



# Introduction to Literature and Composition: The Hero's Journey

This course explores the question, “What does it mean to be a hero?” It looks at literature featuring ordinary people who find themselves in circumstances that require extraordinary acts, and examines these acts in relation to the archetypal hero’s journey. Lessons provide historical background on the setting and author while offering discussion points students can use to explore literary topics with family and peers. The course includes the use of a main lesson book as a reader’s journal to keep track of key passages, new vocabulary, observations about characters, settings, and literary technique, etc. Students develop a wide range of composition skills throughout the course by exploring techniques and formats such as comparative essays, first person writing, figurative language, summarizing, poetry, persuasive writing, inferential reading and contextual clues, and observational writing.

The following materials are included in this course package:

*Introduction to Literature and Composition: The Hero’s Journey* coursebook

*The House of the Scorpion*, by Nancy Farmer

*Kidnapped*, by Robert Louis Stevenson

*The Diary of a Young Girl*, by Anne Frank

*Into the Wild*, by Jon Krakauer

*Pygmalion*, by George Bernard Shaw

*Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston

*House of Light*, by Mary Oliver

*A Pocket Style Manual*, by Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers

*Write It Right: A Handbook for Student Writers* (Oak Meadow Books)

Two blank journals to be used as main lesson books (one for each semester)

**Please note:** There is currently no Teacher Manual available for this course.

# Introduction to Literature and Composition: The Hero's Journey

Oak Meadow  
Sample Lessons

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## Unit III

# Challenges and Temptations

*Kidnapped* by Robert Louis Stevenson

## Lessons 9–14

Have you ever dreamed of being part of a pirate adventure? A pirate adventure is only the beginning of our next hero's journey. As was the standard in the late 1800s, Robert Louis Stevenson's novel *Kidnapped* was first published in weekly serial form, from May to July of 1886, in a family magazine, *Young Folk*. For readers at that time, reading the story in serial form each week would have been like viewers today watching a weekly TV series. If it's really good, you look forward to the next installment. *Kidnapped* was popular, and the story was soon published in book form and has endured as a classic adventure story for all ages.

The novel is realistic, authentic, and geographically accurate. It is based on actual historical incidents as well as on universal human truths. The Scotland in which David lives is a divided country, much altered by war. The British rulers prohibited Highlanders from gathering, wearing their tartans, teaching the Gaelic language, and playing bagpipes. Later, huge tracts of the Highlands were razed by their aristocratic owners to clear the way for large-scale sheep farming, displacing or killing all the people who had lived and worked the land for generations in a deliberate "ethnic cleansing." If you have Scottish ancestors who lived through these times, they may have been forced by the law or by poverty to emigrate during the Highland Clearances. But whatever your ancestry, this kind of history is found in many countries; it has occurred over and over, and still happens in our world today.

The book includes a lot of Scottish (also called Scots) dialect. Deftly incorporated into the flow of speech and description, the dialect becomes part of the texture and atmosphere of the story. You will quickly become familiar with words like *ken*, *muckle*, *siller*, *naething*, *kirk*, *kyte*,

The Scotland in which David lives is a divided country, much altered by war. The British rulers prohibited Highlanders from gathering, wearing their tartans, teaching the Gaelic language, and playing bagpipes.

### Unit III

(continued)

and *feart*. Use your MLB to keep your own glossary of new, unknown words, or those from the Scots dialect.

*Kidnapped* was written in the late 19th century, but refers back to the year 1751, and the language is full of slang, dialect, and the words of that time. The Modern Library Classics edition of *Kidnapped* (which is included with this course package and sent to enrolled students) includes notes that illuminate proverbs and sayings, dialect, and historical references (279–311). Many unknown words will be found in the glossary (313–324), but you can usually get the gist of what they mean just through reading and listening to the sounds of the words. The gazetteer (325–334) is an invaluable tool—an alphabetical listing of place names, mountains, islands, rivers, lochs, etc.

Step into your *brogues* and grab a stout walking stick. It's time to journey into the Highlands and find the challenges that await you!

# Lesson



## *Kidnapped* The Covenant

Can you ever really know what life looks like through another person's eyes? First person narration might be the closest you can get to understand another person's life. As you dive into *Kidnapped*, you'll share David Balfour's adventures from his perspective.

### Lesson Objectives

- Infer word meaning from contextual clues
- Record specific story details
- Become familiar with the vocabulary and rhythm of a traditional cultural dialect

#### Along the Way

The story opens after David's father has died. The advent of his father's death provided David with the impetus—and permission—he needed to strike off into the great, wide world on his own to (quite literally) find his fortune.

One wonders, while reading, what David will need to do in order to survive. David does survive; we are assured of that, since he is the teller of the tale. As David tells his story in first person narration, you share his experiences, his struggles, his fears, his misgivings and distrust, and his attempts at courage (which he calls “false courage”). What must David overcome in himself, what thoughts, angers, and fears? And what inner resources must he find?

Stevenson uses weather deftly in this story as a tool to create a particular setting and tone, and to foreshadow doom. When Uncle Ebenezer is taking David to the ship, the *Covenant*, the weather that day is unusually cold, more like December than June. Stevenson uses that as a natural sign of the trouble ahead.

#### ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- Read Chapters 1–8 in *Kidnapped*.
- Define vocabulary words and use each one in a sentence.
- Answer comprehension questions with specific textual details.
- Answer each question with a well-developed paragraph.
- Complete MLB assignments.

## Lesson 9

(continued)

Lesson  
9

## Assignments

**Dinnae:** don't.**bairn:** child, baby.**ken:** know.**muckle:** great, large.**laird:** lord.**nae:** no.**bonny:** beautiful.**parritch:** porridge.**brogues:** shoes.

## Reading

Read chapters 1–8 in *Kidnapped* (11–71).

As you get used to the Scots dialect in this story, it can be a big help to hear someone speaking with a Scottish accent. If you are not familiar with the sound, you might find some online resources to listen to, such as this rendering of the Robert Louis Stevenson poem, “The Vagabond” by Robert Nichol: <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xo6zmpkk1aU>>.

## Main Lesson Book

1. Begin a new section in your MLB and add the title and author to your table of contents. Your main lesson book assignments for this unit will focus on the role weather and geography play in this story.
2. First, you will be creating a map and tracing David's route, adding place names of locations he passes through as the story progresses. Begin by labeling a page for your map and making a simple sketch of the outline of Scotland. You can use the sketch included here as a model or use the one in *Kidnapped* on the page following the end of “A note on the text” (lxxxiv). You can also find a map of Scotland online or in an atlas and make a copy by hand. There are excellent resources online if you want help with this. One website that has an exceptional map for this story is *Undiscovered Scotland* ([undiscoveredscotland.co.uk](http://undiscoveredscotland.co.uk)). Click on the link for e-books, and at the bottom of the page you'll see a link to *Kidnapped*; the second selection is “Two Maps of the Journey”—let this inspire you to create your own map!





Gustave Doré, *The Scottish Highlands*, 1875, oil on canvas,  
Toledo, Toledo Museum of Art

## Lesson 9

(continued)

Once you have your basic outline, label David's home and the House of Shaws and trace his route from there to the ship.

3. Your second MLB assignment for this unit is to keep a running list of when the weather and geography are mentioned in the story, and how these elements affect the plot or action. Pay particular attention to the ways in which the details of the physical setting are clues about what is to come.

### Writing

1. For each of the following highlighted vocabulary words, record your guess of the word's meaning, and then write down a dictionary definition, and use the word in one original sentence. In this unit, your vocabulary words will be presented in a new way. For each lesson, you will get several vocabulary words as they appear in Stevenson's sentences. First, write down what you *think* the word means—take an educated guess based on the context—and then use a dictionary to define the word (indicating its part of speech). Finally, compose your own sentence. Feel free to use another form of the word when writing your sentences (underline the word).

## Lesson 9

(continued)

In yon great, muckle house, with all these domestics, upper and under, show yourself as nice, as *circumspect*, as quick at the conception, and as slow of speech as any.(14)

To be sure, I laughed over this; but it was rather *tremulous* laughter; and I was glad to get my bundle on my staff's end and set out over the ford and up the hill....(16)

With this notion, all unacknowledged, but nevertheless getting firmly settled in my head, I now began to imitate his *covert* looks; so that we sat at table like a cat and a mouse, each stealthily observing the other. (35)

There was now no doubt about my uncle's *enmity*; there was no doubt I carried my life in my hand, and he would leave no stone unturned that he might compass my destruction. (42)

[Ransome] showed me tattoo marks, baring his breast in the teeth of the wind and in spite of my *remonstrances*, for I thought it was enough to kill him....(46)

After all I had listened to upon the way, I looked at that ship with an extreme *abhorrence*; and from the bottom of my heart I pitied all poor souls that were condemned to sail in her. (49)

Mr. Riach, perhaps from caution, would never suffer me to say another word about my story; the captain, whom I tried to approach, *rebuffed* me like a dog and would not hear a word; and as the days came and went, my heart sank lower and lower, till I was even glad of the work which kept me from thinking. (71)

2. Answer each of the following comprehension questions, providing explicit details from the story. Often there is more than one question to answer, so read carefully and answer all of the questions asked. Use complete sentences that include specific textual details. Be sure to use quotation marks and page references if your answers include direct quotations from the story. See the writing tips for more instruction on in-text references.
  - a. What is David's situation as the novel begins? What is the first action of the story? Describe the setting and the weather that day. How does David feel about leaving his home in

## Lesson 9

*(continued)*

- the countryside and venturing out into the world to find his relations? What is his response to this call to adventure?
- b. What are the shapes of Mr. Campbell's gifts? What are the gifts?
  - c. While he is traveling there, what does David learn about the House of Shaws? What are David's impressions when he arrives?
  - d. What saves David from falling to his death on the grand stair?
  - e. What is the last thing David sees before being stricken senseless on the ship?
  - f. What is the "strange peculiarity" that is the difference between Mr. Riach and Mr. Shuan? How is the captain different from both of them?
  - g. How is it that David does not initially die in captivity? Does someone come to his aid?
3. Respond to each of the following critical thinking questions with a well-developed paragraph. (You will be writing three paragraphs.) For each question, use examples to back up your answer. Give focus to each paragraph by beginning with a topic sentence. Support your opinion with clear observations and specific details from the story.
- a. David is overjoyed to be on his way to the House of Shaws, but once he arrives, things are not as he would like them, and his cheerfulness gives way to disappointment and anger. Give two clear examples of his anger. Is David justified in feeling this way?
  - b. David is cast among a cruel lot on the ship, suffers sorely and almost dies, and yet he looks almost with friendship on some among the crew. He observes, "Even the worst man may have his kindlier sides." Is there some good in these men? Is it realistic that he would come to care for his captives, not simply hate them? Does David see these men clearly by recognizing their dual natures, or is he deluded by the extremity of his situation? Whatever your opinion, support your reasoning with specific examples in one paragraph.



## Lesson 9

(continued)

- c. Write about some of the unusual occurrences in the story so far that may relate to the first part of the hero's journey. In addition to the initial call to adventure, are there instances of supernatural aid? Does David meet with any helpers? Has he already crossed a threshold? Has he begun to face challenges and tests? Refer to the cycle of the hero's journey in answering this question.

### Writing Tip

There are many ways to introduce and incorporate literary quotations into your work, as well as many pitfalls to avoid. Being aware of the rules and conventions will help your writing gain clarity, validity, and interest while ensuring that you avoid accidental plagiarism. Please see the sections on "Introducing literary quotations" (118) and "Avoiding plagiarism" (107) in *A Pocket Style Manual* (Hacker and Sommers).



## Lesson



# *Into the Wild* Lost in the Wild

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Sometimes a small mistake can have very big consequences. Has this ever happened to you? Did you know right away the mistake would be costly, or did the repercussions sneak up on you, slowly becoming apparent as time went by? As Chris McCandless lives out his dream in the wild, a series of mistakes take their toll. Although his short life ended tragically, his spirit of adventure and his drive to find meaning in life became the source of inspiration to many, as evidenced by the flood of mail sparked by Krakauer's initial report of what happened to Chris.

## Lesson Objectives

- Practice descriptive writing
- Craft a 100-word essay
- Research the scientific explanation of McCandless's death

### Digging Deeper

Krakauer began climbing mountains with his father when he was eight years old, and eventually he climbed Mt. Everest. Tragically, four of the five teammates on that trek were killed in a storm. Jon Krakauer wrote about what happened in an article for *Outside* magazine, for which he won a National Magazine Award. Later he wrote about Mt. Everest in *Into Thin Air*, which became a *New York Times* #1 bestseller and *Time* magazine's Book of the Year in 1997. The book also was one of three finalists for the Pulitzer Prize. In *Into the Wild*, Krakauer offers his own personal account of life as a risk-taking young man, searching for meaning, in order to help readers understand what may have motivated Chris McCandless.

### ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- Read chapter 14 through the epilogue.
- Relate each vocabulary word to a person or element in the book.
- Create original descriptions of physical and emotional settings.
- Write a 100-word essay.
- Choose one project to complete.
- Write a summary of Krakauer's follow-up article.
- Complete MLB assignments.

## Lesson 22

(continued)

**cirque** (142) *n*: a steep-walled basin formed by a glacier.

**coppice** (176) *n*: a grove of small trees or shrubs.

**desideratum** (137) *n*: something considered highly desirable.

**hector** (148) *v*: speak in an intimidating or harassing manner; bully.

**incognito** (174) *adj*: disguised or concealed.

**miasma** (178) *n*: a noxious or highly unpleasant smell or atmosphere.

## Lesson



# Assignments

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## Reading

Read chapters 14 through the epilogue (pages 133–203).

## Main Lesson Book

Continue to trace Chris's journey on your map, and make color-coded notes about his choices along the way. Add your own thoughts.

## What Do You Think?

Krakauer describes his own quest for meaning as a young man eloquently:

By fixing my sights on one summit after another, I managed to keep my bearing through some thick postadolescent fog. Climbing mattered. The danger bathed the world in a halogen glow that caused everything—the sweep of the rock, the orange and yellow lichens, the texture of the clouds—to stand out in brilliant relief. Life thrummed at a higher pitch. The world was made real. (*Into the Wild* 134)

Do you think this is how Chris might have viewed his solo wilderness trek? Read this passage aloud to a friend or parent and discuss your thoughts.

## Writing

1. Choose one person, event, or element of *Into the Wild* for each of the following vocabulary words, and explain each choice in a complete sentence. The notes in your MLB might be helpful with this exercise. The first two words are done for you to give you the idea. Hint: You will need to know the meaning of these words in order to do this exercise (but you don't have to write the definitions down for your teacher).

existential: I chose *existential* for Chris because he was always questioning the meaning of existence.

reverie: The word *reverie* makes me think of the wilds of Alaska, where the vast spaces seem to encourage dreamers.

inveigle (136)  
 chutzpah (143)  
 autocrat (147)  
 epiphany (149)  
 hubris (155)  
 laconic (162)  
 blithe (163)  
 perambulate (164)  
 manifesto (179)  
 hauteur (180)

2. Create original descriptions of physical and emotional settings. This book is filled with powerful imagery and moving descriptions of both physical settings and emotions. The author is especially adept at fresh imagery and metaphors. Write five brief, original descriptions of physical places (such as your favorite tree, a lake you've visited, your bedroom, your backyard, or the house of your friend, grandparent, or other relative) and five brief descriptions of emotional expressions. You might choose to describe a time you felt angry, overjoyed, frightened, or overwhelmed, or the way you feel when you are with your favorite pet, riding a roller coaster, or all alone in your room. Strive to describe these places and feelings in new and unusually expressive ways. Here are several examples in Krakauer's signature style:

Physical descriptions:

The icefall was crisscrossed with crevasses and tottering seracs. From afar it brought to mind a bad train wreck, as if scores of ghostly white boxcars had derailed at the lip of the ice cap and tumbled down the slope willy-nilly. (139)

... spindrift avalanches hissed down from the wall above and washed over me like surf...(150)

The summit proper, a slender rock fin sprouting a grotesque meringue of atmospheric ice, stood twenty feet directly above. (153)

## Lesson 22

(continued)

**molybdenum** (142)  
*n*: silver-white metal used in some alloy steels.

**progeny** (147) *n*: offspring; descendants.

**serac** (139) *n*: a block or column of ice on a glacier formed by intersecting crevasses.

**verglas** (153) *n*: thin coating of ice on rock.

## Lesson 22

*(continued)*

Fittingly, the summit was a surreal, malevolent place, an improbably slender wedge of rock and rime no wider than a file cabinet. (153)

Emotional descriptions:

Embarrassed, I halted the blubbering by screaming obscenities until I grew hoarse. (141)

Early on a difficult climb, especially a difficult solo climb, you constantly feel the abyss pulling at your back. To resist takes a tremendous conscious effort; you don't dare let your guard down for an instant. The siren song of the void puts you on edge....(142)

...I was speaking to my father with a clenched jaw or not at all. (148)

Pain, excruciating at times, filled his days like a shrill and constant noise. (149)

3. In 100 words, write a well-reasoned argument for or against the following topic: Mountain climbers and others who do extreme sports sometimes feel, as Krakauer did when getting ready to climb Devil's Thumb, as though facing a particular challenge would "fix all that was wrong with my life" (155). Do you agree or



Devil's Thumb, Alaska. Wikipedia.org.

disagree with this viewpoint? Why? Write your argument, using as many words as you need, and then edit it down to 100 words. See the writing tip for instruction on the 100-word-essay format.

## Lesson 22

*(continued)*

4. Choose one of the following projects to complete. Each of these projects requires you to write one paragraph. When writing a paragraph, make sure to include a comprehensive topic sentence introducing the subject and your stance, and then elaborate on your subject in three to five well-crafted sentences. Wrap up your paragraph with a concluding sentence that ties your ideas together and relates them back to the main topic.

From the many quotations that preface each chapter, choose one that carries great meaning for you personally, and explain its relevance. Write one paragraph, and remember to include the quotation and reference the page number where it can be found (this goes at the top of your page and is not counted as part of your paragraph).

- a. Does it seem ironic to you that Chris chose to stay in a bus stocked with a bed, stove, and supplies during his great solo adventure into the wild? How might someone who claimed he was “no longer to be poisoned by civilization” (163) have justified this? Explain your thoughts in one paragraph.
  - b. On page 174, Krakauer explains how a topographical map could have saved Chris. Do you think having a map on a wilderness survival trip would have been “cheating” or common sense preparedness? What difference would a map have made? Write one paragraph stating your view and backing it up with a logical argument or factual references.
  - c. Do you consider Chris’s lack of supplies and preparedness ignorance or arrogance? Which do you think is worse? Explain your thoughts in a well-reasoned paragraph.
5. Read Krakauer’s follow-up article in the *New Yorker* (“How Chris McCandless Died”) and write a summary of the new scientific research related to Chris McCandless’s death. The article can be found online. If you do not have access to the article, you can research the neurotoxin ODAP (beta-N-oxalyl-L-alpha-beta diaminopropionic acid) and write a summary of its sources and symptoms in humans.

## Lesson 22 **Writing Tip**

(continued)

Writing a 100-word essay is much harder than it sounds! Contrary to popular belief, writing with as few words as possible can be harder than writing with lots of words at your disposal. See “The 100-word essay” in *Write It Right* for tips and an example, and refer to “Tighten wordy sentences” (Hacker and Sommers 2–3) for help in streamlining your writing down to the bare essentials.

### FOR ENROLLED STUDENTS

Please submit the assignments for lessons 21 and 22 (including the outline and rough draft of your essay for lesson 21) to your teacher as soon as you have completed them. Make sure to email your teacher when your lessons are ready for review.