

American Studies – Liptak/Harrison
Into the Wild



Chapter: 1-3; pages 3-23

After reading the selection, please **respond fully** to the following prompts. Be sure that your responses are dated, labeled (*Into the Wild* with chapter numbers), and have your name on them. I will collect them.

Each day we will review homework responses during discussion of the novel. Participation in class discussion is expected and it will be graded each week. At the end of each discussion, you should note at the top of your homework **how many times you participated and indicate the type of participation**, such as: asked a question, commented on the character, answered a homework question, or challenged another student's comment.

- 1.** After reading chapter 1, use two adjectives to describe your impressions of Chris McCandless (Alex). **Explain and support each adjective with a specific quote from the chapter.**
- 2.** After graduating college, McCandless begins, "an epic journey that would change everything" (22). He saw his time in college as "an absurd and onerous duty" (22). In heading west he felt freed "from the stifling world of his parents and peers, a world of abstraction and security and material excess" (22). **Using examples from the reading** explain what he meant by this. Do you agree with his motivation for leaving?

Additional Discussion Topic: McCandless' family relationships and upbringing

Vocabulary Definitions

congenial (5) - friendly

antimony (10) - a metallic element

contumacious (11) - rebellious

amiable (16) - good-natured

plebeian (18) - crude, common

onerous (22) - troublesome

escarpments (10) - a steep slope

anomaly (11) - glitch, inconsistency

visage (16) - face

convivial (18) - sociable

mien (18) - appearance



Chapter 4 and 5; pages 25-46

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1. Chapter 4 ends with the following quote from McCandless' journal: "It is the experiences, the memories, the great triumphant joy of living to the fullest extent in which real meaning is found" (37). Identify an experience from this chapter and explain what "meaning" you think Alex has found. **Use a quote to support your explanation.**
2. What does "Plastic People" in chapter five mean? What are two things McCandless considered plastic? Do you agree with his assessment? **Support your answer with a quote.**

Additional Discussion Topic: McCandless' definition of living life to its fullest.

Vocabulary Definitions

egress (28) - going out

saline (32) - salty

bourgeois (39) - middle class

itinerant (43) - traveling

fatuous (44) - satisfied and stupid

Tolstoy (29) - Russian author and philosopher believed in self-sacrifice,

indolently (32) - lazy, inactive

ere (32) - withered, dry

lumpen (39) - displaced people, misfits of society

primordial (44) - primal, basic form of development

sedentary (44) - sitting, remaining in one area

Thoreau (29) - American writer, poet, and philosopher who believed in simple living and non-violence, and finding happiness personal freedom.

from within.



Chapter 6 and 7; pages 47-69

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1. Ronald Franz and McCandless establish a father-son type of relationship. Identify one benefit or drawback (using a quote) that **each** gets out of the relationship.
2. Before McCandless leaves for Alaska, Wayne Westerberg offers to buy him a plane ticket. McCandless refuses, however, claiming, "flying would be cheating. It would wreck the whole trip" (67). **Find and explain two quotes from this chapter that demonstrate whether or not McCandless actually lives by his own words.**

Additional Discussion Topic: "So many people live within unhappy circumstances and yet will not take the initiative to change their situation because they are conditioned to a life of security, conformity, and conservatism, all of which may appear to give one peace of mind, but in reality nothing is more damaging to the adventurous spirit within a man than a secure future. The very basic core of a man's living spirit is his passion for adventure" (57).

Vocabulary Definitions

hegira (48) - flight
desiccated (49) - dried
indigent (50) - poor
harangue (51) - sermon

creosote (48) - an oily liquid
phantasmal (49) - ghostly
destitute (51) - poor
fulminate (52) - verbal attack
arroyo (49) - gorge
serape (51) - poncho

endemic (52) – widespread

unalloyed (55) – pure

unbidden (63) – not asked



INTO THE WILD

Chapter 8 & 9; Read pages 70 – 97

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1. **Think about the following questions:** Do you feel, as one letter writer did, that there is “nothing positive at all about Chris McCandless’ lifestyle or wilderness doctrine ...surviving a near death experience does not make you a better human it makes you damn lucky” (116); or do you see something admirable or noble in his struggles and adventures? Was he justified in the pain he brought to family and friends in choosing his own solitary course in life?

After pondering the questions, **write a letter** to Jon Krakauer that responds to these questions and addresses what value you thought this book had for you. Your letter should be at least **one page** in length typed or one and half hand written.

Additional Discussion Topic: What can be learned from McCandless’ story?

2. **Think about the following questions:** Do you feel, as one letter writer did, that there is “nothing positive at all about Chris McCandless’ lifestyle or wilderness doctrine ...surviving a near death experience does not make you a

better human it makes you damn lucky” (116); or do you see something admirable or noble in his struggles and adventures? Was he justified in the pain he brought to family and friends in choosing his own solitary course in life?

After pondering the questions, **write a letter** to Jon Krakauer that responds to these questions and addresses what value you thought this book had for you. Your letter should be at least **one page** in length typed or one and half hand written.

Additional Discussion Topic: What can be learned from McCandless' story?

Chapter: 10 and 11; page: 98-116

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1. Identify two qualities that Walt McCandless and his son have in common. Support **each** quality with **a quote** from the text.
2. Identify **two** specific details or examples (**using quotes**) from Chris McCandless' childhood/high school years that seem to predict his later behavior. What is it about these events that help to explain his actions as an adult?

Additional Discussion Topic: “How is it that a kid with so much compassion could cause his parents so much pain?” (104).

Vocabulary Definitions:

mercurial (105) - quick and changeable **wanderlust** (108) -a strong impulse to travel

incorrigible (115) -uncontrollable, incapable of being reformed

Chapter 12, pages 117-126; Chapter 16, pages 157 – 171

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1. Contrast McCandless' feelings about his family with his family's feelings about him. How does the Thoreau quote that opens the chapter match Chris' feelings about his family? **Support your points with two quotes from the reading.**
2. Read the italicized passage on page 168 that McCandless wrote and the italicized passage he highlighted from Tolstoy on page 169. Based on these writings and events in this chapter, what convinced McCandless that it was time to return to civilization? What did he learn from his time "in the wild"? **Support your answer with specific details.**

Additional Discussion Topic: What did McCandless expect this "greatest adventure" to accomplish?

Vocabulary Definitions

monomania (120) - obsessed with one idea

choler (122) - anger

idiosyncratic (123) - distinctive, individual

extemporaneous (124) - impromptu

Rubicon (163) - point of no return

perambulation (164) - patrol

reverie (164) - dream

sanctimonious (122) - self-righteous

sullen (123) - brooding, angry

castigated (123) - punish

gloaming (161) - dusk

aesthetic (163) - appreciates beauty in nature

taiga (164) - subarctic forest

obliquely (123) - indirectly

Chapter 17; pages 172 - 186

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1. Krakauer observes that it is not "unusual for a young man to be drawn to a pursuit considered reckless by his elders." **Identify two details** from this chapter where McCandless exemplifies this observation. Explain whether or not McCandless would agree with Krakauer. Finally compare McCandless' view with that of **one of the following men** mentioned in this chapter: Andy Horowitz, Gordon Samel, Roman Dial, Sir John Franklin.
2. Krakauer goes on to claim that McCandless' "life hummed with meaning and purpose. But the meaning he wrested from existence lay beyond the comfortable path." Do you agree with Krakauer? **Support your response with two specific quotes from this chapter.**

Additional Discussion Topic: Adventure and freedom versus safety

Vocabulary Definitions

ford (174) – a shallow place to cross a river

malevolent (176) – mean

ungulate (178) – hoofed animals

scabbard (178) – cover

hauteur (180) – arrogance

sobriquet (181) – humorous nickname

modicum (184) – small amount

miasma (175) – cloud

massif (176) – connected mountains

moldering (178) – rotting

maxillae (179) – jawbones

metis (180) – people of Indian and French-Canadian descent

rumination (183) – reflection

feckless (184) – incompetent

posited (184) – put forward as truth

sojourn (179) – break

existential (184) – creating meaning through experience because life has no inherent meaning; emphasizes personal freedom and responsibility.

Chapter: 18 and Epilogue; page: 185-203

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1. How does the Doctor Zhivago quote that opens the chapter foreshadow McCandless' actions and writings later in the chapter? Cite **two specific examples using quotations from the text**.
2. Do you believe McCandless is to blame for his own death? Explain your answer using **two specific details** from the chapter. **Use quotations to support your response.**

Additional Discussion Topic: The poem "Wise Men in Their Bad Hours" and the Epilogue

Vocabulary Definitions

munificence (188) - bounty
precipitous (190) - abrupt
emetic (192) - causes vomiting
moniker (198) - name
beatific (199) - saintly

eloquence (189) - expressive speech
decumbent (192) - growing along the ground
insidiously (194) - causing harm in a sneaky way
conflagration (198) - fire