Upton Sinclair’s novel The Jungle inspired a movement to reform the food industry and champion workers’ rights, resulting in the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. In this text, Sinclair makes use of rhetorical strategies in order to call the reader to action, proving literature can be a powerful catalyst for social change.

Firstly, Sinclair’s use of imagery prompts the reader to feel disgust and anger. The revelation in paragraph two of the deplorable conditions in the meatpacking industry no doubt ignited protest and calls for change. The narrator describes rat-infested rooms where “meat that had tumbled out on the floor, in the dirt and sawdust, where the workers had tramped and spit uncounted billions of consumption germ (paragraph 2).” In this graphic depiction, Sinclair achieves his purpose in two ways: he highlights the plight of the workers and the danger of consuming the product that would be sold to consumers. Thus, he plays both on the reader’s concern for himself and his fellow man. In turn, the reader is inspired to become involved in the food reform movement.

Following this further, Sinclair uses both imagery and personification in paragraph eight to illicit an emotional response from the reader. By describing Jurgis’s work as “the pit of hell,” Sinclair further stirs the reader’s outrage at the deplorable working conditions in the meatpacking industry. Sinclair’s use of personification, stating that buildings “swayed and danced” allows the reader to feel Jurgis’s despair and defeat, thus provoking the reader to call for change (paragraph 8).

Finally, Sinclair directly plays on the reader’s emotions in paragraph 12 by describing the pitiful condition of a young child, stricken with measles and unable to receive medical help. The child is described as “a thing uncanny and impish to behold, a plaster of pimples and sweat, a great purple lump of misery

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(paragraph 12).” This would certainly prompt outrage from the reader, inspiring protest and demands for change, thus achieving Sinclair’s ultimate purpose.

Sinclair’s skillful use of rhetorical strategy creates a powerful emotional appeal for the reader, and thus, inspiring and ultimately bringing about much needed social change.