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Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Into the Wild

by Jon Krakauer

written by Ashin Bray

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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.

Literary Terms

Allusion - a reference to a person, place, poem, book, event, etc., which is not part of the story, that the author expects the reader will recognize. **Example:** In *The Glass Menagerie*, Tom speaks of “Chamberlain’s umbrella,” a reference to British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.

Autobiography - the relating of a person’s life by that person. **Example:** *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*.

Foreshadowing - the use of hints or clues in a story to suggest what action is to come. Foreshadowing is frequently used to create interest and build suspense. **Example:** Two small and seemingly inconsequential car accidents predict and hint at the upcoming, important wreck in *The Great Gatsby*.

Irony - a perception of inconsistency, sometimes humorous, in which the significance and understanding of a statement or event is changed by its context. **Example:** The firehouse burned down.

- **Dramatic Irony** - the audience or reader knows more about a character’s situation than the character does and knows that the character’s understanding is incorrect. **Example:** In *Medea*, Creon asks, “What atrocities could she commit in one day?” The reader, however, knows Medea will destroy her family and Creon’s by day’s end.
- **Structural Irony** – the use of a naïve hero, whose incorrect perceptions differ from the reader’s correct ones. **Example:** Huck Finn.
- **Verbal Irony** - a discrepancy between what is said and what is really meant; sarcasm. **Example:** A large man whose nickname is “Tiny.”

Local Color - details and descriptions common to a certain place. **Example:** The Mississippi River, the people living around it, and the way they talk, act, think, etc., are essential to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Motivation - the reasons behind a character’s actions. **Example:** Huckleberry Finn travels down the Mississippi River in order to escape the Widow Douglas, who wants to “sivilize” him.

Narrator - the one who tells the story. The narrator must not be confused with “author,” the one who writes the story. If the narrator is a character in the book, the proper term is “first-person narration.” **Example:** *Moby Dick* is narrated by Ishmael, a crewmember. If the narrator is not a character in the book, the correct term is “third-person narration.” **Example:** *Sense and Sensibility*.

Point of View - the position or vantage point, determined by the author, from which the story seems to come to the reader. The two most common points of view are First-person and Third-person. **Examples:** First-person point of view occurs in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; the reader receives all information through Huck's eyes. An example of third-person point of view is Dickens' *Hard Times*, in which the narrator is not a character in the book.

Simile - a comparison between two different things using either like or as. **Examples:** I am as hungry as a horse. The huge trees broke like twigs during the hurricane.

Theme - the central or dominant idea behind the story; the most important aspect that emerges from how the book treats its subject. Sometimes theme is easy to see, but, at other times, it may be more difficult. Theme is usually expressed indirectly, as an element the reader must figure out. It is a universal statement about humanity, rather than a simple statement dealing with plot or characters in the story. Themes are generally hinted at through different methods: a phrase or quotation that introduces the novel, a recurring element in the book, or an observation made that is reinforced through plot, dialogue, or characters. It must be emphasized that not all works of literature have themes in them. **Example:** In a story about a man who is diagnosed with cancer and, through medicine and will-power, returns to his former occupation, the theme might be: "Real courage is demonstrated through internal bravery and perseverance." In a poem about a flower that grows, blooms, and dies, the theme might be: "Youth fades, and death comes to all."

Tragedy - a serious work, usually a play, in which the main character experiences defeat, brought about by a tragic flaw. **Example:** *Hamlet*.

Into The Wild

Test

1. Chris McCandless
 - A. was an explorer in Alaska.
 - B. was a highly trained mountain climber.
 - C. died of starvation in Alaska.
 - D. survived his Alaska adventure and wrote Into the Wild.
 - E. died from injuries sustained in a fall from Mt. McKinley.
2. Chris McCandless referred to himself as
 - A. Alexander Supertramp.
 - B. a leather tramp.
 - C. a rubber tramp.
 - D. king of the hill.
 - E. the new Tolstoy.
3. McCandless's old yellow Datsun was
 - A. taken by troopers and sold at auction.
 - B. used in drug raids in Arizona.
 - C. abandoned in Alaska.
 - D. wrecked when he tried to cross a river in it.
 - E. abandoned after he drove it to Mexico.
4. Ron Franz
 - A. urged McCandless to go back to school.
 - B. offered to pay for McCandless to enter law school.
 - C. thought McCandless was mentally ill and tried to avoid him.
 - D. taught McCandless the craft of leatherworking.
 - E. drove McCandless into Canada.
5. Wayne Westerberg
 - A. reported that McCandless was a slacker as an employee.
 - B. paid McCandless to work at his grain elevator.
 - C. had just been released from jail when McCandless met him.
 - D. knew Ron Franz and met McCandless through him.
 - E. was a much older man who tried to give McCandless advice.

6. Jon Krakauer suggests that McCandless considered Westerberg a friend; this conclusion is based in part on the fact that
 - A. Westerberg told the author this in an interview.
 - B. McCandless repeatedly placed collect calls to Westerberg after leaving Carthage.
 - C. McCandless continued to send Westerberg post cards and letters after leaving Carthage.
 - D. McCandless asked Ron Franz to take him to see Westerberg.
 - E. McCandless named Westerberg on a list of friends in his journal.
7. The journal McCandless kept in Mexico
 - A. did not include dates, so no one could reconstruct his trip there.
 - B. was written in the third person, as if he was observing the action from a distance.
 - C. revealed heavy drug use.
 - D. showed that he was ambivalent about going to Alaska.
 - E. was mostly about what kind of Mexican food he preferred.
8. Oh-My-God Hot Springs
 - A. was a “bizarre” scene where people camped for the winter.
 - B. had been a prosperous suburb until the wells ran dry.
 - C. required people to register with the police before using the springs.
 - D. was where McCandless abandoned his car.
 - E. was a resort area where McCandless worked at McDonald’s.
9. Krakauer inserts stories of several people who went to the wilderness because he wants to show that
 - A. many people behave irresponsibly.
 - B. McCandless was not alone in feeling the call of the wilderness.
 - C. people who go into the wilderness invariably die.
 - D. so many people are in the wilderness that loneliness is not a factor.
 - E. only the mentally ill embark on wilderness adventures.
10. When the newspapers ran stories about the dead hiker,
 - A. the police already knew that it was McCandless.
 - B. the detective hired by McCandless’s parents provided police with the hiker’s name.
 - C. Ron Franz gave the police the hiker’s name.
 - D. he was identified from pictures in his personnel file at McDonald’s.
 - E. Wayne Westerberg convinced the police that the hiker had worked for him.
11. Walt McCandless
 - A. is a college dropout who invented a new kind of radar.
 - B. is a high-achieving and very demanding person.
 - C. fathered only two children.
 - D. was a government bureaucrat for twenty years.
 - E. is a hippie who spends months at a time in the wilderness.

12. Krakauer recounts his own quest to
 - A. hike from Fairbanks to Anchorage.
 - B. climb Mount McKinley.
 - C. climb the Devil's Thumb.
 - D. ride the rails from Seattle to Anchorage.
 - E. photograph the Devil's Thumb each month for a year.
13. Krakauer's father
 - A. was more understanding than Walt McCandless.
 - B. was a doctor who abused drugs.
 - C. demanded so much of his children that they turned to drugs.
 - D. developed radar systems for the government.
 - E. knew Walt McCandless in college.
14. The author talks about Walt McCandless and his own father to
 - A. suggest that divorce hurts young children.
 - B. illustrate how poverty corrodes family relationships.
 - C. show how difficult father and son relationships can be.
 - D. gain sympathy.
 - E. add some content that does not relate to the wilderness.
15. Krakauer and some friends reconstructed McCandless's trip
 - A. for the publicity.
 - B. to write a report for the Alaska State Troopers.
 - C. to test camping equipment for a local outfitter.
 - D. to gain a first-hand understanding of the perils and realities of the trip.
 - E. as a favor to Chris McCandless's parents.
16. McCandless was trapped at his campsite
 - A. by his resolution to stay there for 150 days.
 - B. by his broken leg.
 - C. by the flooding river and his lack of a good map with alternate routes.
 - D. because he could not start the bus.
 - E. because he failed to arrange for the helicopter to return to him.
17. Krakauer believes that all young men
 - A. should take a wilderness survival course.
 - B. show poor judgment and planning skills.
 - C. experience difficult relations with their fathers.
 - D. would benefit from required national service in parks and wilderness settings.
 - E. seek out high-risk activities as a rite of passage.

18. Almost without exception, the people who befriended McCandless during his travels
 - A. tried to persuade him not to go to Alaska.
 - B. described him as very likeable and intelligent.
 - C. taught him survival skills.
 - D. reported his whereabouts to his parents.
 - E. felt he could not survive much longer on the road.
19. Krakauer suggests that the fatal mistake McCandless made was
 - A. eating poisonous seeds that prevented him from metabolizing other foods.
 - B. trying to butcher and smoke a whole moose.
 - C. becoming a vegetarian.
 - D. drinking some water that was contaminated by rotting meat.
 - E. simply not eating enough.
20. Walt and Billie McCandless went to the bus where their son died to
 - A. gather evidence for a lawsuit.
 - B. evaluate the scene for an upcoming movie.
 - C. try to understand him better and leave a small memorial.
 - D. clear his belongings from it.
 - E. leave signs warning other campers of the dangers of the area.

Essay Questions

(pick any two)

1. Discuss the concept that young men are drawn to high-risk activities, citing examples and evaluating how successful the author is in presenting this idea convincingly.
2. Evaluate Walt McCandless as a father, and consider how Chris McCandless reacted to him. Was their relationship functional or dysfunctional? What could have made their relationship work better?
3. Write a book review of *Into the Wild*, including your evaluation of the readability of the book, the author's knowledge of his material, the structure of the story, and whether material that did not directly relate to Chris McCandless was useful.
4. Select one of the following people that Chris McCandless knew on the road, and write a character sketch of that person:
 - Wayne Westerberg
 - Ron Franz
 - Jan Burres
5. In what ways does Krakauer compare his own father with Walt McCandless?

Into The Wild

Test Answer Key

1.	C	6.	C	11.	B	16.	C
2.	A	7.	B	12.	C	17.	E
3.	B	8.	A	13.	B	18.	B
4.	D	9.	B	14.	C	19.	A
5.	B	10.	E	15.	D	20.	C

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.

6. Hospitality was one recurring element in the relationships McCandless formed while he was on the road. Discuss how others showed hospitality to McCandless, and give examples of how he returned this hospitality with personal generosity.
7. McCandless made a number of friends on the road, and he affected some people deeply. What personality traits made McCandless easy to be with? What qualities did people see in him that made them remember him so clearly and with such affection? How did McCandless keep people at arm's length? Provide examples of other people in literature or society who exhibit some of these qualities to help support your answers.
8. Discuss the personal history and character of Billie McCandless, focusing on her relationship with her son. What do you know from the book about his birth and early childhood, preteen years, and Billie's support of his growing interest in the outdoors? What do you infer from the way she mourns him? Overall, gauge the strength and vitality of the mother and son relationship.
9. Did alcohol or drugs play a significant part in the story of Chris McCandless? Cite examples from the text to support your opinion.
10. Momentum occurs in a story when a decision is made or an event takes place that leads to a series of consequences or happenings. Choose one of the events listed below, and discuss the events that followed it and how those events build momentum toward the conclusion of the story:
 - Walt McCandless takes his eight-year-old son Chris on a three-day backpacking expedition in the Shenandoah Valley.
 - Chris McCandless, a senior in high school, buys a used yellow Datsun.
 - Chris hitchhikes in South Dakota and is picked up by Wayne Westerberg.

Author's Note and Chapter One: The Alaska Interior

Vocabulary

asceticism – existence stripped bare of any luxury or indulgence
divergent – going in different directions
enigma – a mystery; something that is difficult to understand or explain
fulminated – ranted; criticized in an energetic way
moral rigor – extreme attention to ethical questions and shadings
muskeg – boggy areas, especially those where peat is formed
renunciation – turning away from or against
shards – broken pieces
transcendent – beyond the bounds of normal experience
unsullied – pure, clean

1. What is the purpose of the Author's Note?

Krakauer wants the reader to understand that the book is a nonfiction reconstruction of actual events, researched initially for a magazine article and then re-investigated over the course of a year. The book is largely a biography of Chris McCandless, with the author serving as narrator and writing in the third-person. He also wants to explain that he found the events personally compelling because they echoed some events in his own earlier years. Some autobiographical information is included.

2. What are Krakauer's credentials for writing *Into the Wild*?

*Krakauer had written a feature story about Chris McCandless and his death for Outside magazine. In preparing for that article, he had spoken to some of the people McCandless had met on the road, but he felt there was more to be learned, so he devoted a year to following McCandless's trail and learning everything he could about his subject. In addition, Krakauer is an experienced mountaineer and explorer who wrote *Into Thin Air*, the story of doomed climbers on Mt. Everest.*

3. What is the personal history of Chris McCandless?

Answers should be similar to the following: He was a young man who graduated from college, abandoned many of his belongings, gave away his savings, and left his home in Atlanta, Georgia. Without discussing his plans with his family, he drove across North America and eventually hiked into the Alaskan wilderness, where he died of starvation.

4. What themes does Krakauer introduce in the Author's Note?

He lists the fascination some Americans feel for the idea of wilderness, the pull that some young men feel toward activities that involve risk, and the nature of father and son relationships.

5. What is the purpose of the quoted material at the start of Chapter One?

The material is used to set up the chapter. It shows that someone called Alex was entering the Alaskan wilderness and knew he might die there.

6. Who is Alex?

Because of the match between the postcard text at the head of the chapter and the information in the Author's Note, the reader can assume that Alex is the alias selected by Chris McCandless.

7. Who is Jim Gallien, and how did he meet McCandless?

Gallien is an electrician who was driving from Fairbanks to Anchorage. He picked up McCandless, who was hitchhiking to the Denali National Park.

8. What was Gallien's assessment of McCandless?

Gallien thought McCandless was about 17 or 18 years old, although McCandless gave his age as 24. Gallien decided McCandless was poorly prepared for the wilderness, based on his lack of equipment or food sufficient for staying "for a few months." Gallien saw that McCandless did not have a compass, was wearing inadequate boots, had a gun that would not be effective protection against large animals, and only a ten-pound bag of rice for food. Overall, he considered McCandless well-educated, stubborn, excited, and congenial.

9. What kind of advice did Gallien give McCandless?

He tried to get McCandless to give up his idea of going into the wild without preparation. Gallien then offered to take him to Anchorage and buy him the gear he needed.

10. What was McCandless's response to Gallien's offer?

McCandless stubbornly kept to his plan, and he was not moved at all by any of Gallien's arguments.

11. What did McCandless give Gallien, and what was McCandless's behavior toward the older man?

McCandless gave Gallien his watch and his money (eighty-five cents). He was cheerful and determined to enter the wild with only what he brought with him.

12. What did Gallien give McCandless?

Gallien insisted that McCandless accept some old, but sturdy, work boots and the lunch that his wife had packed for him; he also gave McCandless his phone number. McCandless asked Gallien to take a photo of him entering the trail.

13. Why did Gallien decide not to alert the authorities about McCandless?

He decided that McCandless would come out of the wild rapidly because "he'd probably get hungry pretty quick and just walk out to the highway. That's what any normal person would do."

14. Gallien's statement that McCandless would "probably get hungry pretty quick and just walk out to the highway. That's what any normal person would do," is an example of the literary device of irony. What is ironic about the statement?

The comment is ironic because, as it is made known in the Author's Note, McCandless may not be normal in his perceptions, and he never walked out of the wild to the highway.

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?

He has established that Jack London's writings were a major influence on Chris McCandless and wants the reader to understand the power of London's writing.

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

These powerful descriptions are intended to help the reader understand the difficult conditions that McCandless encountered—covering distances over broken and difficult ground, connecting mountain ranges, and trails that are not passable by conventional motor vehicles.

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

Krakauer first encountered this story as a reporter; he obtained the names and details from the report filed with the local police, then he spoke to everyone.

4. What was considered to be the cause of Chris McCandless's death?

Because of the condition of his body and the lack of major internal injuries or broken bones, the cause of death was cited as starvation.

5. How did the police know the body was that of Chris McCandless?

Initially, they did not know for sure. Chris McCandless's name was signed at the bottom of the SOS note, but police did not find any formal identification; they had a name but no connection and no one to call. The police had to wait to find out where McCandless was from, when he entered the Stampede Trail, and why he was in Alaska.

Chapter Three: Carthage

Vocabulary

abstraction – an idea or concept, rather than something tangible
altruistic – motivated purely by charity or kindness
anthropological – relating to the study of cultures
apartheid – the legalized separation of people of different races
clapboard – overlapping wooden boards or shingles
contrite – repentant
estranged – not close to; emotionally separated from
grain elevator – a building used to elevate and store grain
hyperkinetic – overactive
in stir – in jail
itinerary – a list of destinations on a trip
jetsam – items cast overboard from a ship; cast-offs
mawkish – idealized; sickeningly romantic
mien – the appearance or behavior
odyssey – a long, complicated journey
onerous – heavy; burdensome
plebeian – common; low-level
stasis – slowness; balance
surrogate – a substitute
tendrils – curls
visage – the face
vulnerability – the capacity to be bruised or hurt; tenderness

1. Who is Wayne Westerberg?

Westerberg is a resident of Carthage, South Dakota, where he owns grain elevators and works cutting barley for customers such as Coors and Anheuser-Busch.

2. Describe Westerberg's first encounter with McCandless, including the hospitality McCandless was offered.

On September 10, 1990, Westerberg stopped for McCandless, who was hitchhiking in Montana. Westerberg considered McCandless a kid and someone who needed protection. A few minutes after Westerberg picked up McCandless, they stopped in a nearby town to deliver a package. Westerberg's friend offered them beer and then saw that McCandless looked hungry. The friend's wife made McCandless a large meal; McCandless ate hungrily and fell asleep at the table. Back on the road, the men encountered heavy rains, and Westerberg convinced McCandless to bunk with the grain crew until the rain passed.

3. Local color is introduced when a writer uses regional or colorful terms to present an image of a distinct area or culture. The terms leather tramp and rubber tramp qualify as examples of local color. What culture do they describe, and what is the difference between rubber tramps and leather tramps?

These terms describe the itinerant society that exists in the U.S. but is largely invisible. It is comprised of people who move around from region to region, sometimes seasonally. A rubber tramp travels in a car; the rubber represents tires. A leather tramp travels by foot; the leather represents shoes.

4. When does Westerberg encounter McCandless again?

About two weeks later, McCandless approaches Westerberg, who has returned to Carthage. McCandless asks Westerberg for a job and begins working in the grain elevator.

5. What kind of worker was McCandless, and how did Westerberg evaluate him?

According to Westerberg, McCandless "was the hardest worker I've ever seen." He took any job, including getting rid of dead rats. Westerberg admired McCandless's work ethic, saying "It was almost like a moral thing for him. He was what you'd call extremely ethical. He set pretty high standards for himself."

6. Why did the author say that McCandless found a "surrogate family in Westerberg and his employees"?

There was a loose companionship in Westerberg's house, with a few men living congenially. They shared chores at the house and enjoyed evenings together after a full day of physically demanding work. Everyone was on his own during the evenings, with no supervision and no rules.

7. Why did McCandless leave Carthage?

He left because Westerberg went to jail for four months, so there was no work at the grain elevator and, therefore, nothing to keep him in the small town.

8. What evidence does Krakauer give that McCandless continued to be fond of Carthage and consider Westerberg his friend?

Krakauer documents the fact that McCandless had his mail forwarded to Carthage told people Carthage was his home. Before he left, he gave Westerberg a copy of War and Peace, a book that was important to him. He continued to call or write Westerberg at regular intervals.

9. How does the reader know that *War and Peace* was important to McCandless?

He inscribed the copy he gave to Westerberg, "Transferred to Wayne Westerberg from Alexander. October, 1990. Listen to Pierre." Pierre was, like Tolstoy, "altruistic, questing, illegitimately born." Certainly McCandless saw himself as altruistic and questing, and he abhorred the effect money had on morals.

10. Describe McCandless's early years and family life.

The son of an aerospace engineer, McCandless was raised in a busy family. His parents eventually started a consulting firm. McCandless had one sister with whom he was very close and a set of six half-siblings from his father's first marriage. McCandless graduated from Emory University with an impressive academic record.

11. What was McCandless's financial background?

The family lived comfortably on the earnings of his father, and later, from the prosperity of the firm his parents founded. McCandless received a bequest of \$40,000 from a family friend. Part of this was used to fund his last two years at Emory, and he had \$24,000 left when he graduated.

12. What clues did McCandless give that he was out of step with the commercialism of contemporary society?

McCandless had refused to give or accept gifts for two years. He refused his parents' offer of a new car upon graduation, and he did not want to accept their money for law school, where they thought he was headed. He gave the remainder of his bequest (\$24,000) to OXFAM America in support of its work to end hunger.

13. How does the reader know that Chris McCandless went on long trips alone in his car?

He had bought a used car when he was a senior in high school, and he wrote to his sister that the car "has spanned the continent from Miami to Alaska." In addition, he told his parents and sister that after graduation he intended to "disappear for a while."

14. How did McCandless's parents find out that he had left Atlanta?

Since McCandless chose to not have a phone, they decided to drive from their home in Annandale, Virginia, to Atlanta to check on their son. When they arrived there, they learned from the landlord that he had left soon after graduation. When his parents returned home, they received all the letters they had sent him during the summer. McCandless had instructed the post office to hold his mail until August 1st, then send it all to his parents' address.

15. What change did McCandless make that symbolized the new life he expected to build after he left Atlanta?

He stopped using his real name and began using the alias Alexander Supertramp, or just Alex.

Chapter Four: Detrital Wash

Vocabulary

angularity – sharpness

concave – hollowed out

inimical – hostile

physiologically – relating to the health of internal organs

sensorily – relating to the five senses

1. The head note to this chapter concludes that people go to the desert “not to escape but to find reality.” How does this statement apply to McCandless?

McCandless had chosen to go to the desert around Lake Mead for the same reason that others have taken their quest to the desert: to find reality.

2. What was the motivation for abandoning the Datsun, and why was the find of the car important?

McCandless decided to abandon the car because it became a liability; he could not drive it out of the area, so he covered it lightly with the tarp, removed evidence of his ownership, and left it behind. However, once the car was found, it proved that McCandless had been in the area on July 6th, just as recorded in the journal he left with Wayne Westerberg.

3. For what purpose did the rangers decide to use the Datsun?

They decided that the Datsun was not a very ranger-looking car, so it would be perfect for using in intercepting drug deliveries, making fake drug purchases, and in drug raids.

4. What was ironic about the rangers' use of the Datsun?

While there is no suggestion that McCandless was involved in drug dealing, he abandoned the Datsun so he would not have to answer questions from the rangers about his expired license or why he had driven his car into a forbidden area.

5. Who is Jan Burres, and how did she figure into McCandless's travels?

Burres and her boyfriend picked McCandless up in the northern part of California and took him in, feeding him and letting him camp with them for a couple of weeks.

6. Why did Jan Burres feel an attachment to McCandless?

Her own son, about the same age as McCandless, had gone off on his own some years before, and her encounter with McCandless made her feel closer to her son and rekindled the hope that she would see him again.

7. How did McCandless's parents learn where he was, and what did they do with the information?

Chris McCandless had given his parents' address when he was ticketed for hitchhiking, and when they received the ticket, they knew he had been in Northern California on August 10th. They hired a private investigator to try to find their son.

8. What did McCandless's parents learn from the investigator?

They learned that their son had given away his college fund to OXFAM before leaving Atlanta.

9. What did McCandless buy when he was in Topock, Arizona, and where did he get the money?

He bought a used canoe. The letter he wrote to Westerberg reiterated the fact that McCandless had earned money working at the grain elevator.

10. Describe the trip McCandless took with the canoe.

McCandless paddled south from Hoover Dam on the Colorado River, going toward the Gulf of California. In late November, he stopped in Yuma, Arizona. From there he sent Wayne Westerberg a long note on a postcard before heading south again. McCandless crossed into Mexico on December 2nd.

11. How did McCandless get to the ocean?

He encounters some duck hunters, and one of them tows his canoe to their camp, then puts it in the back of a pick-up truck and drives him to a small village on the Gulf of California.

12. This chapter contains numerous excerpts from the journal McCandless kept. What is noticeable about the writing in his account of his Mexican adventure?

The journal is written in the third-person; McCandless refers to himself as "he" or "Alex."

13. What did McCandless do when he gets back into the U.S.?

He spent six weeks walking and hitchhiking, covering the Southwest between Houston and the Pacific Coast.

14. What did McCandless retrieve when he returned to the Detrital Wash?

He dug up the license plates that he had buried when he abandoned the Datsun, along with a few odds and ends.

15. Existentialism is a philosophy that emphasizes the individual's responsibility and free will to direct the course of their life. What existential conclusion does McCandless reach when leaving Las Vegas?

He said, "It is the experiences, the memories, the great triumphant joy of living to the fullest extent in which real meaning is found. God it's great to be alive! Thank you. Thank you."

Chapter Five: Bullhead City

Vocabulary

bourgeois – materialistic
constituents – members of a community who vote to elect their leaders
denizens – residents
espoused – claimed to champion
fatuous – foolish, ridiculous
ideologue – someone who follows a defined set of ideas or way of thinking
lumpen – crude or ignorant people
oxymoronic – containing a contradiction (e.g., jumbo shrimp)
porous – having holes or gaps that allows something to pass through or be absorbed
primordial – the basic or primitive developmental level; fundamental
rheumy – runny; watery
sedentary – inactive; lacking exercise
turgid – heavy; graceless

1. What did McCandless do after he left Las Vegas in May 1991?

According to a post card he sent to Jan Burres he spent July and August in Oregon, and he was in Bullhead City, Arizona, in early October. Other than this, little is known because he did not keep a journal during this period.

2. What kind of life did McCandless lead in Bullhead City?

He led a rather normal life; he used his real name, worked at McDonald's, rode a bicycle to work, and opened a savings account. He was homeless, however, camping out and then living as a squatter in an abandoned motor home.

3. How did the other McDonald's employees regard McCandless?

They admitted that he was a slow and steady worker, but very reliable; personally, though, they "all thought he was missing a few screws."

4. How did he find the trailer?

A man who was keeping an eye on the trailer saw McCandless shaving in a restroom one morning and recognized that he was living in the open. The man, known as Charlie, offered McCandless the use of the abandoned trailer.

5. In a letter to Jan Burres, McCandless assessed Charlie. What did he think of the older man?

McCandless wrote, "The only drawback is this old guy, whose name is Charlie, is something of a lunatic and it's rather difficult to get along with him sometimes."

6. When Krakauer found Charlie and interviewed him, how did Charlie assess McCandless?

He said, "Nice guy; yeah, a pretty nice guy. Didn't like to be around too many people, though. Temperamental. He meant good, but I think he had a lot of complexes—you know what I'm saying? Liked to read books by that Alaska guy, Jack London. Never said much. He'd get moody, wouldn't like to be bothered. Seemed like a kid who was looking for something, looking for something, just didn't know what it was."

7. What events occurred when McCandless left Bullhead City?

In November, McCandless had sent a postcard, with a return address, to Jan Burres, and she responded with a Christmas card indicating she and her boyfriend would drive to see McCandless the next weekend. Before the weekend arrived, McCandless showed up at the Slabs, the place where Burres was living.

8. Describe the conditions and the residents of the Slabs. Note some of the local color that makes this community memorable.

The Slabs, named for the old concrete slabs that made up a Navy air base (now abandoned), was home to about 5,000 drifters and campers who wanted a cheap place in the warmth of the desert to spend the winter. Local color is added by the detail about the former Navy base, the outdoor flea market, and the term "rubber-tired culture," that suggests the lines of cars, vans, and trucks in the community.

9. Using the swap meet as a springboard, Krakauer talks about McCandless's love of books, especially the work of Jack London. What attracted McCandless to Jack London's work?

McCandless felt sympathy for the outsiders London portrays, and, like London, he rejected living to get rich, while romanticizing the outsider or the person without advantages who scrapes out an existence against great odds.

10. What character traits and skills does Jan Burres recount about McCandless?

Burres talks about how good McCandless was at sorting and selling books, encouraging others to share his enthusiasm for reading. She also recounts his playfulness with puppies and his musical skills at singing and playing a keyboard.

11. What was Jan Burres's reaction to McCandless's idea of going to Alaska?

She was concerned for him, saying, "I thought Alex had lost his mind when he told us about his 'great Alaskan odyssey.'" She tried to get him to take some knives for hunting and trading, as well as some warm clothing, but he left most of her gifts in her van.

12. What was Burres's assessment of McCandless's ability to survive in Alaska?

She felt that he had learned a lot about how to survive on the road, and she said, "I felt sure he'd figure out Alaska, too."

Chapter Six: Anza Borrego

Vocabulary

arroyos – dried creek beds
bajada – plain, open land
creosote – a desert plant with a thick, sticky resin
desiccated – dried out
filigree – a lacy pattern
geothermal – heated by the temperature of the earth
harangues – rants; going on and on about something
hegira – a pilgrimage
nexus – an intersection
ocotillo – a flowered dessert plant
phantasmal – filled with delusions
platted – laid out on a plat or topographical map
prodigious – plentiful; huge
pseudonym – fake name or alias
sink – a lowland
snafu – a disaster

1. Who was Ron Franz, and how did he enter the story?

Ron Franz was an older man who had heard about the Outside magazine article written by Jon Krakauer. He wrote to the author requesting more information and volunteering the information that he had driven "Alex" from California to Colorado in March 1992 and had taken videos of the journey.

2. What does Krakauer think about the relationship between Franz and McCandless?

The author writes, "McCandless made an indelible impression on a number of people during the course of his hegira, most of whom spent only a few days in his company, a week or two at most. Nobody, however, was affected more powerfully by his or her brief contact with the boy than Ronald Franz, who was eighty years old when their paths intersected in January 1992."

3. What is Anza-Borrego?

It is a park; Anza-Borrego Desert State Park is in California, near the Salton Sea.

4. What is the Salton Sea?

It is a 400-square-mile landlocked sea, created in 1905 by disastrous engineering miscalculations. After a new irrigation canal was opened, a series of heavy floods overrode the canal, and water streamed into a low-lying area known as the Salton sink. The flooded area, once rich farmland, is now known as the Salton Sea.

5. How did McCandless and Franz meet, and what area did McCandless show Franz?

They met when Franz gave a ride to McCandless, who was hitchhiking. McCandless told Franz he was camping at Oh-My-God Hot Springs, then he showed the place to Franz.

6. What is Oh-My-God Hot Springs? What literary term can be associated with the name?

In the desert area near the Salton Sea, two pools had been formed with water from geothermal wells. These springs attracted about 200 people who lived in an essentially cashless, classless society that enjoys the heat of the desert and the warm springs. The name, Oh-My-God Hot Springs, adds local color to the narrative.

7. What was the life story of Ron Franz?

Franz spent his career in the Army, with mostly overseas postings. Several years earlier, his wife and only son had been killed by a drunk driver. He was devastated. To try to overcome his sense of loss, he began a series of unofficial adoptions of children on the Pacific island of Okinawa, paying for their care and education. When he met McCandless, he wanted to guide him in light of his own loss, and Christian principles and practices.

8. How did the relationship between the older man and McCandless develop?

Just as he had affected many others he met on the road, McCandless inspired Franz to become his friend and surrogate family. After a prickly start to their relationship, in which McCandless proclaimed that he lived as he did by choice, they began to enjoy each other's company, meeting for meals and conversation when McCandless went into town.

9. What role did leatherworking take in their relationship?

Franz excelled at leatherwork and belt-making, and he taught McCandless this craft. McCandless made an intricately detailed belt that included his initials and his road name (Alex) and depictions of his journey, from a hitchhiker's thumb to a canoe.

10. How did Franz and McCandless part company?

Franz drove McCandless to San Diego, where McCandless intended to find work to fund his trip to Alaska. Franz later told Krakauer, "It was a very hard thing for me to do. I was sad to be leaving him."

11. After leaving San Diego without finding work, McCandless made his way to Seattle, enjoying a new kind of transportation. What was it, and what were his comments about it?

He began life as a hobo, riding the trains from one stop or train yard to another. He liked the adventure of it, especially outsmarting the "bulls" (train security personnel or local police).

12. From Seattle, McCandless returned to California. What was this second visit to Ron Franz like?

Franz was overjoyed to hear from McCandless again, and he immediately took the young man to a restaurant for a big meal. McCandless said he would only stay long enough to wash his clothes and get ready to go to Carthage, South Dakota, to work at Wayne Westerberg's grain elevator again. Franz offered to drive him as far as Grand Junction, Colorado, and McCandless agreed. Franz gave the younger man some gear for his trip to Alaska, they stopped at Charlie's trailer to pick up some belongings McCandless had stored there. Then they headed for Colorado, taking pictures along the way.

13. Franz made a family-oriented request of McCandless. What was it, and how did McCandless respond?

Because Franz was the last of his family, he asked if he could adopt McCandless as his grandson. McCandless stalled, saying, "We'll talk about it when I get back from Alaska, Ron."

14. What was the tragedy of Ron Franz's life?

The tragedy of his life was loneliness; his son was killed, and McCandless, whom he wanted to adopt, rebuffed him and left for Alaska.

15. The author gives a brief character analysis of McCandless after recounting that Franz dropped him off in Colorado. What does the author say about McCandless?

McCandless had a tendency to evade intimacy and the demands of friendship. He notes that McCandless had escaped from his own family, finding their emotional demands confining, and that he had also slipped away from Jan Burres and Wayne Westerberg whenever he felt they were getting too close to him. The author suggests that McCandless was relieved to say good-bye to Franz and his desire for a family.

16. From Carthage, McCandless sent Franz a long letter with advice and a summation of his philosophy. What did McCandless say about life, and what did he advise Franz to do?

McCandless said, "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." He went on to tell the older man, "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."

17. How did Ron Franz respond to this letter?

He followed the advice McCandless gave him, buying a camping van and moving out to McCandless's old campsite beyond the hot springs. Although a flash flood caused him to move farther out, he was still living in the desert when Karkauer met him.

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

*He picked up hitchhikers who had just read Krakauer's article in *Outdoor* and told him that McCandless had frozen to death in Alaska.*

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

Once a very observant Christian, Franz gave up religion and stopped believing in God when he learned of McCandless's death. He said, "I decided I couldn't believe in a God who would let something that terrible happen to a boy like Alex."

Chapter Seven: Carthage

Vocabulary

ambivalence – a neutral reaction; indecisiveness
astute – insightful; sharp
canted – slanted
celibate – a deliberate state of sexual inactivity
corollary – a natural consequence or inference from known data
grubstake – money and/or supplies for a trip
maw – a large, intimidating opening
milo – a form of sorghum, is a grain that is used in foods and sweeteners
polarization – separation; divisiveness
succor – aid and comfort
surfeit – an excess

1. Why was Wayne Westerberg annoyed?

His harvesting crew had been working long hours, so he was tired. His equipment kept breaking down, so he got behind, and he “was counting on Alex being back at work by now.” He was grieving the loss of McCandless, who had been dead for 50 days.

2. How did Westerberg summarize McCandless and his skills?

He described McCandless as being a hard worker, noted his lack of mechanical skills, and said, “But there was gaps in his thinking.”

3. Who is Gail Borah, and what did she have to say about McCandless?

She is Westerberg’s girlfriend. She befriended McCandless after they met, often had him to dinner, and became something of a confidante to him. She realized that he was estranged from his family, although he did talk about his sister Carine, to whom he felt close.

4. What is the author’s analysis of the relationship between McCandless and his father?

He says that “father and son were stubborn and high-strung. Given Walt’s need to exert control and Chris’s extravagantly independent nature, polarization was inevitable.” He also includes part of a letter from Chris to Carine that indicated he would “completely knock them out of my life. I’m going to divorce them as my parents.”

5. The Krakauer goes on to comment on McCandless's sex life. What does he conclude?

He believes that McCandless did not have an active sex life with either men or women, choosing, instead, to live a celibate life. The author speculates that McCandless found fulfillment in nature, not in people.

6. The author includes three incidences of foreshadowing at the end of this chapter. What are they?

Gail Borah said she saw tears in McCandless's eyes when he hugged her good-bye, and she thought, "I figured he wouldn't have been crying unless he intended to take some big risks and knew he might not be coming back. That's when I started having a bad feeling that we wouldn't never see Alex again." Krakauer cites a post card to Westerberg from Fairbanks that stated, "If this adventure proves fatal and you don't ever hear from me again, I want you to know you're a great man," and another post card, sent to Jan Burres, that said, "This is the last communication you shall receive from me."

7. What is suggested by these examples of foreshadowing?

The statements and writings suggest that McCandless had a premonition of death; they raise the possibility that he knew the plan was inherently dangerous. In addition they raise the question of whether he intended to die there, even if it meant some form of suicide.

Chapter Eight: Alaska

Vocabulary

academia – the world of education
alpinists – specialists in climbing high and challenging mountains
asceticism – a pared-down existence without many worldly goods
Athapaskan – a local Alaskan population with their own language and culture
banalities – meaningless comments
bight – a small bay formed by a curve in the shoreline
burlesque – a ridiculous or extreme interpretation
cliché – an overused expression, example, or type
countercultural – against established norms of a culture
eremitic – hermit-like or reclusive
histrionic – overly dramatic
hubris – overblown pride
linguistics – the study of, the formation and development of languages
opprobrium – criticism; judgment
paucity – scarcity
pseudoliterary – a false display of scholarship
recondite – obscure; difficult for most people to understand
seine – fish with nets

1. What kind of reaction did Krakauer receive about his article in *Outside* magazine?

He received a lot of mail, much of it criticizing McCandless for tackling Alaska without adequate knowledge or equipment. Much of it criticized the author for an article that seemed to praise McCandless as a daring young man on a quest.

2. Why does the author include the story of his encounter with the man called the “Mayor of Hippie Cove”?

The author wants to provide his own credentials as having been in Alaska for extended periods of time, living off the land, camping, and working among local people. He wants to show that he is not an outsider writing about Alaska.

3. What is the purpose of including the full story of Gene Rossellini?

Krakauer wants to show that McCandless was not the first or only young man to want to experience Alaska deeply. He also wants to raise the issues of mental or emotional problems and the possibility of suicide.

4. What motivated the author to include the story of John Waterman?

Krakauer is trying to place McCandless as part of a small group of young men who are drawn to the Alaskan wilderness, with its inherent dangers and risks, to live out their dreams or fantasies of finding meaning and importance in the vastness of the wild. This and other stories in this chapter serve as examples of one of Krakauer's themes—the magnetic pull of high-risk behavior to young men, which here coexists with the charm of the wilderness. He also wants to show that McCandless was comparatively unprepared for conditions and to invite the reader to evaluate the mental state of McCandless and others who have gone solo into the wild.

5. What are some parallels in the story of John Waterman and Chris McCandless?

Both were highly intelligent boys raised in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. Both were loners and had difficult relationships with their fathers and families.

6. What are some differences between the stories of Waterman and McCandless?

- Although both had difficult relationships with their fathers, Waterman's father rejected him, whereas Walt McCandless never rejected his son; it was the son who rejected the father.*
- Waterman was an accomplished climber, and McCandless was not, nor was that his intent when he went into the wild.*
- Waterman was a compulsive journalist, but McCandless kept journals at times.*
- Waterman appeared to be mentally ill; McCandless, although showing signs of emotional imbalance, was able to function with different kinds of people.*
- Waterman had much more experience with death than did McCandless; Waterman's brother had disappeared, and he had been on expeditions where numerous climbers died.*
- Waterman seemed to go out on his last trek intending to die; the evidence on McCandless is much less convincing.*

7. What purpose does the story of Chris McCunn serve in the narrative?

McCunn's story, which seems at first to be a simple digression, is included to emphasize the attraction of risk to young men and the fatal effect of being unprepared. McCunn died because he did not arrange for transportation out of the wild, he did not realize this until it was too late to walk out for help, had no radio or flares, and he did not know the hand gestures to signal an SOS to an airplane. The story is included because McCandless was also unprepared for his venture into the wilderness—no way to call for help, no compass, inadequate food, and insufficient clothing.

Chapter Nine: Davis Gulch

Vocabulary

anchorites – hermits
atavistic – exhibiting characteristics of distant ancestors or of early man
currachs – lightweight boats developed in Ireland
defile – a route notable for its narrowness; a gorge
desiccated – dried-out
ephemeral – fleeting; dying quickly
esthete – one who seeks beauty
esthetics – the philosophy that beauty is an important basis of moral good
graffito – personal markings in public spaces, similar to graffiti
hogan – a log and mud shelter characteristic of the Navajo
insinuated – worked one's way in
ludicrous – ridiculous
matrix – a grid
mythographers – those who develop a myth about another person
nom de plume – a French word meaning pen name
petroglyphs – carvings in rock walls
pictographs – pictures from an earlier era drawn or painted on a rock wall
pot-sherds – broken bits of pottery
stratum – a layer of rock in a larger formation
talus – a natural land form caused by accumulated rocks and dirt
veracity – truth

1. Summarize story of Everett Ruess.

Beginning when he was 16, Ruess took extended trips alone, walking, camping, and hitchhiking through the American West in search of natural beauty and the exhilaration that beauty gave him. Ruess returned home after his first trip, graduated from high school, entered, then dropped out of college, and returned to the solitary life with only brief breaks. He sought out famous photographers and artists who painted in the West, and he wrote flowery letters about the beauty he encountered. Ruess adopted new names at times. Before he began his last journey, he wrote that he would be beyond settlements for some time. Then he vanished.

2. What are the main theories about how Ruess died?

Many believe that he fell while climbing canyon walls; others think he was murdered. Ken Sleight, one man who has studied Ruess's story and the area, thinks he drowned while crossing the Colorado River.

3. Ken Sleight has studied the story of Everett Ruess and discussed Chris McCandless with the author. What is Sleight's conclusion about the two young men?

Sleight believes that, like himself and many others, Ruess and McCandless enjoyed "companionship, see, but we can't stand to be around people for very long. So we go get ourselves lost, come back for a while, then get the hell out again."

Chapter Ten: Fairbanks

Vocabulary

VHF – very high-frequency radio

1. What information appeared in the *New York Times* about the death of Chris McCandless?

The article stated that the body showed evidence of injury, and that the hiker left a diary and two notes. Placing the man "in his late 20's or early 30's." McCandless had been "stranded at the camp for more than three months." The article also stated that police had a name but they had not been able to locate any relatives or others who could confirm the identity of the hiker, so they did not release the name.

2. What information was Jim Gallien able to give the police?

Gallien, who had dropped McCandless off near the Stampede Trail, was able to identify several items McCandless had with him but that had not been mentioned in the news article. When Gallien was shown the pictures developed from the camera McCandless left behind, he was able to identify the hiker as the young man he knew as Alex. He told the police that Alex was from South Dakota.

3. How did Wayne Westerberg learn that McCandless was dead?

One of his employees told him to turn on the truck radio; he heard the story immediately.

4. What did Westerberg do after finding out that the dead hiker was McCandless?

He called the Alaska State Troopers, who were overwhelmed with callers trying to identify the body. Westerberg's call was not given much attention until he said, "I know who he is. He worked for me. I think I've even got his Social Security number."

5. How did the Social Security number help identify McCandless?

The Social Security number gave the police the former address of Walt and Billie McCandless, who had moved away. They found another McCandless listed, who turned out to be Sam, a half-brother of Chris McCandless. Local police met with Sam, who made the identification from pictures.

6. What responsibility did Sam have to face after identifying Chris McCandless from photos?

He had to tell his father and step-mother that their son was dead.

Chapter Eleven: Chesapeake Beach

Vocabulary

aperture – an opening
arcane – specialized and unusual; known to only a few
chastened – corrected, reformed
concocted – put together; made up
conical – shaped like a cone
entrepreneurial – characteristic of starting a business
gorilla tuck – a crouched position used in skiing
helices – spiral-shaped
loathe – unwilling
mercurial – changeable, as is the element mercury
morass – a quagmire, bog
ostensibly – for the sake of appearances
panache – style, flair
rancor – bitterness
scudding – pushed by the wind
sparring – fighting
Tolstoyan – following the beliefs of the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy
trajectory – the path of a moving object through space
vagaries – uncertainties

1. When this chapter opens, the rhythm of the story changes, and the reader is not provided with the description of Sam McCandless telling his father and step-mother that Chris McCandless is dead. Why would the author leave out an important event in the story? How does the reader know that some time has elapsed since McCandless's parents learned of his death?

Krakauer choose to not intrude on the family's privacy. The change in rhythm indicates that the emotional intensity has changed, suggesting that time has elapsed, and the text reads, "Seven weeks after the body of his son turned up," which provides the time frame.

2. This is obviously a first-hand account of a visit by the author to McCandless's parents. Why did he visit them?

The author was writing the article that appeared in Outside magazine and had arranged the visit to complete the research for that article.

3. What is the purpose of giving biographical information on Walt McCandless?

One theme of this book is the difficult relationship between fathers and sons. The author has established that Chris McCandless and his parents were estranged, with friction between father and son. He wants the reader to be able to make an assessment of the father and decide where the relationship became strained and why.

4. What illustrates the confusion Walt McCandless feels about the choices his son made after leaving college?

While standing at the window, Mr. McCandless says, "How is it that a kid with so much compassion could cause his parents so much pain?" In addition, he talks about missing his son, the times they shared, and the activities they engaged in.

5. What was unique about the sleeping bag Chris McCandless's body was found in, and why would it have particular emotional importance?

Chris McCandless's body was found "wrapped in a blue sleeping bag that Billie [his mother] had sewn for him." Although he had been able to afford a sleeping bag rated for Alaskan conditions, McCandless had kept this bag with him all through his travels; it obviously reminded him of his mother, his family, and his home.

6. What was the emotional significance of the guitar Chris McCandless abandoned near the yellow Datsun?

It was a guitar that his father had bought his mother shortly after McCandless was born. His mother used to strum the guitar and sing to him to soothe and relax him as a baby.

7. Cite some of the possible causes of friction between Chris McCandless and his father, as revealed in this chapter.

- In third grade, Chris McCandless tried to move into an accelerated program, and his teacher earmarked him as a willful child.*
- He and his sister formed deep a bond because their parents were unavailable due to working long hours, and they "learned to count on each other when Mom and Dad weren't getting along."*
- McCandless protested his father's decision to turn around on a climb of Longs Peak in Colorado. Mr. McCandless noted his son's daring by saying, "He didn't think the odds applied to him. We were always trying to pull him back from the edge."*
- When McCandless refused to follow the directions for physics lab reports, his father sided with the teacher. According to Mr. McCandless, "his son resisted instruction of any kind."*
- A major clash occurred when McCandless decided he did not want to go to college or have a career, although he did end up going to college right after high school.*
- Billie McCandless, said that Chris was embarrassed by the family's growing wealth and tried to distance himself from it.*

8. Summarize the passage late in this chapter that foreshadows further breakdowns in the family's relationship.

McCandless said he planned to get in his car and drive around the country after graduating from high school. Foreshadowing further trouble, the author says, "Nor could anyone in his family have foreseen that a chance discovery during this initial journey would ultimately turn him inward and away, drawing him and those who loved him into a combination of anger, misunderstanding, and sorrow."

Chapter Twelve: Annadale

Vocabulary

anomalous – unusual; inconsistent
carrel – a desk in a library or other learning center
choler – anger
confrères – close friends
extemporaneous – impromptu; done without planning
hypocrite – a person who does or says one thing but or says something else
idiosyncratic – peculiar; unpredictable in style
monomania – being fixated on a single idea
pellucid – allowing light to shine through
sanctimonious – falsely appearing holy or moral
scrupulously – carefully

1. Why does Krakauer go into such detail about the speech and gift Chris McCandless gave his father at the high school graduation party?

The speech and gift marked an unusual public display of closeness between the two. After the party, McCandless began his first big road trip, and the relationship between father and son became more contentious.

2. Where did McCandless go the summer after he graduated from high school, and what did his parents ask him to do while traveling?

He drove alone across the U.S. to the Pacific. His parents asked him to call them every three days; at first he complied, but later, communications became less frequent.

3. Why did McCandless lose so much weight while he was on the road?

He had gotten lost in the Mojave Desert and suffered from dehydration.

4. What did McCandless obtain in his travels, supposedly for his own protection?

He obtained a machete and a rifle.

5. How does the first year at Emory go for Chris?

He did well academically, and he seemed to fit in. He returned to the clean-cut look of his high school years and talked about attending law school.

6. What did he do the next summer, after his freshman year at Emory?

Instead of going out on the road, he stayed at home and worked for his parents' company, where he wrote a complex computer program.

7. What happened when Walt McCandless asked Chris to show him how the computer program worked?

He refused to tell his father, claiming that all he needed to know was that it worked.

8. What did McCandless do during the summer after his sophomore year at Emory? What did his sister say about his ability to make money?

He took a job delivering pizzas. According to his sister, every night, he would total up his receipts and costs for the day and compare his profits to the week before. Carine noted, "He kept track of everything and showed me how to do it, how to make a business work. He didn't seem interested in the money so much as the fact that he was good at making it. It was like a game, and the money was a way of keeping score."

9. Why did McCandless relationship with his parents deteriorate that summer?

He had made discoveries about his parents—especially his father—two summers before. As his anger over these discoveries grew his resentment started to show.

10. What did Chris McCandless learn about his father, his mother, and their history?

He returned to the neighborhood where he was born, where he learned that his parents were not married when he was born. Although his father was separated from his first wife, he continued to be intimate with her. He lived a kind of double life, even fathering another child with his first wife two years after McCandless was born. When this information came out, it was very difficult for the three adults involved, and it hurt the children, although McCandless did not remember any of these events. These revelations, and the lies used to cover them up for so many years, were a deep source of pain to McCandless, and they caused him to resist his father's attempts to influence him.

11. What was McCandless's view of the government?

He wrote numerous editorials for the student newspaper at Emory, and he was politically active as the co-founder of the College Republican Club, but his views were not consistent with any particular ideology. He seemed to view most questions as isolated issues. Overall, however, he seemed to prefer the least possible government intervention.

12. What was his initial plan for the summer after his junior year at Emory, and what did he end up doing that summer?

His initial plan was to go to Guatemala, according to a postcard he sent his parents. Instead, he drove north and went to Alaska.

13. When his mother wrote to ask him if he thought it was right to ignore his family, McCandless replied angrily to his sister. What caused his anger?

He told his sister, "I bet they think I'm a homosexual. How did they ever get that idea? What a bunch of imbeciles."

14. Reactions to the prolonged absence of Chris McCandless varied in his family. Describe how his sister and his parents reacted to his absence.

Carine said she was not hurt by his absence or lack of communication and that "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." On the other hand, his parents continued to worry, and whenever they saw a hitchhiker, they would check to see if the person looked like their son, fearing that he was sick or cold.

15. In July 1992, Billie McCandless had a moving experience relating to her son. What was it?

She woke up in the night because she heard his voice pleading, "Mom! Help me!"

Chapter Thirteen: Virginia Beach

Vocabulary

anorectic – excessively and dangerously thin due to intentionally starving oneself;
another term of anorexic
apologia – the defense or explanation of one's position or actions
fatuous – extremely foolish

1. This chapter opens with a quotation from an essay by John Haines. What is the purpose of including this quotation?

Krakauer is using this essay to guess at sentiments held by Chris McCandless, namely that his journey was both outward into the wild and inward to understand his own emotions. In this sense, the journey was both physical and mental.

When an author refers to another writer to reinforce a point or to introduce a new idea, the device is called an allusion. In this book, the author opens each chapter with a quotation, using frequent allusions to add weight to the story.

2. What kind of life did Carine McCandless live when the author met her?

She lives in “an expensive new home” with her husband Chris Fish. She has kept her own name. Together, they own a car repair business, and she works long hours to help the business succeed.

3. How did Carine learn that her brother had died?

Sam McCandless called her husband with the news, and her husband came home to tell her.

4. How did she react to the news?

She had a very emotional reaction, at first denying the news and then crying and screaming hysterically for five hours. Then she and her husband gathered up some clothes and headed for her parents' house. On the way, she asked her husband to stop at their church, but she did not find the answers—or comfort—she was seeking.

5. What task did Carine and her husband take on for the family after learning that Chris McCandless had died?

They flew to Alaska. First, they went to Fairbanks and picked up the personal effects that had been found with the body. Then they went on to Anchorage, where the body had been cremated after the autopsy.

6. How did Carine and her parents respond to food after learning that Chris McCandless had died of starvation?

Carine and her mother both lost their appetite, losing significant amounts of weight. In contrast, Walt McCandless gained eight pounds from compulsive eating.

7. A month after Carine returned from Alaska, her mother looked at snapshots from McCandless's life. What is it that she could not understand?

She didn't understand her choices, stating, "I just don't understand why he had to take those kind of chances. I just don't understand it at all."

Chapter Fourteen: The Stikine Ice Cap

Vocabulary

abyss – a void; the depth of nothingness
bald – a blank area unpopulated by vegetation
bergschrund – a crevasse formed by a split in the ice
carapace – a shell-like exterior coating
chutzpah – nerve; confidence; arrogance
cirque – an open area shaped like a half-circle and having steep sides
comlier – more beautiful
crampons – metal prongs used for climbing on ice
crevasses – deep openings in a glacier or ice floe
cyanide – a swift-acting poison
dearth – a shortage of; lack
diorite – a kind of rock that forms into small granular crystals
dunning – persistent
exfoliated – scrubbed free of debris
existential scabs – figurative wounds made by repeated questions about the nature of man and his place in the world
extricated – got out
fjordlike – like the narrow fingers of the sea that characterize the coast of Norway
frost feathers – thin, unstable accumulations of frost
glaciologist – one who studies glaciers
gunwale – the top of a boat's side
halogen – a group of elements including fluorine and chlorine
inebriated – drunk
inveigled – cadged and begged for
Kerouac – the author of *On the Road* and a member of the Beat Generation
labyrinthine – having a complex, maze-like pattern; like a labyrinth
madrigal – a bare sound, without accompaniment of any kind
melodramatic – overly emotional
molybdenum – a strong, light metal that can be shaped with precision
Nietzsche – the 19th century German author who believed that humans had to recognize the meaninglessness of existence to triumph over it
nordwand – the north wall of a mountain
penitente – a pilgrim seeking penitence through a difficult journey or physical task
phantasmagoria – a fantastic visual phenomenon of extended figures and shapes
plastic – sculpted
psycho-neurotic – relating to a mental illness
rime – granular ice created when clouds or fog become supercooled and precipitate out
skates – pallets or storage packets
stinted – spare in growth; stunted
scattershot – random; not organized
seracs – sharp points where ice juts out of a glacier into peaks
sublimity – beyond thought; outstandingly grand
superterranean – above the ground
thrummed – pulsed; vibrated
unhandselled – without tokens of good luck; unforgiving
whiteout – conditions of blowing snow and ice that prevent good vision

1. To what extent is this chapter about Chris McCandless?

Except for a statement that the author thinks McCandless died by accident (not by suicide), the chapter is really not about McCandless at all.

2. What is the purpose of this chapter? How does it differ in point of view from earlier chapters?

Krakauer is trying to make the case that his own solo journeys give him insight into McCandless's state of mind. In addition, expanding a 9,000-word article into a book requires new material. This chapter differs from earlier chapters in that it is largely written in the first-person, whereas earlier chapters had been predominantly third-person.

3. What parallels does Krakauer draw between himself and McCandless?

He says they both had problems with male authority figures and they both became obsessed with different interests, exploring them in depth. In addition, both had the habit of going off on long solo journeys without letting anyone know where they were. They seemed to live on a shoestring, never having much money. Both embarked on trips for which they were not fully prepared.

4. What is the purpose of including allusions to Nietzsche and Kerouac?

The allusions reinforce the author's literary credentials and place him among rebellious young men who think that leaving the conventional world will bring meaning to their lives.

5. What was Krakauer's plan for climbing in Alaska? How does this echo one of his themes?

He decided to make a solo climb of the Devil's Thumb, a 6,000-foot mountain that rises from a glacier. He would have to get there by hitching rides on boats. Once on the glacier, he would have to ski across 30 miles of ice before beginning his ascent. All this would certainly qualify as high-risk behavior, reinforcing the theme that such danger is very attractive to certain young men. It also echoes the idea that wilderness is attractive to the American imagination.

6. What are the circumstances of Krakauer's departure from Boulder, where he was working as a carpenter?

He quit his job and left, without telling anyone of his plans or saying goodbye. He had \$200 in cash and a 17-year-old car.

7. How did Krakauer get to Alaska?

He drove his car from Boulder to Gig Harbor, Washington. There, he abandoned the car and found a salmon boat that would take him north for free if he worked on board.

8. What kind of gear did Krakauer have, and how did he carry it?

He carried a few days' worth of food, his clothes, and crampons, compass, skis, tent, sleeping bag, and curtain rods to make into a cross-shaped piece of equipment. He carried all this in a backpack.

9. What good idea did Krakauer spend the last of his money on after he arrived in Alaska?

He bought a hoard of food, packed it into cartons, and gave a bush pilot \$150 to drop the food to him after he arrived on the glacier.

10. How did he obtain the after the pilot couldn't find him?

Four days after he pitched his tent on the glacier, he heard the drone of the plane's engine. He waved and called, but the pilot could not see him. Then he made a flag by tying his sleeping bag to the end of one of his curtain rods and waved the "flag" to attract the pilot's attention. The pilot saw him and dropped the food.

11. What was Krakauer's climb like? How did he use local color to describing his climb?

The climb was very dangerous and difficult. He crossed several ice fields that were steeply sloped and covered with snow. He found a shaft of ice and decided to climb there, ascending 20 inches per step. He climbed for about 300 feet. Then the ice gave way to rock. Krakauer could not get a good hold on the rock, so he climbed down about 80 feet, examined the rock face for an alternate route and ended his attempt. His detailed descriptions of the mountain, ice, rocks, equipment, weather, etc. provide an image of the setting and tone.

12. What did Krakauer say about the challenge of hazardous climbing?

He said the danger forces the climber to focus, and the climber becomes more comfortable with the danger, eventually feeling a sense of happiness that comes when the demands of the world are "temporarily forgotten, crowded from your thoughts by an overpowering clarity of purpose and by the seriousness of the task at hand."

13. Where would the reader expect the story to go next?

Krakauer had abandoned the climb, but he was still more than 3,000 feet up on the glacier. He would have to get down somehow, and this would probably be the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter Fifteen: The Stikine Ice Cap

Vocabulary

acid – smelling harsh or bitter
autocratic – dictatorial; not allowing negotiation
bivouac sack – a lightweight covering or shell that allows a camper to sleep outside a tent
bivvy – slang for bivouac, a temporary camp without shelter
calamitous – disastrous
cirrus – flattish clouds formed by ice crystals
condolence – sympathy
contingent – dependent upon
entanglement – involvement
escapade – a caper; adventure
fly – an extra piece of fabric that forms a second roof on a tent
hectored – nagged
hubris – arrogance; excessive pride
malevolent – with evil intention; threatening
metastasized – grown new colonies
patina – the outer layer
pharmacopoeia – a pharmacy full of
reconnaissance – a preview of a trip or route
spindrift – a strong wind
spindrift avalanches – snow slides caused by strong wind rather than by falling rock
supplanted – replaced
surreal – intensely irrational
thwart – to frustrate, prevent success
Tlingit – one of the groups of Native Americans
verglas – glacial ice; heavy glacier-like ice as in an ice storm
volatile – explosive
volition – free-will

1. What happened when Krakauer returned to his tent after abandoning his quest to scale the north face of the Devil's Thumb?

In the midst of a snow storm, he holed up in his tent for three days, smoking, reading, and deciding what to do. Then he smoked a joint, threw the match into his garbage bag, not realizing that his tent was on fire until he burned the fly that provide extra protection.

2. Whose tent had Krakauer burned?

He had burned his father's new tent, which borrowed for this trip.

3. What did Krakauer say about his father?

He said that his father was temperamental and demanding, with high goals for his children regardless of what they aspired to. Krakauer's father was a doctor and suffered a return of polio symptoms. He began abusing prescription drugs to try to control the pain. He attempted suicide and went insane, eventually he was committed to a psychiatric hospital.

4. Picking up the story of his experience on the glacier, what did Krakauer decide to do?

He decided to try to reach the summit of the Devil's Thumb again.

5. What happened on Krakauer's next attempt to reach the summit?

He tried another route on the north face, but he had to turn around after only 120 feet. He decided to spend the night on the mountain itself, but this plan was thwarted by persistent snow, and he eventually descended to the area of his tent, which he found after considerable effort.

6. What does Krakauer say about the possibility of being killed while trying to climb the Devil's Thumb?

He states that, at the age of 23, he did not understand that death was a real threat—it just seemed like an abstraction to him.

7. What did Krakauer decide to do after giving up on finding a successful route to the summit on the north side?

He decided to try a new route on the southeast side of the mountain. It was near a route that was climbed successfully in 1946, but it was a new route; he would be the first to try it.

8. What did he say about the summit? What did he do while on the summit?

The summit was very narrow—a spike of ice and rock “no wider than a file cabinet.” He took pictures to prove that he reached the summit, and then he began the descent.

9. What did Krakauer learn when he returned to the town of Petersburg?

He learned that nobody cared that he climbed to the summit of the Devil's Thumb.

10. What comparisons does Krakauer draw between himself and Chris McCandless?

He says, "like Chris McCandless, I was a raw youth who mistook passion for insight and acted according to an obscure, gap-ridden logic." He also says he thought a solo achievement in the wild would fix everything that was wrong in his life, a point he believes he shared with McCandless. He notes that both he and McCandless had unsatisfactory relationships with their fathers and both ignored dangers in their discontented and intense quests for satisfaction.

11. Why does the author believe that McCandless was not suicidal?

After delineating the similarities between himself and McCandless, Krakauer says, "I wasn't suicidal." His implication is that, similarly, McCandless was not suicidal.

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?

McCandless met Stuckey at the hot springs at a public park and asked for a ride. Stuckey refused, saying his company did not allow drivers to pick up hitchhikers. But after about a half-hour of conversation, Stuckey changed his mind and offered to give McCandless a ride up to 500 miles.

2. How far did Stuckey take McCandless?

He gave McCandless a ride all the way to Fairbanks, about 1,000 miles.

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

He found McCandless to be appealing, friendly, and well-educated. McCandless talked a lot about his sister. He admitted that he did not get along well with his parents, noting that his father had been a bigamist although he “was a genius, a NASA rocket scientist.” McCandless was very clear that he “wanted to prove to himself that he could make it on his own, without anybody else’s help.”

4. What preparations did McCandless make for his trip while he was in Fairbanks?

He bought 10 pounds of rice, a book on local edible plants, a light .22 caliber gun for hunting, and ammunition.

5. What two requests did Stuckey ask of McCandless, and what did Stuckey regret later?

He asked McCandless to send him a postcard when he left Alaska. He also gave McCandless his credit card number, and asked him to call his parents. Later, Stuckey regretted that he did not get McCandless parents’ phone number and call them himself.

6. What was ironic about McCandless’s route out of Fairbanks, when he passed the Geophysical Institute?

The Institute had a large satellite dish designed to receive data from orbiting satellites equipped with the specialized radar that Walt McCandless had developed. Mr. McCandless had actually worked at that Institute when the station was being built.

7. How does the author know about what McCandless did once he went into the wild?

His information comes from the journal McCandless started and the photos that were developed from McCandless’s camera.

8. How did McCandless get across the Teklanika River and to the abandoned bus?

The river had thawed, so he could not cross on ice bridges; instead, he had to wade in water that most likely came up to his thighs.

9. Krakauer states that when McCandless crossed the Teklanika, “he was crossing his Rubicon.” What made his crossing of the river such a fateful decision?

McCandless assumed that the river would be at the same level or lower when he wanted to walk out of the wild. Where he was from, rivers swelled in the spring but became shallower as the summer heat set in. He did not know that thawed water upstream would make the Teklanika a deep, swift, and dangerous torrent that would be impossible to cross .

10. In addition to a mouse, what animals did McCandless shoot for food?

He shot “squirrel, spruce grouse, duck, goose, and porcupine.” He also killed a ptarmigan, and numerous birds.

11. Describe the problems McCandless encountered after shooting the moose.

He struggled to cut up it into pieces for smoking, and he had to keep the fires going, all the while fighting off flies and mosquitoes that were attracted to the exposed meat. He made stews with the internal organs, and he tried to smoke large hunks of meat, not knowing that in Alaska people cut the meat into thin strips and air-dried them. The smoking fires were not sufficient to smoke the large amount of meat, and much of the moose rotted. He had to lay out the rotting meat for the wolves. In the end, he wrote, “I now wish I had never shot the moose. One of the greatest tragedies of my life.”

12. Explain the meaning of the simile in the quote, “. . . like some unemployed janitor who’d gone to Reno and won a million-dollar jackpot.”

Krakauer makes the comparison to illustrate that McCandless’s acquisition of the moose was a windfall that provided him with something he didn’t have but needed to survive—food.

13. The author says that a sense of well-being had returned to McCandless in July, after the moose incident, but he then experienced “the first of two pivotal setbacks.” What was it?

McCandless decided to walk out of the wilderness, but he found that he could not cross the river, which had flooded the trail and become dangerously swift.

Chapter Seventeen: The Stampede Trail

Vocabulary

arable – appropriate for farming
Bedouin – a member of a nomadic desert tribe
confluence – joining, coming together
coppice – a grove
gauging – measuring
gothic – remote and threatening
hauteur – snobbishness; superiority
hydrologists – scientists who study water and inhabitants
incandescent – glowing
livid – wild; angry
massif – a major mountain range
métis – a person of racially mixed heritage
miasma – fog
naïve – innocent
Oedipal – emotional attachment to a parent of the opposite sex—one who is treated by a doctor in the mental health field
scabbard – a sheath for holding a knife
shank – a narrowed piece of ground
sustenance – enough food and water for survival
tableau – a scene or picture
terra ...incognita – a Latin term meaning unknown land
ungulate – a hoofed animal, such as a moose, goat, deer, or caribou
voyeur – spy; interloper

1. Why did Krakauer go to the bus where McCandless died?

He wants to see if the locale would help him understand the motivation and struggles McCandless experienced and to see if the area would provide clues about McCandless's death.

2. What did Krakauer take to the scene that McCandless did not have?

He took a detailed map, with a scale of one inch to one mile, that showed the elevation and land configurations. In addition, he brought three companions to help him.

3. What did they encounter when they reached the river, and why was the time of year important?

They were at the river a year and a day after McCandless died, so they assumed that the river would look similar to the way it did when McCandless tried to cross it to get out.

4. How did the author and his companions get across?

They could not cross where McCandless turned back because of the fury of the river. They hike a half-mile downstream to use a cable that spanned the river. The cable and attached basket were part of an old gauging station that was once used to track the seasonal changes of the river.

5. How does Krakauer describe the hike to the bus and the area that McCandless would have lived in?

Because it is remote and not frequented by people, the area does not have clear trails, and the bush is thick. Hiking through it is challenging and unpleasant—they saw evidence of grizzly bears in the area—and the author found the heavy growth to be threatening, smothering, and unsettling.

6. What was the purpose of the lengthy discussion about whether McCandless shot a moose or a caribou?

Krakauer is trying to show that McCandless actually knew quite a bit about local animals, and that he was not the inexperienced, unqualified interloper that many people claimed after they read the article in Outside.

7. Describe the interior of the bus where McCandless died.

The mattress where McCandless died was still in the bus, along with the rest of his gear, some books, Jim Gallien's boots, pots and dishes, the scabbard Ron Franz gave him a toothbrush and toothpaste, the crown that he had broken from his tooth, an old grizzly skull, a stove, two pairs of jeans, and other personal items.

8. What effect did the interior of the bus have on Krakauer?

He found being inside the bus very uncomfortable, it gave him the sensation that he had intruded into a private place where he had no business. He perceived the presence of Chris McCandless while in the bus, and he found it disturbing and suffocating. He left to go outside, free his mind, and fill his lungs with fresh air.

9. What is the story of Sir John Franklin, and why is it inserted here?

Franklin was a British explorer who made three trips to Alaska. Unprepared for the first trip, his men ran out of food, ate shoes and deer hide, and finally engaged in cannibalism. Several of his men died, and all were near death when they were rescued. The second trip was less notable, but on the third trip, he and the whole party of 128 vanished, again because of lack of adequate preparation, equipment, and food. The story is intended to show the severity of conditions faced many years later by McCandless and to emphasize the assertion made by many Alaskans who read the Outside article, that McCandless was not only naïve, but also arrogant in thinking that he could conquer such difficult conditions when he was so lightly equipped.

10. What did Krakauer conclude about McCandless after reviewing the Franklin story?

Krakauer concluded that McCandless tried to live off the country but was not prepared with adequate knowledge, experience, or equipment. Krakauer argued that McCandless was not arrogant, nor did he assume that the trip was without risk. Krakauer's argument was that McCandless, like many young men, as the path to adulthood.

11. How does the author's friend, Roman, fit into the story?

Krakauer uses the example of his friend, Roman, to show that young men who take risks (as Roman did) are praised and respected when the risks are successful. He wants to contrast this to McCandless, who was criticized by many Alaskans when his risky behavior ended in death.

Chapter Eighteen: The Stampede Trail

Vocabulary

aboriginal – native; early
alkaloids – bitter, often poisonous, organic bases occurring naturally in some plants
curare – an alkaloid that is poisonous and causes muscles to relax
decumbent – a plant that lies on the ground
emaciation – extreme thinness due to lack of nutrition
emetic – something that causes vomiting
fecund – rich; fertile
feral – wild, undomesticated
glucose – a sugar
gristle – sinew
hoary – bleached or white with age
inarticulate – unable to communicate in a clear way
insidiously – subtly dangerous
mescaline – an alkaloid that causes hallucinations
munificence – plenty
neurological – affecting the central nervous system
precipitous – steep; rapid
spectrographic – the analysis of the spectrum of elements in a sample
strychnine – a poisonous alkaloid

1. What was Chris McCandless's situation when he returned to the bus on July 8th after finding that he could not cross the river and return to the larger world? Based on his situation, what do you think he planned to do next?

He had plenty of food—berries and small game—and the weather was mild. He must have just accepted his situation—neither knowing nor fearing what was ahead.

2. What does Krakauer cite as “the mistake that pulled [McCandless] down”?

McCandless apparently ate something that made him terribly ill and compromised his health. His journal noted, “EXTREMELY [sic] WEAK. FAULT OF POT. SEED. MUCH TROUBLE JUST TO STAND UP. STARVING. GREAT JEOPARDY.”

(Note: [sic] means that the misspelling of “extremely” appears in the text.)

3. What makes the author think that McCandless had changed in the previous few days or weeks and was ready to re-enter the world?

McCandless had written in the text of Doctor Zhivago, the last book he read, noting "HAPPINESS ONLY REAL WHEN SHARED." This would be a significant observation for someone who had sought happiness in the communion of the individual and nature.

4. What did the author think poisoned McCandless?

He believes that McCandless ate the poisonous seeds of the wild potato, a plant whose roots he had probably been eating since he arrived in Alaska. The seeds contain alkaloids, which acted as a natural poison.

The hypothesis is that the seeds develop an alkaloid coating to keep animals from eating the them and making the plant extinct. When McCandless ate the seeds, they made him sick over a period of time, blocking his body's ability to metabolize other foods he ate, so he began to starve to death in spite of the fact that he was, at first, still finding food. As he weakened, he did not have the strength to search for food, and his decline became more rapid.

5. What was the last achievement McCandless noted in his journal?

He noted that he had survived for 100 days in the wilderness.

6. What else did he include in the same journal entry, and what does this entry reveal about his state of mind?

McCandless also said, "BUT IN WEAKEST CONDITION OF LIFE. DEATH LOOMS AS SERIOUS THREAT. TOO WEAK TO WALK OUT, HAVE LITERALLY BECOME TRAPPED IN THE WILD. -NO GAME." This entry shows that he recognized his condition, he was fully rational, and he accepted the reality that he would probably die there.

7. What did McCandless mean by, "NO GAME," in the above quote?

He meant that there was no game for him to shoot, that he had not seen or shot the small game (squirrels, birds) that he had been eating. The quote does not mean that his time had been a game but that the game was over.

8. Why does Krakauer put in the information about cabins a few miles away that were vandalized?

While some owners believed that McCandless broke into their cabins, the Park Service did not agree, and Krakauer includes this part of the story to argue that McCandless would have gone to the cabins to try to save himself if he knew they were there, but he did not know about them, so he did not go there when he began to get sick.

9. McCandless did not start a forest fire to draw attention. Why?

Because no planes flew over the area during the time Krakauer was there, he believes McCandless knew that planes would not spot the smoke. More importantly, however, is Carine McCandless's statement that "Chris would never, ever, intentionally burn down a forest, not even to save his life. Anybody who would suggest otherwise doesn't understand the first thing about my brother."

10. What are the symptoms of starvation, and how does the starvation cause death?

Answers will vary, but should include some of the following information: Pain is frequent and severe as muscles waste. Dizziness, heart irregularity, and a pervasive feeling of cold are also present as the heart (a muscle) and the circulatory system deteriorate. Exhaustion and convulsions are present, often accompanied by hallucinations. However, according to Krakauer, at the end of life, "the suffering is replaced by a sublime euphoria, a sense of calm accompanied by transcendent mental clarity."

11. Describe the last picture Chris McCandless took of himself and explain what this image may reveal about him.

He is shown as exceptionally thin, with a "skeletal" look, but his face appears different: "he is smiling in the picture," and in Krakauer's opinion, "Chris McCandless was at peace..."

Epilogue

Vocabulary

altimeter – an instrument that shows how high above the earth an aircraft has climbed
anomalous – unusual, out of context, an exception from the norm

1. Who was on the trip described in the Epilogue? What was the purpose of the trip?

Chris McCandless's and Krakauer took a helicopter to the site where McCandless died. His parents decided that, as part of their healing process, they needed to see the spot where he died in an effort to gain understanding of their son.

2. How did McCandless's parents react to the prospect of the visit?

Walt McCandless was anxious about it, acting irritable and edgy, but Billie felt comfortable—peaceful, even—about visiting the site.

3. How did McCandless's parents react when they saw the bus in which their son died?

His mother said she thought it was beautiful; reminded her of the area where she grew up. His father said he did not like Alaska, but he admitted that "the place has a certain beauty," and added, "I can see what appealed to Chris."

4. How did Billie McCandless assess her son's death?

She said, "He must have been very brave and very strong, at the end, not to do himself in."

5. How did Walt and Billie McCandless memorialize their son?

Walt placed a simple brass plaque inside the bus, and Billie arranged some local flowers as a memorial. They also brought a suitcase filled with emergency food, first-aid, and survival supplies, which they left on the bus to help others.

Author's Note and Chapter One: The Alaska Interior

Vocabulary

asceticism – existence stripped bare of any luxury or indulgence
divergent – going in different directions
enigma – a mystery; something that is difficult to understand or explain
fulminated – ranted; criticized in an energetic way
moral rigor – extreme attention to ethical questions and shadings
muskeg – boggy areas, especially those where peat is formed
renunciation – turning away from or against
shards – broken pieces
transcendent – beyond the bounds of normal experience
unsullied – pure, clean

1. What is the purpose of the Author's Note?

2. What are Krakauer's credentials for writing *Into the Wild*?

3. What is the personal history of Chris McCandless?

4. What themes does Krakauer introduce in the Author's Note?

5. What is the purpose of the quoted material at the start of Chapter One?

6. Who is Alex?

7. Who is Jim Gallien, and how did he meet McCandless?

8. What was Gallien's assessment of McCandless?

9. What kind of advice did Gallien give McCandless?

10. What was McCandless's response to Gallien's offer?

11. What did McCandless give Gallien, and what was McCandless's behavior toward the older man?

12. What did Gallien give McCandless?

13. Why did Gallien decide not to alert the authorities about McCandless?

14. Gallien's statement that McCandless would "probably get hungry pretty quick and just walk out to the highway. That's what any normal person would do," is an example of the literary device of irony. What is ironic about the statement?

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”?

4. What was considered to be the cause of Chris McCandless's death?

5. How did the police know the body was that of Chris McCandless?

Chapter Three: Carthage

Vocabulary

abstraction – an idea or concept, rather than something tangible
altruistic – motivated purely by charity or kindness
anthropological – relating to the study of cultures
apartheid – the legalized separation of people of different races
clapboard – overlapping wooden boards or shingles
contrite – repentant
estranged – not close to; emotionally separated from
grain elevator – a building used to elevate and store grain
hyperkinetic – overactive
in stir – in jail
itinerary – a list of destinations on a trip
jetsam – items cast overboard from a ship; cast-offs
mawkish – idealized; sickeningly romantic
mien – the appearance or behavior
odyssey – a long, complicated journey
onerous – heavy; burdensome
plebeian – common; low-level
stasis – slowness; balance
surrogate – a substitute
tendrils – curls
visage – the face
vulnerability – the capacity to be bruised or hurt; tenderness

1. Who is Wayne Westerberg?

2. Describe Westerberg's first encounter with McCandless, including the hospitality McCandless was offered.

3. Local color is introduced when a writer uses regional or colorful terms to present an image of a distinct area or culture. The terms leather tramp and rubber tramp qualify as examples of local color. What culture do they describe, and what is the difference between rubber tramps and leather tramps?

4. When does Westerberg encounter McCandless again?

5. What kind of worker was McCandless, and how did Westerberg evaluate him?

6. Why did the author say that McCandless found a “surrogate family in Westerberg and his employees”?

7. Why did McCandless leave Carthage?

8. What evidence does Krakauer give that McCandless continued to be fond of Carthage and consider Westerberg his friend?

9. How does the reader know that *War and Peace* was important to McCandless?

10. Describe McCandless's early years and family life.

11. What was McCandless's financial background?

12. What clues did McCandless give that he was out of step with the commercialism of contemporary society?

13. How does the reader know that Chris McCandless went on long trips alone in his car?

14. How did McCandless's parents find out that he had left Atlanta?

15. What change did McCandless make that symbolized the new life he expected to build after he left Atlanta?

Chapter Four: Detrital Wash

Vocabulary

angularity – sharpness

concave – hollowed out

inimical – hostile

physiologically – relating to the health of internal organs

sensorily – relating to the five senses

1. The head note to this chapter concludes that people go to the desert “not to escape but to find reality.” How does this statement apply to McCandless?

2. What was the motivation for abandoning the Datsun, and why was the find of the car important?

3. For what purpose did the rangers decide to use the Datsun?

4. What was ironic about the rangers' use of the Datsun?

5. Who is Jan Burres, and how did she figure into McCandless's travels?

6. Why did Jan Burres feel an attachment to McCandless?

7. How did McCandless's parents learn where he was, and what did they do with the information?

8. What did McCandless's parents learn from the investigator?

9. What did McCandless buy when he was in Topock, Arizona, and where did he get the money?

10. Describe the trip McCandless took with the canoe.

11. How did McCandless get to the ocean?

12. This chapter contains numerous excerpts from the journal McCandless kept. What is noticeable about the writing in his account of his Mexican adventure?

13. What did McCandless do when he gets back into the U.S.?

14. What did McCandless retrieve when he returned to the Detrital Wash?

15. Existentialism is a philosophy that emphasizes the individual's responsibility and free will to direct the course of their life. What existential conclusion does McCandless reach when leaving Las Vegas?

Chapter Five: Bullhead City

Vocabulary

bourgeois – materialistic
constituents – members of a community who vote to elect their leaders
denizens – residents
espoused – claimed to champion
fatuous – foolish, ridiculous
ideologue – someone who follows a defined set of ideas or way of thinking
lumpen – crude or ignorant people
oxymoronic – containing a contradiction (e.g., jumbo shrimp)
porous – having holes or gaps that allows something to pass through or be absorbed
primordial – the basic or primitive developmental level; fundamental
rheumy – runny; watery
sedentary – inactive; lacking exercise
turgid – heavy; graceless

1. What did McCandless do after he left Las Vegas in May 1991?

2. What kind of life did McCandless lead in Bullhead City?

3. How did the other McDonald's employees regard McCandless?

4. How did he find the trailer?

5. In a letter to Jan Burrese, McCandless assessed Charlie. What did he think of the older man?
- _____
- _____
- _____
6. When Krakauer found Charlie and interviewed him, how did Charlie assess McCandless?
- _____
- _____
- _____
7. What events occurred when McCandless left Bullhead City?
- _____
- _____
- _____
8. Describe the conditions and the residents of the Slabs. Note some of the local color that makes this community memorable.
- _____
- _____
- _____
9. Using the swap meet as a springboard, Krakauer talks about McCandless's love of books, especially the work of Jack London. What attracted McCandless to Jack London's work?
- _____
- _____
- _____
10. What character traits and skills does Jan Burrese recount about McCandless?
- _____
- _____
- _____

11. What was Jan Burres's reaction to McCandless's idea of going to Alaska?

12. What was Burres's assessment of McCandless's ability to survive in Alaska?

Chapter Six: Anza Borrego

Vocabulary

arroyos – dried creek beds
bajada – plain, open land
creosote – a desert plant with a thick, sticky resin
desiccated – dried out
filigree – a lacy pattern
geothermal – heated by the temperature of the earth
harangues – rants; going on and on about something
hegira – a pilgrimage
nexus – an intersection
ocotillo – a flowered dessert plant
phantasmal – filled with delusions
platted – laid out on a plat or topographical map
prodigious – plentiful; huge
pseudonym – fake name or alias
sink – a lowland
snafu – a disaster

1. Who was Ron Franz, and how did he enter the story?

2. What does Krakauer think about the relationship between Franz and McCandless?

3. What is Anza-Borrego?

4. What is the Salton Sea?

5. How did McCandless and Franz meet, and what area did McCandless show Franz?

6. What is Oh-My-God Hot Springs? What literary term can be associated with the name?

7. What was the life story of Ron Franz?

8. How did the relationship between the older man and McCandless develop?

9. What role did leatherworking take in their relationship?

10. How did Franz and McCandless part company?

11. After leaving San Diego without finding work, McCandless made his way to Seattle, enjoying a new kind of transportation. What was it, and what were his comments about it?

12. From Seattle, McCandless returned to California. What was this second visit to Ron Franz like?

13. Franz made a family-oriented request of McCandless. What was it, and how did McCandless respond?

14. What was the tragedy of Ron Franz's life?

15. The author gives a brief character analysis of McCandless after recounting that Franz dropped him off in Colorado. What does the author say about McCandless?

16. From Carthage, McCandless sent Franz a long letter with advice and a summation of his philosophy. What did McCandless say about life, and what did he advise Franz to do?

17. How did Ron Franz respond to this letter?

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

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

Chapter Seven: Carthage

Vocabulary

ambivalence – a neutral reaction; indecisiveness
astute – insightful; sharp
canted – slanted
celibate – a deliberate state of sexual inactivity
corollary – a natural consequence or inference from known data
grubstake – money and/or supplies for a trip
maw – a large, intimidating opening
milo – a form of sorghum, is a grain that is used in foods and sweeteners
polarization – separation; divisiveness
succor – aid and comfort
surfeit – an excess

1. Why was Wayne Westerberg annoyed?

2. How did Westerberg summarize McCandless and his skills?

3. Who is Gail Borah, and what did she have to say about McCandless?

4. What is the author's analysis of the relationship between McCandless and his father?

5. The Krakauer goes on to comment on McCandless's sex life. What does he conclude?

6. The author includes three incidences of foreshadowing at the end of this chapter. What are they?

7. What is suggested by these examples of foreshadowing?

Chapter Eight: Alaska

Vocabulary

academia – the world of education

alpinists – specialists in climbing high and challenging mountains

asceticism – a pared-down existence without many worldly goods

Athapaskan – a local Alaskan population with their own language and culture

banalities – meaningless comments

bight – a small bay formed by a curve in the shoreline

burlesque – a ridiculous or extreme interpretation

cliché – an overused expression, example, or type

countercultural – against established norms of a culture

eremitic – hermit-like or reclusive

histrionic – overly dramatic

hubris – overblown pride

linguistics – the study of, the formation and development of languages

opprobrium – criticism; judgment

paucity – scarcity

pseudoliterary – a false display of scholarship

recondite – obscure; difficult for most people to understand

seine – fish with nets

1. What kind of reaction did Krakauer receive about his article in *Outside* magazine?

2. Why does the author include the story of his encounter with the man called the “Mayor of Hippie Cove”?

3. What is the purpose of including the full story of Gene Rossellini?

4. What motivated the author to include the story of John Waterman?

5. What are some parallels in the story of John Waterman and Chris McCandless?

6. What are some differences between the stories of Waterman and McCandless?

7. What purpose does the story of Chris McCunn serve in the narrative?

Chapter Nine: Davis Gulch

Vocabulary

anchorites – hermits
atavistic – exhibiting characteristics of distant ancestors or of early man
currachs – lightweight boats developed in Ireland
defile – a route notable for its narrowness; a gorge
desiccated – dried-out
ephemeral – fleeting; dying quickly
esthete – one who seeks beauty
esthetics – the philosophy that beauty is an important basis of moral good
graffito – personal markings in public spaces, similar to graffiti
hogan – a log and mud shelter characteristic of the Navajo
insinuated – worked one's way in
ludicrous – ridiculous
matrix – a grid
mythographers – those who develop a myth about another person
nom de plume – a French word meaning pen name
petroglyphs – carvings in rock walls
pictographs – pictures from an earlier era drawn or painted on a rock wall
pot-sherds – broken bits of pottery
stratum – a layer of rock in a larger formation
talus – a natural land form caused by accumulated rocks and dirt
veracity – truth

1. Summarize story of Everett Ruess.

2. What are the main theories about how Ruess died?

3. Ken Sleight has studied the story of Everett Ruess and discussed Chris McCandless with the author. What is Sleight's conclusion about the two young men?

Chapter Ten: Fairbanks

Vocabulary

VHF – very high-frequency radio

1. What information appeared in the *New York Times* about the death of Chris McCandless?

2. What information was Jim Gallien able to give the police?

3. How did Wayne Westerberg learn that McCandless was dead?

4. What did Westerberg do after finding out that the dead hiker was McCandless?

5. How did the Social Security number help identify McCandless?

6. What responsibility did Sam have to face after identifying Chris McCandless from photos?

Chapter Eleven: Chesapeake Beach

Vocabulary

aperture – an opening
arcane – specialized and unusual; known to only a few
chastened – corrected, reformed
concocted – put together; made up
conical – shaped like a cone
entrepreneurial – characteristic of starting a business
gorilla tuck – a crouched position used in skiing
helices – spiral-shaped
loathe – unwilling
mercurial – changeable, as is the element mercury
morass – a quagmire, bog
ostensibly – for the sake of appearances
panache – style, flair
rancor – bitterness
scudding – pushed by the wind
sparring – fighting
Tolstoyan – following the beliefs of the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy
trajectory – the path of a moving object through space
vagaries – uncertainties

1. When this chapter opens, the rhythm of the story changes, and the reader is not provided with the description of Sam McCandless telling his father and step-mother that Chris McCandless is dead. Why would the author leave out an important event in the story? How does the reader know that some time has elapsed since McCandless's parents learned of his death?

2. This is obviously a first-hand account of a visit by the author to McCandless's parents. Why did he visit them?

3. What is the purpose of giving biographical information on Walt McCandless?

4. What illustrates the confusion Walt McCandless feels about the choices his son made after leaving college?

5. What was unique about the sleeping bag Chris McCandless's body was found in, and why would it have particular emotional importance?

6. What was the emotional significance of the guitar Chris McCandless abandoned near the yellow Datsun?

7. Cite some of the possible causes of friction between Chris McCandless and his father, as revealed in this chapter.

8. Summarize the passage late in this chapter that foreshadows further breakdowns in the family's relationship.

Chapter Twelve: Annadale

Vocabulary

anomalous – unusual; inconsistent
carrel – a desk in a library or other learning center
choler – anger
confrères – close friends
extemporaneous – impromptu; done without planning
hypocrite – a person who does or says one thing but or says something else
idiosyncratic – peculiar; unpredictable in style
monomania – being fixated on a single idea
pellucid – allowing light to shine through
sanctimonious – falsely appearing holy or moral
scrupulously – carefully

1. Why does Krakauer go into such detail about the speech and gift Chris McCandless gave his father at the high school graduation party?

2. Where did McCandless go the summer after he graduated from high school, and what did his parents ask him to do while traveling?

3. Why did McCandless lose so much weight while he was on the road?

4. What did McCandless obtain in his travels, supposedly for his own protection?

5. How does the first year at Emory go for Chris?

6. What did he do the next summer, after his freshman year at Emory?

7. What happened when Walt McCandless asked Chris to show him how the computer program worked?

8. What did McCandless do during the summer after his sophomore year at Emory? What did his sister say about his ability to make money?

9. Why did McCandless relationship with his parents deteriorate that summer?

10. What did Chris McCandless learn about his father, his mother, and their history?

11. What was McCandless's view of the government?

12. What was his initial plan for the summer after his junior year at Emory, and what did he end up doing that summer?

13. When his mother wrote to ask him if he thought it was right to ignore his family, McCandless replied angrily to his sister. What caused his anger?

14. Reactions to the prolonged absence of Chris McCandless varied in his family. Describe how his sister and his parents reacted to his absence.

15. In July 1992, Billie McCandless had a moving experience relating to her son. What was it?

Chapter Thirteen: Virginia Beach

Vocabulary

anorectic – excessively and dangerously thin due to intentionally starving oneself;
another term of anorexic
apologia – the defense or explanation of one's position or actions
fatuous – extremely foolish

1. This chapter opens with a quotation from an essay by John Haines. What is the purpose of including this quotation?

2. What kind of life did Carine McCandless live when the author met her?

3. How did Carine learn that her brother had died?

4. How did she react to the news?

5. What task did Carine and her husband take on for the family after learning that Chris McCandless had died?

6. How did Carine and her parents respond to food after learning that Chris McCandless had died of starvation?

7. A month after Carine returned from Alaska, her mother looked at snapshots from McCandless's life. What is it that she could not understand?

Chapter Fourteen: The Stikine Ice Cap

Vocabulary

abyss – a void; the depth of nothingness
bald – a blank area unpopulated by vegetation
bergschrund – a crevasse formed by a split in the ice
carapace – a shell-like exterior coating
chutzpah – nerve; confidence; arrogance
cirque – an open area shaped like a half-circle and having steep sides
comlier – more beautiful
crampons – metal prongs used for climbing on ice
crevasses – deep openings in a glacier or ice floe
cyanide – a swift-acting poison
dearth – a shortage of; lack
diorite – a kind of rock that forms into small granular crystals
dunning – persistent
exfoliated – scrubbed free of debris
existential scabs – figurative wounds made by repeated questions about the nature of man and his place in the world
extricated – got out
fjordlike – like the narrow fingers of the sea that characterize the coast of Norway
frost feathers – thin, unstable accumulations of frost
glaciologist – one who studies glaciers
gunwale – the top of a boat's side
halogen – a group of elements including fluorine and chlorine
inebriated – drunk
inveigled – cadged and begged for
Kerouac – the author of *On the Road* and a member of the Beat Generation
labyrinthine – having a complex, maze-like pattern; like a labyrinth
madrigal – a bare sound, without accompaniment of any kind
melodramatic – overly emotional
molybdenum – a strong, light metal that can be shaped with precision
Nietzsche – the 19th century German author who believed that humans had to recognize the meaninglessness of existence to triumph over it
nordwand – the north wall of a mountain
penitente – a pilgrim seeking penitence through a difficult journey or physical task
phantasmagoria – a fantastic visual phenomenon of extended figures and shapes
plastic – sculpted
psycho-neurotic – relating to a mental illness
rime – granular ice created when clouds or fog become supercooled and precipitate out
skates – pallets or storage packets
stinted – spare in growth; stunted
scattershot – random; not organized
seracs – sharp points where ice juts out of a glacier into peaks
sublimity – beyond thought; outstandingly grand
superterranean – above the ground
thrummed – pulsed; vibrated
unhandselled – without tokens of good luck; unforgiving
whiteout – conditions of blowing snow and ice that prevent good vision

1. To what extent is this chapter about Chris McCandless?

2. What is the purpose of this chapter? How does it differ in point of view from earlier chapters?

3. What parallels does Krakauer draw between himself and McCandless?

4. What is the purpose of including allusions to Nietzsche and Kerouac?

5. What was Krakauer's plan for climbing in Alaska? How does this echo one of his themes?

6. What are the circumstances of Krakauer's departure from Boulder, where he was working as a carpenter?

7. How did Krakauer get to Alaska?

8. What kind of gear did Krakauer have, and how did he carry it?

9. What good idea did Krakauer spend the last of his money on after he arrived in Alaska?

10. How did he obtain the after the pilot couldn't find him?

11. What was Krakauer's climb like? How did he use local color to describing his climb?

12. What did Krakauer say about the challenge of hazardous climbing?

13. Where would the reader expect the story to go next?

Chapter Fifteen: The Stikine Ice Cap

Vocabulary

acid – smelling harsh or bitter
autocratic – dictatorial; not allowing negotiation
bivouac sack – a lightweight covering or shell that allows a camper to sleep outside a tent
bivvy – slang for bivouac, a temporary camp without shelter
calamitous – disastrous
cirrus – flattish clouds formed by ice crystals
condolence – sympathy
contingent – dependent upon
entanglement – involvement
escapade – a caper; adventure
fly – an extra piece of fabric that forms a second roof on a tent
hectored – nagged
hubris – arrogance; excessive pride
malevolent – with evil intention; threatening
metastasized – grown new colonies
patina – the outer layer
pharmacopoeia – a pharmacy full of
reconnaissance – a preview of a trip or route
spindrift – a strong wind
spindrift avalanches – snow slides caused by strong wind rather than by falling rock
supplanted – replaced
surreal – intensely irrational
thwart – to frustrate, prevent success
Tlingit – one of the groups of Native Americans
verglas – glacial ice; heavy glacier-like ice as in an ice storm
volatile – explosive
volition – free-will

1. What happened when Krakauer returned to his tent after abandoning his quest to scale the north face of the Devil's Thumb?

2. Whose tent had Krakauer burned?

3. What did Krakauer say about his father?

4. Picking up the story of his experience on the glacier, what did Krakauer decide to do?

5. What happened on Krakauer's next attempt to reach the summit?

6. What does Krakauer say about the possibility of being killed while trying to climb the Devil's Thumb?

7. What did Krakauer decide to do after giving up on finding a successful route to the summit on the north side?

8. What did he say about the summit? What did he do while on the summit?

9. What did Krakauer learn when he returned to the town of Petersburg?

10. What comparisons does Krakauer draw between himself and Chris McCandless?

11. Why does the author believe that McCandless was not suicidal?

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?

4. What preparations did McCandless make for his trip while he was in Fairbanks?

5. What two requests did Stuckey ask of McCandless, and what did Stuckey regret later?

6. What was ironic about McCandless's route out of Fairbanks, when he passed the Geophysical Institute?

7. How does the author know about what McCandless did once he went into the wild?

8. How did McCandless get across the Teklanika River and to the abandoned bus?

9. Krakauer states that when McCandless crossed the Teklanika, "he was crossing his Rubicon." What made his crossing of the river such a fateful decision?

10. In addition to a mouse, what animals did McCandless shoot for food?

11. Describe the problems McCandless encountered after shooting the moose.

12. Explain the meaning of the simile in the quote, “. . . like some unemployed janitor who’d gone to Reno and won a million-dollar jackpot.”

13. The author says that a sense of well-being had returned to McCandless in July, after the moose incident, but he then experienced “the first of two pivotal setbacks.” What was it?

Chapter Seventeen: The Stampede Trail

Vocabulary

arable – appropriate for farming
Bedouin – a member of a nomadic desert tribe
confluence – joining, coming together
coppice – a grove
gauging – measuring
gothic – remote and threatening
hauteur – snobbishness; superiority
hydrologists – scientists who study water and inhabitants
incandescent – glowing
livid – wild; angry
massif – a major mountain range
mètis – a person of racially mixed heritage
miasma – fog
naïve – innocent
Oedipal – emotional attachment to a parent of the opposite sex—one who is treated by a doctor in the mental health field
scabbard – a sheath for holding a knife
shank – a narrowed piece of ground
sustenance – enough food and water for survival
tableau – a scene or picture
terra ...incognita – a Latin term meaning unknown land
ungulate – a hoofed animal, such as a moose, goat, deer, or caribou
voyeur – spy; interloper

1. Why did Krakauer go to the bus where McCandless died?

2. What did Krakauer take to the scene that McCandless did not have?

3. What did they encounter when they reached the river, and why was the time of year important?

4. How did the author and his companions get across?

5. How does Krakauer describe the hike to the bus and the area that McCandless would have lived in?

6. What was the purpose of the lengthy discussion about whether McCandless shot a moose or a caribou?

7. Describe the interior of the bus where McCandless died.

8. What effect did the interior of the bus have on Krakauer?

9. What is the story of Sir John Franklin, and why is it inserted here?

10. What did Krakauer conclude about McCandless after reviewing the Franklin story?

11. How does the author's friend, Roman, fit into the story?

Chapter Eighteen: The Stampede Trail

Vocabulary

aboriginal – native; early
alkaloids – bitter, often poisonous, organic bases occurring naturally in some plants
curare – an alkaloid that is poisonous and causes muscles to relax
decumbent – a plant that lies on the ground
emaciation – extreme thinness due to lack of nutrition
emetic – something that causes vomiting
fecund – rich; fertile
feral – wild, undomesticated
glucose – a sugar
gristle – sinew
hoary – bleached or white with age
inarticulate – unable to communicate in a clear way
insidiously – subtly dangerous
mescaline – an alkaloid that causes hallucinations
munificence – plenty
neurological – affecting the central nervous system
precipitous – steep; rapid
spectrographic – the analysis of the spectrum of elements in a sample
strychnine – a poisonous alkaloid

1. What was Chris McCandless's situation when he returned to the bus on July 8th after finding that he could not cross the river and return to the larger world? Based on his situation, what do you think he planned to do next?

2. What does Krakauer cite as "the mistake that pulled [McCandless] down"?

3. What makes the author think that McCandless had changed in the previous few days or weeks and was ready to re-enter the world?

4. What did the author think poisoned McCandless?

5. What was the last achievement McCandless noted in his journal?

6. What else did he include in the same journal entry, and what does this entry reveal about his state of mind?

7. What did McCandless mean by, "NO GAME," in the above quote?

8. Why does Krakauer put in the information about cabins a few miles away that were vandalized?

9. McCandless did not start a forest fire to draw attention. Why?

10. What are the symptoms of starvation, and how does the starvation cause death?

11. Describe the last picture Chris McCandless took of himself and explain what this image may reveal about him.

Epilogue

Vocabulary

altimeter – an instrument that shows how high above the earth an aircraft has climbed

anomalous – unusual, out of context, an exception from the norm

1. Who was on the trip described in the Epilogue? What was the purpose of the trip?

2. How did McCandless's parents react to the prospect of the visit?

3. How did McCandless's parents react when they saw the bus in which their son died?

4. How did Billie McCandless assess her son's death?

5. How did Walt and Billie McCandless memorialize their son?

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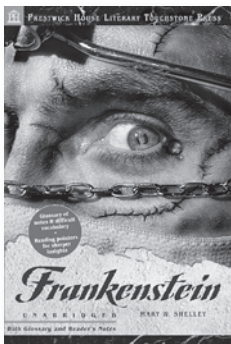
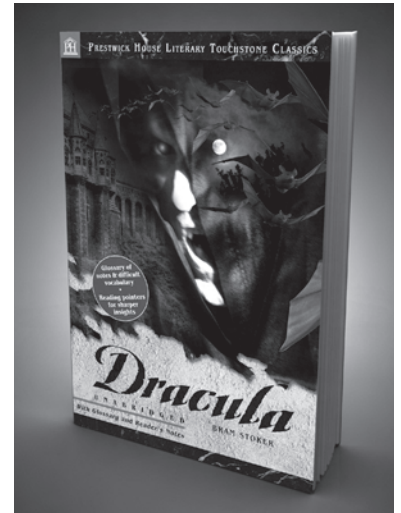
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