1. Why does Krakauer introduce each chapter with a quote from a renowned author (p. 9, 15, etc.)? What impact does that have on our understanding of McCandless and his story? What do these quotes do to focus our reading?

2. Why do you think Chris changed his name to Alex (p. 23)? What was he hoping for with this new identity? Beginning a new school year with new peers is an opportunity to reinvent yourself; in what ways may you do that at college?

3. We learn immediately that Chris dies during his journey, and the anecdotes and interviews are told in retrospective. Krakauer also presents the information about Chris in a non-chronological order. What is the effect of this narrative choice? What impact does this have on the reading process, compared to the film in which the story is told from beginning to end?

4. After graduating from college, Chris McCandless left Emory University with no intentions to return east (p. 22-23). What is Chris’s definition of independence or freedom? Are there any limitations or problems with that definition? How will you define independence and freedom when you leave home to come to college?

5. McCandless set out on a journey for which many believe he was ultimately unprepared. What do you think? As you embark on your college adventure, how will you ensure that you are properly prepared?

6. In Chris’s letter to Ronald Franz (p. 56-58), he encourages him to “adopt a helter-skelter style of life” of which each day is marked by a “new and different sun.” Is it possible to live fully without the extreme natural experiences that Chris seeks? How can you live your life fully while at college?

7. What do you think of McCandless’ assertion that “nothing is more damaging to the adventurous spirit within a man than a secure future” (p. 57)?

8. Many people concluded that McCandless was “mentally disturbed” and that he died a “foolish, pointless death.” (p. 71). Others, like Krakauer, are awed by his lofty ideals (p. 155). Was Chris McCandless courageous and noble, or a just another reckless idiot?


10. Why do you think Krakauer includes the section about other adventurers who had experiences or desires similar to Chris (p. 70-97)? How do these stories shape your opinions about Chris's actions?

11. Does the inclusion of Chris’ family story make you more or less sympathetic to him (p. 103-132)? Are readers supposed to sympathize or understand the position of his parents or sister? How do his feelings towards his family change throughout the book?

12. What are the different versions of family in the story? Consider both Chris's biological family and the families he creates for himself along the way.

13. To what extent does Krakauer’s own history as a young rebellious risk-taker color his judgment of McCandless (p. 133-156)? Does Krakauer’s own experience serve to enlighten his—or your—understanding of Chris?

14. Who or what is responsible for Chris McCandless’ death? Why do you think some people seem to despise Chris “so intensely” for dying in Alaska (p. 180)?

15. Chris’s journal refers to “taking refuge in nature” and he makes notes about the plants, animals, weather, and seasons. How would you describe Chris’s experience in nature and his draw to it? What have been your experiences in the natural world?” (p. 189)
16. What do you think Krakauer's goals were in writing the text? Is this an informational piece? A tragedy we should feel sad about? A cautionary tale?

17. Chris McCandless suggests that happiness is only real when shared (p. 189). What do you think of his revelation?

18. Chris's story remains popular almost 20 years after it happened. What do you think endures about his story? Why is it memorable? Can you think of any other "into the wild" type stories you have heard about or seen on the news? Would Chris’ story have mattered if he had lived?

19. What was Chris McCandless seeking? What do you think he hoped to discover? Did he succeed? How does his experience resonate with you?