

ENGLISH 11 SUMMER READING ASSIGNMENT

Into The Wild, by Jon Krakauer [ISBN- 978-0-385-48680-4]

Summer Greetings Rising Juniors,

If you are taking English 11: American Literature next Fall, your summer reading book will be *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer. This nonfiction work has been chosen deliberately as a transition from English 10 to English 11, which surveys the development of American Literature. *Into the Wild* tells the story of college graduate Chris McCandless, who set out on a quest of self-discovery and journeyed across America, eventually making it to the wilderness of Alaska. On his journey, Chris sought to live freely and to develop his own unique identity without conforming to society's expectations. His quest, his exploration of the American landscape, and his questioning of society's values all parallel the explorations of major writers and characters that we will study in American Literature. As you read, try to understand what motivated Chris and other American adventurers like him. There is a film version of *Into the Wild*; you are encouraged to watch it as a supplement to (but not a replacement for) your reading.

As you read, you may find that reading slowly and even rereading sections is helpful to gain a clear understanding of the work. Keep a pen, pencil or highlighter nearby as you read, and underline or annotate any passages that pertain to the issues raised in the study guide questions that follow. If you read the book early in the summer, these marginal notes and highlighted areas will allow you to skim the book again before the school year starts, refreshing your memory without rereading the entire book. Feel free to also highlight anything that seems important to you even if it does not appear in the list of questions. These questions will provide a foundation for discussion at the beginning of the school year.

A few notes about this book's structure may help your reading. First, each chapter begins with an epigraph (or two). Do not skip over these quotes; read them carefully! The quotes emphasize essential ideas about Chris and his journey. Some of the authors quoted, such as Thoreau and Jack London, will be studied this year as part of your junior English class. Second, many chapters are titled based on the locations that Chris or the author visited on their journeys. At the start of each chapter, take a moment to look up its location on a map (the book contains several, and so use them!). Third, several chapters offer stories of other adventurers to provide context for Chris's journeys. Chapters eight and nine describe several wilderness explorers, and chapters fourteen and fifteen detail Krakauer's own high-risk ascent of a peak in Alaska. Krakauer was a relatively unknown author when he wrote *Into the Wild*, but he is now an internationally acclaimed writer. Many of your parents have probably read his book *Into Thin Air*.

These reading tips and questions are designed to encourage you to read closely, to provide direction so that you get the most out of this assignment, and to help you prepare to share your thoughts about your reading when you return to school in August.

DUE DATE: FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

Reading Questions:

1. Why does Krakauer become so fascinated with the story of Chris McCandless? Read the *Author's Note* at the start of the book to understand the story and Krakauer's interest.
2. Consider the different names Chris used during his travels. How does Chris's use of different names fit with his goals on his cross-country journey?
3. What details in the story suggest Chris's own motives for doing what he did? Highlight any passages that seem to explain these motives.
4. Consider the epigraphs, especially those by Thoreau and London, that begin each chapter. How do these passages reflect key elements of Chris's story? How might Krakauer be using these passages to show that Chris's death was an accident? How do the passages help convey the larger purpose of Krakauer's writing of this book?
5. In ch. 8, Krakauer uses the word *pilgrim* to describe Chris. What does *pilgrim* mean, and what is a *pilgrimage*? Why does Krakauer characterize Chris with these terms, and with other religious diction? How do Chris and Krakauer compare to other pilgrims in the book?
6. Chapters 14 and 15 focus upon Krakauer's quest to climb Devils Thumb. How does this personal anecdote of Krakauer's climbing experience convey his sense of McCandless's intentions? To Krakauer, what are those intentions of Chris? Why does Krakauer use the symbol of the cross and the word *penitente* to represent himself? What does Krakauer learn in his solo climb above Witches Cauldron? What is significant about the Gothic Cathedral simile and nightmare? How do these passages and the religious symbolism help Krakauer represent the larger issue of the book?
7. How does Chris change, according to Krakauer, from his stance on relationships in Chapter 6 to his new view of happiness in Chapter 17? In Chapter 18, what does the final self-portrait photo of Chris reveal about the way Krakauer interprets his character? What does the emphasis on words such as *sublime* and *transcendent* and words such as *bless* and *beatific* and *monk* imply about his character and Krakauer's, too?
8. Consider watching the film and listening closely to the lyrics of the soundtrack to the film. How do scenes from the film help you understand the complexity of Chris? How do the songs "No Ceiling" and "Guaranteed" and "Wolf" best represent his life experiences and the memorable traits of his character?