



Summer Reading Assignment

English II Honors

Mrs. Mathes and Mrs. Villareal

In this course, we'll explore the topic of culture and its effect on identity formation, particularly in teens. As a starting point for our discussion, this summer we'd like you to read *Into the Wild* (1996) by Jon Krakauer. Equal parts adventure tale, coming-of-age narrative, social critique, and mystery, *Into the Wild* tells the true story of a young man named Chris McCandless who grew up in our nation's capital, came from an attentive, upper income family, received an excellent college education, and was described by many as motivated and personable. Despite, or perhaps *because of*, these advantages, Chris struggled to identify himself as an individual and to reconcile his social responsibilities with his personal goals and values. Ultimately, McCandless turned his back on his family, education, society, and all the material comforts of life to wander America as a vagabond—working odd jobs, making friends in low places, living life on his own terms. He reached the ultimate goal of his journey, Alaska, with the aim of living off the land for a time, and while he realized that dream in his first few weeks, a series of unfortunate events led Chris to die of starvation less than four months after his arrival in the Alaskan bush country.

Author Jon Krakauer is a journalist and the author of several well-known works of nonfiction including *Into Thin Air*, about an attempted ascent of Mt. Everest that ended in tragedy, and *Under the Banner of Heaven*, about Mormons in America. Krakauer became fascinated with Chris McCandless's story after he wrote an article for *Outside* magazine about the young man's unconventional life and mysterious death. *Into the Wild* chronicles Krakauer's attempt to understand more deeply what motivated Chris McCandless to seek out such extreme isolation and self-sufficiency by tracing McCandless's journey across the US and talking to the people he befriended as well as the family he left behind. McCandless's story (and Krakauer's book) has provoked passionate and varied responses: some people view Chris as a visionary who suffered a tragic end, while others dismiss him as an arrogant, self-centered man who got what he deserved.

Expectations for Completing Your Summer Reading

- Active, engaged reading is a **must** for this class, so **underline passages** that contribute meaningfully to your understanding of character, conflict, symbolism, and theme and **add notes in the margins** about **how/why these quotes are significant**. Try to focus on quotes that contain good concrete details and/or suggest an associative meaning.
- You'll find annotation less time consuming and more useful to you in class and in writing your paper if you are **selective** about what you underline and annotate. We've included a list of questions about the book below. **We recommend that you choose 1-2 of these topics before you begin reading the book, write them on the inside cover of your book, and annotate quotes that help you explore and develop a better understanding of these topics.** A well-annotated book will benefit your class participation and writing assignments, so start acclimating yourself to this expectation this summer.

- We also want you to keep a **reading journal** this summer in which you **elaborate on 4-5 of the quotes from the book** that you annotated. You may keep your journal on the computer or use a notebook—whichever you prefer—but **the entries you submit for a grade must be typed**. We’ve included a sample journal entry with this handout; **please organize your entries in the same way**. Each entry should include the **date** and the **chapter where your quote appears**. Divide your entry into **three columns**: in one, record specific quotes or events to which you are going to respond (include page numbers); in the second column, record your observations about the quote, focusing on connotations and associations of specific words and images, and in the third column suggest some ways in which your quote addresses one of the three main topics in the book (below).
- Aim to complete a journal entry after every **2-3 chapters of the book**. Focus on developing your understanding of one or more of the topics below so that you have excellent material for a paper.
- You will write an essay on *Into the Wild*, so again we encourage you to read carefully, annotate, and challenge yourself to move beyond summary in your journal entries.

Topics to annotate for as you read (Choose 1-2 on which to focus your annotations):

- An excerpt from the epigraph that begins chapter four reads: “To the desert go prophets and hermits; through the deserts go pilgrims and exiles.” What are the connotations of the desert that make it a goal for prophets and pilgrims? What do you think Chris’s “desert” was and why? Which of these types—prophet, hermit, pilgrim, or exile—best fits Chris’s purpose and personality? Did he fit any of these categories?
- Chris doesn’t get along at all with his parents, and he doesn’t have much respect for arbitrary figures of authority. However, he does connect with and respect many other people over the course of his travels. Who are the people who make the greatest impact on Chris, and what traits/values does Chris find attractive about these people and their lives? What do they teach him that he believed his parents could not?
- One of the themes in this book is transformation and self-knowledge. What features of the culture Chris grew up in cause his desire for transformation? Why doesn’t he fit in? How does Chris believe the “vagabond” lifestyle will help him achieve transformation and self-knowledge? Why does he believe he must go as far as Alaska and with minimal supplies to achieve his goal? Is Chris successful, in your opinion, in achieving transformation?

Sample Journal Entry on Next Page

Sample Reading Journal Entry

Date: June 22, 2012

Into the Wild, chapter 6

<p>“make a radical change in your lifestyle and begin to boldly do things which you may previously never have thought of doing, or been too hesitant to attempt. So many people live within unhappy circumstances and yet will not take the initiative to change their situation because they are conditioned to a life of security, conformity, and conservation, 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. If you want to get more out of life, you must lose your inclination for monotonous security and adopt a helter-skelter style of life that will at first appear to you to be crazy. But once you become accustomed to such a life you will see its full meaning and its incredible beauty.”</p>	<p>“Radical, bold”—traits Chris admires because they are strong, active, different from the norm</p> <p>“Take the initiative to change their situation”—he <i>believes</i> people have the power within themselves to change their lives; kind of his personal philosophy</p> <p>“Conditioned to a life of security, conformity, and conservation”—“conditioned” suggests that we are part of an experiment—that we are being controlled by forces larger than ourselves.</p> <p>“Appear to give one peace of mind”—distinction between appearance vs. reality; Chris believes life in the “real world” is the illusion distracting us from the “full meaning” of life.</p> <p>Monotonous security vs. helter-skelter—he uses a lot of opposites; not a lot of gray area</p>	<p>Chris’s rich language and use of polar opposites in his letter to Ronald Franz reveals how strongly he feels that life in society is damaging while life on the road is liberating and fulfilling.</p> <p>Words like “radical, bold, initiative, adventurous” are all positive, active words that contrast words like “hesitant, conditioned, security, and conformity” to show how he views these two lifestyles differently.</p> <p>He also asserts that the conformist lifestyle is “damaging,” which explains why he felt he had to leave it behind—it was a matter of self-preservation.</p> <p>Chris feels we need to break our social conditioning and take the initiative to change our lives. Only then can we truly live.</p>
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