

ALONE IN THE WOODS

AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE FOR *ALONE IN THE WOODS*

BY REBECCA BEHRENS

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS ALIGNED FOR GRADES 4-7



ABOUT THE BOOK:

Jocelyn and Alex have always been best friends...until they aren't. Jocelyn's not sure what happened, but she hopes their annual joint-family vacation in the isolated Northwoods will be the perfect spot to rekindle their friendship.

But Alex still isn't herself when they get to the cabin, and Jocelyn reaches a breaking point during a rafting trip that goes horribly wrong. When the girls' inner tube tears, it leaves them stranded and alone on the banks of the Wolf River.

Before they know it, the two are hopelessly lost in a national forest.

Wearing swimsuits and water shoes and with only the contents of their wet bags, the girls face threats from biting blackflies to black bears, poison ivy to hypothermia. Both Jocelyn and Alex will have to use strengths they didn't know they had in their desperate trek home. But beyond battling the elements during the days and nights they spend lost in the wilderness, they'll have to overcome their fractured friendship—if they want to make it out of the woods alive.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

REBECCA BEHRENS is the author of the critically acclaimed middle-grade novels *When Audrey Met Alice*, *Summer of Lost and Found*, *The Last Grand Adventure*, and *The Disaster Days*. She grew up in Wisconsin, studied in Chicago, and now lives with her husband in New York City. You can visit her online and learn more about her books at rebeccabehrens.com.



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PREREADING QUESTIONS AND SCAVENGER HUNT ACTIVITY: INTRODUCING *ALONE IN THE WOODS*

When students first receive copies of *Alone in the Woods*, ask them to follow the steps below to explore the text.

Step 1: Look at the front and back covers of the text. Based on the meanings of words and images on the covers, what do you think this book will be about?

Step 2: The title, *Alone in the Woods*, tells readers that in this text, characters are going to be on their own in the wilderness. Brainstorm at least two predictions about what will happen over the course of the story.

Step 3: The summary description of *Alone in the Woods* just inside the book's jacket states that the characters will face threats from the environment. Flip through *Alone in the Woods* and look for words that relate to injuries, emergencies, wild animals, weather, and first aid. According to the words you find, what kinds of problems do you think the characters will face? Cite some of the words you found as text evidence.

The questions contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4-7.1, RL.4-7.4)

TEACHING STRATEGIES: COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS, COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES, AND ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES FOR *ALONE IN THE WOODS*

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Comprehension questions for each chapter of *Alone in the Woods* are provided below. Here are some ways in which the comprehension questions could be integrated into a lesson:

- As an individual student “do now” or “bell-ringer” activity
- As informal one-on-one discussion in pairs
- As a formal small-group discussion, where students are assigned roles and/or questions
- As an informal class discussion
- As a formal written assignment; individual students could be assigned different questions to answer and share with the whole group

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- As part of a written quiz
- As a written homework assignment

CHAPTER ONE

1. From whose point of view is this story being told?
2. How does Jocelyn feel about her family's vacation? How has she felt about this trip in the past? Do her feelings about the trip change during the course of this chapter?
3. How would you describe Jocelyn's relationship with her best friend, Alex? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
4. What do you learn in this chapter about the book's setting?

CHAPTER TWO

1. How does Jocelyn feel about traditions at the cabin, especially ones she shares with Alex?
2. What other details do we learn about the book's setting in chapter two?
3. How does Jocelyn feel after she goes up to the aerie alone? What does this show you about her character?

ALEX: THE BEGINNING OF THE END

1. Who is telling the story in this section? Why do you think the author chose to change the narrator?
2. This section is a flashback. What do you learn about Jocelyn and Alex's friendship from reading it?
3. How do you think this part of the story would be different if it were told from Jocelyn's perspective?
4. Make a prediction about what will happen to the girls' friendship over the course of the summer.

CHAPTER THREE

1. What details do you learn about the national forest in this chapter? Why do you think the author chose to include those details?
2. The author uses figurative language throughout this chapter, such as when she says that Jocelyn's feelings toward Alex have "curdled, like old milk." How does this language help you understand Jocelyn's emotions?
3. At the end of the chapter, Jocelyn states, "Who knew where this little adventure was going to take Alex and me." Make a prediction about what effect the tubing trip will have on their friendship.

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CHAPTER FOUR

1. How does the “Swiss cheese model” help you understand how accidents can take place? Why do you think the author had Jocelyn share this theory?
2. How does Alex’s cell phone affect her relationship with Jocelyn?
3. How would this chapter be different if it were told from Alex’s perspective?
4. This chapter ends with a cliff-hanger. What do you predict will happen after Jocelyn bounces the tube?

ALEX: SPANISH CAMP

1. When does this flashback from Alex’s perspective take place?
2. What does Alex mean when she says that Laura wasn’t “coded for empathy”?
3. Before she gets to camp, Alex isn’t looking forward to it. How do her feelings about camp change by the end of two weeks?
4. How was Alex’s experience at camp with Laura different from her experiences at Walden with Jocelyn?

CHAPTER FIVE

1. How does Jocelyn feel when Alex’s phone drops into the river? What does this show about her character?
2. How does the author use sensory details—like the ice-cold water—to add tension in this chapter?
3. How does the text in italics help you understand Jocelyn’s feelings throughout this chapter?
4. What do you predict Jocelyn and Alex will do now that their inner tube has a leak?

CHAPTER SIX

1. What obstacles do the characters face in this chapter?
2. What sensory details about the setting does the author include at this point in the story?
3. How does Jocelyn feel about the fact that no one has come back to find them yet?
4. What decision do the characters make at the end of chapter six? Do you think it was a good decision? Explain.

ALEX: FIRST DAY BACK FROM CAMP

1. When does this flashback from Alex’s perspective take place?
2. Why do you think the author chose to include text messages between Alex and Laura, and Alex and Jocelyn, in the text?

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3. What effect does her friendship with Laura have on Alex's feelings toward Jocelyn?
4. How does Alex feel at the end of this chapter? Use text evidence to support your answer.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1. How does the setting change in this chapter? What sensory details does the author include to help you understand the setting?
2. Why do you think Jocelyn lets Alex lead the way along the trail?
3. How would this chapter be different if Alex were telling the story?
4. Jocelyn has a frightening realization at the end of the chapter. What is it? Make a prediction about what will happen next.

CHAPTER EIGHT

1. How does Jocelyn's perception of the forest change at the beginning of chapter eight? How does this help you understand her feelings?
2. How do the girls respond differently to their problem of being lost? What does this show you about their characters?
3. How does Jocelyn feel about her relationship with Alex at the end of this chapter?

ALEX: THE DOG DAYS OF SUMMER

1. When does this flashback from Alex's perspective take place?
2. According to Alex, how is the time she spends with Jocelyn different from previous summers? How does Alex feel about this change?
3. What insecurities does Alex share in this section? How do they help you understand her character?
4. This section ends with a cliff-hanger about the girls' friendship. How do you predict things will "unravel," as Alex says?

CHAPTER NINE

1. What new information about the real-life setting do you learn in this chapter?
2. What obstacles do Jocelyn and Alex face in this chapter?
3. Jocelyn makes the decision to set up a shelter for this night. Do you think this was the right decision to make? Explain.

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4. How do sensory details help you understand the environment in this chapter? How do they help you know Jocelyn's emotions?

CHAPTER TEN

1. How does the author use descriptive details to create suspense in this chapter?
2. What new obstacles do the girls face when they wake up the next morning?
3. How does the author use figurative language to help you understand how the characters look and feel in the morning?
4. At one point in this chapter, Jocelyn says, "Everybody knows that if you're lost, you shouldn't keep walking or you might get more lost." Do you agree with that statement? Do you think Jocelyn makes the right choice about whether to keep moving? Explain.

ALEX: POOL PARTY DAY

1. When does this flashback from Alex's perspective take place?
2. Compare and contrast the clothing choices Alex and Jocelyn make in this chapter. What does their clothing show you about the characters?
3. How does Laura affect how Alex feels about Jocelyn?
4. How would this section be different if it were told from Jocelyn's point of view?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

1. In this chapter, Alex blames Jocelyn for problems like her poison ivy rash. Do you think she is right to hold Jocelyn responsible? Explain.
2. How does Jocelyn feel about Alex in this chapter? Use details from the text to support your answer.
3. What new obstacle do Jocelyn and Alex face at the end of the chapter?

CHAPTER TWELVE

1. At the beginning of this chapter, Jocelyn says she wishes she could go back to the pool party and behave differently. How do you think the story would be different if Jocelyn had changed her behavior that day?
2. What does Jocelyn mean when she says "Maybe now [Alex] was Lexie all the time"? How does this help you understand her feelings about Alex?
3. What details about her family's financial situation does Jocelyn share in this chapter? How does that help you understand her character? Do you think that affected her friendship with Alex? Explain.

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4. At the end of their fight, Jocelyn says that her words “couldn’t ever be brushed or washed away.” Do you agree with that statement? Explain.

ALEX: REGISTRATION DAY

1. When does this flashback from Alex’s perspective take place?
2. Why is Registration Day so important to Alex? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
3. How does Alex feel being at school with Laura? What does this show you about her character?
4. How does Alex feel about her own actions at the end of the chapter?

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

1. How does Jocelyn feel about her friendship with Alex at the beginning of this chapter?
2. Jocelyn and Alex never speak to each other in this chapter. How do their actions show that they are still in the middle of a fight?
3. This section ends with a cliff-hanger, when the bear appears. Make a prediction about what will happen next.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

1. What factual information about black bears does the author include in this chapter? Why do you think she chose to include that information?
2. How does the author use sensory and descriptive details to increase tension in this chapter?
3. How are Jocelyn and Alex’s interactions different in this chapter than in the previous one?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

1. Why does Jocelyn start laughing at the beginning of this chapter? What effect does laughing have on Alex?
2. When Alex realizes she is missing a flip-flop, what do the girls do? How does this show a shift in their relationship?
3. How do Jocelyn’s and Alex’s behaviors change in the second half of this chapter? What factors do you think might be causing these changes?

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

1. Jocelyn provides support to Alex when she's sick at the beginning of this chapter. What does that show you about her character? What does it show you about her feelings toward Alex?
2. How does the author use figurative language to help you understand the girls' physical and emotional states in this chapter?
3. How does Jocelyn feel about spending another night in the forest?

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

1. What sensory details does the author use to describe the forest at night? How do they help you understand how the characters feel?
2. What do Jocelyn and Alex each apologize for in this chapter? Do you think their apologies are effective? Explain.
3. At the end of the chapter, Jocelyn says, "Last night, we'd slept far apart like parentheses. That night, we were double quotation marks." What does this show you about the girls' friendship at this point in the story?

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

1. How have Jocelyn's and Alex's physical and emotional conditions changed by this point in the story? What new obstacles do they face?
2. What new factual information about the risks of their environment does the author share in this chapter? Why do you think she chose to include this information?
3. Jocelyn makes a decision about which way to go. What factors influenced her decision? Do you think she made the right one? Explain.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

1. Jocelyn is a little uncertain about whether she really spotted a wolf. Do you think she did, or do you think she imagined it? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
2. When Jocelyn explains the difference between "Alex" and "Lexie," Alex insists that "they're both me." What do you think she means by this statement?
3. What does Jocelyn mean when she says the blueberry they share "is friendship"? What does friendship mean to you?



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4. What tool does Alex reveal at the end of this chapter? How would the story have changed if she'd realized they had it earlier on?

CHAPTER TWENTY

1. How does Alex feel when Jocelyn calls her a “genius” for thinking of a use for the sticker? Why might this compliment be particularly important to her?
2. How does leaving a “cairn” of their things behind make Jocelyn feel?
3. What is the significance of the wolf sweatshirt to Jocelyn? To Alex?
4. By the end of this chapter, the girls are back in their tube on a river. Make a prediction about what will happen next.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

1. How does the author use sensory details to create tension in this chapter? Do you think the details are effective?
2. Why is Jocelyn concerned that Alex has stopped shivering?
3. How does Jocelyn feel about their situation at the end of this chapter, when she says they no longer have a plan?

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

1. What sensory details does the author use at the start of this chapter? How do they help you understand what is happening in the story?
2. What final obstacles do the girls face in reaching safety? How do they overcome them?
3. Explain the significance of Jocelyn stating, “But we were Team Alexelyn once again.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

1. How has the setting changed from the beginning of the story?
2. In this chapter, it says “Things change. People change. Friendships change. That’s part of life. And the beauty of it is, new traditions can always be made.” Do you agree with this statement? Support your answer.
3. What is the significance of the word *newfound* to Jocelyn?
4. How has Jocelyn and Alex’s friendship changed since the beginning of the book?



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A NOTE ON THE SETTING

1. According to this author's note, which parts of the setting are fact and which are fictional?
2. Why did the author choose to change some details of the environment the story takes place in? Do you think this was a good idea? Support your answer.
3. Why do you think the author shares this additional information about the setting with the reader?

The questions contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4-7.1) (RL.4-6.3) (W.4.9a) (SL.4-7.1)

COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES FOUND POEMS AND THEME(S)

One creative way to reinforce the meaning of key vocabulary words and ideas and to explore a literary work's theme(s) is by having students write Found Poems. Found Poems can be made when students engage in collaborative discussions in which they identify, choose, and organize ideas, words, and phrases from a text and then compose them into a poem that reviews the text's ideas and synthesizes learning. This synthesis results in students finding a theme. Found Poems allow students to practice their reading-literature, writing, and speaking and listening skills.

Step 1: Each individual student chooses and writes down at least ten words, phrases, and quotations from *Alone in the Woods*. Students should cite this textual evidence with page numbers from the text, although citations will not appear in Found Poems.

Step 2: Students begin organizing those ten words, phrases, and quotations into an outline of a Found Poem. For this and each subsequent step, students could work individually or could engage in a collaborative discussion with a partner or a small group to "share" or "trade" words, phrases, and quotations and then organize them. Ideally, Found Poems will be tied to key words and important ideas in the text.

Step 3: Students return to the text and collect additional words to fill in gaps in the outlined poem that they just wrote. Remember, in Found Poems, students can only use words that come from the text!

Step 4: Students finish writing their Found Poems about *Alone in the Woods*.

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Step 5: Students share their Found Poems with the class. Students may do so by volunteering to read their Found Poems to the whole class or sharing them with another student. Another option for sharing is to ask all students to write their Found Poems on large posters, which can be hung up the classroom. Afterward, students can walk around Found Poems as if in a gallery.

Step 6: Through reflection and paraphrasing, students review the key words and important ideas expressed in the shared Found Poems. In doing so, students are able to identify a literary work's theme(s). Students may do so through oral discussion or written reflection.

The activities contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4-7.1, RL.4-7.2, RL.4-7.4) (SL.4-7.1)

POINT OF VIEW IN *ALONE IN THE WOODS*

Alone in the Woods is written mostly from Jocelyn's first-person point of view, with six additional flashback passages from Alex's first-person point of view.

Step 1: To establish understanding of point of view, discuss the following questions as a class:

1. What is point of view? From whose point of view is most of *Alone in the Woods* written?
2. What is narrative voice? Why do you think the author chose to write the book in first-person narrative voice?
3. Parts of *Alone in the Woods* are written in the format of text messages. Why do you think the author chose to include these?
4. Six flashback passages are written from Alex's first-person perspective. Why do you think the author decided to include a second narrative voice?
5. How does having Jocelyn as the main narrator in *Alone in the Woods* shape the story's content and style?

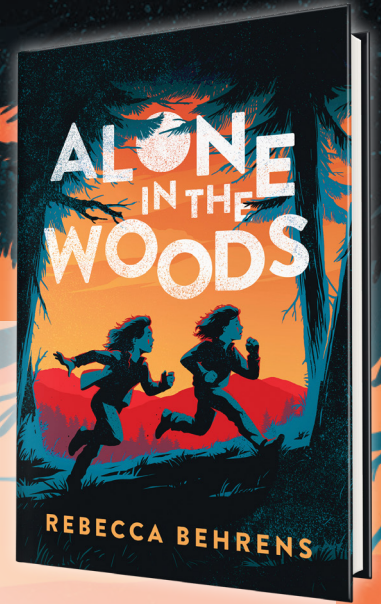
Step 2: Encourage students to imagine and think aloud about how this book might be different if it all were told from another point of view (such as Alex's, a sibling's, one of the parents', or even Laura's). As a class, select a part from one chapter of the book and brainstorm ideas about how it might look from a different character's point of view.

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Step 3: Have each student select a pivotal part of a chapter and rewrite it as seen through the eyes of a different character. (For example, Alex's point of view in chapters four and five is likely different from Jocelyn's point of view of the same actions. Think about how Alex would see and describe the events from her own point of view.)

Step 4: Ask students to share their rewritten pivotal parts of a chapter with one another.

The activities contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RL.4-7.6)

TURNING-POINT DISCUSSION

An important literary concept is the turning point, and an important reading-literature skill is to analyze how literary elements interact to produce a turning point. To help students to understand these concepts and practice reading-literature skills, engage them in a discussion about the turning point in *Alone in the Woods*.

Step 1: Define turning point and identify to students the general area where the turning point happens in *Alone in the Woods*. A turning point is needed in literature to advance the plot and bring it close to its resolution. Turning point refers to actions taken by a character that change the direction of her or his life, affect the lives of others, and/or change the course of history. *Alone in the Woods's* turning point occurs when Jocelyn and Alex encounter a black bear and are forced to work together to get away safely.

Step 2: To check students' ability to identify the turning point, ask students to look back at *Alone in the Woods* and identify a sentence in chapters thirteen to fourteen that shows that the story has reached a turning point. Ask two or three student volunteers to read the sentences identified. Write their possible turning-point sentences on the board. Discuss their possible turning-point sentences, and make a conclusion about what the best turning-point sentence is as a class.

Step 3: Explain further to students how literary works build up to a turning point, using literary elements. Numerous literary elements are used to make a turning point. For example, other chapters build up to the turning point, and a specific series of events lead to the explosive fight Jocelyn and Alex have in chapter twelve, right before the turning point. In the chapters of *Alone in the Woods* that follow the turning-point encounter with the bear, Jocelyn and Alex are no longer just reacting to their setting and circumstances.

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Their newfound cooperation enables them to take action to save themselves. A simplified way to have students think about this structure is that books are made up of parts before, at, and after turning points.

Step 4: To check for students' understanding of literary elements that help build up to the turning point of *Alone in the Woods*, ask students to return to the book—and to identify the parts before, at, and after its turning point. To do so, students may want to skim earlier and later chapters. As they reread the text, ask students to look for and take notes about how chapters one through twelve build up before the turning point, how the specific series of events in chapters thirteen and fourteen show the characters at their turning point, and how the effects after the turning point are found in chapters fifteen through twenty-three.

Step 5: Discuss students' notes as a whole class. On the board, draw a three-column chart with the labels "before the turning point," "at the turning point," and "after the turning point." Ask student volunteers to share their notes and record them on the chart for the whole class. Afterward, ask students to use the details on the whole class's chart to answer comprehension questions related to turning point. Specific questions could include:

1. How did Jocelyn and Alex change over time in *Alone in the Woods*?
2. How did chapters one through twelve lead up to the turning point in chapters thirteen and fourteen?
3. What happened in chapters fifteen through twenty-three as a result of the turning point?

Step 6: To further review turning points and allow for student reflection, ask students to think about their own lives and what turning points they have experienced so far. Ask students to draw a three-column chart in their notebooks with the labels "before the turning point," "at the turning point," and "after the turning point." Students should complete these charts about themselves.

The activities contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards:
(RL.5.5) (RL.6.3, RL.6.5) (RL.7.3)

ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES CHEQUAMEGON-NICOLET NATIONAL FOREST RESEARCH

As stated in the author's note, the setting of Jocelyn and Alex's adventure is based on real places in Wisconsin, including the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. Throughout the book, the author

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incorporates factual information about the plants, animals, and climate of the national forest. Students should research to learn more about the environment in which the story is set. To show their research results, students should create a small poster that shares the information they discovered about the national forest and that includes related photographs or illustrations.

The activities contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (W.4–7.7) (W.4–7.8) (W.4–7.10)

MAKE A MAP

Numerous Wisconsin landmarks are mentioned in the story: Madison, Minocqua, Paul Bunyan's Cook Shanty, the Wolf River, the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, the Oconto River, and various real and fictional lakes. In addition, landmarks within the woods are described throughout—the cove where the characters exit the Wolf River, the trail they initially follow, the shelters the girls make each night, the clearing where they hear a plane, the stream they follow, and the picnic spot where they are rescued. In this activity, ask students to create their own map (on paper or digitally) of selected landmarks from *Alone in the Woods*. They may use print and online resources to research the locations of the real landmarks, and they should use the book and their imagination as a resource for fictional landmarks. When they have completed their maps, have students compare their maps, explaining why they chose the landmarks they did and why they are important places in the setting.

The activities contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RH 6–8.7)

WRITING A NEWS ARTICLE OR BROADCAST

At one point in the story, Jocelyn wonders if the story of their disappearance into the woods has become news. A great activity is to ask students to write their news articles or broadcasts that imagine how Jocelyn and Alex's adventure might be reported, before and after they are found. Writing news articles allows students to practice their research and writing skills.

Step 1: Explain to students that news articles (and broadcasts) are designed to be informative and should include basic information about who, where, what, when, and how. Most contain writing elements such as a hook to interest the reader at the beginning, an introduction, body paragraphs with quotations, and conclusions. Next, show students a news article. (A possibility is to find an article or video clip about real



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people who have been lost in the wilderness and safely found.) Together with students, identify where the basic information and writing elements are in that news article or broadcast.

Step 2: Give students time to find a news article or broadcast on their own. Ask them to find the following basic information in the articles that they find: who, where, what, when, and how. Ask them to find the following writing elements: a hook to interest the reader at the beginning, an introduction, body paragraphs with quotations, and conclusions.

Step 3: Students should write their newspaper articles, or news broadcast scripts about Jocelyn and Alex's experience including elements of good news-article writing. Elements should include basic information about who, where, what, when, and how, as well as a hook to interest the reader at the beginning, an introduction, body paragraphs with quotations, and a conclusion. (Teachers may want to help scaffold weaker writers by providing a graphic organizer.)

Step 4: Students should peer edit, revise, and share their newspaper articles or news broadcast scripts.

The activities contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (W.4-7.1, W.4-7.2, W.4-7.3, W.4-7.4, W.4-7.5, W.4-7.7, W.4-7.8, W.4-7.9, W.4-7.10)

RECOMMENDED ONLINE RESOURCES

The following author-recommended resources about Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, the Wolf River, "Up North" Wisconsin, and how to stay safe in the woods may help students to learn more about the context of *Alone in the Woods*. Additional educator resources are available at rebeccabehrens.com.

Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest official website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/cnnf/>

Welcome to the Nicolet National Forest: <http://www.exploringthenorth.com/nicolet/nicmain.html>

Outdoor Hazards in Wisconsin: A Guide to Noxious Insects, Plants, and Wildlife (downloadable PDF): <https://burnett.extension.wisc.edu/files/2010/09/outdoorhazardsinWI.pdf>

Travel Wisconsin—Official Guide to Wisconsin Tourism: <https://www.travelwisconsin.com/>



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Wolf River Wisconsin Trail Guide:

<http://wisconsintrailguide.com/paddle/wolf-river.html>

The Wolf River in *Wisconsin 101: Our History in Objects*:

<https://wi101.wisc.edu/2018/05/24/wolf-river/>

“Whitewater rafting on the Wolf River is a wild thrill,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*:

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/travel/wisconsin/2018/06/14/whitewater-rafting-wisconsins-wolf-river-wild-thrill/691817002/>

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