

The Stranger in the Woods by Michael Finkel

Questions from Penguin Randomhouse

1. In the early pages of the book, Finkel states that Knight has “stripped the world to his essentials.” Consider the lifestyle that Knight leads in North Pond. What are his essentials? How many of these essentials are material versus immaterial? What does he value the most?
2. On page 5, Finkel states that Knight has a “moral code” that he lives by, which determines what he will and will not steal. How would you describe his moral code? How does his moral code relate to larger ideas about capitalism and materialism in the United States?
3. How do you feel about Knight? On the North Pond camp owners’ scale of “Lock Knight up forever” to “Let him go immediately,” where do you reside?
4. Discuss Knight’s time in jail. How does the movement from complete solitude to imprisonment affect his morale? What tactics from his time in the woods does he use to pass the time?
5. Throughout *The Stranger in the Woods*, Knight is defined by many labels: He is a hermit, a thief, a prisoner, a purist, a son, a brother. Which of these labels does he associate himself with, if any? How much of a person’s identity is shaped by socialization, and how much is self-determined?
6. Discuss Knight’s childhood and family. How does the idea of rugged individualism and self-reliance color his upbringing? The value of privacy? Consider his absence in the lives of his family members, and his sudden return to them. Does he feel any guilt about his decision to disappear? How does his family interpret his return?
7. Discuss the discipline inherent to Knight’s existence in the woods. How is his life reliant on patterns and consistency? How does he use fear as motivation?
8. *Stranger in the Woods* asks complicated, fundamental questions about solitude, self-reliance, and humans’ relationship with nature, with an extraordinary, singularly unique human at the center. Consider your own life as it relates to these concepts. How often are you completely alone? Do you ever seek out solitude, particularly in nature? How is nature both restorative and challenging for the human spirit? By the end of the book, how did your feelings toward Knight evolve?