

Dear Reader,

Alex was a person who went to the extreme in everything he did. When he was angry with his parents, he cut them off completely. When he hated materialism, he abandoned society. Alex did not understand how to have balance in his life. I think that the theme of *Into the Wild* is learning how to live free, but to balance the risks that can make us feel so alive with the things that actually keep us alive like safety, flexibility, and the nurturing of human relationships. In order to live freely, you must live adventurously and find yourself, but in finding yourself, you have to solve your problems. Running away from your worries and holding grudges only feels like freedom temporarily. Soon a person has to realize that the longest leashes are inside of yourself, holding you hostage from within, and in Chris's case, shielding him from some of the most important things in life: forgiveness, love, and truth. This is a lesson that we all have to learn because life is very complex. The only way to make it meaningful is by challenging yourself to let go of your comfort zone and think deeply not only about the world around you, but also yourself.

This theme was fairly clear to me from the start. In and out of the book there has always been a lot of debate about what Alex did right and what he did wrong. Most people pick one side, "Chris McCandless was a suicidal privileged idiot." or "Alexander Supertramp was a hero who followed his heart and died a tragic death.", but the author seems to think that it was a mix of both. Alex had a strong mind and well thought out philosophies. He made points that I and many people could relate to, but he was in no way perfect. Alex died because he did not think introspectively. Even though he thought so much about the outer world, he didn't evaluate his place within it, his strengths, his privileges, and more importantly his weaknesses. Any person with this mindset, this hubris, does not have the ability to achieve their goal. However, this does not mean that his risk and journey didn't change him. By the end of the book, he understands that he made mistakes and is ready to move on, go home, and maybe even try to have a family of his own. He highlighted passages in books that talked about happiness being true only when shared and living a peaceful life in nature. He grew immensely as a person when he was in Alaska. The theme is most shown from the analysis of Chris McCandless' mistakes and what he learned in his final days.

A quote that I think encompasses this theme comes from the aforementioned growth in Alaska, "I have lived through much, and now I think I have found what is needed for happiness. A quiet secluded life in the country, with the possibility of being useful to people to whom it is easy to do good, and who are not accustomed to have it done to them; then work which one hopes may be of some use; then rest, nature, books, music, love for one's neighbor - such is my idea of happiness. And then, on top of all that, you for a mate, and children, perhaps - what more can the heart of a man desire?" This was highlighted by Alex in a book by Tolstoy called "Family Happiness." I think that it adequately shows a realization of the much needed balance in Alex's life. Notice how it is still very much true to his character. He does not change himself or what he believes in, but there does seem to be a sort of healing shown. Tolstoy felt what Chris was feeling at the end of his journey, when everything was in place and he had the space to reflect on what he wanted. With true self discovery, something that he avoided for some time by

focusing all of his attention on where he would like to go and what things upset him, Chris saw that he needed to make peace.

Our artifact reflects this theme symbolically. The idea for the art piece came from all of us in the group, but Ari was our artist. We saw a polarization that we thought could be characterized as the wilderness, which was cold, lonely, and a place for self discovery, and the comfort of others, which was warm, sometimes distracting, and a necessity for lasting happiness and safety. These are both something that a person needs to live a full life, because without either one, you can't understand the importance and beauty of the other.

See you in the wild,
Izadora