

**Cultivating Space Within:  
Using Literature as a Springboard for an Understanding of Self**  
“You aren’t supposed to think about heavy-duty stuff in high school.”  
(quote from *Into the Wild* by John Krakauer)

**Grade Level:** 11<sup>th</sup> grade, English III G

**Topic:** Identity and Transcendentalism Introduction and Pre-assessment

**Time frame:** 4 non-consecutive days in class (with ongoing independent reading)

**Universal Concept:** Individual identity is strengthened through an awareness of one’s experiences and is communicated largely through verbal and written language.

**1. What students will Know, Understand, and Do**

I want my students to know that their endeavors in this lesson will require the following skills:

ELA.11-12.1	<b>Extend basic and technical vocabulary</b> using a variety of strategies, including: • analysis of an author’s word choice • use of related forms of words • analysis of analogous statements	RL.11-12.4 RI.11-12.4 L.11-12.4 L.11-12.5 L.11-12.6
ELA.11-12.33	<b>Participate in group and panel discussions, including:</b> • identifying the strengths and talents of other participants • acting as facilitator, recorder, leader, listener, or mediator • evaluating the effectiveness of participants’ performance	
ELA.11-12.6	<b>Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.</b>	

Students will know content-specific vocabulary from various nonfiction book *Into the Wild*. (See Appendix A)

**Understand**

- A. Language, both written and spoken, is a primary means through which people express their individuality.
- B. The concepts of Transcendentalism have manifested themselves in various aspects of society over the last 150+ years including environmentalism, civil rights, and other movements.

- C. Transcendentalism presents a progressive model of individual awareness (through *Self Reliance* and *The American Scholar*) adaptable to our own time.
- D. Factors that influence identity are both innate and external.
- E. The need to be both an individual and a member of a community is paradoxical.
- F. The assertion of individuality can cause family or social tension.
- G. The formation of individual identity within society is a complex process.
- H. The need for individuality and self-actualization is greater in some people than in others.
- I. Recognizing one's own uniqueness while maintaining commonalities with the extended community suggests intellectual strength.

### **Do**

- A. Students will define vocabulary and demonstrate their understanding of the words through quizzes requiring application.
- B. Students will write 3 Reader Response critical journals in response to the book. (See Appendix A)
- C. Students will participate in 3 Socratic Seminars corresponding to each reading section and journal assignment in which they will respond to a variety of possible questions as well as generate their questions. (see Appendix B)

### **2. Assessment**

I will evaluate students according to the following:

- A. Pre-assessment: Observation/participation during motivating hook.
- B. Formative: Their participation and attentiveness during discussion (see Appendix A, lesson 1)
- C. Formative: The quality of their Reader Response journals (see Appendix A, lesson 2)
- D. Summative: Vocabulary quizzes (see Appendix C)

### **3. Introduction**

- A. To maintain continuity, I will use the song lyrics below to introduce the lesson.

When I was young  
It seemed that life was so wonderful  
A miracle, oh it was beautiful, magical  
And all the birds in the trees  
Well they'd be singing so happily  
Joyfully, playfully watching me

But then they send me away  
To teach me how to be sensible  
Logical, responsible, practical  
And then they showed me a world  
Where I could be so dependable  
Clinical, intellectual, cynical

There are times when all the world's asleep

The questions run too deep for such a simple man  
Won't you please, please tell me what we've learned?  
I know it sounds absurd but please tell me who I am  
[ From: <http://www.elyrics.net/read/s/supertramp-lyrics/the-logical-song-lyrics.html> ]

I say, "Now what would you say for they calling you a radical  
Liberal, fanatical, criminal?"  
Won't you sign up your name? We'd like to feel you're  
Acceptable, respectable, presentable, a vegetable  
Oh, ch-ch-check it out yeah

At night when all the world's asleep  
The questions run so deep for such a simple man  
Won't you please, please tell me what we've learned?  
I know it sounds absurd but please tell me who I am  
Who I am, who I am, who I am

'Coz I'm feeling so illogical  
D-d-digital  
Oh, oh, oh, oh  
Unbelievable  
B-b-bloody marvelous

- B. After providing a copy of the lyrics and playing the song, I will engage the class through the following questions:
1. At what point is there a clear shift in the song's tone?
  2. What ideas are contrasted?
  3. What does the song assert about society? About individuality?
  4. Is this something you relate to at all?
- C. After allowing discussion of the questions, I will present the background of the book, and introduce the assignment (Appendix A).

#### **4. Teaching Strategies**

- A. Whole class inquiry-guided discussion and Socratic Circles
- B. Explanation/lecture
- C. Pair/share
- D. Sustained silent reading
- E. Modeling

#### **5. Learning Activities**

1. Students will engage in introduction Activities A-C as outlined in section 3.
2. Students will then listen to teacher-provided explanation and model/example of assignments, rubrics, and time frame.
3. Next, students will be given the opportunity ask questions for clarification as needed.

4. Students engage in sustained silent reading with any remaining time on the first day of the lesson. On the subsequent three days focused solely on *Into the Wild*, students will follow the following pattern:

- a. Upon entering class, they will be given 5 minutes to review the words and prepare for the quiz while I take roll. Students will then demonstrate their understanding of vocabulary on quizzes.
- b. After the quiz (approx. 10-15-minute time allotment), they may read the next section of the book or the next assignment silently until the entire class is finished.
- c. When the entire class completes the quiz, they will take out their journals and divide themselves into an outer and inner circle for Socratic Seminar. Journals will be a starting point for discussion, but we will also address specific questions (Appendix B). Only students on the inner circle may participate in the discussion. Outer circle members will listen attentively, and all students will transition during the discussion to both circles. There will be 2 empty desks in the inner circle at all times, and when an outer circle member wants to add to the conversation, he/she will take one of those desks. At that point an inner circle member will exit to the outer circle. All students will participate to earn credit (Discussion Rubric, Appendix A, lesson 1).
- c. Students will make connections to text across time periods, through personal experience, and across the curriculum through Reader Response journals.
- d. Closure will entail my bringing the discussion to a close, reiterating their best observations and insights, collecting journals, and reminding them of their up-coming assignments. I will also choose a question from Appendix B that was not addressed and direct them to be attentive to it during their next reading section.

#### **6. Grouping Strategies**

1. Whole class discussion
2. Pairs determined by proximity
3. Socratic outer/inner circles w/transitioning
4. Within all configurations, I expect students to participate meaningfully and equally divide work among themselves. For whole-class, post-group discussion purposes, any group member may be called upon to summarize, explain, or evaluate the group's work.

#### **7. Products**

1. Work sample: vocabulary quizzes
2. Work sample: Reader Response journals
3. Performance: participation and attentiveness during Socratics and discussions

#### **8. Resources**

1. Song lyrics
2. Handouts of assignment and example
3. Quizzes
4. Classroom computer and tv (to play and view song performance)

#### **9. Language**

Students will apply and enrich their knowledge of literary and stylistic usage through their journal writing and verbal expression during discussion. ELL students will be allowed access to tools which foster their understanding (dictionaries, translators, AlphaSmart, peer assistance). Their ability to communicate clearly and concisely will be emphasized through teacher and peer feedback as the discussion progresses.

### **10. Extension Activities**

Students will be invited to bring in song lyrics which capture their own attitudes toward society or individuality or which they believe have relevant attitudes to present on the concept.

### **11. Modifications**

1. Group configurations may be altered if unresolvable conflicts arise.
2. Writing samples, assignments, surveys, and tests will be read aloud to students requiring assistance with the English language.
3. Twice exceptional students will be encouraged to approach the songs and dramatic performances from their crafts as well as from linguistics and traditional coursework. Students with extenuating needs will be provided with the accommodations specified on their IEPs/504 accommodation plans

## **Appendix A**

### ***INTO THE WILD* by John Krakaur**

#### **Vocabulary**

##### Quiz 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Peregrinations (author's note), asceticism (a.n.), fulminated (a.n.), antinomy, 10, contumacious (11), cursory, (13), environs, (13, 19, 146), posited, (14, 184), mawkish, (16), stasis (18), plebian (18), mien (18), upbraid (20), admonish (21), onerous (22), Interdiction (27) indolently (32), oxymoronic (39), garrulous (40), itinerant, (43, 135), fatuous, (44, 132), sedentary

##### Quiz 2 \_\_\_\_\_

(44, 51), peeved (45), anachronistic, (47), hegira (48), unabated, (49), inadvertently, (49), desiccated (49) surfeit (62), cryptic, (66), opprobrium (70), sinewy, (76), anchorite (97), taciturn, (103), mercurial (105) chastened (105), ostensibly, (108), affinity, (109), incorrigible (115),

##### Quiz 3 \_\_\_\_\_

sanctimonious (122), obliquely, (123), extemporaneous, (124), purportedly (125), scrupulously, (125) recalcitrant, (128), gregarious, (129), intermittently, (134), inveigled (136), reverie (136, 164), precipitously (136), desideratum (137) recumbent (140), feasible (142),

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**Reading schedule:** each section will culminate in a **Socratic discussion** held on the date indicated. Additionally, your **journal response** (typed, double-spaced) will be due at that time.

Section 1: author's note –ch.7 (Tues. 3/13) (First journal response due)

Section 2: ch. 8-14 (Tues 3/20) (Journal 2 due)

Section 3: ch. 15-epilogue (Tues. 3/27) (Journal 3 due)

#### **Assignment Rubric for Reader Response Journals (40 points each)**

Presented professionally/typed/neat	10
250-300 words each (about 1 DS page)	10

Makes meaningful connections (see RR criticism) 10  
Demonstrates grammatical/rhetorical control 5  
Clear indication of quoted passage/chapter/page 5

As you read, choose one quote from each section that relates to something we've studied, something you've read on your own, or something important to you. Just pick something that appeals to you for whatever reason and write a response to the quote. Your response should look something like this:

Name  
Period  
Date

*Section 1 Response*

Passage : Page : authors note, first page (unnumbered) : "... taking up residence at the ragged margin of our society...in search of raw transcendent experience."

Response: I am somewhat fascinated by those who find the ambition within themselves to leave their familiar environments and head toward the margins. I've never been much of a margin-dweller, myself. At least not in practice...but in my thought, there I skim the edges, where waves of "otherness" wash over me. Like McCandless, I've read enough to know what may await if I ever ventured deeper. I suppose I've been content to stare into oceans—I've read "The Awakening"—without wading too far. Buoyed by a life I love, I've learned to lose myself in vicarious experience rather than risk the real thing—having been a witness, once. That was enough to teach me to see. Some people, I suppose, think they need to be in the midst of the scene to understand it, appreciate it, feel it, see it, and while I agree that experience is the best teacher, (This would continue—probably too long—but you get the idea.)

## Appendix B

### ***Into the Wild*** : Questions to discuss

1. How would you describe Chris, both as presented by Krakauer and by those he interacts with throughout his travels? Is he likeable? Irritating? Intelligent? A loner? Etc. Krakauer explains in his Author's Note that he aims to "leave it to the reader to form his or her own opinion" of Chris and his actions (iii). How did you react? Are you sympathetic to Chris, and if so, when? Do you think Krakauer supports and/or understands Chris's choices?
2. Why do you think Chris changed his name to Alex? What is he hoping for with this new identity?
4. Think about Chris's relationship with his family. What do we learn about his childhood, home life, etc? Does the inclusion of this back story make us more or less sympathetic to him? Are we supposed to sympathize or understand the position of his parents or sister?
5. Why do you think Krakauer includes the section about other adventurers who had experiences or desires similar to Chris (pp. 73-06)? How do these stories shape our opinions about Chris's actions?
7. Each chapter opens with 1-2 epigraphs (quotes/excerpts from other sources, interviews, or Chris's writings). What do these epigraphs do to focus our reading? Select one or two in particular and consider their significance in relation to the chapter that follows and in connection to the text as a whole.
8. Think about the circumstances of Chris's death in Alaska. How do we learn about it, and what did you as a reader feel at this point? Why does Krakauer decide to go to the location of Chris's death, and why do you think "some people seem to despise {Chris" so intensely" for dying there (180)?
9. What is the effect of the "extra" materials included with the story (a photo of Chris inside the front cover, various maps of his journey)? Do these shape our reading in a certain way?

10. What do you think Krakauer's goals were in writing the text? Is this an informational piece? A tragedy we should feel bad about? A cautionary tale? Etc.
11. The back of the most recent edition of *Into the Wild* classifies the book as an "Adventure" story. How would you categorize the text? What genre is it a part of, and who is the target audience? What kind of class do you think this book should be read in?
12. *Into the Wild* was made into an acclaimed and popular film in 2007. If you've seen the film, what similarities and/or differences do you see, both in terms of the presentation of the story and our reaction to Chris? What is one medium (film vs. non-fiction text) able to do that the other isn't?
13. Chris's story remains popular with readers and filmgoers almost 20 years after it happened. What do you think endures with this story? Why is it memorable? Does it remind you of other texts or films? Can you think of any other "into the wild" type stories you have heard about or seen on the news?
14. 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 our reading process (versus a story told from beginning to end)?
15. Krakauer admits to not being "an impartial biographer" (ii). What do you think about his presence in the text (random comments and opinions, work as a reporter learning about Chris's story, etc.)? In particular, think about the lengthy interlude about Krakauer's own journey "into the wild" (pp. 134-156). How does this add to or take away from Chris's story?
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