



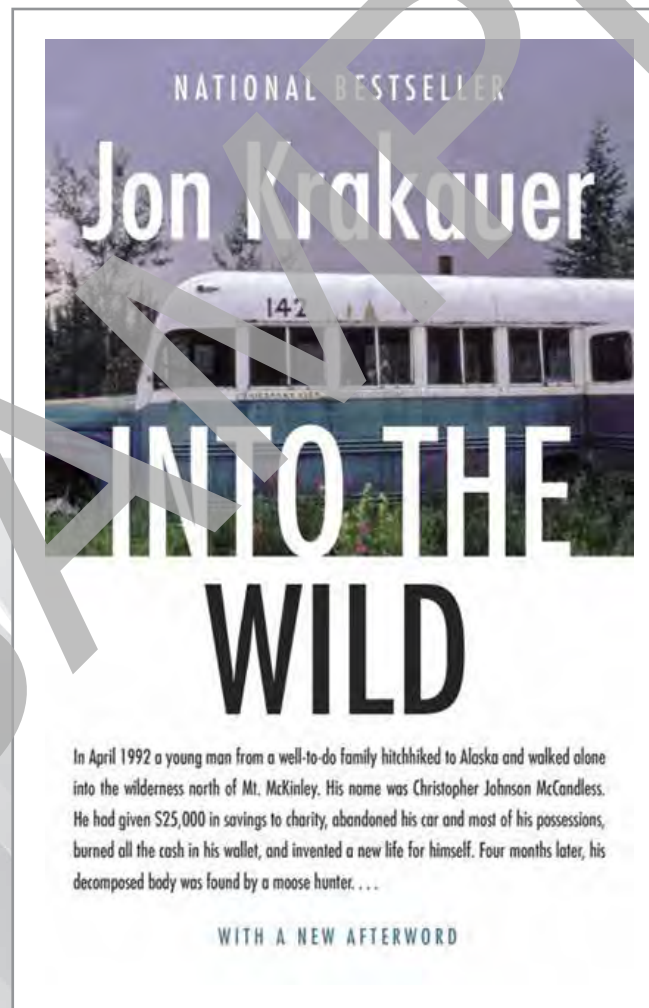
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Into the Wild

Jon Krakauer



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Vocabulary

atavistic
disdain
fauna
taciturn
panorama
mercurial
rancor
panache
tyrants
morass
monomania
hypocrite

Discussion Questions

1. Who was Everett Ruess, and how was Chris similar to him? What do you think happened to Ruess? (*Ruess, like Chris, was a young man who graduated from college, had his own set of stringent and lofty morals, and took many solo trips across the country, exploring remote parts of America. Also like Chris, Ruess deliberately “punished his body, strained his endurance” [p. 90] and, despite warnings, journeyed into dangerous places without proper preparation in order to challenge himself. According to the author, Ruess was “just as romantic as McCandless, if not more so, and equally heedless of personal safety” [p. 92]. Ruess called himself “Nemo” after Captain Nemo in Jules Verne’s Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea. A search party eventually stumbled upon his burros and markings, but they could not find Ruess or any of his belongings. Answers will vary. Discussion could cover the theories surrounding Ruess’s fate: murdered, fell while climbing, drowned, lived to an old age.*)
2. What dead ends did the police encounter while trying to discover Chris’s identity, and what was their first breakthrough? (*During the first week of investigating Chris’s case, the police had few clues. The blue sweatshirt Chris was wearing when he died bore the name of a towing company in California, but employees there had never heard of him. Chris’s diary was full of entries about the local flora and fauna, leading police to question whether or not Chris was a field biologist. The first break came when Jim Gallien read about the body in the newspaper and recognized parts of the story. He called the police and was able to provide information that had not been published in the newspaper. Police found a reference to Gallien in Chris’s diary, substantiating Gallien’s claims. Gallien told them that “Alex” said he came from South Dakota, which gave the police their first credible lead.*)
3. How did Wayne Westerberg help police locate Chris’s family? (*When Westerberg heard about “Alex” on the radio, he called the Alaskan State Troopers to tell them what he knew. Like with Gallien, the police were skeptical. Westerberg then found Chris’s old job application and reported his Social Security number. The troopers were able to trace the Social Security number to a permanent residence in Northern Virginia.*)
4. Describe Walt McCandless, and explain why you think it was difficult for Chris and Walt to get along. (*Chris’s father “is accustomed to calling the shots” [p. 105] and quickly takes control of people and situations. His moods can be dark, and he is easily angered. He is a very intense person, even when he is quiet. According to the author, “When Walt talks, people listen” [p. 105]. He is a self-made man who worked hard for his success. Answers will vary. Chris and Walt may not have gotten along because they are both stubborn and have very clear, yet very different, ideas about what is important in life. Walt is very dominant and controlling, and Chris was a free spirit who rebelled against the suffocating elements in his life. Ironically, both their similarities and differences drove them apart.*)
5. Who was Loren Johnson? How did Chris feel about this man, and why do you think he had such a strong connection to him? (*Loren Johnson was Chris’s maternal grandfather. He didn’t quite fit in with society; he was a truck driver but never held a job for long. He was “a woodsman, a self-taught musician, a writer of poetry” [p. 108], and he had great respect for animals and nature. His love of the wilderness made Chris respect and admire his grandfather. Answers will vary, but students should note that Chris also loved nature and refused to conform. He may have felt that he and his grandfather were kindred spirits.*)

6. How did Chris perform academically? What was the cause of any problems Chris had at school? (*Chris “was a high achiever” and “brought home A’s with little effort” [p. 109]. Anytime Chris had issues at school, it was due to his failing to follow the teachers’ instructions or conform to the rules/expectations of the classroom.*)
7. How did Chris’s ideas about college differ from his parents’? (*Chris didn’t want to go to college because he felt that “careers were demeaning” [p. 114], but his parents felt otherwise. All he wanted to do with his life was help people who were less fortunate, and he didn’t think he needed a college degree to do that. Chris’s parents were able to finally convince Chris to attend college by telling him that he could better help people by getting “some leverage” with a degree and a decent job.*)
8. How did Chris feel about money, and why was this unfortunate? (*Chris believed that “wealth was shameful, corrupting, inherently evil” [p. 115]. Chris was embarrassed by his parents’ extravagance, even though the family didn’t flaunt its modest wealth. Chris’s opinion of money was unfortunate because his parents struggled through poverty to attain financial success, and he was unable to fully appreciate that. Chris’s parents tried to provide their children with all that they had been denied, but Chris rejected these comforts. This outlook is also ironic because Chris “was a natural-born capitalist with an uncanny knack for making a buck...always an entrepreneur...” [p. 115].*)
9. What caused Chris’s “smoldering anger” toward his father? Do you agree with Chris’s assessment of his father and of the world in general? Why or why not? (*After Chris graduated from high school, he traveled out West by himself to discover more about his past and his relatives. During this trip, Chris learned a dark secret about his father: while married to Chris’s mother, his father maintained a relationship [and had one child] with his first wife, whom he had never legally divorced. His father’s disrespect and unconventional lifestyle infuriated Chris, and it reiterated his belief that his father was immoral. Chris seemed to equate a life of wealth and luxury with the flippant attitudes people had toward others, and “his sense of outrage over injustice in the world at large grew” [p. 123]. Answers will vary.*)

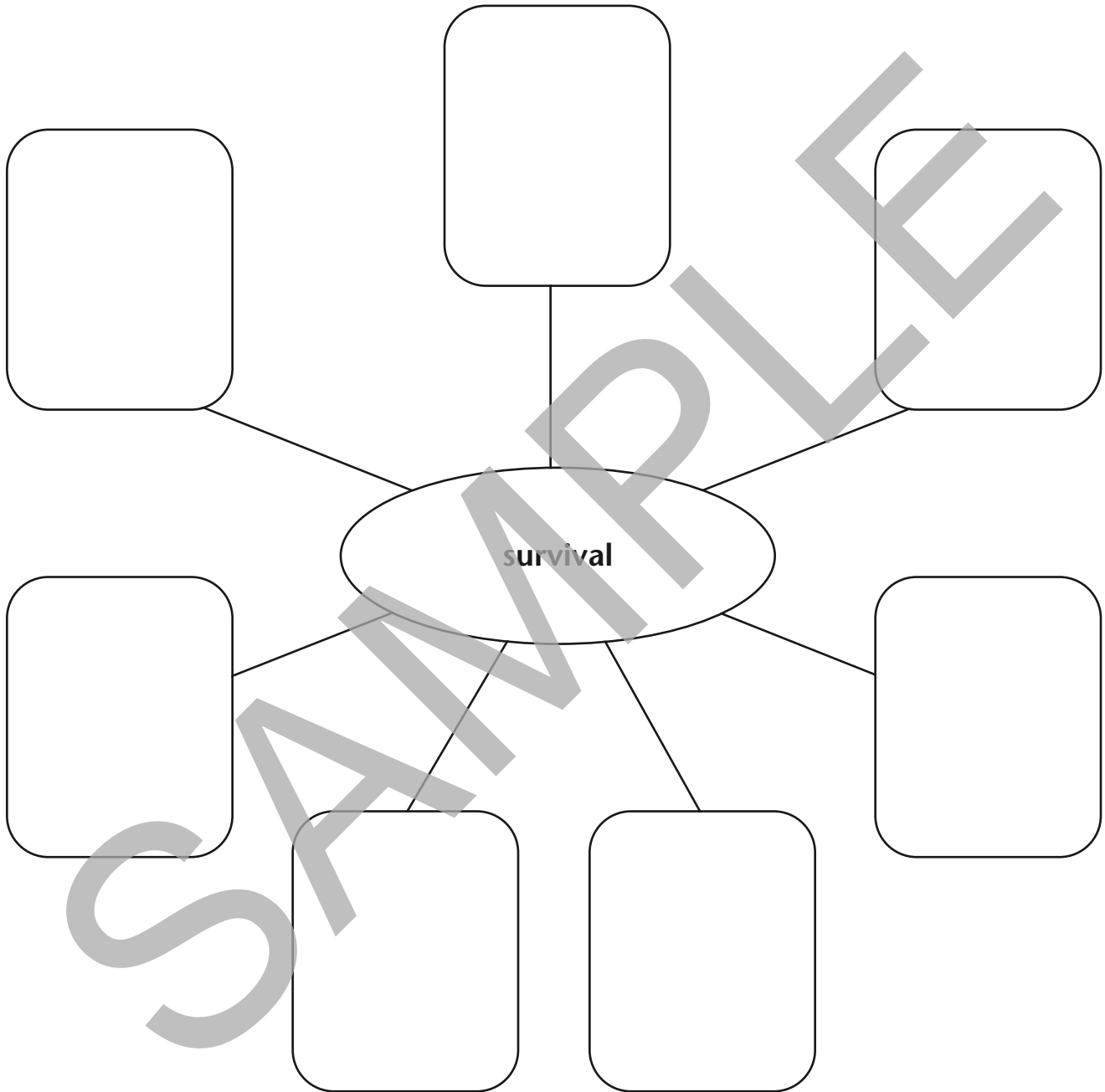
Supplementary Activities

1. Read the excerpt from *Doctor Zhivago* on page 103 of the book. Write a one-page reply stating whether or not you agree with the idea that humans feel the need to “surrender to some such ultimate purpose,” and provide reasons for your opinion.
2. Select an aspect of Chris’s personality as described in Chapters Eleven–Twelve. In a brief essay, explain how your own personality compares to Chris’s.

Chapters Thirteen–Sixteen

The author relates how Chris’s family found out about his death. They discuss memories of Chris and reflect on his motivation for taking such chances with his life. The author explains how he understands Chris’s headstrong mindset and his desire for the ultimate challenge by telling the reader about his own adventures at the Stikine Ice Cap. The focus then shifts back to Chris. Chris made his way up to Alaska, elated to finally be out in the wild. He came upon an abandoned bus, which he made his home, and enjoyed living and surviving on his own. After four months of living off the land, and satisfied with his adventure in the wild, Chris attempted to hike back out of the woods but was foiled by an overflowing river. He then returned to the bus to wait for safer conditions.

Attribute Web



Thought Bubble

Directions: In the graphic below, write what Chris may have been thinking as he lay sick and weak in the bus during his final days.

