



## AMÉRIQUE DU NORD - 2019

### ANGLAIS LV1

#### I. COMPREHENSION

##### DOCUMENT A

**1. Who was Christopher Johnson McCandless? Answer the question, focusing on the three main phases in his life.**

Christopher Johnson McCandless was a young American man born in a wealthy family. He grew up near Washington DC, attended Emory University where he was an excellent student and athlete. After graduation he gave away all his possessions, changed his name and went North to Alaska where his body was eventually found in the taiga by hunters in 1992.

**2. What is the link between Christopher Johnson McCandless and Jon Krakauer?**

Jon Krakauer is a journalist who wrote first an article, and then a book about Christopher Johnson McCandless.

**3. What can you deduce about the literary genre of *Into the wild*? Write the correct answer.**

→ Biography

**4. Concentrate on Christopher Johnson McCandless.**

a) **In what way was 1990 a turning point in his life?** In 1990 Christopher Johnson McCandless graduated from University, then decided to completely change his life, he changed his name, gave away his money, abandoned his car and disappeared.

b) **What is said about his life before 1990? (family background, place where he lived, studies and achievements).** He was from a wealthy family, lived near Washington DC and was an excellent student and athlete at University, where he graduated with honors.

c) **What did he do in 1992?** In 1992 he hitchhiked to Alaska, then died alone in the wilderness.

### Série L LVA seulement

**5. McCandless was “in search of raw, transcendent experience” (l.14). Explain, using elements from the text.**

CJM was in search of ‘raw, transcendent experience’, which why he decided to leave civilization and all its symbols behind. Indeed he burnt ‘all the cash in his wallet’ and ‘abandoned his car’, effectively getting rid of capitalism and consumerism. He wanted to be closer to nature which is why he went to Alaska, the epitome of wilderness in the USA.

### Toutes les séries

**6. Why did Jon Krakauer initially write about Christopher Johnson McCandless?**

Jon Krakauer originally wrote about CJM because the editor of *Outside* magazine, where he worked, asked him to.

**7. Jon Krakauer writes that he has “unwilling to let McCandless go” (l.20).**

a) **What does this statement reveal about the evolution of Jon Krakauer’s interest in McCandless? Quote the words he uses to define his interest.** Jon Krakauer’s interest in CJM went from being purely professional to something much more personal. In fact, he uses words such as ‘fascination’ (l.17), ‘haunted’ (l.19) and ‘obsession’ (l.23)

b) **What caused this evolution. Find three reasons.** Krakauer mentions several reasons to this evolution, the first one being that in his investigation of McCandless’ life he discovered similarities with his own. He also found that CJM’s story actually resonated with much bigger topics such as father-sons relationships, young men’s attitudes to risky activities. Finally he spent a year retracing CJM’s steps to uncover the mysteries of his final months.

Séries L, ES, S LVO seulement

**8. "I won't claim to be an impartial biographer" (l.28).**

**a) What does this comment show about Jon Krakauer's intentions?** It shows that Jon's Krakauer intended to write CJM's biography to the best of his abilities.

**b) How does he feel about the result?** He feels that he succeeded in telling CJM's story, but not always in keeping an impartial distance as a writer.

**c) Did he fully succeed?** Karakauer says that he feels he 'largely succeeded' in minimizing his own presence in the book.

Séries L LVA seulement

**9. How does the nature of his interest affect the objectivity of his narrative? Why? Justify your answer with three different ideas.**

By his own admission, Krakauer's personal and intimate interest in CJM's story has affected the objectivity of his biography, as indeed he says that he was unable to give a 'dispassionate rendering' of CJM's life.

First, Krakauer sees parallels between his life and CJM's which is why he feels a personal connection which sometimes blurs the lines between biography and autobiography. Secondly, Krakauer spent so much time retracing CJM's footsteps, that it became very hard to keep an objective distance. Finally, writing CJM's story led Krakauer to wondering about much wider, almost philosophical subjects and he incorporated the results of his thoughts into his book.

**DOCUMENT B**

**10. Why does the academy believe a biographer shouldn't know his biographee? Support your answer with elements from the text.**

Because knowing the biographee leads to 'inevitable bias' (l.4) on the part of the biographer.

**11. Does the author of this article agree with this principle? Justify by quoting from the text.**

No he doesn't, as he specifies that knowing the biographee renders books suspect in the eyes of the academy, not himself. He actually goes on to say that he'd prefer a biography of Shakespeare written by someone who had actually known the Bard.

**12. Focus on line 7 to 10. What should the goals of modern biographers be? Give three elements.**

Modern biographers should try to convey a sense of intimacy with the biographee, to write about their personalities.

**13. Pick out three elements from the text that explain how these goals can be achieved.**

There are several ways to achieve this. First you can talk about the biographee's private life and environment, not just his public achievements. It is also possible to quote the words of those who actually know or knew the subject. Finally, quoting excerpts from the subject's own writings, including diaries, letters, conversations etc. symbolizes an ongoing private conversation with them and makes us feel closer to them.

#### Série L LVA seulement

**14. What kind of relationship is built between readers and biographees? What does it enable readers to do ?**

Biographies build a sort of 'literary friendship' between readers and the subject. By creating this proximity, it enables readers to virtually get to know the biographee and therefore feel entitled to 'form a judgement' (l.16-17) on the biographee

#### DOCUMENT C

**15.**

**a) What are the most significant differences between the two illustrations chosen for the front covers of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*? Give three elements at least.**

There are three main differences between both illustrations. First, one of them is a painting while the other is a photograph. Then, the painting depicts the character from a distance, whereas the photograph was taken close to the subject. Finally, in the first illustration, the character is turning his back to us, while the man on the second cover is facing us and looking at us.

**b) What is the effect produced by each cover on the potential readers?**

The first cover is very romantic and tends to insist on the 'artist' part of the title, we feel that we are getting a glimpse of his wild mind, while the second one creates a lot more proximity and reflects the 'portrait as a young man' part of the title. The first cover insists on distance, the second on objectivity.

## DOCUMENTS A, B and C

### 16. How are the notions of objectivity and distance in biography illustrated in the three documents?

All three documents show that objectivity and distance in biographies are a lot more relative than we perhaps might think at first. Yes, the biographer and the biographee are two separate distinct individuals but as we see in document A, sometimes there are parallels in their lives which make an objective depiction hard to write.

Furthermore, as document B explains, although a certain measure of objectivity is desirable, the very aim of a biography is to bridge the distance between, this time, biographee and readers, to give the latter the feeling that they can really get to know the biographee.

Finally, as symbolized by both book covers in document, distance and objectivity may sometimes be opposed notions as objectivity requires knowledge which cannot always be acquired at a distance.

## II. EXPRESSION ECRITE

### Séries L, ES, S LVO

1. The postal services have recovered a letter from Christopher Johnson McCandless in which he explains to his family why he decided to change lives. Imagine what the letter is.

(150 words +/- 10%)

Dear Mom,

Dear Dad,

I know you are probably worried sick right now, wondering where I am and what happened to me. I am sorry. I never meant to hurt you. I wanted to send you this letter so many times, to let you know that I am fine, but each time I stopped myself. You see, I was afraid that I would lose courage and end my quest for truth.

What makes a man, a man? You see, diplomas, cash, bank accounts... nothing is real. At the end of the day, diplomas and banknotes are nothing but paper, and my savings account, nothing more than numbers in a computer somewhere. Even my name is just a string of letters. Would I be different if you'd called me Ryan?

Only nature is real and that is why I am going to confront it alone. Then I will know if I am truly a man.

Your loving son,

ET

## 2. Can anyone become the subject of a biography? (200 words +/- 10%)

When we think about a biography, the first books that come to mind are all about famous people : Steve Jobs, Barack Obama, there are numerous examples. But to answer the question we first need to examine what is a biography and which purpose it serves. Only then, will we be able to establish who can be the subject of a biography.

The first objective of a biography is to tell the life of a person, and therefore serves an informative and educational purpose. As such, only people who can be considered examples deserve to be the subjects of a biography.

Furthermore, a modern biography's ambition goes beyond a mere educational purpose and aims to create intimacy and proximity between readers and the subject. In that sense only people whom we wish to understand are worthy of a biography.

However, creating such proximity between readers and a character also empowers readers to better understand an era and that is why even anti-heroes can help us get a feel for a specific

time period. For example *Viper's Dream*, by Jake Lamar, the biography of a Harlem drug dealer takes us into the golden years of Jazz in New York and through Viper's life we get to understand a lot about the city at that time.

To conclude, anyone can be the subject of a biography, so long as the telling of their life serves a bigger purpose, whether it is to give a moral example, to educate readers or to help people relate to a situation.

### Série L LVA

#### 3. Cf topic 2

### ET

**4. Gloria Steinem, an American journalist once said: "All biographers end up using their subjects as mirrors to figure themselves out." Do you agree with her statement? (200 words +/- 10%)**

When Gloria Steinem said that 'All biographers end up using their subjects as mirrors to figure themselves out', she was pointing out the fact that although a biography is supposed to be about the life, actions and personality of the subject, very often biographers do uncover things about themselves in the process of working on their subjects. I agree with this statement, because on many levels, a biography is a much more intimate genre than it appears to be at first sight.

First, the choice of a subject itself is very revealing. Writing a biography entails a lot of work and research, sometimes travels to follow in the footsteps of the biographee and no one is ready to devote so much energy to someone they are not attracted to, or at the very least, fascinated by.

Then, writing a biography means adding meaning to someone's life, creating the cement that will link a persons' actions together into a consistent pattern, justifying or explaining some choices, judging others. The way a biographer does this is very revealing of their own opinions and beliefs on such topics. And so, by trying to discover meaning in their biographees' lives,

biographers are led to think about what makes life meaningful, which values are important, and inevitably they draw a parallel with themselves.

OU

**5. You have decided to write the biography of a personality or celebrity you admire. You are writing to a publisher to convince him to accept your project. Write the letter (200 words +/- 10%)**

Dear Madam, Dear Sir,

I am writing to submit to you my proposal for a biography of Andy Booth, a horseriding trainer who has dedicated the past 20 years of his life to helping horses and riders better understand each other.

Not only does his story take us all over the world, from the Australian outback to cowboy territory in the United States and then a beautiful estate near Bordeaux, in France, it also features a zorse, the exceptional result of a cross between a horse and a zebra.

Although this biography will primarily speak to horse and animal lovers, Andy's determination, courage, willingness to adapt to change and his ability to never lose hope will be an inspiration to many, for example in the fast-moving business world of today, where such qualities are a necessity.

In an interview, Andy Booth once said that one his guiding principles was that, if someone ever wrote a book about his life, he would want it to be exciting and full of passion, a page-turner that readers can't put down. I believe it is time to make his dream come true.

I hope that you will respond favourably to my request and look forward to hearing from you to further discuss this project.

Yours sincerely,