

***Into the Wild* Summer Reading Assignment**

Instructions: You should keep your answers to these prompts on notebook paper or in an online document that you can PRINT to be turned in the first week of school.

A note about plagiarism: this should be YOUR work that is written in YOUR own words. No credit will be given for plagiarized work.

For each epigraph (short quotes or statements at the beginning of the chapter), you are to write thoughtful responses regarding how you feel the epigraph pertains to the chapter.

Epigraph 1: August 27th, 1992 ‘Greetings from Fairbanks! This is the last you shall hear from me Wayne. Arrived here 2 days ago. It was very difficult to catch rides in the Yukon Territory. But I finally got here. Please return all mail I receive to the sender. It might be a very long time before I return South. If this adventure proves fatal and you don’t ever hear from me again I want you to know you’re a great man. I now walk into the wild. Alex.’ Postcard received by Wayne Westerberg in Carthage, South Dakota.”

Epigraph 2: “Jack London is King/Alexander Supertramp/ May 1992/ Graffito carved into a piece of wood discovered at the site of Chris McCandless’s death/ ‘Dark spruce forest frowned on either side of 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 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.’ Jack London/ White Fang”

Epigraph 3: “I wanted movement and not a calm course of existence. I wanted excitement and danger and the chance to sacrifice myself for my love. I felt in myself a superabundance of energy which found no outlet in our quiet life. Leo Tolstoy, ‘Family Happiness’ Passage Highlighted in one of the books found with Chris McCandless’s remains”

Epigraph 4: “It should not be denied...that being footloose has always exhilarated us. It is associated in our minds with escape from history and oppression and law and irksome obligations, with absolute freedom, and the road has always led west. Wallace Stegner, *The American West as Living Space*.”

Epigraph 5: “The desert is the environment of revelation, genetically and physiologically alien, sensorily austere, esthetically abstract, historically inimical...Its forms are bold and suggestive. The mind is beset by light and space, the kinesthetic novelty of aridity, high temperature, and wind. The desert sky is encircling, majestic, terrible. In other habitats, the rim of sky above the horizontal is broke or obscured; here, together with the overhead portion, it is infinitely vaster than that of rolling countryside and forest lands...In an unobstructed sky the clouds seem more massive, sometimes grandly reflecting the earth’s curvature on their concave undersides. The angularity of desert landforms imparts a monumental architecture to the clouds as well as to the land...To the desert go prophets and hermits; through deserts go pilgrims and exiles. Here the leaders of the great religions have sought the therapeutic and spiritual values of retreat, not to escape but find reality. Paul Shepard, *Man in the Landscape: A Historic View of the Esthetics of Nature*.”

Epigraph 6: “The dominant primordial beast was strong in Buck, and under the fierce conditions of trail life it grew and grew. Yet it was a secret growth. His newborn cunning gave him poise and control. Jack London, *The Call of the Wild*.”

Epigraph 7: “All Hail the Dominant Primordial Beast!/ And Captain Ahab Too!/Alexander Supertramp/May 1992/ Graffiti found inside the abandoned bus on the Stampede Trail”

Epigraph 8: “No man ever followed his genius till it misled him. Though the result were bodily weakness, yet perhaps no one can say that the consequences were to be regretted, for these were a life in conformity to higher principles. If the day and the night are such that you greet them with joy, and life emits a fragrance like flowers and sweet-scented herbs, is more elastic, more starry, more immortal,—that is your success. All nature is your congratulation, and you have cause momentarily to bless yourself. The greatest gains and values are farthest from being appreciated. We easily come to doubt if they exist. We soon forget them. They are the highest reality...The true harvest of my daily life is somewhat intangible and indescribable as the tints of morning or evening. It is a little star-dust caught, a segment of the rainbow which I have clutched. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, or Life in the Woods*/ Passage highlighted in one of the books found with Chris McCandless’s remains”

Epigraph 9: “There was some books...One was *Pilgrim’s Progress*, about a man that left his family, it didn’t say why. I read considerable in it now and then. The statements was interesting, but tough. Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.”

Epigraph 10: “It is true that many creative people fail to make mature personal relationships, and some are extremely isolated. It is also true that, in some instances, trauma, in the shape of early separation or bereavement, has steered the potentially creative person toward developing aspects of his personality which can find fulfillment in comparative isolation. But this does not mean that solitary, creative pursuits are themselves pathological...[A]voidance behavior is a response designed to protect the infant from behavioral disorganization. If we transfer this concept to adult life, we can see that an avoidant infant might very well develop into a person whose principal need was to find some kind of meaning and order in life which was not entirely or even chiefly, dependent upon interpersonal relationships. Anthony Storr, *Solitude: A Return to the Self*”

Epigraph 11: “It may, after all, be the bad habit of creative talents to invest themselves in pathological extremes that yield remarkable insights but no durable way of life for those who cannot translate their psychic wounds into significant art or thought. Theodore Roszak “*In Search of the Miraculous*”

Epigraph 12: “We have in America ‘The Big Two-Hearted River’ tradition: taking your wounds in the wilderness for a cure, a conversion, a rest, or whatever. And as in the Hemingway story, if your wounds aren’t too bad, it works. But this isn’t Michigan (or Faulkner’s Big Woods in Mississippi, for that matter). This is Alaska. Edward Hoagland, ‘Up the Black to Chalkyitsk’” Epigraph 13: “As to when I shall visit civilization, it will not be soon, I think. I have not tired of the wilderness; rather I enjoy its beauty and the vagrant life I lead, more keenly all the time. I prefer the saddle to the streetcar and star-sprinkled sky to a roof, the obscure and difficult trail, leading into the unknown, to any paved highway, and the deep peace of the wild to the discontent bread by cities. Do you blame me then for staying here, where I feel that I belong and am one with the world around me? It is true that I miss intelligent companionship, but there are so few with whom I can share the things that mean so much to me that I have learned to contain myself. It is enough that I am surrounded with beauty... Even from your scant description, I know that I could not bear the routine and humdrum of the life that you are forced to lead. I don’t think I could ever settle down. I have known too much of the depths of life

already, and I would prefer anything to an anticlimax. The last letter ever received from Everett Ruess, to his brother, Waldo, dated November 11, 1934”

Epigraph 14: “What Everett Ruess was after was beauty, and he conceived beauty in pretty romantic terms. We might be inclined to laugh at the extravagance of his beauty-worship if there were not something almost magnificent in his single-minded dedication to it. Esthetics as a parlor affection is ludicrous and sometimes a little obscene; as a way of life it sometimes attains dignity. If we laugh at Everett Ruess we shall have to laugh at John Muir, because there was little difference between them except age. Wallace Stegner, *Mormon Country*.”

Epigraph 15: “Dying in the Wild, A Hiker Recorded the Terror, Anchorage, Sept. 12 (AP)—Last Sunday a young hiker, stranded by an injury, was found dead at a remote camp in the Alaskan interior. No one is yet certain who he was. But his diary and two notes found at the camp tell a wrenching story of his desperate and progressively futile efforts to survive. The diary indicates that the man, believed to be an American in his late 20s or early 30s, might have been injured in a fall and that he was then stranded at the camp for more than three months. It tells how he tried to save himself by hunting game and eating wild plants while nonetheless getting weaker. One of his two notes is a plea for help, addressed to anyone who might come upon the camp while the hiker searched the surrounding area for food. The second note bids the world goodbye....An autopsy at the state coroner’s office in Fairbanks this week found that the man had died of starvation, probably in late July. The authorities discovered among the man’s possessions a name that they believe is his. But they have so far been unable to confirm his identity and, until they do, have declined to disclose the name. *The New York Times*/September 13, 1992”

Epigraph 16: “Everything had changed suddenly—the tone, the moral climate; you didn’t know what to think, whom to listen to. As if all your life you had been led by the hand like a small child and suddenly you were on your own, you had to learn to walk by yourself. There was no one around, neither family nor people whose judgment you respected. At such a time you felt the need of omitting yourself to something absolute—life or truth or beauty—of being ruled by it in place of the man-made rules that had been discarded. You needed to surrender to some such ultimate purpose more fully, more unreservedly than you had ever done in the old familiar, peaceful days, in the old life that was now abolished and gone for good. Boris Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, passage highlighted in one of the books found with Chris McCandless’s remains/ “Need for a Purpose” had been written in McCandless’s hand in the margin above the passage.”

Epigraph 17: “Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth. I sat at a table where were rich food and wine in abundance, an obsequious attendance, but sincerity and truth were not; and I went away hungry from the inhospitable board. The hospitality was as cold as the ices. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, or Life in the Woods*, passage highlighted in one of the books found with Chris McCandless’s remains. At the top of the page, the word ‘TRUTH’ had been written in large block letters in McCandless’s hand.”

Epigraph 18: “For children are innocent and love justice, while most of us are wicked and naturally prefer mercy. G.K. Chesterton”

Epigraph 19: “The physical domain of the country had its counterpart in me. The trails I made led outward into the hills and swamps, but they led inward also. And from the study of things underfoot, and from reading and thinking, came a kind of exploration, myself and the land. In time the two became one in my mind. With the gathering force of an essential thing realizing itself out of early ground, I faced in myself a passionate and tenacious longing—to put away though forever, and all the trouble it brings, all but the nearest desire, direct and searching. To take the trail and not look back. Whether on foot, on snowshoes or by sled, into the summer hills and their late freezing shadows—a high blaze, a runner track in the snow would show where I had gone. Let the

rest of mankind find me if it could. John Hines, *The Stars, the Snow, the Fire: Twenty-five Years in the Northern Wilderness*.”

Epigraph 20: “I wished to acquire the simplicity, native feelings, and virtues of savage life; to divest myself of the factitious habits, prejudices and imperfections of civilization;...and to find, amidst the solitude and grandeur of the western wilds, more correct views of human nature and of the true interests of man. The season of snows was preferred, that I might experience the pleasure of suffering, and the novelty of danger. Estwick Evans, *A Pedestrious Tour, of Four Thousand Miles, Through the Western States and Territories, During the Winter and Spring of 1818*”

Epigraph 21: “Wilderness appealed to those bored and disgusted with man and his works. It not only offered an escape from society but also was an ideal stage for the Romantic individual to exercise the cult that he frequently made of his own soul. The solitude and total freedom of the wilderness created a perfect setting for either melancholy or exultation. Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*.”

Epigraph 22: “Nature was here something savage and awful, though beautiful. I looked with awe at the ground I trod on, to see what the Powers had made there, the form and fashion and material of their work. This was that Earth of which we have heard, made out of Chaos and Old Night. Here was no man’s garden, but the unhandselled globe. It was not lawn, nor pasture, nor mead, nor woodland, nor lea, nor arable, nor waste land. It was the fresh and natural surface of the planet Earth, as it was made forever and ever,--to be the dwelling of man, we say,--so Nature made it, and man may use it if he can. Man was not to be associated with it. It was Matter, vast, terrific, --not his Mother Earth that we have heard of, not for him to tread on, or to be buried in,--no, it were being too familiar even to let his bones lie there,--the home, this, of Necessity and Fate. There was clearly felt the presence of a force not bound to be kind to man. It was a place of heathenism and superstitious rites,--to be inhabited by men nearer of kin to the rocks and to wild animals than we....what is it to be admitted to a museum, to see a myriad of particular things, compared with being shown some star’s surface, some hard matter in its home! I stand in awe of my body, this matter to which I am bound has become so strange to me. I fear not spirits, ghosts, of which I am one, --that my body might, --but I fear bodies, I tremble to meet them. What is this Titan that has possession of me? Talk of mysteries! Think of our life in nature,--daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it, --rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the solid earth! the actual world! the common sense! Contact! Contact! Who are we? where are we? Henry David Thoreau, ‘Ktaadn’”

Epigraph 23: “It is nearly impossible for modern man to imagine what it is like to live by hunting. The life of a hunter is one of hard, seemingly continuous overland travel...A life of frequent concerns that the next interception may not work, that the trap or the drive will fail, or that the herds will not appear this season. Above all, the life of a hunter carries with it the threat of deprivation and death by starvation. John M. Campbell, *The Hungry Summer*.”

Epigraph 24: “Now what is history? It is the centuries of systematic explorations of the riddle of death, with a view of overcoming death. That’s why people discover mathematical infinity and electromagnetic waves, that’s why they write symphonies. Now, you can’t advance in this direction without a certain faith. You can’t make such discoveries without spiritual equipment. And the basic elements of this equipment are in the Gospels. What are they? To being with, love of one’s neighbor, which is the supreme form of vital energy. Once it fills the heart of man it has to overflow and spend itself. And then the two basic ideals of modern man—without them he is unthinkable—the idea of free personality and the idea of life as sacrifice. Boris Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, passage highlighted in one of the books found with Christopher McCandless’s remains; underscoring by McCandless”

Epigraph 25: “Still, the last sad memory hovers round, and sometimes drifts across like floating mist, cutting off sunshine and chilling the remembrance of happier times. There have been joys too great to be described in words, and there have been griefs upon which I have not dared to dwell; and with these in mind I say: Climb if you will, but remember that courage and strength are nought without prudence, and that a momentary negligence may destroy the happiness of a lifetime. Do nothing in haste; look well to each step; and from the beginning think what may be the end. Edward Whymper, *Scrambles Amongst the Alps*”

Epigraph 26: “We sleep to time’s hurdy-gurdy; we wake, if we ever wake, to the silence of God. And then, when we wake to the deep shores of time uncreated, then when the dazzling dark breaks over the far slopes of time, then it’s time to toss things, like our reason, and our will; then it’s time to break our necks for home. There are no events but thoughts and heart’s hard turning, the heart’s slow learning where to love and whom. The rest is merely gossip, and tales for other times. Anne Dillard, *Holy the Firm*.”

Sustainability Connection:

***Think about the relevance of this novel and what McCandless was trying to accomplish.

Read through the following website: <https://www.epa.gov/sustainability/learn-about-sustainability>. In a well-written paragraph, explain how the journey of McCandless connects to this idea of sustainability and how his story can relate to sustainability for society today.