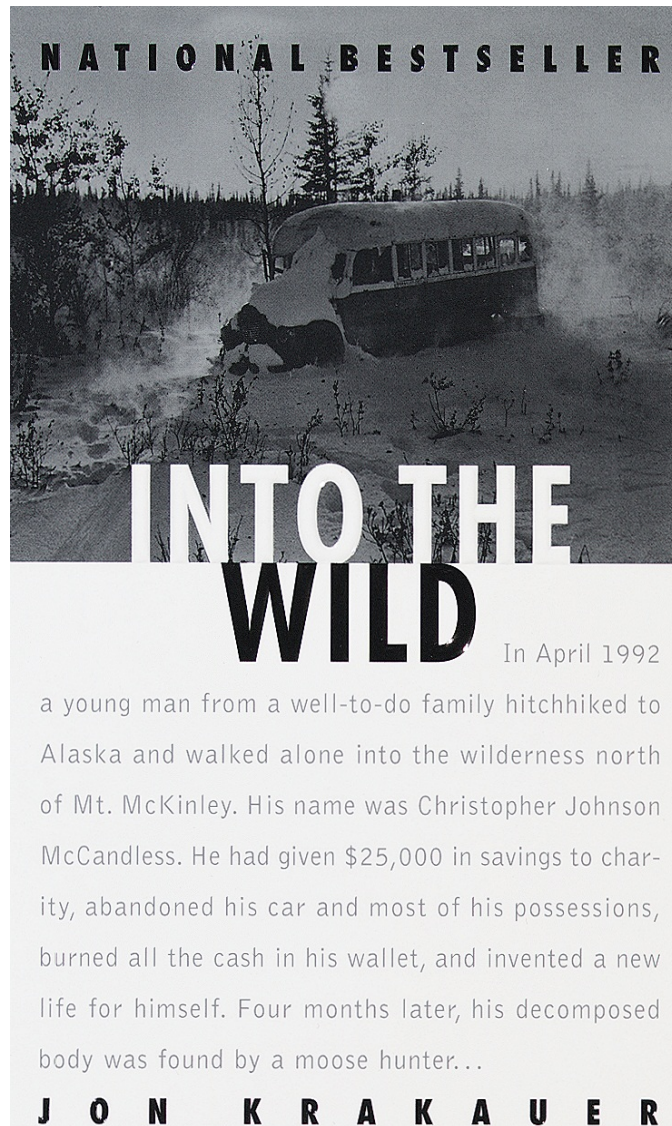


**KNOPF  
DOUBLEDAY**

## **INTO THE WILD COMMON CORE ELA TEACHER'S GUIDE**



**\*\*\*This CC ELA Teacher's Guide is still in Beta! We'd love to hear your feedback. Let us know your thoughts by emailing [acmart@randomhouse.com](mailto:acmart@randomhouse.com) and to thank you we will send you a paperback book of your choice from the Knopf Doubleday AP High School Catalog, found online at [www.randomhouse.com/highschool/catalogs](http://www.randomhouse.com/highschool/catalogs) (must be priced under \$20.00)\*\*\***

## **How to use this template to customize your CC ELA Unit using *Into The Wild*:**

The curriculum framework below is organized around an extended text, shorter texts and guiding questions. The categories in **bold** reflect the curricula recommended by the Common Core framework. The *italicized* categories, companion texts, digital texts and informational texts, are supplemental content that reflect both the Common Core standards and sound educational practice. Engaging students with high interest texts establishes a foundation upon which to build the rigorous work required to fulfill Common Core curriculum requirements.

This unit contains several Common Core aligned approaches to the text. Select a pathway of study that best fits the needs of your students. When deciding which activities to include, consider the duration of the unit as well as the learning that preceded and will follow this particular unit. In other words, if you already have a well-developed research project, you may wish to omit that unit from the template or address it in a less time-consuming fashion.

### **Reading the charts**

The first chart [figure 1] provides a broad overview of the unit, including essential questions, guiding questions, and themes that emerge through the reading of *Into The Wild*. These lead to several possible assessments.

The second chart [figure 2] includes texts for study (under Reading) and formal assignments (under Writing). Beneath the chart are detailed directions for each task. Texts, assignments and explanations are numbered for reference. For example, if you want your students to complete the poetry analysis (#4), you'll find the poems listed under #4 in the reading section and the detailed directions for the assignment under #4 beneath the chart.

### **Assessment**

Decide what students should know at the conclusion of the unit prior to selecting activities. You may choose to summatively evaluate student learning across one or more tasks. Assessments are aligned to the curricular strands outlined to the materials and assignments included in the framework and reflect the Common Core's emphasis on research, analytical and informational writing, argument, and narrative.

### **The *italicized* fields**

(Companion texts, digital texts, informational texts, digital writing and prerequisite knowledge)

You know your students best. What will it take for them to productively engage with the required text? Look for resources that fit under the umbrella of your essential questions and themes and will pique their curiosity. Does your district encourage and support technology use? The Common Core unit you create can adapt itself to many digital tools. What will your students need to know in order to complete the activities you design? By considering prerequisite knowledge, you know what lessons you will need to plan in order to lead your students to success.

### **Standards**








Taking the time to identify standards, aligning them with the text, supplementary material or task, will ensure that you've covered them in depth and will help identify those standards allows your students will need more exposure to.

## Unit Overview: Questions, Themes and Assessments

Essential Questions	Guiding Questions	Unit Themes	Possible Assessments
<b>How can the natural world provide answers to human questions?</b>	What answers might wilderness hold that can't be found within the bounds of civilization?	For some, wilderness holds a promise of answers to questions from within.	<b>Analysis:</b> Poetry
<b>Why take risks?</b>	In what ways is risk-taking appealing?  What's the difference between living deliberately (close to the edge) and acting recklessly?	<u>Hubris</u> can lead to bad decisions, including taking unnecessary risks.	<b>Argument:</b> Hubris
<b>How can we live deliberately?</b>	What does it mean to live deliberately?  What does it mean to be self-reliant?	Living deliberately means evaluating and adjusting one's place in the world.	<b>Argument:</b> Conformity to higher principle  <b>Narrative:</b> Desideratum  <b>Research:</b> Rebels
<b>In what ways do our relationships shape us?</b>	How do our relationships with our parents shape us as individuals?	The bond between fathers and sons can be fraught with misunderstandings.	
<b>How do we know what's true?</b>	Does truth matter?  What is the truth?	Being truthful means acknowledging all sides of the story.	

[figure 1]

## Texts for Study

Extended text	Companion text(s) - high interest	3-5 short complex texts	Digital text(s)	Informational text(s)
 <p><i>Into The Wild</i> by Jon Krakauer</p>	 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. <u>"Society"</u> (soundtrack) <i>Into The Wild</i></li> <li>4. <u>"Into The Wild"</u> (soundtrack) Eddie Vedder</li> <li>4. <u>"Guaranteed"</u> (soundtrack) Eddie Vedder</li> <li>4. <u>"Long Nights"</u> (soundtrack) Eddie Vedder</li> <li>4. <u>"No Ceiling"</u> (soundtrack) Eddie Vedder</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. <u><i>Doctor Zhivago</i></u> (excerpt) Boris Pasternak [<a href="http://bit.ly/1gOwS91">http://bit.ly/1gOwS91</a>]</li> <li>2. <u><i>Walden</i></u> "Chapter 2: Where lived, and what I lived for" (paragraphs 15-17 on living deliberately)</li> <li>2. <u><i>Walden</i></u> "Chapter 11: Higher Principles" (paragraph 7 on conformity to higher principles)</li> <li>2. <u><i>Into The Wild</i></u> (excerpt) - Chris/Alex's letter to Ron (p. 56-58)</li> <li>2. <u>"Self-Reliance"</u> Emerson (excerpt and penultimate paragraph beginning "And so the reliance on property...")</li> <li>4. <u>"Meeting the Mountains"</u> Gary Snyder</li> <li>4. <u><i>Dharma Bums</i></u> Kerouac on <u>Desolation Peak, chapter 33, first two paragraphs.</u></li> <li>4. <u>"Above Pate Valley"</u></li> <li>4. <u>"where water comes together with other water"</u> Raymond Carver</li> </ol>  <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. <u>Yellowstone Act - 1872 and Theodore Roosevelt at Roosevelt Arch in Yellowstone National Park (1903)</u> (speech)</li> </ol>	 <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Jon Krakauer reveals inspiration for <i>Into The Wild</i> [<a href="http://bit.ly/1cYQc2s">http://bit.ly/1cYQc2s</a>]</li> <li>1. <u>Eye to Eye With Katie Couric: Director Sean Penn (CBS News)</u> [<a href="http://bit.ly/1idpKSK">http://bit.ly/1idpKSK</a>]</li> </ol>  <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. <u>Jon Krakauer on Oprah Winfrey</u> [<a href="http://bit.ly/1j7wmQe">http://bit.ly/1j7wmQe</a>]</li> <li>3. <u>"Did Jon Krakauer Finally Solve 'Into The Wild' Mystery?"</u> (from NPR) [<a href="http://n.pr/1idqkQe">http://n.pr/1idqkQe</a>]</li> </ol>  <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. <u><i>Into The Wild</i></u> directed by Sean Penn</li> <li>6. <u>Iconoclasts: Sean Penn and Jon Krakauer Part 1</u> [<a href="http://bit.ly/1cYRj29">http://bit.ly/1cYRj29</a>]</li> <li>6. <u>Iconoclasts: Sean Penn and Jon Krakauer Part 2</u> [<a href="http://bit.ly/1bHv4J0">http://bit.ly/1bHv4J0</a>]</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. NYT Op-ed: <u>"The Charitable Industrial Complex"</u> Peter Buffett [<a href="http://nyti.ms/17teD0l">http://nyti.ms/17teD0l</a>]</li> </ol>  <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. <u>"Remembering Christopher McCandless 20 Years Later"</u> <i>Huffington Post</i> [<a href="http://huff.to/1bHvTSh">http://huff.to/1bHvTSh</a>]</li> <li>3. <u>"Examining Chris McCandless, 20 years after he went 'Into the Wild'"</u> (response to Huff Post article from <i>Alaska Dispatch</i>) [<a href="http://bit.ly/1cYSzIR">http://bit.ly/1cYSzIR</a>]</li> <li>3. <u>"The Cult of Chris McCandless"</u> (from <i>Men's Journal</i>) [<a href="http://mjm.ag/188aCCh">http://mjm.ag/188aCCh</a>]</li> <li>3. <u>"Into the Wild: 3 hikers rescued near scene of fatal Alaska adventure"</u> (from <i>Los Angeles Times</i>) [<a href="http://lat.ms/1gOzbZl">http://lat.ms/1gOzbZl</a>]</li> <li>3. <u>"How Chris McCandless Died"</u> (from <i>The New Yorker</i> - this covers the same material as the NPR interview) [<a href="http://nyr.kr/110B7">http://nyr.kr/110B7</a>]</li> <li>10. <u>"Why the teen brain is drawn to risk."</u> <i>Time Magazine</i> [<a href="http://ti.me/1gOzTpL">http://ti.me/1gOzTpL</a>]</li> </ol>

[figure 2]

## CC Aligned Reading & Listening Standards

The following 11-12 ELA reading and listening standards are a consistent expectation in all work during the unit:

→**RI. & RL.11-12.1.** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

→**RI. & RL.11-12.2.** Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

→**RL.11-12.3.** Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

→**RI.11-12.2.** Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.

**#2→RI.11-12.4.** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text  
**#2→RI.11-12.6.** Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.

**#2→RL.11-12.9** Demonstrate knowledge of 18th, 19th, and early 20th-century foundational works of American literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics

**#4→RL.11-12.1.** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

**#4→RL.11-12.2.** Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

**#4→RL.11-12.4.** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging or beautiful.

**#4→RL.11-12.6.** Analyze a case in which grasping point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant

**#4→RL.11-12.10.** By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 11-CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

**#4→L.11-12.5.** Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

**#5→RI.11-12.8.** Delineate and evaluate the reasoning in seminal U.S. texts, including the application of constitutional principles and the use of legal reasoning and the premises, purposes, and arguments in works of public advocacy.

**#7& 8→RI.11-12.7** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

**#7& 8→RI.11-12.6.** Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.

**#7& 8→SL.11-12.2.** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**#3→RI.11-12.7** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

**#6→RL.11-12.5.** Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as aesthetic impact.

**#6→RI.11-12.7** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

**#6→SL.11-12.1.** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**#3→RI.11-12.1** Cite strong and thorough evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including where the text leaves matters uncertain.

**#3→RI.11-12.6.** Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or beauty of the text.

**#3→RI.11-12.7** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

**#3→RI.11-12.10.** By the end of grade 11, read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 11-CCR text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

## Formal Assignments

Research Project	4-6 Analytical (informational & argument)	Narrative	Routine writing	<i>Digital Writing and Web 2.0 possibilities</i>
<p><b>Prerequisite Knowledge</b>            →Library databases            →Note-taking            →MLA (or other) style            →Research writing</p>	<p><b>Prerequisite Knowledge</b>            MLA (or other) style            → Literary terms            → Rhetorical techniques            → Film techniques            → Close Reading            → Analytical writing            → Argument writing            → Public speaking            → <u>Vocabulary</u> (see list below)</p>	<p><b>Prerequisite Knowledge</b>            → Narrative writing            →Descriptive writing</p>		<p><b>Prerequisite Knowledge</b>            → Web 2.0 Digital Tools</p>
<p><u>1. Rebels, Outcasts, Adventurers, Warriors (assessment)</u></p>	<p><u>2. Conformity to higher principle (assessment)</u>  <u>3. Hubris (assessment)</u>  <u>4. Poetry/poetic language (assessment)</u>  <u>5. President Theodore Roosevelt's speech &amp; Yellowstone Act (1872)</u>  <u>6. Into The Wild (film)</u></p>	<p><u>7. Desideratum personal essay (assessment)</u>  <u>8. Wild Places (descriptive writing)</u></p>	<p><u>9. Journaling (or Blogging)</u>  <u>10. 10 Quick Writes</u>  <u>11. Discussion questions</u></p>	<p><b>1,8,9,11.</b> See specifics for digital writing possibilities below.</p> <p><b>Research Tools</b>  <u>Evernote</u> [www.evernote.com]  <u>Diigo</u> [www.diigo.com]  <u>EasyBib</u> [www.easybib.com]</p> <p><b>Writing Tools</b>  <u>Figment</u> [http://figment.com]  <u>Google Drive</u> [https://drive.google.com]</p> <p><b>Free Annotation Apps</b>  <u>iAnnotate PDF</u>  <u>Notability</u>  <u>PaperPort Notes</u></p> <p><b>Vocabulary Tools</b>  <u>The Noun Project</u>            [http://thenounproject.com]            images for a precise infographic.</p> <p><b>Presentation Tools</b>  <u>Easel.ly</u> [http://www.easel.ly]            To create an infographic, a visual depiction of information</p> <p><u>Prezi</u> [http://prezi.com]  <u>Animoto Video Maker</u></p>

## CC Writing & Speaking Standards

The following 11-12 ELA writing, speaking and language standards are a consistent expectation in all work during the unit:

→**W.11-12.4.** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)  
→**W.11-12.5.** Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1–3 up to and including grades 11–12 on page 54.)

→**W.11-12.6.** Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.

→**W.11-12.10.** Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

→**L.11-12.1.** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

→**L.11-12.2.** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

→**L.11-12.3.** Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

→**SL.11-12.2.** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

→**SL.11-12.6.** Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating a command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

**#1**→**W.11-12.7.** Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

**#1**→**W.11-12.8.** Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

**#2&3**→**W.11-12.1.** Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. Explore and inquire into areas of interest to formulate an argument.  
**#2&3**→**W.11-12.7.9.** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**#4&5**→**W.11-12.7.9.** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**#4&5**→**SL.11-12.4.** Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

**#4&5**→**W.11-12.7.2.** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

**#6**→**W.11-12.7.2.** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

**#7&8**→**W.11-12.3.** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

**#8**→**SL.11-12.4.** Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

**#8**→**SL.11-12.5.** Integrate multimedia and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

**#9**→**L.11-12.3.** Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning and style, and to comprehend more fully when reading and listening.  
**#9&10**→**W.11-12.10.** Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

**#10**→**W.11-12.1 a-e.** Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

**#10**→**W.11-12.9.** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**#11**→**SL.11-12.1.** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively

**#11**→**SL.11-12.2.** Analyze the purpose of information presented in diverse media and formats  
**#11**→**W.11-12.6.** Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.

**W.11-12.6.** Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.

## Research Project

### 1. Rebels, Outcasts, Adventurers, Social and Environmental Warriors

- Use this research unit to introduce students to individuals who resist social conformity before reading the book. After reading *Into The Wild*, ask students to compare and contrast the person they researched with Chris McCandless. What values did they share? Where did their ideals differ? What was the outcome of their actions? What could they have learned from one another?
- Share the videos of Jon Krakauer and Sean Penn discussing what drew them to the story of Chris to demonstrate how professional writers and directors start their creative processes. These clips will also introduce students to Chris.

After he ditches his car and gives away his trust fund, Chris McCandless steps off the road into the Alaskan wilderness carrying only what will fit in his backpack. In doing so, he joined a small but committed group of individuals who in some way reject the ideals and lifestyle of modern America (or their culture). Who are these individuals? What are they looking for? Why are they dissatisfied with their lives or the way others live? For this project, you'll choose one rebel, outcast, extreme adventurer or social/environmental warrior to research and write about.

Using your school's library databases, locate several articles about the individual you have chosen to research. After reading them, be prepared to answer the following questions. Who steps out of the traditional bounds of society and why? What do they hope to accomplish? What do they find? How does society respond to them?

(Ideally, students select their own rebels, but the list below is a start. Encourage students to seek out individuals that are of interest to them. These "rebels" need only to have visibly pushed back against the status quo in some way.)

- Henry David Thoreau, Edward Abbey, Jack Kerouac, Captain Paul Watson, Cheryl Strayed, Anne LaBastille, Beryl Markham, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Edward Snowden, John Muir, Timothy Treadwell, Ted Kaczynski, Paul Gauguin, Allen Ginsberg, George Carlin, Bill Hicks, Daniel Ellsberg, Mahatma Gandhi, Thomas Morton (see Hawthorne's "The Maypole of Merry Mount"), St. Francis, Hermann Hesse (see Siddartha), John Brown, Che Guevara, Nelson Mandela, Ho Chi Minh, Galileo Galilei, Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Martin Luther, Martin Luther King, Jr., William Wallace, George Washington . . .

Once you have a comprehensive understanding of the person you have chosen to research, write a well-developed essay about him or her. In your essay you should analyze this individual's choice to live or operate outside the usual bounds of society. Your thesis should address at least one the following: Did this individual find success on his or her quest? What stumbling blocks did this person encounter along the way? What did this individual learn? What did others learn from this individual? Be sure to support your argument with specific and relevant evidence from the researched information you found, citing the material accordingly.

Make it digital and practice public speaking: Require students to create short digital presentations to share with their peers. Return to these at the conclusion of the unit and evaluate Chris' choices in light of others who choose to live outside boundaries of what is traditional.



## Argument/Information

### 2. Conformity to higher principle (living deliberately) (possible assessment)

- Introduce this writing assignment to students with the song “Society” off the *Into The Wild* soundtrack, analyzing the prompt and modeling close reading, or include the lyrics into the list of texts.
- Scaffold this assignment by providing students with a passage from *Into The Wild*. The letter from Chris/Alex to Ron found on pages 56-58 works well.

In his essay on self-reliance, Ralph Waldo Emerson writes, “Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principle.” Like Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, Chris McCandless chooses to live deliberately. In doing so he estranges himself from his family and others who do not understand his desire to live by these higher principles. Write an essay in which you consider what it means to live deliberately and decide if Chris lived up to these standards. Consider the following documents: the excerpt from *Doctor Zhivago*, the two excerpts from *Walden*, the excerpt from *Self-Reliance*, *The New York Times Op-Ed*, “The Charitable Industrial Complex” and *Into The Wild*.

### 3. Hubris (possible assessment)

Help students see both sides to this story by introducing this assignment with Krakauer’s interview on *Oprah*. Although Krakauer clearly lands in the pro-McCandless camp, he acknowledges that others do not give Chris as much credit.

One theme explored in depth throughout *Into The Wild* is the fine line between hubris (excessive pride or self-confidence) and deliberately living one’s life on the edge. A number of Alaskans argue that Chris McCandless brought about his own demise by going into the wild without sufficient respect for the wilderness. Others believe that Chris understood the risks he took and that he did so deliberately because he wished to push himself to the limits of his ability. Did Chris act recklessly when he walked into the Alaskan wilderness or did his actions reflect the certitude of an individual testing his own fortitude? Write an essay in which you develop a thesis (an argument) about Chris’s actions, specifically whether they constitute hubris or a deliberate risk. Consider the information provided -- including the source -- in the following documents: “Remembering Christopher McCandless 20 Years Later,” “Examining Chris McCandless, 20 Years After He Went ‘Into The Wild,’” “Into the Wild: 3 Hikers Rescued Near Scene of Fatal Alaska Adventure,” the video excerpt of Jon Krakauer’s appearance on *Oprah* (if not used to introduce the assignment), “Did Krakauer Finally Solve ‘Into The Wild’ Mystery” or “How Chris McCandless Died,” and *Into The Wild*. Be sure to distinguish your claim from opposing claims, support your argument with at least four of the documents (including the book) and cite your sources.

### 4. Poetry/Poetic language: Close reading

- Scaffold this activity by practicing close reading with students prior to beginning analysis of these poems. Three songs from the Into The Wild soundtrack, “Guaranteed,” “Long Nights,” and “No Ceiling,” lend themselves to close reading.

- Literary terms and techniques explicitly addressed in the questions below: imagery, figurative language, tone, repetition, metaphor, theme, word choice, style.

To familiarize students with the text-based literary analysis, ask them to write a brief response to the poems below in which they identify one effect intended by the author and analyze how the author’s use of one literary element or technique advances this effect. Students should support their analysis with evidence from the poem.

Additionally, analyzing the content of these poems (and the excerpt from *Dharma Bums*) can help lead students to a richer understanding of Chris’s experience. Use the questions to help students to closely read the poems and draw parallels or make contrasts between the texts.

- Dharma Bums* (excerpt) - What does Kerouac mean when he is upside-down, literally and figuratively? What is the effect of this image upon the meaning of the passage? What is the tone of this passage?
- “Above Pate Valley” - What does the speaker of the poem find on the trail? What parallel does the speaker of the poem draw between himself and his subject? How does Snyder use repetition to establish this?
- “where water comes together with other water” — What is the tone of this poem? Rivers are the subject of the poem, but they also function as a metaphor. Explain how the metaphor functions. How does the poet’s figurative language lead the reader to a more complete understanding his message (theme)?
- “Meeting the mountains” — The word meeting has multiple meanings. How does each alter our understanding of the poem? What other words might have Snyder chosen? How would they alter the meaning of the title? What is the effect of the poet’s style, especially the way he chooses to introduce the first four lines? What is the poet’s attitude toward his subject?

**Implementation idea for analyzing individual poems:** model, partner, independent, assessment

### **5. The Yellowstone Act (1872) (A) and Theodore Roosevelt’s Speech at Yellowstone National Park (B) - close reading**

- Analyze the text of the law prior to reading Theodore Roosevelt’s speech. Then, when reading the speech, in addition to the text-based analysis, ask students to consider how Roosevelt supports the tenets established in the Yellowstone Act at the dedication of the Roosevelt Arch thirty-one years later.

**A.** To familiarize students with the reasoning and language of legal texts, ask students write a brief response to the Yellowstone Act, identifying the purpose and parameters of the law. What does the law purport to do and how?

- Teachers may wish to practice close reading with students prior to beginning analysis of this speech. In this case, ask students to pay particular attention to how writers establish their claims. What specific examples do they include to support their argument? Rhetorical techniques explicitly addressed: theme.
- To help students visualize the scene, show this short PBS video, Theodore Roosevelt Speaks at Yellowstone Arch: [<http://www.pbs.org/nationalparks/history/ep2/4/>]

- Additionally, analyzing the content of this speech can help lead students to a richer understanding of the context of *Into The Wild*. Given Chris’s affinity for wild places as well as his aversion to consumerism, how do you think he would react to Roosevelt’s speech? A number of the places Chris visits are protected as “forever wild” under our country’s system of national parks. How does this legacy allow individuals like Chris to live his life more fully?

**B.** To familiarize students with the text-based literary analysis, ask them to write a brief response to Theodore Roosevelt’s Speech at Yellowstone National Park in which they identify one effect intended by the author and analyze how the author advances this effect. Students should support their analysis with evidence from the speech.

What does President Theodore Roosevelt tell Americans in his speech? What message (theme) does he want them to walk away knowing? What points does he make in order to persuade his audience of his position? How do these examples advance his message?

**C.** To extend this analysis, discuss how Chris might respond to the legislation that led to the creation of the National Park system (the Stampede trail lies just outside the boundary of Denali National Park and Preserve) and what President Teddy Roosevelt had to say about it at the turn of the century.

#### **6. The film version of *Into The Wild* - close reading**

- View the video of Sean Penn and Jon Krakauer discussing their methods and what drew them to the story of Chris before asking students to analyze the film.
- Prerequisite knowledge includes literary and film techniques. This YouTube video Film Techniques and Examples [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATDnFr25JG8&feature=youtu.be>] covers the basics.
- Ask students to analyze a particular effect or effects. For example, why use a long shot rather than a medium shot? What information does shot choice give the viewer? How does this particular directorial choice influence the viewer’s perception of what is on screen?

Write a brief response to the film version of the story in which you identify one effect intended by director Sean Penn and analyze how the director’s use of film technique advances this effect.

Additionally, examine (in writing or through discussion) how different artists present the same topic using different mediums, consider the similarities and differences between the the text and film versions of *Into The Wild*. Evaluate the challenges to each particular artist when representing a story. What can the film version represent better than the book? What can the book do better? Consider the special, collaborative circumstances that led to Sean Penn’s film. How was his interpretation of Chris’s story shaped by Krakauer’s telling of the story? How does his film draw upon author Jon Krakauer’s work? How does his film build upon the foundation of the textual version?

## Narrative

### 7. Desideratum (personal essay)

What's essential to you? To Chris McCandless it was essential that he could live off the grid, supporting himself through his own means. He gave away his inheritance, burned his money and walked into the wilderness with few possessions. He actively resisted the life that most of us live, one that is safe and comfortable. Chris encouraged those he met to embrace the minimalist existence of the nomad, eschewing comforts of home for experiences available only to those who are willing to step off usual path. Chris felt so strongly about his choices that he willingly placed himself in harm's way for them. In this personal essay, describe your desideratum, one belief that guides your life. You might also wish to discuss how you came to this belief, why it's essential to you, how you intend to pursue it, conflicts you may encounter along the way, and what you hope to accomplish through it.

### 8. Wild Places (descriptive writing)

- Define "wild" broadly to include all students.
  - Wild might be standing shoulder to shoulder on the defensive line of the football team. It might be a particularly difficult cross-country workout. Wild might be a marathon gaming session in the basement. It might be a hike in the local park that ends at a favorite lookout. It can be hiking a 14,000 foot peak in the Rockies. It can be learning a difficult dance routine or musical piece. Or stargazing on the rooftop of an apartment building. It could be surfing the local break during a snowstorm in January. Wild means different things to each of us.
- Writers should aim to "show" readers their wild places.
- Krakauer's description of summiting Devil's Thumb can be found on page 153.

Chris McCandless sought the wilderness on the Stampede Trail in Alaska. Jon Krakauer climbs to the peaks of unclimbed mountains. Gary Snyder's conveys feelings of exuberance upon "Meeting the Mountains." In *Dharma Bums*, Jack Kerouac describes the serenity he finds about the clouds in the Pacific Northwest. We all have wild places we go to find peace of mind. Where do you go and what do you do when you need clarity? What makes you happy, really happy? Few of us have the means or desire to transport ourselves into the backcountry, but that doesn't mean we are any less moved by the wild places around us. Using these these writers as your guide, write a narrative that describes your wild place and how it makes you feel.

**Practice public speaking:** Develop class community by requiring or encouraging students to share their wild places with their peers. The final product can be a formal or informal presentation. Be sure to tell students up front if they will be sharing their work with their peers.

**Make it digital:** Require students to post their Wild Places pieces to a shared digital space, such as a blog or a Ning. Or, have students create a visual guide (Prezi or other) to support their presentation.

## Routine Writing

### 9. Journal Writing (or Blogging)

There is a permanence to the written word. One of the reasons we know anything about Chris McCandless is because he kept a journal. Chris's writing allowed Jon Krakauer to retrace his steps on his journey northward and onto the Stampede Trail. Chris's journal also helped his family put the pieces of

his story back together when he failed to return home.

Ask students to maintain a journal for the duration of this unit. Share the entry from Chris’s journal below and discuss how his decision to write in third person alters the feel of it. (When he encountered Chris’s writing, Sean Penn felt as if he were scripting the movie to his life, something he quickly said that Chris would have hated.) As students maintain their own journals, ask them to write in both third and first person and then discuss how changing the point of view alters the entries.

Krakauer’s observations on Chris’s journal: “Although the tone of the journal—written in the third person in a stilted, self-consciousness voice—often veers toward melodrama, the available evidence indicates that McCandless did not misrepresent the facts; telling the truth was a credo he took seriously.”

Journal entry for January 11, 1991

“A very fateful day.”

After traveling some distance south, he beached the canoe on a sandbar far from shore to observe the powerful tides. An hour later violent gusts started blowing down from the desert, and the wind and tidal rips conspired to carry him out to sea. The water by this time was a chaos of whitecaps that threatened to swamp and capsize his tiny craft. The wind increased to gale force. The whitecaps grew into high, breaking waves. “In great frustration,” the journal reads, he screams and beats canoe with oar. The oar breaks. Alex has one spare oar. He calms himself. If loses second oar is dead. Finally through extreme effort and much cursing he manages to beach canoe on jetty and collapses exhausted on sand at sundown. This incident led Alexander to decide to abandon canoe and return north. [p. 36]

## 10. Ten Quick Writes

Ask students to respond to the **Quick Write Prompts** below following the parameters for quick writes (5-10 minutes of uninterrupted writing). Use these prompts during reading to help students makes connections to the text and prepare for discussion.

### Quick Write Prompts

I have some good friends here, but no one who really understands why I am here or what I do. I don’t know of anyone, though, who would have more than a partial understanding; I have gone too far alone. I have always been unsatisfied with life as most people live it. Always I want to live more intensely and richly. [p. 91]

***“No one really understands why I am here or what I do” could be a teenage anthem. Is Chris misunderstood? (Does Chris understand himself?) Are teens misunderstood? (Do teens understand themselves?)***

Everything had changed suddenly—the tone, the moral climate; you didn’t know what to think, whom to listen to. As if all your life you had been led by the hand like a small child and suddenly you were on your own, you had to learn to walk by yourself. There was no one around, neither family nor people whose judgment you respected. At such a time you felt the need of committing yourself to something absolute—life or truth or beauty—of being ruled by it in place of the man-made rules that had been discarded. You needed to surrender to some such ultimate purpose more fully, more unreservedly than you had ever done in the old familiar, peaceful days, in the old life that was now abolished and gone for good. BORIS PASTERNAK, DOCTOR ZHIVAGO PASSAGE HIGHLIGHTED IN ONE OF THE BOOKS FOUND WITH CHRIS MCCANDLESS’S REMAINS. “NEED FOR A PURPOSE” HAD BEEN WRITTEN IN MCCANDLESS’S HAND IN THE MARGIN ABOVE THE PASSAGE. [p. 103]

***Chris highlights this passage from Doctor Zhivago. Why does it speak to him? How might others on the cusp of adulthood also find it appealing***

Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth. I sat at a table where were rich food and wine in abundance, an obsequious attendance, but sincerity and truth were not; and I went away hungry from the inhospitable board. The hospitality was as cold as the ices. HENRY DAVID THOREAU, WALDEN, OR LIFE IN THE WOODS PASSAGE HIGHLIGHTED IN ONE OF THE BOOKS FOUND WITH CHRIS MCCANDLESS'S REMAINS. AT THE TOP OF THE PAGE, THE WORD "TRUTH" HAD BEEN WRITTEN IN LARGE BLOCK LETTERS IN MCCANDLESS'S [p. 117]

***What is the rich food that is placed before you? How does it leave you hungrier than you were before?***

Like many people, Chris apparently judged artists and close friends by their work, not their life, yet he was temperamentally incapable of extending such leniency to his father. [p. 122]

***How are we most critical of those closest to us? Why are we?***

The slow journey up the Inside Passage unfolded in a gauzy reverie of anticipation. I was under way, propelled by an imperative that was beyond my ability to control or comprehend. [p. 136]

***In what way have you been "propelled by an imperative that was beyond [your] ability to control or comprehend?"***

Early on a difficult climb, especially a difficult solo climb, you constantly feel the abyss pulling at your back. To resist takes a tremendous conscious effort; you don't dare let your guard down for an instant. The siren song of the void puts you on edge; it makes your movements tentative, clumsy, herky-jerky. But as the climb goes on, you grow accustomed to the exposure, you get used to rubbing shoulders with doom, you come to believe in the reliability of your hands and feet and head. You learn to trust your self-control. By and by your attention becomes so intensely focused that you no longer notice the raw knuckles, the cramping thighs, the strain of maintaining nonstop concentration. A trancelike state settles over your efforts; the climb becomes a clear-eyed dream. Hours slide by like minutes. The accumulated clutter of day-today existence—the lapses of conscience, the unpaid bills, the bungled opportunities, the dust under the couch, the inescapable prison of your genes—all of it is temporarily forgotten, crowded from your thoughts by an overpowering clarity of purpose and by the seriousness of the task at hand. [p. 142]

***Psychologist and theorist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi argues that humans seek happiness through "flow" experiences, those that captivate us so completely that nothing else seems to matter. Flow experiences incorporate these four principles: a challenge that is neither too easy nor too difficult and includes clear goals and feedback, a focus on immediate experience during which the individual must feel a sense of competence and control. Krakauer finds this when he's climbing, Chris when he's outside the bounds of traditional society. What is your "flow" experience?***

It is easy, when you are young, to believe that what you desire is no less than what you deserve, to assume that if you want something badly enough, it is your God-given right to have it. When I decided to go to Alaska that April, like Chris McCandless, I was a raw youth who mistook passion for insight and acted according to an obscure, gap-ridden logic. I thought climbing the Devils Thumb would fix all that was wrong with my life. In the end, of course, it changed almost nothing. But I came to appreciate that mountains make poor receptacles for dreams. And I lived to tell my tale. [p. 155]

***Krakauer writes, "But I came to appreciate that mountains make poor receptacles for dreams," what does he mean? What are some other "poor receptacles" for dreams and why are we so inclined to***

***choose them and then hang onto them?***

Deliberate Living: Conscious attention to the basics of life, and a constant attention to your immediate environment and its concerns, example→ A job, a task, a book; anything requiring efficient concentration (Circumstance has no value. It is how one relates to a situation that has value. All true meaning resides in the personal relationship to a phenomenon, what it means to you). [p. 168]

***Imagine you have been directed to live “deliberately.” What does this mean to you and how you will alter your habits in order to live more deliberately?***

Even from your scant description, I know that I could not bear the routine and humdrum of the life that you are forced to lead. I don't think I could ever settle down. I have known too much of the depths of life already, and I would prefer anything to an anticlimax. THE LAST LETTER EVER RECEIVED FROM EVERETT RUESS, TO HIS BROTHER, WALDO, DATED NOVEMBER 11,1934 [p. 87]

***Had Everett Ruess survived into his third and fourth decades, what would he say to his younger self? What do you think you will say to your younger self thirty years from now?***

As Everett Ruess's father mused years after his twenty-year-old son vanished in the desert, “The older person does not realize the soul-flights of the adolescent. I think we all poorly understood Everett.” [p. 186]

***What are some of the ways young adults are misunderstood by those older than them, parents, teachers, others?***

McCandless's postcards, notes, and journals . . . read like the work of an above average, somewhat histrionic high school kid—or am I missing something? [p. 72]

***As high school students, you're in a unique position to comment on this. Does Chris act like a “histrionic high school kid?”***

Read the *Time* magazine article “[Why the Teen Brain is Drawn To Risk.](http://healthland.time.com/2012/10/02/why-the-teen-brain-is-drawn-to-risk)”

[<http://healthland.time.com/2012/10/02/why-the-teen-brain-is-drawn-to-risk>]

***Consider your own choices in light of the article's premise, risk-taking occurs when teens are unaware of the dangers involved. Do you agree? Consider Chris's decision to walk into the wild. Was he fully aware of the risks he took?***

**11. Discussion Questions** (organized thematically):

Depending upon student needs, the discussion questions below may be utilized in a variety of ways.

Several possible methods include:

- a. Student-led discussion: assign small groups a thematic topic. Students write questions then pose them to their peers during class discussion. All students should answer questions in writing prior to discussion. Use the questions below as exemplars or scaffolding.
- b. Socratic seminar: assign small groups a thematic topic. Using the questions below and the essential questions as sustaining questions, ask students to write and then discuss facilitating questions.
- c. Create thematic discussion groups on a shared digital space. Working in groups, students may mediate discussion or simply respond to questions posted. Include the essential questions.

## Discussion Questions (organized thematically)

### **Theme: The Promise Of The Wilderness**

*It should not be denied . . . that being footloose has always exhilarated us. It is associated in our minds with escape from history and oppression and law and irksome obligations, with absolute freedom, and the road has always led west.* WALLACE STEGNER, *THE AMERICAN WEST AS LIVING SPACE* [p. 15]

**The wilderness and the west have always been glamorized in American history and culture. Why do these places elicit such a hold on our imagination? Is their promise real?**

He was so enthralled by these tales, however, that he seemed to forget they were works of fiction, constructions of the imagination that had more to do with London's romantic sensibilities than with the actualities of life in the subarctic wilderness. McCandless conveniently overlooked the fact that London himself had spent just a single winter in the North and that he'd died by his own hand on his California estate at the age of forty, a fatuous drunk, obese and pathetic, maintaining a sedentary existence that bore scant resemblance to the ideals he espoused in print. [p. 44]

**“The dominant primordial beast was strong in Buck, and under the fierce conditions of trail life it grew and grew. Yet it was a secret growth. His newborn cunning gave him poise and control. JACK LONDON, THE CALL OF THE WILD All Hail the Dominant Primordial Beast! And Captain Ahab Too! Alexander Supertramp May 1992 GRAFFITO FOUND INSIDE THE ABANDONED BUS ON THE STAMPEDE TRAIL” Chris, who sees so many contradictions in others and in society, seems almost willfully blind to the contradictions of his literary heroes. Why?**

The prevailing Alaska wisdom held that McCandless was simply one more dreamy half-cocked greenhorn who went into the country expecting to find answers to all his problems and instead found only mosquitoes and a lonely death. [p. 72]

**Are answers ever to be found in nature?**

And if I did pull it off . . . I was afraid to let myself imagine the triumphant aftermath, lest I invite a jinx. But I never had any doubt that climbing the Devils Thumb would transform my life. How could it not? [p. 135]

**Is there a note of irony implied in Krakauer's rhetorical question, how could it not? As a grown man, how does he seem to reflect upon the younger version of himself?**

I was alone, however, even the mundane seemed charged with meaning. The ice looked colder and more mysterious, the sky a cleaner shade of blue. The unnamed peaks towering over the glacier were bigger and comelier and infinitely more menacing than they would have been were I in the company of another person. And my emotions were similarly amplified: The highs were higher; the periods of despair were deeper and darker. To a self-possessed young man inebriated with the unfolding drama of his own life, all of this held enormous appeal. [p. 138]

**When describing his own decision to climb Devil's Thumb, what does Krakauer's phrase “inebriated with the unfolding drama of his own life” imply?**

### **Theme: Hubris/ Risk-taking / Living Deliberately on the Edge**

Still, Gallien was concerned. Alex admitted that the only food in his pack was a ten-pound bag of rice. His gear seemed exceedingly minimal for the harsh conditions of the interior, which in April still lay buried under the winter snowpack. Alex's cheap leather hiking boots were neither waterproof nor well insulated.



His rifle was only .22 caliber, a bore too small to rely on if he expected to kill large animals like moose and caribou, which he would have to eat if he hoped to remain very long in the country. He had no ax, no bug dope, no snowshoes, no compass. The only navigational aid in his possession was a tattered state road map he'd scrounged at a gas station. [p. 5]

**When Chris walks into the Alaskan interior with so few provisions, is he foolish, a highly principled ascetic or something else?**

It may, after all, be the bad habit of creative talents to invest themselves in pathological extremes that yield remarkable insights but no durable way of life for those who cannot translate their psychic wounds into significant art or thought. THEODORE ROSZAK, "IN SEARCH OF THE MIRACULOUS" [p. 70]

**Given Chris's intentions to return to civilization, is he given to "pathological extremes?" Had Chris lived, what would he have done next?**

(Jack London got it right in "To Build a Fire." McCandless is, finally, just a pale 20th-century burlesque of London's protagonist, who freezes because he ignores advice and commits big-time hubris)... [p. 72]

**When Krakauer first published his account of Chris's death in Outside magazine the story generated a lot of strongly-worded feedback. The writer above accuses Chris of hubris. Hubris is exaggerated pride or self-confidence. Do you agree with this individual? Is hubris the reason Chris dies?**

His ignorance, which could have been cured by a USGS quadrant and a Boy Scout manual, is what killed him. And while I feel for his parents, I have no sympathy for him. Such willful ignorance ... amounts to disrespect for the land, and paradoxically demonstrates the same sort of arrogance that resulted in the Exxon Valdez spill—just another case of underprepared, overconfident men bumbling around out there and screwing up because they lacked the requisite humility. It's all a matter of degree. [p. 72]

**The same writer accuses Chris of "willful ignorance," deliberately failing to adequately assess the dangers of the area and what it would take to survive. The writer compares Chris's actions to those taken by the men piloting the Exxon Valdez, whose ignorance caused one of the largest environmental disasters in history. Do you agree? Is Chris's "arrogance" the cause of his death?**

I knew that people sometimes died climbing mountains. But at the age of twenty-three, personal mortality—the idea of my own death—was still largely outside my conceptual grasp. When I decamped from Boulder for Alaska, my head swimming with visions of glory and redemption on the Devils Thumb, it didn't occur to me that I might be bound by the same cause-and-effect relationships that governed the actions of others. Because I wanted to climb the mountain so badly, because I had thought about the Thumb so intensely for so long, it seemed beyond the realm of possibility that some minor obstacle like the weather or crevasses or rime-covered rock might ultimately thwart my will. [p. 151]

**What adjective would you employ to describe Krakauer's (and by extension Chris's) attitude? Ignorance? Arrogance? Naivety? Willful disregard? Something else? Explain and support your choice with specific examples from the text.**

Not only did McCandless die because he was stupid, one Alaska correspondent observed, but "the scope of his self-styled adventure was so small as to ring pathetic—squatting in a wrecked bus a few miles out of Healy, potting jays and squirrels, mistaking a caribou for a moose (pretty hard to do)... Only one word for the guy: incompetent." [p. 177]

**Imagine you've been tasked with responding to Chris's critics. How would you reply to their**

### **critiques of his choices?**

In the *Outside* article, I reported with great certainty that *H. mackenzii*, the wild sweet pea, killed the boy. Virtually every other journalist who wrote about the McCandless tragedy drew the same conclusion. But as the months passed and I had the opportunity to ponder McCandless's death at greater length, this consensus came to seem less and less plausible. [p. 192]

**In the process of writing this book, Krakauer corrects two mistakes he believes he made when writing the *Outside* article, misidentifying the remains of the moose as caribou and the likely reason Chris became sick at the end of his trip. In making those corrections, it appears as though Chris was more competent than his critics believed. Had Chris not become so sick do you believe he would have found a way out in spite of lacking a detailed map and compass? Why or why not? Finally, did Chris trash the cabins located near the bus? Why or why not?**

### **Theme: Sons and Fathers**

Walt and Billie returned home to find that all the letters they'd sent their son that summer had been returned in a bundle. "Chris had instructed the post office to hold them until August 1, apparently so we wouldn't know anything was up," says Billie. "It made us very, very worried." [p. 22]

**Is Chris's (a recent college graduate) deception sneaky or clever? We learn later that his father would have set off after him had they known where he had gone.**

The final two years of his college education had been paid for with a forty-thousand-dollar bequest left by a friend of the family's; more than twenty-four thousand dollars remained at the time of Chris's graduation, money his parents thought he intended to use for law school. "We misread him," his father admits. What Walt, Billie, and Carine didn't know when they flew down to Atlanta to attend Chris's commencement—what nobody knew—was that he would shortly donate all the money in his college fund to OXFAM America, a charity dedicated to fighting hunger. [p. 20]

**Is Chris ungrateful for the largesse he has received? How has he been shaped by the world of privilege he was raised in? Is he just rebelling against his father's values? (also located under *Living Deliberately*)**

"We were all worried when we didn't hear from him," says Carine, "and I think my parents' worry was mixed with hurt and anger. But I didn't really feel hurt by his failure to write. I knew he was happy and doing what he wanted to do; I understood that it was important for him to see how independent he could be. And he knew that if he'd written or called me, Mom and Dad would find out where he was, fly out there, and try to bring him home." Walt does not deny this. "There's no question in my mind," he says. "If we'd had any idea where to look—OK—I would have gone there in a flash, gotten a lock on his whereabouts, and brought our boy home." [p. 125]

**Is Walt's assertion that he would have "brought [his] boy home" unreasonable?**

It was drilled into me that anything less than winning was failure. In the impressionable way of sons, I did not consider this rhetorically; I took him at his word. And that's why later, when long-held family secrets came to light, when I noticed that this deity who asked only for perfection was himself less than perfect, that he was in fact not a deity at all—well, I wasn't able to shrug it off. I was consumed instead by a blinding rage. The revelation that he was merely human, and frightfully so, was beyond my power to forgive. [p. 148]

**Krakauer draws upon his own experiences to explain Chris's actions, but one might argue that**

**such interpretation is merely speculation. As a biographer, does Krakauer cross a line of professionalism by inserting his own voice into the story, making meaning where only blank spaces exist? Or does the opposite happen: are we granted a more nuanced version of the story through Krakauer's own story?**

Two decades after the fact I discovered that my rage was gone, and had been for years. It had been supplanted by a rueful sympathy and something not unlike affection. I came to understand that I had baffled and infuriated my father at least as much as he had baffled and infuriated me. I saw that I had been selfish and unbending and a giant pain in the ass. He'd built a bridge of privilege for me, a hand-paved trestle to the good life, and I repaid him by chopping it down and crapping on the wreckage. [p. 148]

**Had Chris lived to see his father reach old age, how might his opinions of him changed? What would change them?**

Satisfied, apparently, with what he had learned during his two months of solitary life in the wild, McCandless decided to return to civilization: It was time to bring his "final and greatest adventure" to a close and get himself back to the world of men and women, where he could chug a beer, talk philosophy, enthrall strangers with tales of what he'd done. [p. 168]

**Krakauer places "final and greatest adventure" in quotation marks to indicate that these are Chris's words. What would prompt a young man to identify a two month trip as this? What plans do you imagine Chris had for himself once he returned to the lower forty-eight?**

He seemed to have moved beyond his need to assert so adamantly his autonomy, his need to separate himself from his parents. Maybe he was prepared to forgive their imperfections; maybe he was even prepared to forgive some of his own. McCandless seemed ready, perhaps, to go home. Or maybe not; we can do no more than speculate about what he intended to do after he walked out of the bush. There is no question, however, that he intended to walk out. [p. 168]

**Has Chris changed? Is he ready to forgive his parents? Consider the saying, the heart grows fonder with absence. When Chris returned to the suburbs of DC how much would change?**

### **Theme: Truth**

I won't claim to be an impartial biographer. McCandless's strange tale struck a personal note that made a dispassionate rendering of the tragedy impossible. Through most of the book, I have tried—and largely succeeded, I think—to minimize my authorial presence. But let the reader be warned: I interrupt McCandless's story with fragments of a narrative drawn from my own youth. I do so in the hope that my experiences will throw some oblique light on the enigma of Chris McCandless. [From Author's Note]

**Why is Chris McCandless an enigma? How do Krakauer's personal mountaineering experiences affect the story? Do you agree with his decision to not be an impartial biographer?**

**Theme: Living deliberately**

“I’ve given jobs to lots of hitchhikers over the years,” says Westerberg. “Most of them weren’t much good, didn’t really want to work. It was a different story with Alex. He was the hardest worker I’ve ever seen. Didn’t matter what it was, he’d do it: hard physical labor, mucking rotten grain and dead rats out of the bottom of the hole—jobs where you’d get so damn dirty you couldn’t even tell what you looked like at the end of the day. And he never quit in the middle of something. If he started a job, he’d finish it. It was almost like a moral thing for him. He was what you’d call extremely ethical. He set pretty high standards for himself. [p. 18]

**Do Chris’s “extreme ethics” and “high standards” end up killing him?**

Driving west out of Atlanta, he intended to invent an utterly new life for himself, one in which he would be free to wallow in unfiltered experience. To symbolize the complete severance from his previous life, he even adopted a new name. No longer would he answer to Chris McCandless; he was now Alexander Supertramp, master of his own destiny. [p. 23]

**As Krakauer points out, “trail names” are nothing new. Many adventurers adopt new monikers. Why is this such an important ritual to Chris and others?**

Then, in a gesture that would have done both Thoreau and Tolstoy proud, he arranged all his paper currency in a pile on the sand—a pathetic little stack of ones and fives and twenties—and put a match to it. One hundred twenty-three dollars in legal tender was promptly reduced to ash and smoke. [p. 29]

**Chris has taken pains to rid himself of all money, inheritance and cash though, as his mother points out, he was a born businessman. Why does he do this? We also know he felt this was a significant enough moment to record in his snapshot-journal. For whom is he recording the moment?**

I’d like to repeat the advice I gave you before, in that I think you really should make a radical change in your lifestyle and begin to boldly do things which you may previously never have thought of doing, or been too hesitant to attempt. 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. The joy of life comes from our encounters with new experiences, and hence there is no greater joy than to have an endlessly changing horizon, for each day to have a new and different sun. If you want to get more out of life, Ron, you must lose your inclination for monotonous security and adopt a helter-skelter style of life that will at first appear to you to be crazy. But once you become accustomed to such a life you will see its full meaning and its incredible beauty. And so, Ron, in short, get out of Salton City and hit the Road. [p. 56]

**If Chris had been raised in the back of a station wagon perpetually in motion back and forth the contiguous US, would he advocate for a more settled life? Is the life he champions just a rebellion against the more traditional path his parents chose?**

He was hungry to learn about things. Unlike most of us, he was the sort of person who insisted on living out his beliefs. [p. 67]

**How do “most of us” fail to live out our beliefs? Is compromise bad?**

From *Walden*: “It is hard to provide and cook so simple and clean a diet as will not offend the imagination; but this, I think, is to be fed when we feed the body; they should both sit down at the same table. Yet perhaps this may be done. The fruits eaten temperately need not make us ashamed of our appetites, nor interrupt the worthiest pursuits. But put an extra condiment into your dish, and it will poison you.” [p. 167]

**What does Thoreau mean when he suggests a diet that “will not offend the imagination?” Why would this idea appeal to Chris?**

## 12. Extending Learning

Teachers working with accelerated students may wish to expand the study of the ideas explored in this unit by pairing it with additional texts. Herman Hesse’s novel *Siddartha* provides a logical progression from which to extend the study of Chris’s exploration of social values, self-knowledge and the risks of hubris. Greek myths about Arachne, Niobe and Phaethon offer further insight into the risks of hubris, providing a classical model against which to measure Chris’s modern dilemmas.

## Resources

1. Vedder and Penn team up for Into The Wild

[<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0TD65iRoG4s&feature=youtu.be>]

2. Civil Disobedience [<http://thoreau.eserver.org/civil.html>]

Henry David Thoreau’s essay; likely the source of Chris’s ideas on civil disobedience

3. Chapter 18: Conclusion (paragraphs 12,15 on truth) [<http://thoreau.eserver.org/walden18.html>]

Truth is a theme that emerges from Chris’s reading while he’s in Alaska

4. Video clips: Chris’s family and friends were interviewed to mark the publication of *Back to The Wild*, a collection Chris’s photographs.

Walt McCandless visits Bus 142

[<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KBtHiRRzgLU&feature=youtu.be>]

Billie McCandless visits Bus 142

[<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0D4DSIi-PuY&feature=youtu.be>]

Wayne Westerberg travels back to Bus 142

[<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQsKXiSCqDI&feature=youtu.be>]

Jan Burren visits Bus 142

[[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aC3KTKL9\\_Sw&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aC3KTKL9_Sw&feature=youtu.be)]

## Vocabulary

antimony	indigent	burlesque	morass
anomaly	destitute	hubris	monomania
contumacious	harangues	asceticism	pensive
mawkish	fulminate	recondite	recalcitrant
fickle	endemic	banal	fatuous
itinerant	burgeoning	transient	desideratum
convivial	surfeit	enigma	volition
stasis	conjecture	allude	surreal
plebeian	astute	affable	malevolent
mien	corollary	paucity	factitious
jetsam	adherents	aesthetics	rictus
onerous	ambivalence	(esthetics)	absolutism
irksome	supplant	callow	disquietude
anachronistic	succor	atavistic	modicum
hegira	congress	taciturn	feckless
snafu	opprobrium	chastened	existential
prodigious	strident	rancor	
desiccated	epistle	convivial	