

Into Thin Air by Jon Krakauer

Suggested activities in conjunction with the College Book Program

Anthropology:

Compare and contrast the legends of the Yeti, Bigfoot, and Sasquatch.

Write a short paper on some aspect of Sherpa culture. Information is available using the *National Geographic Index* and the [Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life](#) at the Library.)

Art:

What do you think the climbers felt when they reached the top of Everest? Can you create a work of art to show these feelings?

Architecture:

Find a picture of dwellings found in the Himalayas. See *National Geographic*, October 1966, page 573, and October 1962, page 548.

Biology:

Compare and contrast the yak and the llama.

What is the national bird of Nepal? (*Instructors: it is the Impeyan pheasant, picture in National Geographic, June 1982, page 716.*)

English:

Thinking in general terms and not just about climbing, do you agree or disagree with this quote from the book on page 20? "Getting to the top of any given mountain was considered much less important than how one got there."

Here is another quote from page 22 of the book, "Assuming you're reasonably fit and have some disposable income . . . the biggest obstacle is probably taking time off from your job and leaving your family for two months." If you were reasonably fit, had enough disposable income, and could take two months off from work, what would you do?

Were the organizers of these climbs justified in taking large sums of money to escort relative amateurs into danger?

Into Thin Air doesn't have an index in the back, i.e. you cannot look up a name and find out which page(s) it is on. How do you feel about that? Would you like to see an agreement among publishers that all non-fiction books must have indexes?

Read [Lost Horizon](#) or watch the movie. Compare and contrast how the native people are portrayed in it and in *Into Thin Air*.

In Chapter 18, some climbers came across members of another team who had severe altitude sickness. Instead of helping, they continued to ascend to the summit. Later one of them said, "We didn't know them. No, we didn't give them any water. We didn't talk to them." Another said, "We were too tired to help. Above 8,000 meters (25,000 feet) is not a place where people can afford morality." (emphasis added) Comment on this.

In Chapter 21 author Jon Krakauer says, "It was titillating to brush up against the enigma of mortality, to steal a glimpse across its forbidden frontiers." Do you indulge in a hobby that courts danger such as he describes? Can you imagine feeling this way?

How does *Into Thin Air* fit our Staff Development theme, "Honor Our Unity, Connect Our Differences"?

Geography:

Locate Everest on a map of Asia.

Locate Darjeeling and show the 400-mile route to the foot of Everest.

On a map of the world, find the highest point on each continent. Give its name and elevation. (Instructors: these may be found in a footnote in Chapter 2 of *Into Thin Air*. They are: Asia- Everest - 29,028; South America - Aconcagua - 22,834; North America - Mt. McKinley (Denali) - 20,320; Africa - Kilimanjaro - 19,340; Europe - Elbrus - 18,510; Antarctica - Vinson Massif - 16,067; Australia - Kosciusko - 7,316.)

Pick one of the Seven Summits other than Everest and write a one-page report about it, how it got its name, who discovered it and when, etc.

Make a puzzle (crossword or fill-in-the-blanks) using words found in the book, such as names of the Seven Summits, names of people, mountaineering terms, etc. (Instructors: let the students solve the puzzles in class or for extra credit.)

History:

Find a primary source about Hillary reaching the top of Mount Everest. (A primary source is one published at the time it happened.) Bring a copy of the article to class. Find a primary source from 1996 about the expeditions described in *Into Thin Air* and bring a copy to class. What are the similarities? the differences?

Math:

Make a bar graph showing the Seven Summits, the highest point on each of the continents. Include the names and elevations of the peaks. (List can be found in a footnote in Chapter Two of the book.)

In the beginning of the book, under *Dramatis Personae*, there is an extensive listing of all the expeditions and participants in the 1996 climbs. Taking all of the expeditions together, calculate the percentages of the various nationalities and show this as a pie graph.

Music:

Discuss what kinds of music (either your own creation or selections from another source) would convey the feelings of the climbers during the arduous ascent, at the summit, on the way back down when fatigue could so easily lead to disaster.

Nursing:

What are the symptoms of and treatment for frostbite?

What are the symptoms of and treatment for altitude sickness? There is a good article in *National Geographic*, October 1962, pages 530-1. How has treatment changed since then?

Personal Development:

Thinking in general terms and not just about climbing, do you agree or disagree with this quote from the book? "Getting to the top of any given mountain was considered less important than how one got there."

Here is another quote from the book: "Assuming you're reasonably fit and have some disposable income . . . the biggest obstacle is probably taking time off from your job and leaving your family for two months." What is the biggest obstacle to your achieving your goals? Share with your classmates and brainstorm how some of these obstacles might be overcome, even if only in part.

What is the most challenging thing you have ever attempted? Were you successful? Even if you were not, was the attempt worth it?

Political Science:

Compare the political situation in the Himalayan region at the time of Hillary's ascent in 1953 and in 1996.

Psychology:

Discuss the effects of sleep deprivation.

Sociology:

Compare the leadership styles of Woodall and Hall and how the respective groups were affected.

How does the book Into Thin Air fit our staff development theme "Honor Our Unity, Connect Our Differences"?

Spanish:

Imagine that you are a news anchor in Mexico reporting on the first successful ascent of Mount Everest in 1953. Give the news story in Spanish.

With a partner playing author Jon Krakauer, interview him in Spanish for a Mexican television or radio station.