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Very often in life, people are struggling to achieve freedom from something, whether it is physical or mental, and this theme of struggling for independence is therefore very common in all types of literature; Upton Sinclair's The Jungle is no exception. This novel involves a young immigrant, Jurgis Rudkus, and the struggle of his family and himself to make a living in the abject stockyards of Chicago. Many members of the family are forced to work long hours in deplorable conditions simply to earn enough money to keep the family from starving. For them, every day is a struggle to stay alive. Throughout this novel, Jurgis strives to gain independence, independence from wage slavery at the factories and meat packing plants, independence from being mired in the city of Chicago, and independence from his feeling of helplessness and worthlessness.

Jurgis was able to temporarily feel freedom from being trapped at the stockyards in Chicago when he ran away from his family into the countryside. Jurgis had always been forced to remain in the city to earn money for food and shelter for his family. However, after the death of his wife, Ona, and his only son, Jurgis felt no more reason to stay in the city and so he departed to the country. He traversed several farms and fields, where he was able to help with the farm work in return for food. After finally escaping the city, Jurgis feels elation and euphoria because he thought that "He was going to live in the country....For three long years he had never seen a country sight nor heard a country sound....And now he felt like a bird lifted up..." (211). After many dreadful years in Chicago, Jurgis was once again able to see the countryside, a sight he had long missed. He felt like a bird after finally being free because, like a bird, he could go

wherever he wanted without obstruction. He had been lifted up around the towering walls of his jail, which was the city of Chicago. For the first time in years, he felt truly freed.

Jurgis also tried to gain independence by joining the Socialist Party. He hoped that socialism could equalize the distribution of wealth so that the poor could be freed from wage slavery from the rich. He also felt freed by the fact that socialism gave his life a purpose. Jurgis felt an enormous feeling of liberation after hearing an eloquent speaker discuss socialism. He was so amazed by the oration that he “could not think at all, he was stunned; yet he knew that in a mighty upheaval that had taken place in his soul, a new man had been born....The whole world had changed for him – he was free, he was free!” (304). Jurgis felt that he had been reborn because he had been so influenced by the speaker. He felt freedom because he knew that by fighting for socialism, his life would be meaningful and that it was even something to die for; he felt his world had changed because he finally had a purpose.

In order to convey the feeling of independence, the author also used changes in the mood of his writing. Throughout much of the novel, Sinclair uses a depressing tone to evoke a mood of hopelessness and despair. Jurgis experiences many hardships, including working in brutal, atrocious conditions, becoming injured on the job, being cheated into paying extra for a home, being incarcerated in prison, and facing the deaths of many members of his family. Towards the end of the novel, though, the mood changes to one full of hope, freedom, and purpose. Sinclair describes Jurgis' encounter with socialism in such a way as to fill the reader with a feeling that conditions can improve. The author uses this shift in the mood from one of despair to one of hope and freedom to express a strong feeling of liberation and independence.

Throughout The Jungle, Jurgis struggles to gain freedom and independence, both from being physically trapped in Chicago and from being mentally mired, in such a way that his life

seems meaningless. Jurgis physically escapes Chicago, but is much more liberated by his discovery of socialism, because it frees him mentally. Sinclair uses a change in the mood of the novel from hopelessness to freedom, compounding the theme of independence in the book.