



Pushing the Limits of Survival Suggested Reading and Discussion Questions

This theme explores the fundamental urge to survive and how it has manifested in society in the past and today. Issues to consider in group discussions include the ways in which we strive for the survival of the planet, of our families, and as individuals.

The Revenant: A Novel of Revenge

Michael Punke, Fiction. Now a major motion picture, #1 *New York Times* bestseller... The year is 1823, and the trappers of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company live a brutal frontier life. Hugh Glass is among the company's finest men, an experienced frontiersman and an expert tracker. But when a scouting mission puts him face-to-face with a grizzly bear, he is viciously mauled and not expected to survive. Two company men are dispatched to stay behind and tend to Glass before he dies. When the men abandon him instead, Glass is driven to survive by one desire: revenge. With shocking grit and determination, Glass sets out, crawling at first, across hundreds of miles of uncharted American frontier. Based on a true story, *The Revenant* is a remarkable tale of obsession, the human will stretched to its limits, and the lengths that one man will go to for retribution. *Amazon.com*

- Glass is faced with many challenging situations and has to do things that many of us living in 21st-century North America would find difficult, such as eating rodents and raw meat. Under the same circumstances how do you think you would have fared? Are there any other things that Glass does in order to survive that you would find especially difficult? What kinds of knowledge or information do you have living in the 21st century that Glass didn't have, that would make it easier or harder for you to make the choices he made to survive?
- As the novel progresses, Punke provides backstories for some of the central characters, including Glass, via flashback. We learn that Glass was once employed as a freighter captain for Rawsthorne & Sons. After learning of his father's death, Glass hops aboard a Spanish merchant ship to return to Philadelphia to tend to family matters. When the ship is captured by pirates, Glass decides that in order to survive he has little choice but to join the pirates. What does this say about Glass? Do you think this was something like a "fight or flight" situation?
- Glass's mother and fiancé died while he was held by the pirates, so with no real reason to return to the east, he joins the Rocky Mountain Fur Company on their venture along the upper Missouri River. Punke writes that Glass "could not explain or articulate his reasons" for joining, rather it "was something that he felt more than understood." What does this mean? What did The West represent in America in Glass's time? Have you ever made a decision that you couldn't explain? What do you think is actually going on when you make a "gut decision" like that?

