

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Into the Wild

by Jon Krakauer

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Notes on Teaching Into the Wild

Into the Wild is the story of a young man, Chris McCandless, who leaves a middle-class life, sells his belongings, and goes out on his own to travel the back roads and obscure trails of the American West and, ultimately, Alaska. The book recounts the investigation of his journey and death, and it includes findings based on an examination of his body. The book contains elements of emotional distance and dysfunction, suggestions of mental illness, and the possibility of suicide. Teachers may want to discuss the sense of alienation and isolation that is common among teenagers and try to help students verbalize their feelings about someone who decided to “drop out” of conventional society.

Into the Wild also contains some strong language, references to drug usage (marijuana and the abuse of prescription drugs), and brief sexual content.

Note: All references are from the Anchor Books edition of Into the Wild, published in 1997 by Random House.

Into the Wild

Objectives

By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:

1. discuss the motif of the allure of the wilderness on the American imagination, citing historical examples from the book and showing how it affected Chris McCandless.
2. discuss the character of Chris McCandless, pointing out his strengths and weaknesses, the insights given by those he met on the road, and what shaped him into a loner who went into the wild to find peace.
3. discuss the concept of the attraction to high-risk activities by young men, using Chris McCandless as an example and including other young men drawn to danger, as discussed in the book.
4. gain an understanding of the scope and dangers of the Alaskan interior.
5. compare and contrast the character and personality of Chris McCandless and Jon Krakauer as young men.
6. compare the fathers of Chris McCandless and Jon Krakauer; discuss how the relationships between the sons and fathers influenced the choices the sons made, and evaluate the legitimacy of the concept that such relationships are often emotionally complicated, challenging the sons as they enter adulthood.
7. discuss the rigors of climbing mountains of significant height, describe the equipment needed to manage such a climb, and correctly use technical terms related to mountain climbing.
8. evaluate *Into the Wild* as a example of journalism.
9. cite examples of local color, and discuss their purpose in the text.
10. identify the main characters who interact with Chris McCandless and summarize their relationships.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Discuss the challenges of climbing a mountain with an altitude of 6,000 feet or more, including the planning and equipment required. Use examples from the book to explain what to take, how to approach the venture, and how to manage the unexpected. Be sure to incorporate the following terms:
 - massif
 - crampons
 - verglas,
 - *nordwand*
 - glacier
 - crevasse

In concluding your discussion, compare the challenges of mountain climbing with preparing for and meeting other kinds of challenges in life, such as a difficult test, an emotional loss, or a major decision.

2. Define one of the literary terms listed below, and discuss how it was used in the book and how it added to or detracted from the success of the book:
 - motivation
 - allusion
 - theme
3. Chris McCandless went to a large public high school. Considering all you know about his character, discuss the pros and cons of this type of school setting for him, including why it may have contributed to his rebelliousness and feelings of estrangement.
4. When Krakauer goes to Alaska to visit the school bus, he takes three friends, one of whom is Roman Dial, a well-known adventurer who “enjoys statewide renown for a long, brash string of back country escapades” and who, according to Krakauer, feels that McCandless would have been similarly renowned “except that McCandless had the misfortune to perish.” Discuss McCandless as a successful adventurer, citing examples of his resourcefulness, dedication, focus, physical stamina, and other traits on which Roman Dial might base his opinion.
5. Chris McCandless appeared to have had ambivalent feelings about with money. Discuss his financial history as it is revealed in the book, and cite times when he hated money, when he was excited to amass it, and when he simply recognized the need for it. Include your opinion of how his attitude toward money marked different phases of his maturity and independence.

Chapter Two: The Stampede Trail

Vocabulary

amalgam – a mix
anomaly – an exception to the standard or norm
antimony – a metal found in ore that is used in metallic alloys and medicine
contumacious – stubborn, especially stubbornly disobedient
cordillera – a string of parallel mountain ranges
desolation – barrenness; the lack of growth or health
escarpments – a series of long, high rocky ridges
glacial till – mixed soils and rocks carried by a glacier's movement
ominous – warning of danger
oxidized – combined chemically with oxygen
ramparts – rocky supports (in this case, supporting ridges or foothills)
subcutaneous – under the skin; internal

1. Why would Krakauer include a quote from another author (Jack London) as the heading for this chapter?

2. What is the purpose of the detailed descriptions of Mt. McKinley, Denali, and the Stampede Trail?

3. How does Krakauer know that in 1992, “six people in three separate parties happened to visit the remote vehicle on the same afternoon”?

18. How did Ron Franz learn that McCandless had died?

19. How has Franz's life changed since McCandless died?

Chapter Sixteen: The Alaska Interior

Vocabulary

autonomy – independence
axioms – statements or beliefs that are taken as true because nothing contradicts them
castigated – scolded powerfully; berated
climactic – at the climax of an emotion or event
counterintuitive – opposite to what one would expect or think
enthrall – to captivate
Ethnobotany – the study of how a culture understands plants and their lore
factitious – reduced or made by man as opposed to nature
Geophysical – the study physical properties of the Earth
gaunt – extremely thin
gloaming – the soft light at dawn or dusk
Hoosier – someone from Indiana
laconic – not given to flowery words or much length in speech or writing
leery – skittish, anxious
pedestrious – on foot
perambulations – walks around an area
proximity – physical nearness
rictus – a grimace
succumbing – dying or coming under the power of something
sulfurous – heavy with the chemical element, sulfur or stinking of sulfur
taiga – a damp forest where conifers grow
taut – pulled tight

1. How did McCandless get a ride with Gaylord Stuckey?

2. How far did Stuckey take McCandless?

3. What did Stuckey think of McCandless? What did they talk about?
