyard. *The Jungle Books*. New York: Oxford UP, 2008. Print. Oxford World's Classic)

## Portrait



## Biography

Born December 30th 1865 in Bombay, British India, Rudyard Kipling grew up to become a British author and poet. He is best known for his fiction works like *The Jungle Book* which he wrote in 1894. Another of his most famous works include *Kim* (1901) and *The Man Who Would be King* (1888). His famous poems include *Mandalay* (1890), *Gunga Din* (1890) and *If* (1910). He is well recognized as a major "innovator in the art of the short story" his children's books are enduring classics of children literature. Of his early life [victorianweb.org](http://victorianweb.org) gives us a great background. Rudyard Kipling at Bombay, India, where his father, John Lockwood Kipling, himself an artist, was principal of the [Jeejeebyhoy Art School](http://www.jeejeebyhoy.com). His mother, Alice Macdonald Kipling, had three sisters who married well: among his uncles young Rudyard could number not only the famous painters [Sir Edward Burne-Jones](#) (one of the most important of the [Pre-Raphaelites](#)) and [Sir Edward Poynter](#) but [Alfred Baldwin](#), a future Prime Minister, and all three family connections were to be of great importance in Kipling's life. His early years in India, until he reached the age of six, seem to have been idyllic, but in 1871 the Kipling family returned to England. After six months John and Alice Kipling returned to [India](#), leaving six-year old Rudyard and his three-year-old sister as boarders with the Holloway family in Southsea. During his five years in this foster home he was bullied and physically mistreated, and the experience left him with deep psychological scars and a sense of betrayal.

Between 1878 and 1882 he attended the United Services College at Westward Ho in north Devon. The College was a new and very rough boarding school where, nearsighted and physically frail, he was once again teased and bullied, but where, nevertheless, he developed fierce loyalties and a love of literature.

In 1882 Kipling returned to India, where he spent the next seven years working in various capacities as a journalist and editor and where he began to write about India itself and the Anglo-Indian society which presided over it. Kipling was one of the most popular English writers in both prose and verse. In 1907 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature, making him the first English language writer to receive the prize, and to date remains its youngest recipient. He was also sounded out for the British Poet Laureateship and on several occasions for a knighthood, all of which he declined. Later in his life Kipling came to be recognized as a "prophet of British imperialism". Many saw prejudice and militarism in his works, and the resulting controversy about him continued for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to critic Douglas Kerr: "He is still an author who can inspire passionate disagreement and his place in literary and cultural history is far from settled."

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudyard\\_Kipling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudyard_Kipling)

<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/kipling/rkbio2.htm>

## Resources and Links

### Articles

Arata, Stephen D. "A Universal Foreignness: Kipling in the Fin de Siecle". *English Literature in Transition* 36.1 (1993): 6-38.

Benson, Stephen. "Kipling's Singing Voice: Setting the Jungle Books." *Critical Survey* 13.3 (2001): 40.

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Burdick Harmon, Melissa. "THE RISE AND FALL OF RUDYARD KIPLING How Tragedy Devastated the Author of The Jungle Book." *Biography* 5.10 (2001): 92.

Ciha, Karen, Janet Joseph and Terry Martin. "Racism in Walt Disney's *The Jungle Book*." *Popular Culture Review*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 23-35, Feb 1994.

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### Links

[Kipling Society](#)

[Representations of Identity in The Jungle Book](#)

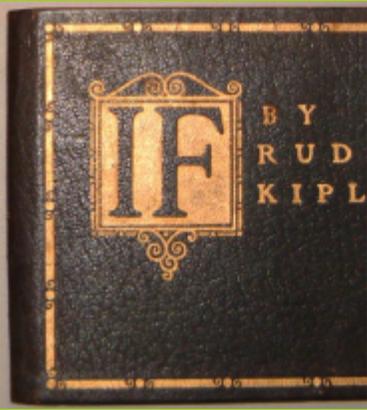
[Trailer of the 1942 Movie](#)

### Video

Trailer for the 1942 film adaptation of Kipling's *The Jungle Book*.

Film produced by Alexander Korda Films.

### Image Gallery





courtesy British Period

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