

**Reflections:**

*A Student Response Journal for...*

# *Into the Wild*

*by Jon Krakauer*

written by Carrie Thiel

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*Into the Wild*

**Note to the Teacher**

The teacher should be advised that there are instances of profanity and vulgarity in *Into the Wild*. This should be taken into account when determining what grade level is appropriate for teaching the novel.

**Author's Note**

1. Something about the Alaskan wilderness draws Chris McCandless to it, even to the point of giving up everything he owns so can go there to pursue a more independent life—one in which he lives off of the land and apart from society.

Based on what you've seen in movies, on television, in books and magazines, or on the Internet, free write for several minutes describing everything you know about Alaska and/or wilderness areas in general. Be as descriptive as you can, and include as many facts and details as you can recall.

2. Shortly after his college graduation, and without telling his family or friends, Chris gives up everything—family, friends, money, college, his given name, his possessions—in search of a transcendent experience. He feels as though something important is missing from his life, some deeper meaning to his existence. Look up the word “transcendent” in a dictionary.

Think about what it means, and then write a paragraph or two to explain why you think people might believe they could have a transcendent experience in a place like the Alaskan wilderness.

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3. Chris had studied the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy and had come to see him as a role model of how one should live. Tolstoy's simple life and views of asceticism particularly spoke to Chris and played a part in why he left his comfortable life behind to search for a different lifestyle. Research Tolstoy's life, looking specifically for information about his ascetic lifestyle and why he lived that way.

Once you've found the information about Tolstoy, write an essay in which you explain what he believed and how he lived out his beliefs. Then discuss whether you would like to live that way, and give reasons for your opinion.

### **Chapter One: The Alaska Interior**

4. Imagine you are going to spend time in an Alaskan wilderness area in the middle of spring just as Chris does, when winter-like weather could still be an issue. Make a list of all the necessities you would want to take with you so that you could be as prepared as possible for your trip. Now, keeping in mind that you only have one backpack in which to carry your supplies, refine your list even further, carefully considering which items you absolutely must have, and those you will be forced to leave behind. Estimate how long you think you could safely stay in the wilderness area based on your supplies and the cold Alaskan climate. Write that estimate and explain your reasons for it at the bottom of your list.
5. Chris begins his Alaskan adventure near the Denali National Park. Research the Denali National Park region, writing down facts about its weather, geography, and facilities during April. Use that information to write an email that a park communications person might write in response to someone planning a backpacking trip into the Denali region, who has inquired about such things. Be specific in explaining to the backpacker what conditions to expect as well as what one should bring to be prepared and safe out in the wilderness.

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6. As part of his attempt to leave his former life behind, Chris changes his name to Alex. Imagine you have decided to change your name as a way to reflect a change of lifestyle, attitude, or beliefs.

Write a journal entry in which you state what your new name will be and why you chose it. Also, write about changes in your life this new name signifies. Express why you have decided to make these changes. Describe what about your old way of thinking or living wasn't working and what you hope will be changing in your life besides your name.

7. Chris feels confident he will be able to handle any situation that might arise in the Alaskan wilderness, even though Jim Gallien tries to warn him otherwise. In an essay, describe a time you didn't listen to advice from someone who seemed to know better than you. Tell what the situation was—describe the circumstances, the person, and the setting. Explain how it all turned out and whether you now believe you did the right thing by ignoring the advice you were given. Cite specific examples from your experience to illustrate your explanation and opinions.

### **Chapter Two: The Stampede Trail**

8. Several people come upon Chris's dead body in the abandoned bus before someone finally contacts the authorities to investigate what happened to him.

Imagine you are a newspaper reporter who hears about the discovery of a mysterious dead body, and you have been assigned to cover the story. Write a newspaper article using the journalistic approach of telling the who, what, where, when, why and how of a story. Using only the facts as they are given in this chapter, write as detailed an account as you can.

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9. From *White Fang* by Jack London:

*Dark spruce forest frowned on either side the frozen waterway. The trees had been stripped by a recent wind of their white covering of frost, and they seemed to lean toward each other, black and ominous, in the fading light. A vast silence reigned over the land. The land itself was a desolation, lifeless, without movement, so lone and cold that the spirit of it was not even that of sadness. There was a hint in it of laughter, but of a laughter more terrible than any sadness—a laughter that was mirthless as the smile of the Sphinx, a laughter cold as the frost and partaking of the grimness of infallibility. It was the masterful and incommunicable wisdom of eternity laughing at the futility of life and the effort of life. It was the Wild, the savage, frozen-hearted Northland Wild.*

Imagine you are left alone for days in the place described in the above passage from London's novel. Write a journal entry in which you describe what it feels like physically and emotionally to be alone in such a place. Use descriptive details that relate to your five senses: sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. Explain how these sensory experiences affect your emotions, mood, and state of mind in such a harsh landscape.

10. The couple from Anchorage who first stumble upon Chris's body find a note from him that says:

*S.O.S. I NEED YOUR HELP. I AM INJURED, NEAR DEATH AND TOO WEAK TO HIKE OUT OF HERE. I AM ALL ALONE, THIS IS NO JOKE. IN THE NAME OF GOD, PLEASE REMAIN TO SAVE ME. I AM OUT COLLECTING BERRIES CLOSE BY AND SHALL RETURN THIS EVENING. THANK YOU, CHRIS MCCANDLESS. AUGUST?*

Write a hypothetical transcript of the conversation these two people might have had upon finding this note, and in trying to decide what to do. Include important details about the surroundings, weather, and situation as well as their emotions as part of your narration of this dialogue. Be sure to include the reasons each person gives for wanting to handle the situation a certain way. You can make up names for the characters to make it easier to write as dialogue.

**Chapter Three: Carthage**

11. Look again in the book for descriptions of Chris, Wayne Westerberg, Walt McCandless, and Billie McCandless. In a separate paragraph for each character, describe the attributes of each character including appearance, age, personality, background, and anything else you can find. Then, for each character, list an actor or actress to play this person in a movie, if a new one were to be made from this book. Explain why you think each actor or actress would be perfect for each role.
  
12. Adopt the persona of Chris's father Walt, his mother Billie, or his sister Carine, and write a letter to an advice columnist explaining that you have learned that Chris has given away \$24,000 he had saved for law school, moved without telling anyone, and hasn't been heard from in three months. In your letter, describe not only the facts about what has happened, but your feelings about what Alex has done, too. Include your worries, fears, doubts, and hopes for him and for your family. End your letter by asking a specific question for some advice.

Then, as the advice columnist, write a response to this letter and explain why you offer the advice you do. Give a full, clear explanation of your reasoning.

13. Chris gave away 24,000 dollars he had saved for law school to a charitable organization called OXFAM America, which helps fight hunger. If you had \$24,000 to donate to a charity, which would you choose and why?

Write a letter to the charity you have chosen and in the letter, announce your decision to donate this large sum of money. State the reasons you have chosen this particular charity to which to contribute your money. Explain to the organization what you hope they will use your contribution for. If you can't think of any charitable organizations to which you would like to contribute, do some research on the Internet and find an organization whose mission you would support, if you had the money.

