

Unless you are provided with a short line (like #2 below) or the question is multiple choice, please write your answers using complete sentences.

Into the Wild by Jon Krakauer

Study Guide

“Author’s Note”

1. By immediately establishing the fact that Chris McCandless died in the wilderness of Alaska, his decomposed body found months after his death, what **tone** does Krakauer set up for the reader?



- a. Cheerful b. Ominous c. Hopeful d. Curious
2. Krakauer states that he “won’t claim to be an **impartial biographer**.” What does he mean? What must you keep in mind while reading, regarding bias / neutrality?
- (Jon
Krakauer)
3. **Characterization:** McCandless was “captivated by” the famous Russian author, Leo Tolstoy (*War and Peace*). What did he admire and emulate about this writer?

4. **Vocabulary in Context:** “Instead, his innocent mistakes turned out to be **pivotal** and irreversible, his name became the stuff of legend, and his bewildered family was left clutching the shards of a fierce and painful love.” Based on the context clues in this sentence, the underlined word most likely means...

- a. Meaningless b. Irrelevant c. Guilty d. Crucial

Krakauer begins the story by detailing McCandless's flight from his hometown and family, and introducing the substitute family McCandless finds on the road. This sets the stage for Krakauer's discussion of father-son relations and how they impact McCandless's choices. From this foundation, the story begins to chronicle McCandless's two years on the road in a chronological fashion.

Each chapter title reflects a stop on McCandless's trail.

CHAPTER ONE: “The Alaska Interior” (Note: At this point in his travels, Chris is calling himself **Alex Supertramp**)

1. “A rifle protruded from the young man’s backpack, but he looked friendly enough; a hitchhiker with a Remington semiautomatic isn’t the sort of thing that gives motorists pause in the forty-ninth state” (3-4). Based on this statement, what **generalization** can you make about Alaskans?



2. Based on the information on page 4, how does Jim Gallien feel about people “from the lower forty-eight” who come to Alaska to live off the land in the wilderness? **Please include a quotation in your response.**

3. What about Alex **worried** Jim Gallien?
 - a. His Remington semiautomatic rifle
 - b. The machete hanging from his belt
 - c. His congenial, well-educated manner
 - d. His minimal amount of gear
4. To what trail does Chris / Alex ultimately intend on traveling? _____
5. Alex gives Jim Gallien items, and Gallien also gives items to Alex. Write down what they exchange below.
Gallien gives Alex...
Alex gives Gallien...

CHAPTER TWO: “The Stampede Trail”

1. According to his graffiti, what author did Alex think was “King”? _____



2. How did a junked bus end up about half way up the trail?

3. Check out page 11. Who “typically pays a visit to the old bus”? Why?

(Yes, this is the real Bus 142)

4. Krakauer continually paints a picture of the Alaskan wilderness being an unruly, dangerous antagonist in this man versus nature conflict. Find a bit of detail from pages 10-13 that includes such a description and write it below, **using a properly formatted quotation.**



5. The autopsy could only reveal so much about McCandless, so what did authorities propose as the most probable cause of death?

CHAPTER THREE: "Carthage"

1. Read Tolstoy's and Stegner's quotations that introduce chapter three. What do these reveal about McCandless's personality and state of mind?

2. "Westerberg, a hyperkinetic man with thick shoulders and a black goatee, owns a grain elevator in Carthage..." (16). The underlined portion is which of the following?

a. Direct characterization b. Indirect characterization



3. After meeting Alex (Chris McCandless) and having him over for dinner, Westerberg offered him a job. According to Westerberg, how was Alex different from previous hitchhikers who had worked for him?



4. According to the letter Chris sent his sister Carine (page 21), why did Chris believe he'd have to be careful "not to accept any gifts" from his parents?

Walt and Billie

5. Chris had \$24,000 in his bank account when he graduated. His parents thought he would use it for law school, but that was not his plan. What did he do with it?

- A. He gave it all to his church
- B. He gave it all to Westerberg

- C. He donated it to OXFAM America
- D. Vegas, baby!

6. What did Chris McCandless do to “symbolize the complete severance from his previous life” (23)? Be specific.

7. Below, contrast the Westerberg and McCandless families. How are they different? Think of as many ways as possible. Include finance, social status, how they treat Chris (Alex), whom Chris (Alex) keeps in contact with, etc.

Westerberg	McCandless

8. After contrasting the two families, consider this: Krakauer breaks his chronological timeframe to include information about **both** families in this chapter. Why do you think the author does this?

CHAPTER FOUR: “Detrital Wash”

(FYI: Detritus means “loose fragments (sand or gravel) that have been worn away from rock,” typically by water (like flash floods))



1. Why did McCandless abandon his car in Detrital Wash, Arizona? What happened?
Please include a quotation from pages 28 or 29.

(Chris and his Datsun)

2. **Journalism question:** Many readers of nonfiction ask, how can the author possibly know all this stuff *really* happened?! *How do we know* that McCandless buried and burned these things?

3. On August 10, McCandless was ticketed for hitchhiking near Willow Creek, California. What was the effect of this ticket on his family? What did they do?



4. McCandless bought a canoe in Topock, Arizona, and planned on paddling down the Colorado River to the Gulf of California. Was he able to accomplish his goal? Explain why or why not.

(from the film, *Into the Wild*)

5. During this canoe trip, McCandless “had not seen or talked to another soul in thirty-six days” (36), subsisting only on a five pound bag of rice and whatever marine life he could catch. **Of what did this experience convince him?**



CHAPTER FIVE: “Bullhead City”

1. Why is not “a great deal known” about where McCandless traveled “after departing Las Vegas in May 1991?”
2. What is “the Slabs”? Where is it? Who did McCandless stay with when he was there?
What did he do to help these people out?
3. After carefully reading page 44, explain the parallels between **Jack London** and **Chris McCandless**. What ideas / philosophies do they share?
4. Was the real Jack London like the one McCandless so often preached about? Explain.

CHAPTER SIX: “Anza-Borrego”

1. What craft did Franz teach Alex?

a. Leatherwork

b. Woodcarving

c. Metallurgy

d. Vampirism



2. What “astonishing” artifact did McCandless make? Why was it astonishing?

3. In February and March of 1992 McCandless left Salton City in California and went to two cities to try to earn money to outfit him for his Alaska trip. In addition to hitchhiking, how did McCandless travel during this time period?

4. After returning to Southern California to retrieve his possessions, McCandless decided to go back to South Dakota to work. Franz drove him part way. What special request did Franz ask of McCandless during that trip? What did McCandless reply?



5. In early April, Franz received a long letter from McCandless. What specific advice did McCandless give to Franz? How did Franz respond to this advice? Be specific.

(Chris McCandless)

6. Which of these statements do *you* **MOST** agree with? All of these concern *why* Krakauer devoted an entire chapter to Ronald Franz.

a. Despite his support of McCandless, Krakauer sees the pain McCandless's abandonment of human society caused to those who loved him.

b. Examining Franz so closely allows Krakauer to show how McCandless projects his feelings onto Franz when he states that Franz is stubbornly fighting his own happiness.

- c. By including and explaining how McCandless needs to convince Franz to live a nomadic life, McCandless is struggling to justify his own choice to leave society.

CHAPTER SEVEN: “Carthage”

1. Carefully read Anthony Storr’s passage on page 61. To the best of your ability, summarize each paragraph in a single sentence (total: **two** sentences please!).
2. “Nor was McCandless endowed with a **surfeit** of common sense” (62). Based on the rest of the paragraph in which that sentence appears, what does the underlined word most likely mean?
a. Morsel b. Bit c. Excess d. Forfeit
3. On page 64, Krakauer examines Chris’s relationship with his father, Walt, and how trouble was bound to happen. **Explain some of the problems Chris had with his family.**



4. What caused Gail Borath to have a “bad feeling” that they wouldn’t see Alex again?
 - a. Alex displayed his talent for playing the piano.
 - b. While shopping for supplies, Alex bought more than usual.
 - c. Alex didn’t like dancing, but he danced at the party with Borath.
 - d. Alex cries when he hugs Borath goodbye.

CHAPTER EIGHT: “Alaska”

(Chris at an early age)

1. Krakauer begins this chapter by listing some of the negative responses he received on his article about McCandless’ death. “Much of the negative mail was sent by Alaskans.” What was the cause of this negativity? Why were these people so critical of McCandless?

2. The remainder of this chapter is about three “marginal characters” who “marched off into the Alaska wilds” and who have become “lodged firmly in the state’s collective memory.” Briefly describe each of these three men, please, and include what ultimately happened to each of them? (Complete sentences not necessary)

John Mallon Waterman

Gene Rosellini

Carl McCunn



3. Krakauer writes about these men both to draw parallels between them and McCandless and also to show that McCandless was different from them. Specifically, how was McCandless **not** like these men?

4. McCandless desired and often claimed to live completely independent from human society, but was he *truly* able to accomplish that? Explain your answer with specific evidence from the text so far, please.

CHAPTER NINE: “Davis Gulch”

Krakauer devotes this chapter to a comparison between McCandless and twenty-year-old **Everett Ruess**, who disappeared in the wilds of Utah canyon country in 1934. Both were well-educated and independent-minded young men who were drawn to the wilderness for the freedom it provided and for the transcendental experiences that the beauty of nature can provide.

1. In addition, Krakauer reveals “uncanny parallels between Ruess and Chris McCandless.”



List two (or more) parallels between these young men, please.

2. What ultimately happened to Ruess is a bit of a mystery.
What are **two** possibilities?

(Everett Ruess)

3. At the end of this chapter, the author writes about Irish monks who “sailed and rowed” across “treacherous stretches of ocean” in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. to a treeless and rocky island off the coast of Iceland. Why did the monks do this? What qualities did they display by doing it?

CHAPTER TEN: “Fairbanks”

1. In the space below, briefly explain how each man found out about McCandless’ death.

Jim Gallien	Wayne Westerberg

2. Sam McCandless was the first family member to hear of Chris's death. Explain the **irony** of his **initial reaction** to the story, please.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: "Chesapeake Beach"

1. "'How is it,' [Chris's father, Walt] wonders aloud, as he gazes blankly across Chesapeake Bay, 'that a kid with so much compassion could cause his parents so much pain?'" (104)? What is your reaction to this statement?



2. Chris was a high achiever academically, but he received an F in high school physics. Why? What does this incident reveal about his character?



3. What was ironic about Chris's belief that "wealth was shameful, corrupting, and inherently evil" (115)? Hint:
What was he especially good at?

CHAPTER TWELVE: "Annandale"

1. The first two years of Chris's college experience were very successful. He also worked hard during the summers and his relationship with his parents seemed good, but he had a "smoldering anger" toward his parents that "began to leak to the surface" near the end of that time. This anger was based on a discovery that Chris had made during his road trip two years earlier. **Specifically, what was this discovery?**

2. After his junior year of college, Chris took another road trip. To where this time? What effect did it have on him?

3. "From then on he scrupulously avoided contacting his parents or Carine, the sister for whom he purportedly cared immensely. 'We were all worried when we didn't hear from him,' says Carine." Based on the previous information, the underlined word most likely means...

- a. carelessly b. carefully c. thoroughly d. stupidly

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: "Virginia Beach"

1. Using the Venn Diagram below, tell me how Chris and Carine were both similar and different.

Chris

Carine

2. In a single sentence, summarize the main point of the John Haines passage at the beginning of this chapter.

3. How did Carine find out about her brother's death? How did food play a part in her reaction?

4. Krakauer writes, "Such bereavement, witnessed at close range makes even the most eloquent apologia for high-risk activities ring fatuous (idiotic) and hollow" (132). What kinds of activities might Krakauer have been thinking about, besides retreating to the wilderness, when he wrote that statement?
(In other words, what are some life-threatening activities that some people may think are foolish? **A list is fine.**)

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: "The Stikine Ice Cap"

FYI: This chapter (and the one following it) consists of a digression in which the author describes himself as a young man and compares himself to Chris McCandless. Specifically, he describes his attempt to climb a mountain when he was 23.

1. What is the name of this mountain and where is it located? _____

2. As detailed on page 134, what personality characteristics does Krakauer share with McCandless? (A list is fine)



3. What was the primary danger of skiing across the snow covered ice fields at the foot of the mountain? Plus, how did Krakauer prepare for this danger?

4. Krakauer planned on spending three to four weeks on this mountain; however, he could not carry in enough food for that amount of time. What arrangement did he make to get food? What was the problem with this plan?

5. What forced the author to give up on his first attempt to climb the mountain?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: “The Stikine Ice Cap”

1. Study the Donald Barthelme passage that introduces this chapter, and then answer the following question. Krakauer implies that his struggle with the mountain is his way of working out something...but what?



2. What was Krakauer’s father’s blueprint for his son’s life? What were his expectations? Did Jon Krakauer follow this blueprint?

3. True False Jon Krakauer never succeeded in climbing the mountain.

4. At the end of this chapter, the author explains his purpose for telling this story about his doing an extremely dangerous and foolish thing. **What is this purpose?** (Hint: It has to do with what people would have said about him if he had not returned.)

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: "The Alaska Interior"



1. After meeting and traveling with Gaylord Stuckey, what did McCandless want to “study up on” before he set out for the wilderness?

2. What did Stuckey beg and plead with McCandless to do?
a. Not to go to Alaska c. To bring a larger gun
b. To call his parents d. To be his adopted son

3. When he set off on the Stampede Trail, what food and supplies did McCandless have with him?

4. What surprising difficulties did McCandless have during his first week in the wilderness? (He was staying in the “Magic Bus” by this time.)

5. When the snow melted, what did McCandless gather and eat? _____

6. Once McCandless could hunt well, what animals did he kill and eat? _____

7. What caused McCandless to change his original plan to walk 500 miles to tidewater?



8. Why does McCandless say that shooting the moose was one of the “greatest tragedies of my life”?

(Chris Victorious) →



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: “The Stampede Trail”

1. This chapter describes a visit by the author and others to the site where McCandless died. The author states that he has something that enables him to cross the raging river that McCandless did not have. What is it?
2. Two of the hunters who discovered McCandless’ body believed that the large animal he shot was not a moose. What did they think it was? What did it really turn out to be, and what did that prove?
3. In an attempt to explain why McCandless did what he did, Krakauer compares him to Sir John Franklin, John Muir, and Henry David Thoreau. Ultimately, however, he states that McCandless is unlike these men and that he does not fit any stereotype. He attributes what happened to Chris to “the passion and longings of youth.” He quotes the father of Everett Ruess who said, “**The older person does not realize the soul-flights of the adolescent.**”
Do you agree? Were the mistakes that Chris made simply attributable to the passions one has at his age? Explain.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: “The Stampede Trail”



1. This chapter covers the time from July 8 when Chris arrived back at the bus and August 18, the probable date of his death. Although Chris did not write a lot during this time, he did leave some clues about what may have happened to him. Krakauer uses these clues to attempt to prove that Chris’s death can be attributed at least partially to a cause other than simple starvation. What is Krakauer’s theory?

2. Carefully examine the passages Chris highlighted from *Doctor Zhivago* on pages 188-189. What conclusion does Krakauer believe Chris McCandless had ultimately come to? What was Chris preparing to do?



3. What is the tragic irony of Chris's location (in the Magic Bus)? In other words, he would have brought a topographical map with him, what would he have discovered?

if

(Chris's final self-portrait...still smiling)

4. Do you believe it was Chris who trashed the two nearby cabins? Why or why not?

"Epilogue"

1. The Epilogue recounts the visit that Chris's parents made to the bus ten months after Chris died. Chris's mother Billie says the surroundings are pretty and states, "**IT** looks just like the Upper Peninsula! Chris must have loved it here." To what is she referring?



2. What does Billie put under the bed at the rear of the bus? What does it say?

3. What is **Walt's reaction** to his visit to the bus?

4. **Billie** says, ""You can't fix **IT**." To what is she referring? Plus, how did her reaction make you feel while you were reading it?



This is the plaque Walt installed on the

bus.



An aerial view of Bus 142.