



Looking For Alaska

by John Green

Supplies

- Nametags
- Markers
- White board
- Dry erase markers
- Posters of famous last words (*optional*)

Extras

- Serve fried foods. If you can find a Bufriedo, even better! Ask students to share what they are thankful for before eating.
- Place posters of famous last words around the room.
 - “I have tried so hard to do right.” (President Grover Cleveland)
 - “That’s obvious.”¹ (President John F. Kennedy)
 - “We are all going.”² (President William McKinley)
 - “It’s very beautiful over there.”³ (Thomas Edison)

Entering Activity

As students enter, have them write down on a white board their answer to the question, “What is the most important question human beings must answer?”⁴ You will use their answers to this question later in the discussion.

Introductions

Say: *First impressions are a funny thing. Describe the first impression Miles made of Chip. Have you ever made a bad first impression? Have you ever made a good first impression? Have students to introduce themselves and share a brief story about a time they made either a bad or good first impression. Remind students of the story behind Alaska’s name? (page 53) What does her name mean? Ask, “Do you know what your name means? Does it represent who you are?”*

1 Green, John. *Looking for Alaska*. (New York: Penguin Group (USA) Inc, 2005), 18.
2 Green. 121.
3 Green. 221.
4 Green. 70

Optional Activity

The Eagle has a “Look of Doom,”⁵ a look he gives to students when they are in trouble. Have a “Look of Doom” contest. Ask each student to give their best “Look of Doom,” and have students vote on whose look is most scrutinizing and unnerving. Capture these looks taking pictures of the students as they enter giving their best “Look of Doom” and sharing the pictures on your youth website or social media page.

Discussion Questions

Miles describes why he decides to go to Culver Creek with this statement, “So this guy, Francois Rabelais. He was this poet. And his last words were ‘I go to seek a Great Perhaps.’ That’s why I’m going. So I don’t have to wait until I die to start seeking a Great Perhaps.”⁶ What is your Great Perhaps? What does Pudge believe his Great Perhaps is?

As the Colonel(Chip) is orienting Pudge(Miles) to the life at Culver Creek, he says, “Pretty much the only important thing is never never never rat.”⁷ Is this a good rule? Why is this rule a code to live by at Culver Creek? How do students react when they think someone has ratted on another student?

As Alaska shares one of her favorite books, *The General in His Labyrinth*, she wonders what the labyrinth stands for and what he is trying to escape. Alaska suggests that the labyrinth is suffering. What explanation does she give and what questions does she ask related to suffering? (page 82) What deal do Alaska and Pudge make related to the labyrinth?

Describe the Weekday Warriors. Why is there animosity between the Weekday Warriors and the others? What pranks do they play on each other? Are any of their pranks harmful? If so, explain. Do you think pranks can ever be good natured or do they always single out a person or group? Describe a few of their pranks.

Religion class provides for much thought as events unfold. Listen to these quotes from religion class and discuss their meaning and influence throughout the book.

- “Religion is important whether or not we believed in one, in the same way that historical events are important whether or not you personally lived through them.”⁸
- “Myth doesn’t mean a lie; it means a traditional story that tells you something about people and their worldview and what they hold sacred.”⁹
- “Buddhists believe that all things are interconnected.”¹⁰

5 Green. 21.

6 Green. 5.

7 Green. 17.

8 Green. 33.

9 Green. 33.

10 Green. 38.

When Pudge was kicked out of religion class by the Old Man, why did Alaska stick up for him? (page 40) What did she do to be in solidarity with Pudge? How is this action another example of her self-destructive behavior?

Trust and loyalty are two qualities that the main characters take seriously. What are some ways the characters try to prove that they can be trusted? Do they ever break this trust?

Many characters engage in risky behaviors, such as smoking, drinking, and pranking. Why do you think they participate in these activities — for fun, boredom, a way of coping? Does boredom justify alcohol use? What are the reasons you feel young people experiment with things that they know to be unhealthy?

Alaska holds quite a bit of power over others with her moodiness, but also her charm. How does her charisma affect others and what they allow her to get away with?

Alaska shares with the Colonel and Pudge the story of her mother's death. She shares her blame, and how the events define her. If you could say anything to Alaska to let her know she is not defined by those few moments with her dying mother, what would you say?

Why do you think Pudge likes last words? (page 128) What are Alaska's last words? (page 132) What was not said to Alaska when she left? (page 132)

Alaska's death brings a torrent of emotions: grief, anger, blame, pain, etc. Place yourself in their shoes. What would you feel? Would any of them make you feel better? What could the Colonel and Pudge do differently to save her? Why are they blaming themselves? Does the Eagle know that they could have stopped her? Does it matter?

Pudge summarizes his feelings for Alaska on page 151, saying, "I felt the unfairness of it, the inarguable injustice of loving someone who might have loved you back but can't due to deadness, and then I leaned forward, my forehead against the back of Takumi's headrest, and I cried, whimpering, and I didn't feel sadness so much as pain. It hurt, and that is not a euphemism. It hurt like a beating."¹¹ Can love be painful?

In thumbing through Alaska's life library, they come across the question, "How will I ever get out of this labyrinth," and the subsequent words, "straight and fast,"¹² that seem to answer this question. How are these notes clues to her death and how or why she died?

11 Green. 151.

12 Green. 155.

13 Green. 159.

14 Green. 159.

15 Green. 199.

Dr. Hyde addresses Alaska's death in this statement to the class, "there's no doubting that the questions we'll be asking have more immediacy now than they did just a few days ago. What happens to us after we die, for instance, is no longer a question of idle philosophical interest. It is a question we must ask about our classmate. And how to live in the shadow of grief is not something nameless Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims have to explore. The questions of religious thought have become, I suspect, personal."¹³ He continues to write on the board Alaska's question she planned to address in her essay, "How will we ever get out of this labyrinth of suffering?"¹⁴ Attempt to answer this question.

After Alaska's death, they spend a large amount of time trying to figure out the details surrounding her death. Do they discover anything new through their conversation with Jake? What is the meaning of the white flowers? Takumi, the Colonel, and Pudge discover what happened the night of Alaska's death, that she left because of guilt for forgetting the date of her mother's death and forgetting to visit her mother's grave. Does the revelation change anything? How does their revelation help them to rediscover the Great Perhaps and they are still alive?

What was the "Alaska Young Memorial Prank?"¹⁵ What was it about this prank that was different than others? As the Eagle responds to the prank, he admires the creativity and the 'Alaska-ness' of this prank. What does this say about the Eagle? About Alaska?

How does forgiveness play a role in the labyrinth? How is it key for survival? (page 218)

Most Important Question

As their final exam for religion class, students are required to write an essay on how different religions answer their most important question that human beings must answer. Take a look at the questions you wrote as you walked in. How does our faith attempt to answer these questions? On page 101, Pudge sums up his essay on afterlife. What is his answer to why humans need afterlife? What does our faith tell us? How does each religion answer the question with hope? (page 215–216)

Closing Prayer

Read the portion of Miles' answer to the essay question starting with the last paragraph on page 220–221. End by saying, "Amen."

Written by: Shannon Guse Edited by: Gina Yeager-Buckley

17 Green. 215.

18 Green. 33.

19 Green. 87.

20 Green. 115.

21 Green. 166.