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## **Sample MonkeyNotes**

**Note: this sample contains only excerpts and does not represent the full contents of the booknote. This will give you an idea of the format and content.**

# ***Into the Wild***

by

**Jon Krakauer**

**1996**



**MonkeyNotes Study Guide by Laurie Lahey**

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**\*Note: Throughout “Chris” and “Alex” will be used interchangeably to represent Chris McCandless, depending on which name he went by in each section\***

## **KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS**

### **SETTING**

This book follows the travels of Chris McCandless mostly in the western portion of the United States, as well.....

### **LIST OF CHARACTERS**

**Alex Supertramp / Chris McCandless** - Chris McCandless is the subject of this book. He grew up in the Washington D.C. metro area and attended Emory University. When he graduated college, he donated his money to charity and headed out West. Away from home Chris went by the alias “Alex” and adopted the moniker “Alexander Supertramp” while hiking. Chris died of starvation on a much anticipated stint in the Alaskan wilderness.

**Wayne Westerberg** - Wayne Westerberg employed McCandless in Carthage, South Dakota. McCandless became friends with Westerberg and enjoyed his time in South Dakota so much that he claimed South Dakota as his home thereafter. Westerberg was able to supply authorities with McCandless’s social security number when he was found dead, leading them to a positive identification.

**Walt McCandless** - Walt McCandless is Chris’s father. In later years, Chris became angry with Walt when he learned Walt had a child by his first wife after Chris had been born to Walt’s second wife.

**Billie McCandless** - Billie McCandless is Chris’s mother. She and Walt began a private consulting firm and became successful enough to give Chris and his sister privileged lives.

**Carine McCandless** - Carine is Chris’s younger sister, borne to Billie McCandless. Carine was very close to her brother and had a very tough time dealing with his death.

**Jim Gallien** - Jim Gallien delivers the hitchhiking McCandless to his final destination. Gallien tries to make McCandless change his mind about his plans. Gallien is certain that Alex, as McCandless calls himself, is not prepared for life in the Alaskan outdoors. Gallien even offers to buy him some decent gear, but Alex refuses. Gallien insists that Alex take his boots and his lunch for the day; Gallien gives Alex his phone number, telling him to call if he makes it out alive.

**Jan Burre** - McCandless meets Jan Burre and her boyfriend Bob, both transients, on the road. McCandless meets up with Jan and Bob a few times and keeps in touch with them periodically through post cards.

**Ronald Frantz** - Ronald Frantz gives “Alex” a ride to his camp at Oh-My-God Hotsprings. Frantz, who had lost his wife and only son some forty years earlier in a car accident, felt a connection with Alex. Frantz and Alex developed a relationship and spent a lot of time together. Frantz, who was a.....

Many additional characters are identified and discussed in the complete study guide.

### **SHORT PLOT/CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)**

This book moves back and forth in time, opening with its subject, Chris McCandless, on the last day anyone saw him alive. From there, Krakauer will investigate the tragic end to a life that had immense promise. He will interview people Chris met during his travels, Chris’s family and friends from Virginia, and authorities. Krakauer will also draw comparisons with other men who met similar fates in order to speculate about what

motivated Chris. Finally, Krakauer returns to the scene of Chris's death with companions and then again with Chris's parents.

*Into the Wild* opens with Jim Gallien driving through Alaska, when he sees a hitchhiker who looks as though he is eighteen years old. The hitchhiker is actually twenty-four years old and claims to be named Alex and to come from South Dakota. Alex seems to be carrying a light load for someone planning to live off the land for a few months, as he says he will do in Denali National Park. As Alex elaborates on his plan, Gallien tries to make him change his mind. Gallien is certain that Alex is not prepared for life in the Alaskan outdoors. Gallien even offers to buy him some decent gear, but Alex refuses. Gallien insists that Alex take his boots and his lunch for the day; Gallien gives Alex his phone number, telling him to call if he makes it out alive. The date was April 28, 1992

Krakauer fast-forwards to September 6, 1992 to a broken down bus in Denali National Park. Ken Thompson, Gordon Samel, and Ferdie Swanson visit the park to drive their ATVs. When they arrive at the bus, there is a couple from Anchorage that looks spooked. A bad smell comes from the bus. A note is taped to the bus, begging for help. Samel discovers a dead body inside the bus, wrapped in a sleeping bag. No one has room in his vehicle to remove the dead body. Another man, Butch Killian, arrives on the scene. Butch drives back toward the highway and alerts the authorities on his two-way radio. The next day, a police helicopter removes the body of Chris McCandless, five rolls of exposed film, the SOS note, and a diary with 113 entries. An autopsy reveals that McCandless starved to death; his corpse weighed only sixty-seven pounds.

Next, Krakauer introduces the people Chris met during his travels. He begins with Wayne Westerberg, a man who knew Chris McCandless as "Alex" before his death. Westerberg recounts the day he picked up Alex, who was hitchhiking. The weather was bad and Alex was ill-equipped, so Westerberg suggested he stay on with him for a while. Alex spent three days with Westerberg; before parting ways, Westerberg told.....

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY**

Jon Krakauer was born April 12, 1954 in Brookline, Massachusetts; although, his family moved to Oregon when he was just two years old. In 1976 he graduated from Hampshire College with a degree in Environmental Studies and married Linda Mariam Moore in 1980.

Krakauer is an experienced and accomplished mountain climber, as he describes in this book. He was published in the *American Alpine Journal* and began writing regularly for *Outside* magazine. His work.....

## **GENRE**

*Into the Wild* is work of non-fiction. It is important to note the differences between non-fiction writing such as *Into the Wild* and novels. A novel is a fictional narrative in which literary elements such as exposition, rising action, climax, denouement, and characterization are essential elements. *Into the Wild* is an.....

## **CHAPTER SUMMARIES AND NOTES**

### **CHAPTERS 1 - 3**

#### **Summary**

Chapter 1 opens with Jim Gallien driving through Alaska, when he sees a hitchhiker who looks as though he is eighteen years old. The hitchhiker is actually twenty-four years old and claims to be named Alex and to come from South Dakota. Alex seems to be carrying a light load for someone planning to live off the land for a few months, as he says he will do in Denali National Park. As Alex elaborates on his plan, Gallien tries to make him change his mind. Gallien is certain that Alex is not prepared for life in the Alaskan outdoors. Gallien even offers to buy him some decent gear, but Alex refuses. Gallien insists that Alex take his boots and his lunch for

the day; Gallien gives Alex his phone number, telling him to call if he makes it out alive. The date was April 28, 1992

Chapter 2 opens on September 6, 1992 at a broken down bus in Denali National Park. Ken Thompson, Gordon Samel, and Ferdie Swanson visit the park to drive their ATVs. When they arrive at the bus, there is a couple from Anchorage that looks spooked. A bad smell comes from the bus. A note is taped to the bus, begging for help. Samel discovers a dead body inside the bus, wrapped in a sleeping bag. No one has room in his vehicle to remove the dead body. Another man, Butch Killian, arrives on the scene. Butch drives back toward the highway and alerts the authorities on his two-way radio. The next day, a police helicopter removes the body of Chris McCandless, five rolls of exposed film, the SOS note, and a diary with 113 entries. An autopsy reveals that McCandless starved to death; his corpse weighed only sixty-seven pounds.

In Chapter 3 the reader meets Wayne Westerberg, a man who knew Chris McCandless as “Alex” before his death. Alex was hitchhiking one day. The weather was bad and Alex was ill-equipped, so Westerberg suggested he stay on with him for a while. Alex spent three days with Westerberg; before parting ways, Westerberg told Alex to find him if he ever needed work. A few weeks later, Alex found Westerberg and began working for him. Westerberg says that Alex was very intelligent and a hard worker. Alex moved on when Westerberg had to serve time for involvement with “black boxes.” Alex stayed in touch with Westerberg and as he traveled on, claimed he was from South Dakota.

Alex, or Chris, was really from Annandale, Virginia—the son of successful parents and a graduate of Emory University. Following his college graduation, Chris headed West in his second-hand Datsun. His family, not even his favorite sister Carine, had any idea he had gone.

## Notes

The opening chapters of this book read much like a novel’s exposition—the reader learns who the major characters are and what background information is necessary to understand the next chapters as they unfold. However, this story is not fiction because the people and events are real. Yet the reader should always be aware that Krakauer must make decisions about what events to discuss, what comparisons to make, and which journal entries and postcard messages to include. Each of these decisions attempts to provide a coherent picture of what happened to Chris McCandless; although that picture is necessarily false because this story could be told from a multitude of angles. Certainly McCandless’s mother would have told the story differently, as would his sister, or another journalist. Each of these decisions also characterizes Chris McCandless in a particular, albeit conflicted, manner. Krakauer will wrestle with who McCandless “actually” was throughout this book and draw his own conclusions.

The reader should note the way Krakauer begins the story: at the end. Thus we already know what happens to Chris McCandless and must wonder how someone with so much going for him could end up so tragically. This move generates suspense and is intended to keep the reader interested in the story through enticement. Krakauer, who previously wrote an article about McCandless for *Outside* magazine, will construct this story through interviews, McCandless’s journals, photographs, and letters, as well as secondary research on other adventurers.

## CHAPTERS 4 - 7

### Summary

In October, 1990—more than three months after McCandless left Atlanta—his Datsun was found abandoned at Lake Mead National Recreation Area by Park Ranger, Bud Walsh. Of course, without license plates, Walsh could not trace the car to McCandless. The rangers kept the car for driving around the park. Krakauer learns through his research that McCandless got caught in a flash flood with the car, which caused the battery to die. Instead of having to explain why his driver’s license and registration had expired, why he.....

## IMPORTANT / KEY FACTS SUMMARY

Title: *Into the Wild*

Author: Jon Krakauer

Date Published: 1996

Genre: Non-Fiction

Setting: Primarily in the western portion of the United States, as well as in Alaska, Mexico, and Virginia. The events in the book span various years but most important events take place in the 1980s and 1990s.....

## STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

When examining a piece of non-fiction writing, the reader should always be concerned with methodology. An author's methodology is the way he or she constructs the argument. This includes the sources the author uses as well as the way he or she presents the argument—what evidence the writer includes and the order in which the evidence is presented. The main reason for evaluating methodology is to consider the author's methodological assumptions and to decide for oneself if the argument is convincing.

In this work, Jon Krakauer primarily uses Chris McCandless's journal entries, photographs, and letters along with interviews of family, friends, and authorities, secondary research on other explorers, as well as his own personal experience to probe the life and death of Chris McCandless.

Krakauer begins *Into the Wild* with the last day McCandless was seen alive, followed by.....

## MEMORABLE QUOTES

Edition Used: Anchor Books, 1997

1. **"Livin' in the bush ain't no picnic."** Jim Gallien says this of people who think they can come to Alaska and live off the land (5).
2. **"I've given jobs to lots of hitchhikers over the years. Most of them weren't much good, didn't really want to work. It was a different story with Alex. He was hardest worker I've ever seen."** Wayne Westerberg says this of Chris's work ethic (17-18).
3. **"NEMO 1934."** Everett Ruess carves this into a stone slab and into several other locations throughout his travels (94).
4. **"He'd tell us to think about all the evil in the world, all the hatred, and imagine ourselves running against the forces of darkness, the evil wall that was trying to keep us from running our best."** Eric Hathaway, Chris's friend from high school, says this is how Chris motivated.....

## MEMORABLE QUOTES QUIZ

Match the quote (1 - 10) with the attribution (A - J) listed below

1. "He looked like those paintings of Jesus on the cross
2. "I have had a happy life and thank the Lord. Goodbye and may God bless all!"
3. "He'd tell us to think about all the evil in the world, all the hatred, and imagine ourselves running against the forces of darkness, the evil wall that was trying to keep us from running.....

A. Walk says this about where Chris died (202).

B. Eric Hathaway, Chris's friend from high school, says this is how Chris .....

## ANSWER KEY

1. H 2. J 3. B 4. C 5. F 6. A 7. I 8. D 9. G 10. E

## VOCABULARY

Mawkish—overly sentimental

Enigmatic—puzzling.....

## STUDY QUESTIONS - MULTIPLE CHOICE QUIZ

1. How old is Chris when Jim Gallien picks him up in Alaska?  
A. 18  
B. 24  
C. 29
2. What did the coroner determine Chris died from?  
A. Starvation  
B. Malaria  
Cancer.....

## ANSWER KEY

1. B 2. A 3. C 4. A 5. A 6. C 7. B 8. B 9. B 10. C 11. A 12. B 13. A 14. C 15. B

## ESSAY QUESTIONS - BOOK REPORT TOPICS TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION / IN-CLASS WRITING

### Chapters 1-3

1. How would you describe Krakauer's tone in this first chapter? Does he seem sympathetic toward Chris McCandless?
2. Why do you think Chris would have lied about his name and age to Jim Gallien?
3. Why would someone who was raised in a privileged manner want to hitchhike and live in the wilderness out West?

### Chapters 4-7

1. How would you describe Chris McCandless after reading this section?
1. For someone who claimed to be a loner, why did Chris befriend so many people?.....

## SUGGESTED TOPICS FOR TAKE-HOME ESSAYS

### Chapters 1-3

Krakauer will construct this story from some of McCandless's effects—journal entries, photographs, postcards, markings in the margins of books he read—as well as through interviews and research on men whose fates were similar to McCandless's. Do you think these are reliable sources? Why might some sources be more given to interpretation than others? Could Krakauer have.....

***END OF SAMPLE MONKEYNOTES EXCERPTS***

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