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RICK RIDGEWAY

# Life Lived Wild

Adventures at the Edge of the Map



Teacher's Guide by Chris Gilbert





## Introduction

How can a connection with wildness teach the importance of separating matters of consequence from matters of inconsequence? How does mountaineering teach the importance of taking and carefully managing risk? How can shared adventure create friendships and longtime collaborations between those who appreciate and seek to protect the natural world? How can we honor those we leave behind while also moving forward in the face of loss and grief? Looking back on a lifetime of outdoor adventures, Rick Ridgeway explores these questions and others in his memoir *Life Lived Wild: Adventures at the Edge of the Map*. This book offers readers invaluable learning opportunities, and it beckons them to examine their relationships with each other and the natural world. This guide serves as a navigational companion for readers as they embark on this enlightening journey. It was written with a variety of readers in mind, and the questions and activities within appeal to a broad audience. Importantly, this guide features three sections that both individual readers and reading groups can draw from: comprehension and discussion questions, thematic activities and research topics, and a related resources section. Hopefully, this guide will prove useful for you during your reading of this wonderful book.

# Comprehension and Discussion Questions

This section features a variety of questions for each of the book's chapters. Some questions serve as comprehension questions while others inspire reflection and analysis.

## Prologue

1. How could a connection with nature teach someone to separate “matters of consequence from matters of inconsequence” (p. 9)?
2. What do you think about the approach: “Commit and Then Figure it Out” (p. 10)? Is this an approach you commonly adopt in your life? If not, would you consider taking it up?
3. “In mountaineering—and in business—it’s not about taking risks but managing risks” (p. 11). How do you react to this statement? What do you think about the idea of accepting risk while carefully managing it?
4. According to Doug Tompkins, how does a crisis differ from a predicament? How do you differentiate one from the other?
5. What does Rick seek to do with the years he has remaining? What do you seek to do with yours?

## Chapter One: Sacred Rice

6. “We all arrive at forks in the road where the only signposts are constructed not from facts but from intuitions” (p. 17). What fork in the road does Rick encounter early in this chapter?
7. What is your impression of Jonathan?
8. “Lama want to know why you want to climb Chomolungma” (p. 21). Why do you think Rick truly seeks to climb Everest? What do you think of the answer he offers?
9. How does a National Geographic cover impact Rick’s desire to climb Everest?
10. What is your impression of Pasang Kami?
11. How do Rick’s relationships with Chris and Jonathan differ?
12. “Jonathan knew me well enough to know what was going on in my head, that I was reconciling



how Chris had reached the summit while I had not” (p. 36). Put yourself in Rick’s position. What kind of thoughts would you grapple with in this situation?

13. “He says it’s because you make much money, become famous, write many books” (p. 36). What do you think about the old Sherpa’s statement regarding why climbers take on Everest? What role do you think fame and financial success generally play for climbers like Rick?

## Chapter Two: The Knife-Edge

14. How do you react to the image on p. 38? What emotions does it evoke?
15. Why does the invitation to climb K2 cause Rick to feel a “mix of excitement and foreboding” (p. 39)?
16. How is Chris different during the K2 climb? What is weighing on him?
17. What sort of complicated interpersonal dynamics does this climb present for the group?
18. What insect does Rick spot at 23,000 feet?
19. Why is oxygen so important for climbers at this altitude? What are the risks of climbing without it?
20. Describe the various physical and emotional challenges Rick experiences during this climb. What do you think are the most challenging aspects for him?
21. “At 28,250 feet, there was not a breath of wind. The sun shone through the cloudless atmosphere. We could see the curve of the Earth” (p. 54). How do you think you would have reacted to being in this location and having this view?



### Chapter Three: Men Against the Clouds

22. According to Rick, how has his relationship with Jonathan evolved?
23. Where is Minya Konka? Why is the prospect of climbing it so exciting?
24. What causes tension between Rick and some of the climbers?
25. Why is Rick so fascinated with birds? What animal do you find yourself captivated by?
26. How does Rick know the slope has avalanche potential?
27. How did you feel while reading the avalanche sequence of this chapter? Share your feelings with others.
28. “I held him in my lap and continued to run my fingers through his hair. I bent and kissed him on his forehead and set his head down and folded his arms on his stomach so he looked comfortable” (p. 78). How did you react to Jonathan’s death? How do you think this experience ultimately affected Rick and the other climbers?

### Chapter Four: The Door in the Mountain Wall

29. “We laid him on the platform. His bent knees fit perfectly inside the slight curve of the tumulus. We covered him with stones, and between two bamboo wands at the head of his grave we hung prayer flags” (p. 82). How does the beauty of his burial, and the setting around his grave, honor Jonathan?

30. In your opinion, should anyone be blamed for the avalanche? Explain your reasoning.
31. How does Rick's dream connect to his childhood?
32. What is the significance of Rick's early sojourns into the mountains?
33. Put yourself in Rick's shoes. How would you have handled your time in prison? Relatedly, how do you feel about his decision to attack the ring leader?
34. In general, what do you think Rick learned from the youthful experiences detailed in this chapter? How do you think he grew from them?

## Chapter Five: Matters of Consequence

35. What is your initial impression of Nicholas DeVore?
36. Why is Rick unsure if he will ever again take up mountaineering? Put yourself in his shoes. Do you think you would go back to the sport if you had experienced what he had?
37. What is your impression of Jennifer? What kind of impression does she make on Rick?
38. "All of us have that experience when the path of our life crosses another's and, like a boat rounding a navigation marker, we are forever on a new course" (p. 104). In what ways can you relate to this passage?
39. What sad connection do Rick and Jennifer share?
40. "...climbing mountains was the main thing I did. It was not only the way I defined myself, it was also the way I imagined others thought about me" (p. 108). How do you react to this passage? Can you relate to Rick's feelings about an activity being so closely tied to identity?
41. Why is it risky for Rick to not join Frank Wells and Dick Bass on their adventure?
42. From your perspective, what separates matters of consequence from matters of inconsequence in life?





## Chapter Six: The Boldest Dream

43. How does Rick attempt to find balance between his work life and family life? How do you work to find balance in yours?
44. How does Dan serve as a mentor for Rick?
45. What is the Seven Summits project? Perform some related, online research. How many people have completed it?
46. Compare and contrast Dick and Frank. Additionally, how would you describe their relationship?
47. Why don't Frank and Dick reach the summit of Everest?

## Chapter Seven: Jungle Fever

48. What is the goal of the expedition team? Additionally, describe the team members.
49. "I had been around a lot of dirtbags, but Bridwell took it to another level" (p. 133). In what ways?
50. "I started to feel sick, like I was catching the flu. In the jungle, getting sick is always worrisome; you never know at the outset if it's serious" (p. 134). Why is this situation so dangerous for Rick? What do you think you would have done to help if you had been a member of Rick's crew?
51. "I survived the avalanche; I had lived while Jonathan had died, but now I might die too, leaving my wife and daughter behind just as Jonathan had left his" (p. 137). How do you react to this passage?
52. How does Rick's period of sickness illustrate his ability to persevere? Additionally, how does this ordeal speak to the importance of kindness and assistance from others?.

## Chapter Eight: Difficulties Are Just Things to Overcome

53. Why is Vinson Massif, from a logistical perspective, the hardest of the seven summits?
54. What do you think about Frank's statement, "Difficulties are just things to overcome" (p. 142)? How is this idea reflected in other parts of the book?
55. "The others departed, and Chris and I kept climbing. We braced into the worst blasts, with gusts of sixty knots and temperatures of thirty below. My goggles were so iced I had to rely on Chris's fuzzy figure to guide me" (pp. 145–146). How do you think you would have fared in these conditions? Additionally, how do these conditions compare to those present during other climbs mentioned thus far?

56. “The air was crystalline, and we could gaze beyond the range to the great icecap that curved downward to the edges of the horizon; we could see that the Earth was round” (p. 149). How do you think you would have reacted to this view?
57. “For me, it was an enduring lesson of what you can do when you share the spotlight. Looking back, I can see times when I forgot that, and I can see how things always started to go better when I remembered it again” (p. 152). Reflect on this passage. Can you relate to Rick’s thoughts? If so, in what ways?
58. What is Dick’s incredible achievement?

## Chapter Nine: The Boy Scout Compass

59. Why is the decision to climb Gangkhar Puensum a complex one for Rick?
60. “...I knew it was because the attraction of going to a place few outsiders had ever seen was outweighing the risk of returning to a big mountain” (p. 160). In your opinion, does the benefit of this climb outweigh the risks? Justify your opinion.
61. What is your impression of Tom Brokaw in this chapter? Does this contrast with your previous knowledge of him?
62. In what ways does the slogan “Viva Los Fun Hogs” represent the shift in Rick’s thinking about adventure sports?
63. Describe the group dynamics of the “Do Boys.” How do these men interact and learn from each other? How do their personalities differ? Have you ever found yourself in a group with these dynamics?
64. What is the significance of the Boy Scout compass mentioned in this chapter?







## Chapter Ten: The Edge of the Map

65. From the first few pages of this chapter, what are your impressions of Calcutta?
66. How is the Bhutan climbing team “disparate” (p. 177)?
67. How does this climb position Rick and his crew not only as adventurers, but also as explorers?
68. What are some of the unexpected challenges that arise during the climbers’ journey?
69. In what ways does this chapter illustrate the saying, “You can’t break rules if you write your own rule book” (p. 185)?
70. “I knew that in a transactional way I had traded my friendship with Chris for the summit of K2” (p. 189). Why does Rick say this? Also, what news does he receive about Chris?
71. Why does Rick’s crew decide to burn the maps? How do you react to this decision?

## Chapter Eleven: Elixir of Youth

72. What are some of the dangers of southern Chile, according to the climber who advises the Do Boys? Relatedly, what is a williwaw?
73. What does Rick mean when he says, “In that sense we were like batteries that worked best with an occasional discharge in order to be fully recharged” (p. 197)?
74. What, according to Rick, is “Deep Ecology”? Is this something that interests you? Why? Why not?
75. What do you think of Jim and Yvon’s decision to climb the spire in extremely bad weather? Do you feel they effectively manage risk? Why? Why not?
76. Why do you think Yvon says that the trip was “just what I needed” (p. 206)?
77. Why do you think this chapter is called “Elixir of Youth”?



## Chapter Twelve: The Larsen Ice Shelf

78. Why is Rick's dog-mushing team one of the last allowed on the frozen continent?
79. "This was my third expedition to the Antarctic, a place that, once you are away from the coast, is nearly devoid of life. That absence of life had revealed by contrast how my own life depended on the life support I had with me, and that in turn had made me viscerally aware of the formula by which all wild animals begin and end each day: that calories in must equal calories out" (p. 213). How do you react to this passage?
80. What is your impression of Reinhold Messner?
81. "I'm not going to fly on that plane. It's too dangerous" (p. 220). What do you think about Rick's decision? Do you feel he chooses the correct commitment to honor? How does this decision relate to the larger theme of managing risk?
82. Rick observes that Jennifer "lived more fully in the moment than anyone I had ever known" (p. 221). Who do you more closely resemble in your own approach to life? Rick or Jennifer?
83. How does this chapter reflect the importance of focusing on "matters of consequence"?

## Chapter Thirteen: Talking to Beluga

84. What is your impression of Doug Peacock?
85. In what way has the "central appeal" (p. 227) of Rick's adventures shifted?
86. "...my time in wilderness was affording me a greater awareness of how, in the web of life, I was an animal among animals" (p. 228). What does Rick mean here? In what ways are you "an animal among animals" (p. 228)?

87. What do you think about the practice of attaching transmitters to whales? Do the benefits offset the harm introduced by this practice?
88. “One of the white whales came alongside me and turned its head; for a brief moment our eyes held, two species looking at each other” (p. 234). What is significant about this moment? Have you ever had a moment of shared connection like this with a wild animal? If so, share your experience with others.

## Chapter Fourteen: Jungle Mirror

89. What warning related to the Yanomami do the “old jungle hands” deliver to Rick?
90. What does Paul’s incident with the piranha reveal about him?
91. “In that shaft of light in the jungle, maybe for the first time in my life, I had seen a human acting as pure Homo sapien, an animal among other animals. I had seen who I used to be” (p. 244). How do you react to this passage? What do you think human beings have both gained and lost as a result of becoming “civilized”?
92. “‘Other cultures are not failed attempts at being you,’ said philosopher Wade Davis in reference to “The Other.” “They are unique manifestations of the human spirit” (p. 244). What is Davis getting at here?
93. What is the significance of this chapter’s title?

## Chapter Fifteen: Do Boy Meets Do Girl

94. What is your initial impression of Kris McDivitt?
95. What is Doug’s reputation as a pilot? How does this also provide a mirror into how he is as a person?
96. What does Doug’s handling of the cow skull trigger in Rick?
97. “‘Living on the extremes is where you want to be,’ Yvon answered. ‘You just got to be careful about spending too much time in the middle’” (p. 256). How do you react to this passage? How does Yvon’s statement connect with, or contrast, the way you live your life?
98. Who do Kris and Doug ask Rick about?

## Chapter Sixteen: The Road Less Taken

99. What is Project RAFT?
100. What is Dima’s plan? How does it deviate from the Do Boys’ original plan?





101. “Remember, Tom,” Yvon said with his impish smile, “it’s only an adventure when things start to go wrong” (p. 262). What prompts Yvon to say this? Also, how do you react to Yvon’s statement?
102. Why do the Do Boys wear Halloween masks on the backs of their heads?
103. Tom worries that Doug may become disillusioned, or even depressed, as he attempts to confront the environmental crisis. What emotion(s) does the idea of tackling the environmental crisis provoke in you?
104. According to Rick, how do Frank’s experiences climbing mountains influence the trajectory of his life? How do you think Rick’s climbing experiences have influenced his path through life?

## Chapter Seventeen: Hobgoblin of Little Minds

105. What is Doug up to in southern Chile?
106. What happens to Peter during the climb?
107. What makes Doug’s involvement in Chile so controversial? Where do you weigh in on these controversies?
108. “Personal computers are what I call “compulsory technology,”” Doug said after we had been served. “You are forced to use them in order to function in society. But then they become another cog in the wheel of the global economy that is ultimately overusing the planet’s resources, reducing habitats, and making species go extinct” (p. 282). What do you think about Doug’s argument?
109. Take a look at “Eden: A Gated Community.” What are your reactions to this article?

## Chapter Eighteen: Life in the Food Chain

110. What does the “Summit-to-Sea” walk consist of?
111. “For most of us, that connection to when we ourselves were lower in the food chain is buried so deep that when it does surface, we fail to recognize it” (p. 286). What, according to Rick, prompts the emergence of this connection?
112. “Bongo had pointed out that they would shoot to kill an elephant only if absolutely necessary, and that they would not shoot a rhino, even if it had killed one of us” (p. 291). What do you think about Bongo’s statement that he would refuse to kill a rhino, even if it killed a member of the party? Additionally, do you think the experience of seeing such animals up close is worth the risk?
113. Put yourself in Rick’s shoes. How do you think you would react if you were charged by an elephant? What would you do? Also, do you feel the use of firearms in this instance was justified? Explain.
114. This chapter sees Rick in close proximity to several animals that could potentially threaten his life. Have you ever had a similar experience? If so, share it with others.

## Chapter Nineteen: People of the Long Bow

115. Who are the Waliangulu? What are they known for?
116. Who is Galogalo Kafonde?
117. How did the Waliangulu acquire metal? Relatedly, what sort of relationship did the Waliangulu maintain with the elephants they hunted?
118. Does it surprise you to learn that the “Los Angeles Basin was once a Serengeti, with three species of elephant, vast herds of camels, and zebra-like horses and antelope, cheetah-like cats” (p. 305)? If time allows, research your own location to see what animals occupied the area before human habitation.
119. Rick notes, “I came to the conclusion that our basal response, whenever we have the opportunity combined with the technology, is to hunt our brethren wild creatures into oblivion” (p. 305). Do you share his observation, or is this something you disagree with? Explain your reasoning.
120. “I would add a fourth: our imperative to have purpose — our need for art, for beauty, for understanding how we fit into the universe, and, closer to home, how we fit into the web of life that surrounds and includes us. Therein lies the hope: that we might allow the fourth imperative to counter the instincts we have carried with us out of the plains of Africa” (pp. 305–306). How do you react to this passage? Do you think humans will ultimately allow this “fourth imperative” to counter our other instincts?



## Chapter Twenty: The Two Burials of Jonathan Wright

121. In what ways is Rick's journey with Asia Wright "a pilgrimage" (p. 309)?
122. Rick writes, "So many times on the trip with Asia I had the sensation of the past melting into the present" (p. 310)? Have you ever had the experience of the past bleeding into the present? If so, in what ways?
123. Why do you think Rick agrees to accompany Asia on this journey?
124. During their journey, Rick notices some changes in the landscape. What caused these changes?
125. What do Rick and Asia find when they reach Jonathan's burial site?
126. How did you feel reading this chapter? In what ways is this chapter one of the emotional cornerstones of the book?
127. In this chapter, how does Rick inhabit both the present and past simultaneously?

## Chapter Twenty-One: Across the Big Open

128. How do you react to Rick's statement: "I reminded myself that tenacity is easier when you don't have a choice" (p. 322)?
129. "'Remember,' he said, 'as soon as you stop moving, you start rusting'" (p. 324). What significance does this statement have for Rick? What meaning does it have for you?



130. In what ways does Rick's motivation for adventuring change from his younger years? What role does protecting wild places, and species, play in his more recent journeys?
131. What do chirus have to do with Rick's journey?
132. What inspired Conrad to take up climbing? What similar experience did Rick have that inspired him?
133. What immense physical challenges do Rick and his fellow adventurers encounter on this particular journey? What, for example, is "the Gorge of despair"? Would you call this journey his most physically challenging adventure? Why? Why not?

## Chapter Twenty-Two: The Better Angels of Our Nature

134. In what ways is the Chang Tang traverse one of Rick's most fulfilling journeys?
135. How does the journey ultimately benefit chirus?
136. How would you describe Rick's visit with the Dalai Lama?
137. Which company offers Rick a job? Additionally, at this time, what particular environmental issue is this company focused on?
138. Rick discusses in this chapter how his experiences in nature reveal the tangible effects of climate change. What effects of climate change do you notice in the natural areas around you?
139. What is the purpose of Rick's journey with Joe Riis?
140. What are pronghorn? What are the threats to their survival?
141. How do Rick and Joe's journey (and Joe's photographs) ultimately benefit the pronghorn?

## Chapter Twenty-Three: Laser Focus

142. "The word obsession gets a bad rap from its association with mental health, but when you look over the history of human achievement you realize much of it happened because one person had an obsessive laser focus on one goal" (p. 362). How do you react to this passage? What examples of this "laser focus" can you think of? How can you apply such a focus in your own life?
143. What, according to Rick, are the targets of Doug and Kris Tompkins' "laser focus"?
144. What sort of reputation does Doug have at this time in Chile and Argentina? Why?
145. How does Kris take inspiration from the motto "Commit, and then figure it out" (p. 370)?
146. Inspired by the film *Mountain of Storms*, what does Chris Malloy propose?
147. This chapter details a rich conversation between Yvon and Doug (pp. 373–374). What strikes you from their exchange?

148. How does this chapter illustrate the connection between outdoor sports and environmental protection? How does the former lead to the latter?
149. Why is the mountain peak detailed in the latter part of this chapter named “Cerro Kristina”?

## Chapter Twenty-Four: That Unmarked Day on Your Calendar

150. “Over the decades, we had never consciously excluded women from our trips but neither had we included them with anything you could call ‘affirmative action’” (p. 380). What does Rick mean here? Does it bother you that women were not often featured in the Do Boys’ adventures?
151. What is “greenwashing,” and why is Doug so critical of it?
152. What is Doug’s vision for the Patagonia National Park visitors center?
153. What latest Do Boy adventure is described in this chapter?
154. “We looked at each other, and I could see in the set of his eyes that he had the same thought I did: in a matter of seconds everything had changed, and now we would be fighting to stay alive” (p. 389). What happens to Doug and Rick here? What makes the stakes so high?
155. How did you feel while reading about Rick and Doug’s struggle and Doug’s death? How do you compare this series of events to the avalanche, and subsequent death of Jonathan Wright, detailed in an earlier chapter?





## Chapter Twenty-Five: The Only Synonym for God

156. What kind of physical shape is Rick in at the beginning of this chapter?
157. How do the remaining Do Boys react to Doug's death?
158. How do you feel about Kris' remarks at Doug's funeral?
159. What is the significance of Corcovado?
160. What seems to give Kris a sense of purpose following Doug's death?
161. What challenges does Kris face as she works to get protected areas in Chile converted into national parks? What is the ultimate outcome?
162. "...to save ourselves we humans need to live in harmony with our fellow wild creatures, to protect the wildlands that they need not just to survive but to thrive, and to protect the solace we humans need to remind ourselves where we have come from, because only then can we have the vision to imagine where it is we need to go" (p. 410). How do you react to this passage? How does this passage connect with the way Doug lived his life?
163. According to Rick, what is the perfect synonym for God? What are your thoughts on this?



## Epilogue

164. How did you react to learning of Jennifer's passing?
165. "We all know this, of course, but how many of us have the wisdom to go about our daily rounds integrating this awareness into all our actions, into all our decisions, whether those decisions are matters of consequence or matters of inconsequence, to find pleasure in the commonplace, to integrate into our lives what it really means to, with profound awareness, live fully in the moment?" (p. 413). How do you react to this passage? How does the certainty of death shape how you live your life?
166. What was the significance of the song "Going Home" for Rick and Jennifer? Read the lyrics on p. 417. What meaning do they have for you?
167. "I don't believe in the idea of closure. It is a misguided response to death. It is healthy to face toward, rather than turn away from, the gap left by the death of someone you love, even as you face the pain of no longer hearing the voice of the one you loved in your ears while you continue to hear the voice in your mind" (p. 418). What thoughts do you have on this passage? How does it connect with your own approach to handling loss and grief?
168. "No, these were the songs and calls of the warblers—the Wilson's, the hermits, the Townsend's—the birds that pass through twice a year on their eternal departures and returns. The spring migration had begun" (p. 419). Why do you think the book ends with these words?
169. What lessons will you take with you from this wonderful book?



## Thematic Activities and Research Topics

This section features a number of activities and research topics related to two of the book's central themes. For each research topic, students could:

- Write a research paper
- Build a website.  
*Free resources for this include <https://www.weebly.com/>, <http://www.wix.com>, and <https://spark.adobe.com/>*
- Deliver a presentation.  
*Free resources for this include <http://slides.google.com> and <http://www.prezi.com>*

### Theme: The Importance of Mentorship, Human Connection, and “Matters of Consequence”

#### Explore Mentorship in *Life Lived Wild*

*“In our popular culture there is a maxim that we succeed to the extent that we have mentors to guide our passages at pivotal transitions from one phase of our lives to the next. I was lucky to have had that guidance from Doug and Yvon and others in our posse” (p. 13).*

Rick benefits from multiple mentors during his journeys. Yvon Chouinard, Doug Tompkins, Dan Emmett, and others teach Rick valuable lessons and profoundly impact his development as both an adventurer and a person. Rick also serves as an important mentor, as he guides and passes on knowledge to Asia Wright, Joe Riis, and others. Invite your students to explore mentorship in the text through this activity.

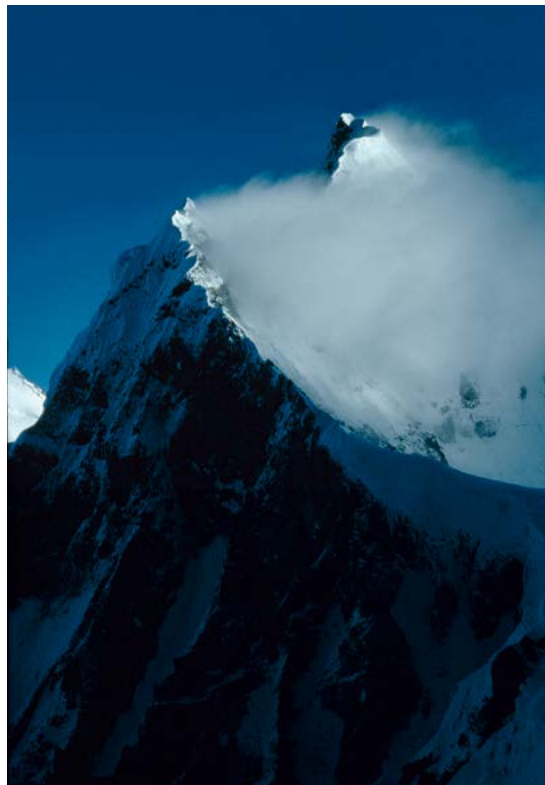
To begin, ask students to review the text through the lens of mentorship. Have them list examples of mentorship; as referenced above, they should list people who served as mentors for Rick, and also those individuals he mentored. Next, invite your students, either individually or in pairs, to create a “mentorship map” through concept map creation. Using one of the websites linked below, have your students place Rick in the center of the map. Above Rick, students should list several of his mentors in their own sections of the map along with the specific knowledge and skills he acquired from each of them. Below Rick, have students map out several individuals he mentored, and have students list the particular forms of knowledge and support he offered each of them.

- <https://creately.com/lp/concept-map-maker/>
- <https://www.visme.co/concept-map-maker/>

Close the activity by asking students to present their maps and explain to their classmates how the exercise deepened their understanding of mentorship and the types of growth it can encourage.

## Explore Mentorship in Your Life

This activity is similar to the one above, but instead of exploring mentorship in the text, this activity invites students to explore mentorship in their own lives. To begin, have students “read” their own lives through the lens of mentorship. Have students create a list of mentors that have aided their personal and/or academic growth. Next, ask them to provide a list of individuals they have mentored (a friend? A sibling? etc.), and prompt them to reflect on how they have offered forms of support and guidance through these personal relationships. To conclude, ask students to also consider opportunities for mentorship they have not yet pursued. What opportunities could they take advantage of to support the growth of another person? As they did in the activity above, ask students to represent all of this information through the visual creation of a concept map. They can use one of the digital resources listed above to do so. Finally, ask students to present their personal mentorship maps to the class.





### Theme-Related Research Topics

1. “‘When I saw that cover photo of you on K2,’ Conrad said, ‘I looked at it and I knew that’s what I wanted to do.’ I told Conrad my story of being about the same age and getting my copy of National Geographic with the story of the first American ascent of Everest and the photograph of Jim Whittaker on the summit, and me telling myself, I want to be THAT guy” (p. 329). Rick occupies an interesting space in the climbing community, as he is connected to the past, present, and future of mountaineering; he takes direct inspiration from the famous climbers of the past, and he also serves as an important source of inspiration for current climbers and those to come. Invite your students to learn more about this community of climbers and their connections to each other through this research activity. To begin, have them select a climber mentioned in the book from either the past (Jim Whittaker, Reinhold Messner, etc.) or present. Next, ask them to research their selected climber’s life: Where were they from? What inspired them to become engaged in climbing? What were their primary accomplishments? Finally, have students research both who their selected climber drew inspiration from, and who they went on to inspire.
2. “I don’t believe in the idea of closure. It is a misguided response to death. It is healthy to face toward, rather than turn away from, the gap left by the death of someone you love, even as you face the pain of no longer hearing the voice of the one you loved in your ears while you continue to hear the voice in your mind” (p. 418). In *Life Lived Wild*, Rick certainly explores the many important relationships he has with others, but he also confronts the challenge of loss in the context of these relationships. Invite your students to reflect on loss, grief, and persistence in the book and in their own lives through this writing activity. To begin, ask students to research loss and grief in the book. How do Rick and other individuals featured in the book experience loss? How do they persist in the face of such loss? How do they honor those who are no longer living? Following this, ask students to reflect on their own experiences with death. What have these experiences taught them about grief and loss? How do they “face toward...the gap” (p. 418) while still moving forward?
3. “I told them how, after we married, I read her *The Little Prince*, and how the Little Prince had talked about ‘Matters of Consequence,’ and how distinguishing matters of consequence from matters of inconsequence became the axiom of our marriage, a marriage that endured for nearly forty years” (p. 416). Distinguishing matters of consequence from those of inconsequence is a recurring idea in *Life Lived Wild* and one at the center of Rick’s relationship with Jennifer. Ask your students

to research how this idea surfaces in the book. How does Rick distinguish between matters of consequence and matters of inconsequence? Next, have students apply this idea to their own lives through sustained reflection and writing. How do they distinguish that which matters from that which is truly inconsequential?

## Theme: The Importance of Experiencing, Appreciating, and Defending Nature

### Experience Nature - Writing Activity

*“You would hope people see and appreciate beauty, but we want to make sure they understand why it’s so important: because beauty is what leads to love of nature, and, as Kris says, you don’t save what you don’t love” (p. 383).*

Rick’s experiences in nature, provided through outdoor sports, allowed him to nurture a deep appreciation for the beauty of the natural world. Importantly, this appreciation led to his desire to protect it. As Rick’s experience teaches us, the first step toward developing such a mindset is to simply experience and appreciate nature. Invite your students to take this step through this activity.

To begin, have your students locate a safe, natural setting that is unscathed by human activity, and instruct them to spend some time in this location and answer the questions below in writing while they are there. Additionally, instruct students to take several pictures and/or videos of their selected natural setting.

- Where are you?
- What do you notice about your surroundings? What do your senses reveal?
- What living things do you notice?
- What forms of beauty do you note?
- Examine your physical and emotional reactions to being in a natural setting. What do you notice?

Next, have each student create a blog by using a free resource such as <http://blogger.google.com> or <http://www.wordpress.com>. On the blog, have students import their writing and associated media. After their blogs are finished, have students share their blog addresses with their classmates and encourage them to comment on each other’s work. Also, promote their material to the larger community by posting links to their blogs on your school’s website and social media platforms.

## Defend the Natural World - Become an Activist

*“This room will be a little different, see, because we’re calling this the Activist’s Room. It’s where we’re going to pause to think about what we’ve just seen. Think about it and think whether we want to do something about it. So, there will be displays about how we can get involved. How you guys can get involved. See, it’s going to be over to you. We’ve messed it up, and you’ve got to fix it” (p. 383).*

Invite your students to follow Doug Tompkins’ lead and take action to benefit the natural world and the wildlife that inhabit it. To begin, have your students form up in small groups. Next, have each group select a local environmental issue that would benefit from their actions. Each group should research the issue to determine the history of the problem, its primary contributors, possible ways to address it, and other important items of information. Finally, have your students take action. Some suggested forms of activism include:

- Use a website such as <http://www.change.org> to start an online petition.
- Write Op-Ed articles and send letters to the editors of local newspapers.
- Initiate an e-mail writing campaign directed toward legislators.
- Staff an information booth to inform the local community about the issue.
- Use free resources such as Wix (<http://www.wix.com>), Weebly (<http://www.weebly.com>), or Google Sites (<http://sites.google.com>) to design a website related to the issue. Promote the website through social media in order to publicize the issue and connect with other activists.
- Use free resources such as Canva (<http://www.canva.com>) or Google Docs (<http://docs.google.com>) to create engaging flyers and brochures to be distributed to the public.
- Screen related films in your local community and follow up with audience Q & A.
- Use social media to organize public demonstrations.

## Theme-Related Research Topics

4. “Little by little, year by year, the central appeal of my adventures was shifting from the sports done in wild places to the wild places themselves, and, increasingly, to the wildlife in those wild places” (p. 227). During his travels, Rick encounters many species of wildlife. These include pronghorns, chirus, elephants, beluga whales, lions, hippos, and other wildlife. Invite your students to research one or more of the species Rick mentions in *Life Lived Wild*. Where is the species primarily located? What are its central characteristics? What are the primary threats to its survival? How is it being affected by climate change? What can be done to protect this species from climate change and

other threats? Have your students explore these questions and others to expand their knowledge of their chosen species.

5. “My increasing understanding of the impact of climate change on wildlife habitat—as well as on the planet as a whole—was linked directly to my experiences spending time in nature ... I remembered how on my last night with the expedition I lay in my sleeping bag and heard the ice crack, and how it didn’t resonate like cracks do on glaciers, and how instead it was sharp and shallow”(p. 347). In this two part research activity, have your students investigate climate change and the effects on the local environment. In the first part of this activity, have your students learn more about climate change. What does existing scientific research reveal about the state of our planet’s climate? What/who are the primary contributors to climate change? Who benefits, both politically and economically, from climate change (i.e., examine who resists attempts to combat it)? What solutions should we, as a species, pursue to address climate change? How much time do we have left to do so? Next, ask students to take a close look at their local environment for effects of climate change. Just as Rick noticed the “sharp and shallow cracks” of the ice from our warming climate, what climate-change related effects can your students locate in the local environment? How are local wildlife affected by these changes? What, if anything, can be done at the local level to address the impacts of climate change? To extend this research topic, ask students to research one of the locations described in *Life Lived Wild* and explore how it is being impacted by climate change.
6. “Doug’s titles were all about conservation and the environment—he had become a student of Deep Ecology, a way of looking at humans as only a thread in the fabric of nature, a species with no moral right to dominate other species” (p. 200). Invite your students to perform research to learn more about “Deep Ecology.” What is it? From whom did it originate? What are its central principles? How do these principles contrast dominant ideologies and social/political/economic systems that position the natural world as an endless source for extraction? Ask students to also consider how living from a Deep Ecology perspective could affect their own beliefs and behaviors.



## Related Resources

These resources relate to *Life Lived Wild's* themes and subjects.

### Books

#### **Seven Summits**

*By Dick Bass and Frank Wells, with Rick Ridgeway*

#### **The Last Step: The American Ascent of K2**

*By Rick Ridgeway*

#### **Below Another Sky: A Mountain Adventure in Search of a Lost Father**

*By Rick Ridgeway*

#### **There and Back: Photographs from the Edge**

*By Jimmy Chin*

#### **The End of Nature**

*By Bill McKibben*

#### **Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century: Readings on the Philosophy and Practice of the New Environmentalism**

*By George Sessions*

#### **Was it Worth It?: A Wilderness Warrior's Long Trail Home**

*By Doug Peacock*

#### **Let My People Go Surfing: The Education of a Reluctant Businessman**

*By Yvon Chouinard*

### Online Resources

#### **Rick Ridgeway: Climbing, Conservation and Capitalism**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LgUIBLksWNg>

#### **The film 180 Degrees South: Conquerors of the Useless**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCFnPYXO\\_bc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bCFnPYXO_bc)

#### **A TED Talk from Kris Tompkins**

[https://www.ted.com/talks/kristine\\_tompkins\\_let\\_s\\_make\\_the\\_world\\_wild\\_again](https://www.ted.com/talks/kristine_tompkins_let_s_make_the_world_wild_again)

## Online Resources (continued)

### **Tompkins Conservation’s website**

<https://www.tompkinsconservation.org/>

### **An interview with Rick Ridgeway**

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jimclash/2021/08/04/five-questions-for-acclaimed-mountaineer-author-rick-ridgeway/?sh=5fc86f727415>

### **Information from Patagonia on environmental activism**

<https://www.patagonia.com/activism/>

## About The Author Of This Guide

**Chris Gilbert, EdD**, is a former high school English teacher and current college instructor who lives in the mountains of North Carolina. He is also an avid writer. His work has appeared in The Washington Post’s education blog, “The Answer Sheet,” NCTE’s (National Council of Teachers of English) English Journal, Kappa Delta Pi’s The Educational Forum, Critical Studies in Education, and Educational Action Research. He has also written a number of educational guides for Penguin Random House and Patagonia.