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Name: _____ Date: _____

The Jungle

Excerpt by: Upton Sinclair

Directions: Read the following excerpt. Then, with your partner, answer the questions that follow. Be prepared to discuss as a class.

Introduction: Today we often take for granted the government legislation that protects our health. Investigative reports on television even go to great lengths to show us when the health guidelines are being violated. In other words, we assume the food available for us to eat is safe. The federal government, however, was not always so involved in such issues.

. . . And then there was the condemned meat industry, with its endless horrors. The people of Chicago saw the government inspectors in Packingtown, and they all took that to mean that they were protected from diseased meat; they did not understand that these hundred and sixty-three inspectors had been appointed at the request of the packers, and that they were paid by the United States government to certify that all the diseased meat was kept in the state. They had no authority beyond that; for the inspection of meat to be sold in the city and state the whole force in Packingtown consisted of three henchmen of the local political machine! . . .

And then there was "potted game" and "potted grouse," "potted ham," and "deviled ham"—devyled, as the men called it. "De-vyled" ham was made out of the waste ends of smoked beef that were too small to be sliced by the machines; and also tripe, dyed with chemicals so that it would not show white, and trimmings of hams and corned beef, and potatoes, skins and all, and finally the hard cartilaginous gullets of beef, after the tongues had been cut out. All this ingenious mixture was ground up and flavored with spices to make it taste like something. Anybody who could invent a new imitation had been sure of a fortune from old Durham, said Jurgis's informant, but it was hard to think of anything new in a place where so many sharp wits had been at work for so long; where men welcomed tuberculosis in the cattle they were feeding, because it made them fatten more quickly; and where they bought up all the old rancid butter left over in the grocery stores of a continent, and "oxidized" it by a forced-air process, to take away the odor, rechurned it with skim milk, and sold it in bricks in the cities! . . .

There was never the least attention paid to what was cut up for sausage; there would come all the way back from Europe old sausage that had been rejected, and that was mouldy and white—it would be dosed with borax and glycerine, and dumped into the hoppers, and made over again for home consumption. There would be meat that had tumbled out on the floor, in the dirt and sawdust, where the workers had tramped and spit uncounted billions of consumption germs. There would be meat stored in great piles in rooms; and the water from leaky roofs would drip over it, and thousands of rats would race about on it. It was too dark in these storage places to see well, but a

man could run his hand over these piles of meat and sweep off handfuls of the dried dung of rats. These rats were nuisances, and the packers would put poisoned bread out for them, they would die, and then rats, bread, and meat would go into the hoppers together. This is no fairy story and no joke; the meat would be shovelled into carts, and the man who did the shoveling would not trouble to lift out a rat even when he saw one—there were things that went into the sausage in comparison with which a poisoned rat was a tidbit. There was no place for the men to wash their hands before they ate their dinner, and so they made a practice of washing them in the water that was to be ladled into the sausage. There were the butt-ends of smoked meat, and the scraps of corned beef, and all the odds and ends of the waste of the plants, that would be dumped into old barrels in the cellar and left there. Under the system of rigid economy which the packers enforced, there were some jobs that it only paid to do once in a long time, and among these was the cleaning out of the waste barrels. Every spring they did it; and in the barrels would be dirt and rust and old nails and stale water—and cart load after cart load of it would be taken up and dumped into the hoppers with fresh meat, and sent out to the public's breakfast. Some of it they would make into "smoked" sausage—but as the smoking took time, and was therefore expensive, they would call upon their chemistry department, and preserve it with borax and color it with gelatine to make it brown. All of their sausage came out of the same bowl, but when they came to wrap it they would stamp some of it "special," and for this they would charge two cents more a pound. . . .

NAME: DATE: CLASS:

The Jungle

Analysis Questions

1. Define progressivism.

2. What do you find most surprising in Upton Sinclair's account of the meatpacking industry around the turn of the century? Why?

3. What do you think was Sinclair's purpose for writing this piece?

4. How do you think readers reacted to The Jungle when it first came out?

5. What connection do you see between the public's reading The Jungle and subsequent progressive legislation, like the Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Act, which were passed within six months of its publication?

6. Do you think this legislation would have passed without the public attention these issues received after the publication of articles and books like this one? Why or why not?

7. What does the publication of The Jungle tell you about the progressive movement?

8. In the style of Upton Sinclair, write a paragraph describing an issue that you think must be addressed in today's society. Ideas may include gas prices, sweatshop labor, or climate change, but it is recommended that you come up with your own creative issue.