

# **PEAK**

**By Roland Smith**

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Greetings,

I am thrilled to present this curriculum to you. I know that your students are going to love reading *Peak* and that you are going to enjoy using it to meet your state standards for English Language Arts. What's more, *Peak* is full of some of the most important issues our young adolescents face today. The book represents themes such as courage, honesty, interdependence, change, hope and respect. These themes are driven by the main character, Peak, and the events that affect his survival while on Everest and his survival and growth as a young adolescent.

Peak is an extraordinary young man both in positive and negative ways. He loves his family but feels lost and confused. Though he seldom reveals his deep love and commitment to his mother, she is, in fact, his hero. He is close to his stepfather and dearly loves his twin half-sisters but he has a "hole" in his heart. He attempts to fill this void in negative and abusive ways. He pushes his family's grace to the limits by climbing skyscrapers and leaving his "tag." Trouble catches Peak and his inner struggles become outward troubles with the law. All of Peak's choices are taken from him in a dramatic fashion when he begins an adventure with his biological father far from the family who loves him. Though he travels far, this new adventure brings him closer to his family than he could have imagined and to an understanding of who he is and who he wants to become.

This unit is a blend of down and dirty English, thematic studies, research and writing. It is designed as a read aloud or students can read in small cooperative groups that share their ideas using the learning experiences for guidance. Students will work with parts of speech, elements of literature, literary devices, and even a bit of poetry and there are suggestion for differentiation throughout. Students will also research Mt. Everest and its indigenous people. Finally, students will work in small groups to create and analyze scenarios regarding each of the themes of the novel. Much of what students will know and be able to do will coincide with state standards and also touch the unique needs and characteristics of young adolescents. I hope your students have a "peak" experience with the novel and the unit. I highly recommend that each student buy their own book and take notes in the margins and learn to highlight and underline.

Please contact me if you have any concerns or questions. I enjoy the feedback!

*Julie*

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## Timeline

*In the Appendix is a time line calendar of when each learning experience is started. The week before the book is read and the majority of the unit is begun, the research and vocabulary are completed. Then the unit is approximately six weeks long. Feel free to revise, drop, substitute or edit any item in the unit. Please make the unit work for YOUR students.*

*Homework is infused throughout the unit. As soon as students have a start on figurative language, characterization, themes, etc. they can do some of the work at home. I never assign chapters to read at home unless students have been ill.*

## English Language Arts Standards

*These Standards are taken from the state of Minnesota but can be readily and easily adapted to any state or national English Language Arts standards. The bold represents the learning experiences in the unit and the following are the actual standards and benchmarks.*

### **All Vocabulary, Read Aloud – Think Aloud, Figurative Learning Experiences, “I” Poem**

*Word Recognition, Analysis, and Fluency:*

- ◆ *Read unfamiliar complex and multi-syllabic words using cueing systems, advanced phonetic analysis and structural analysis*
- ◆ *Read narrative text with fluency, accuracy and comprehension at an appropriate silent reading rate*

*Vocabulary Extension:*

- ◆ *Acquire, understand and use new vocabulary through explicit vocabulary instruction and independent reading*
- ◆ *Analyze word structure and use context clues to understand new words*
- ◆ *Identify and explain similes*
- ◆ *Determine pronunciation, meanings and alternate word choices through the use of dictionaries, thesauruses and electronic tools*

### **Frontloading Research, Read Aloud, Journal Quest, Theme Connections, Character Analysis - Triple Venn, Word Mountain, Persuasive Position, “I” Poem, Knots**

*Comprehension:*

- ◆ *Use a variety of strategies and demonstrate literal, interpretive, inferential and evaluative comprehension*
- ◆ *Comprehend, interpret and evaluate text by asking and answering questions*
- ◆ *Recall and use prior learning and preview text to prepare for reading*
- ◆ *Use texts’ structural organizers, such as graphics, illustrations, references, notes, introductions, boldface type and subheadings to aid comprehension*
- ◆ *Make inferences and draw conclusions based on explicit and implied information from text.*

- ◆ *Critically read and evaluate to determine the author's purpose, point of view, audience and message*
- ◆ *Create logical notes and summaries across content areas.*
- ◆ *Use knowledge of narrative and expository text structures and subject specific texts to summarize content*

***Frontloading Research, Characterization, Plot – What If, Conflict, Cause and Effect, Theme Connections, Journal Quest, Socratic Discussion, Figurative Language, Point of View – Character Flip***

***Literature:***

- ◆ *Actively engage in the reading process and read, understand, respond to, analyze, interpret, evaluate and appreciate a wide variety of fiction*
- ◆ *Read a variety of high quality, contemporary literary works specific to America.*
- ◆ *Recognize the difference between first and third person point of view*
- ◆ *Identify and analyze the relationships among elements of fiction*
- ◆ *Contrast points of view in narrative texts and explain how they affect the overall theme of the works*
- ◆ *Respond to literature using ideas and details from the text to support reactions and make literary connections*
- ◆ *Identify and analyze the effect of characters' traits on the plot and resolution of the conflict*
- ◆ *Analyze how figurative language and literary devices contribute to the meaning of a text*
- ◆ *Identify and understand recurring themes across literary works, citing evidence from the texts*
- ◆ *Respond to literature using ideas and details from the text to support reactions and make literary connections*

***Point of View – Character Flip, Position Essay, "I" Poem***

***Writing:***

- ◆ *Create informative and expressive writing*
- ◆ *Engage in the writing process*
- ◆ *Create multiple paragraph compositions that state, maintain and use details in a logical order to support a main idea*
- ◆ *Create narratives that develop settings, people/characters, and conflicts using descriptive, concrete language to engaged audiences*
- ◆ *Create informative reports; including gathering material, formulating ideas based on gathered material, organizing information, and editing for logical progression*
- ◆ *Consider the intended audience when composing text*

**Position Essay, Point of View – Character Flip, “I” Poem**

*Spelling, Grammar, Usage:*

- ◆ *Apply Standard English conventions when writing*
- ◆ *Compose complete sentences when writing*
- ◆ *Edit writing for correct spelling and sentence clarity*
- ◆ *Apply grammar conventions correctly in writing*
- ◆ *Apply punctuation conventions correctly in writing*

**Frontloading Research**

*Research:*

- ◆ *Formulate questions and collect and assess relevant information to address these questions*
- ◆ *Gather and organize information from a variety of sources, including electronic and print*
- ◆ *Cite sources for quoted and paraphrased information in a bibliography when writing a research essay*

**Brainstorming, Metacognitive Reflection, Questioning, Vocabulary Games, “I” Poem, Socratic Discussion**

*Speaking and Listening:*

- ◆ *Participate in and follow agreed-upon rules for conversation and formal discussion in large and small groups*
- ◆ *Know and apply listening rules for formal setting*
- ◆ *Orally communicate information, opinions and ideas effectively to different audiences for a variety of purposes*

## Teacher Notes and Answer Guide

### Reading the Novel

Whether students are reading the novel in small cooperative groups or you are reading the novel aloud, there must be time set aside for metacognitive reflection. Students need to stop, think, and analyze “what they know that they know” about the character, vocabulary, plot, themes, etc. As you implement the learning experiences, you must implement metacognitive reflection. Whole class reflection can be done by asking students to “pair share” (share something they know with someone who is close to them) “mix-freeze” (mix up the class by asking them to move about the room then say freeze. Students find two people with whom to share their knowledge, or students can record bits of information on “exit tickets” (small sheets of paper they fill with their ideas and then pass to teacher before they leave class). It is good to mix up all these different types but what is crucial is that they are utilized periodically as the book is read.

### Student Pack

The Student Pack is to be used in conjunction with a journal just as Peak uses his moleskins. As students work through the learning experiences, (those in the student pack and those strictly in this teacher pack) they are for you to select as you work with your unique set of students. Both you and your students should note that all the action verbs, actual student tasks, are set in bold type. All my examples for the students are set in italics.

### Frontloading the Author

Before students do anything with the novel, help them get to know Roland Smith. It won't take more than 30 minutes as he has an informative biography, pictures, and other interesting information right on his web site, [www.rolandsmith.com](http://www.rolandsmith.com) Students can also email him questions, though it would be best to decide on three “class” questions so that he can respond quickly. Helping your students understand the writer will help them better understand how he writes and how other authors write.

### Frontloading Research

Students will reap a great deal more benefits if they can have a frame of reference for climbing Mt. Everest. This learning experience will also help them practice many important skills.

Plan six different mini-lessons as students work through the research process.

1. Resources – How to “bib” the resources (given in student pack)  
Bias, Reliability and Validity – Students need to know that not all web sites are valid. Sometimes authors have a bias or post nonsense. Wikipedia is a site that has basic information but it is not reliable or valid, while PBS is a well-known and trusted site with experts who are there to inform.

*Differentiate this learning experience by asking some of your students to prove bias, reliability and validity within their sources.*

2. 7 Minute Research – see Appendix
3. Loaded Words and Persuasive Writing – Students need to be reminded that words have power and even a sarcastic “don’t be stupid” in a persuasive paper will not help their argument.
4. Broad Questions – Students don’t always see the big picture so you will want to help them form their broad questions regarding the Everest Research. You might even have students brainstorm their questions as a class, then split into their partner(s) groupings.
5. Transitions – Help students understand the importance of transitions in persuasive writing.

### **Frontloading Vocabulary**

1. Students should underline each of the vocabulary words if they have their own books.
2. A word wall would be a perfect choice for the words in this novel. You could set it up like levels of Everest. Use the visual in the book to create Everest and fill in the words inside the mountain as you go. Place the technical words on the outside of the mountain. Both sets of words help you conquer Everest as you read the novel. It will also help students see the many levels of the climb.
3. Before the Down and Dirty Sentencing experience and other sentencing work, students need a quick review of simple and compound sentences. Have students identify these in the novel and create a few on their own. Also, prepositional phrases should be reviewed, what they are and their purpose.

4. After students complete the first section of the Sentencing Sheet, give them all a copy of the words and synonyms/short phrases to check their answers. They should also place the synonyms and short phrases on the back of their note cards. Remind them to do this for both sets of cards. To score the sentences, I ask the students to select the 10 sentences they are the most proud of and that represent their best work. These are the ones I score. Yes, I skim them all.

*A differentiation plan would be to have students who are stronger in vocabulary not only learn the meaning of new words but also search out similar sophisticated words. In this way they are learning several meanings for the word relaxed. Ex: mellowed (novel word), relaxed(synonym), tranquil, serene(other sophisticated synonyms that are variations on the word relaxed.)*

*Another differentiation would be to have students find a sophisticated antonym for the novel word such as mellowed(novel word), harried, distressed.*

5. Speak It, Hear It, Candy Toss and Ping Pong Vocabulary are four ways to help students learn the words before, during, and after the book is read.

Speak it, Hear it – (not in Student Pack)

Students need to hear the words and synonyms and phrases spoken and, in turn, speak the words they will learn themselves. At the beginning of the memorization process ask all students to stand up and mimic you as you speak through the master list of words. Words like treacherous and jarring can be said with great dramatics for ease in memorization. The word “verified” may not have the same dramatic effect but more often than not the words provide opportunities for drama. I ask students to start many of our days throughout the unit doing this with a partner.

Candy Toss– (not in Student Pack)

Call a word from the master list - the student who calls out the meaning first gets a piece of candy. For every piece earned, the winner must sit out that many sessions. I usually do this for about twelve words on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Differentiate this assignment by asking students to reply with an accurate and appropriate sentence instead of just the meaning. (Ask each student to bring in a bag of their favorite candy – this saves on the teacher’s budget and most parents don’t mind if they know the purpose for the request.)

Ping Pong Vocabulary– (not in Student Pack)

Write numbers on ping pong balls, one number for every word that is on the master list AND/OR write N, V, Adj, and Adv on about 50 balls. Place an overhead of the master vocabulary list so that all students can see the list. Toss out the balls. Students take turns looking at what they have on their ball and then responding with the synonym/short phrase and/or a sentence that contains the word. Students can do this amongst themselves in groups of six as well. You can create homogenous groups (to practice their additional synonyms or antonyms) to toss and gather points and then create heterogeneous groups for students to bring back their point for extra unit points or prizes. In this way students are challenged and contributing to a larger group. This is a simple version of Teams, Games, and Tournaments.

**Frontloading Titles**

Students predict the story using chapter titles and lead sentences. See Appendix – **Predicting**

**Journaling**

Students use their journals for three different tasks:

- Homework - to record periodically “what they know that they know” about *Peak*
- Class work - to answer, in detail, the Socratic Discussion Questions
- Both class work and homework - to record information for some of the learning experiences, complete their research, take notes as the read etc.

## Figurative Language

If students have their own books they should mark any signs of figurative language in their book as they read. A simple “s” for simile, “m” for metaphor and “p” for personification works well. Then they can easily go back and use these for the learning experiences.

### Similes

There will be varied answers for the five similes given but here is a list of some other similes they should be able to find throughout the novel. There are many other similes throughout the book. I have recorded some of the most engaging.

- p. 81 ¶ 1 “...like fingernails scraping on a chalkboard.”
- p. 82 ¶ 1 “...like a red-headed scarecrow dressed in pink goose down.”
- p. 82 ¶ 2 “...like turtles coming out of their shells.”
- p. 82 ¶ 5 “Her hawklike brown eyes darted...”
- p. 94 ¶ 5 “...and Holly was waiting for me like a guard dog.”
- p. 100 ¶ 3 “...we had to double and triple up in the remaining tents like sardines.”
- p. 101 ¶ 4 “...as likely as me flying a Gamow bag to Jupiter.”
- p. 111 ¶ 2 “...like a puppet with its strings cut.”
- p. 112 ¶ 9 “...like some kind of magic elixir.”
- p. 121 ¶ 1 “...like we were on the moon.”
- p. 147 ¶ 4 There are 3 in a row!!! “...dark as a moonless night...straight as a floor timber...as broad as I am tall...”
- p. 153 ¶ 9 “...like the glacier was a bowling lane.”
- p. 158 ¶ 4 “...like giant jagged teeth.”
- p. 198 ¶ 1 “...like they were ice-skating.”
- p. 203 ¶ 6 “...looks like an army encampment.”
- p. 210 ¶ 1/2 “...like a corpse emerging.”
- p. 216 ¶ 1 “...like a wax figure.”
- p. 219 ¶ 2 “...like climbing at sea level.”

### Metaphors

Here is a list of a few other metaphors they should be able to find throughout the novel. There will be varied answers for the meanings.

- p. 22 ¶ 6 “...but it wasn’t watertight yet.”
- p. 24 ¶ 8 “...I felt the drain plug loosen.”
- p. 31 Title “Rock Rats”
- p.33 ¶ 1/2 “She was bullet-proof.”
- p.34 ¶ 1/2 “...the whole orthopedic jigsaw puzzle.”
- p. 52 ¶ 2 “...everything I needed to get through the death zone.”
- p. 77 Title “Rock Weasels”
- p. 82 ¶ 4 “Josh wriggled out of her tentacles...”
- p. 137 ¶ 5 “If Shek catches you, you’re toast.”
- p. 173 ¶ 1 “...Base Camp was a nightmare.”

### Knots – Creating Metaphors

*There are many web sites that will direct your students in the art of tying knots. If you have a local Boy Scout Troop, they might have someone willing to come in and share. Knot tying is life or death to climbers. A discussion of the best knots to use and the support they give will make for a great discussion – AND the metaphor of tying strong knots in rope and creating strong ties in relationships could make for a lively discussion as well. Have students share how creating relationships are like tying knots in small cooperative groups. Have a whole class share. Have students write short quotations that can be used in your school announcements for others students to think about.*

### Personification

The statement “You can never tell who the mountain will allow and who it will not.” Is used three times throughout the book (p. 113, p. 121, and p. 229) and shares a vivid and memorable example of personification.

How does this personification example help you visualize the mountain?

*As a strong person of authority.*

How does this personification example help you understand the story better?

*The mountain is in charge of the climbers. It decides if it wants to be climbed or not and who deserves to make it to the top. It shows how few people there are who understand Everest.*

How would it be possible for a mountain to choose who gets to climb and who does not??

*The idea is in the weather of the mountain, as if it controls the weather on any given day.*

Peak uses this same phrase when he is climbing Everest with Sun-jo (p. 229). How has the meaning of this personification changed? What does it tell you now about the story? What scene does it paint for you?

*The meaning is different because Peak is beginning to see that the mountain will allow Sun-jo, perhaps even rejoice, in his climbing but only with Peak’s help. He begins to see that the mountain may not “allow” both of them and he wants Sun-jo to have the honor.*

### Personification “I” Poem

*The “I” Poem invites students to write about Everest and continue thinking and imagining the mountain and its power and majesty. “I” poems can be compelling invitations for students to try out the poet’s way of knowing. Poets pay attention. They notice. They take time to look and listen. They sift experiences. They turn things over again and again. When they have something to say, they choose their words carefully. They are precise and concise. The format of the poem is given to the students in their packets. To differentiate ask students to use the format for different people or places represented in the book OR to create new “I” lines for the poem.*

*Poetry is meant to be read aloud. All students should practice at home and then practice in small groups. They should finally be asked to read at least one poem aloud in a poetry circle (desks or chairs are placed in a circle). I ask them to bring in flashlights. I turn off all the lights then students shine their flashlights at the paper of the*

person reading the poem. IF the person states, "Spotlight," then the flashlights are shined past the persons shoulders,, not at the eyes. Students love this and with some strict guidance do not go "crazy" with the flashlights. You will be surprised who actually states, "Spotlight." Finally, I always write and share my own "I" poems. Students need to see "us" as writers and poets.

### Elements of Literature

If students have their own books they should use the margins to keep notes of the characters, setting, plot, etc. or use a highlighter to mark important information.

### Characterization

Peak's Character Traits – Students collect these throughout the reading.

fourteen	climber	smart	writer
sarcastic	strong	athletic	agile
wise	unselfish	kind	shy
male	scarred	brave	muscular
persistent	curious	juvenile delinquent	infamous
audacious			

### Minor Characters

Here are a few ideas about these characters and their effects on Peak. If your students are anything like mine, they will come up with a many more.

Differentiate by asking students to compare these characters to themselves. Who are they most like and why?

The "Two Peas", Patrice and Paula

*He loves his twin half sisters who were born on his birthday. He only began to regret the "tagging" when he saw them in the courtroom. He wants to be a good role model for them. He begins to make decisions based on what they might think. They adore and idolize him.*

Rolf

*Rolf is Peak's stepfather and, at first, he is an annoyance. It didn't help that Peak and his mom had to move when his mother and Rolf married, but Peak became used to New York, a little. Rolf treats Peak as a son, early on in the story– willing to adopt him, in the courtroom – "cashing in all his favors" to help him; at the airport – pulling him aside and sharing that he would miss Peak and telling Peak to take care of himself and "don't hesitate to use those cards;" in the letter – sharing how much he missed him and loved him. Peak finally realizes that Rolf is his real dad in almost every sense of the word.*

Sun-jo

*At first Sun-jo is a friend and then an enemy and then a friend again. I hope there is a second book that unites these two young men. He makes Peak think about himself and helps Peak realize what is most important in his life, family. Sun-jo is climbing to help*

*his family while Peak is climbing to help himself (though Josh may profit from it). Sun-jo also helped Peak persist in climbing even when he wanted to stop; they spurred each other forward!*

Joshua Wood

*Joshua Wood is only Peak's biological father; he has never been his "Dad". Josh affects how Peak views himself; Peak wonders if he is worth much if his father doesn't even take the time to write him back. It is devastating to Peak when he gets the letters and during the "fight" the two have. Joshua Wood looks out for his business and for himself. He actually shows Peak how NOT to behave. His actions show Peak what is truly important in life.*

Zopa

*Zopa is a monk and a Sherpa who helps Peak throughout his climb and even afterwards. He gets him the right equipment, makes sure that Peak is "tough," acclimatized, and ready overall for the climb. He is also Sun-jo's grandfather. At first Peak thinks that Zopa has abandoned helping him, but Zopa has his own ways of doing things. He is actually in charge of the entire climb up Everest. In fact, there are many times when you get the feeling that Zopa is in charge of the mountain itself, especially when he meets Peak at the bottom of the mountain on the opposite side of where Peak was supposed to be.*

Holly Angelo

*Holly is an old friend of the family, but even more, a reporter who is there to document Peak's attempt. At first she annoys Peak and everyone else. He avoids her at all costs. However, he comes to appreciate her perseverance and strength; and he gets energy from seeing her work her way up the mountain. When Holly decides to quit and go home, it is the beginning of Peak's reflection into why he is actually climbing the mountain. He also learns to respect her because she agrees to leave his part of the story out of her article.*

Vincent

*(Don't you just love that the English/Writing teacher is portrayed in such a wise and caring way??!!)*

*Vincent is Peak's writing teacher, mentor and friend. He gives Peak the Moleskins and Peak is constantly reminded of his teachings – not only the writing ones but the ones about life as well. Vincent's assignment helps Peak "think" through his whirlwind adventure. Vincent forces and encourages Peak to reflect upon each day that he is on Everest and what the adventure means to him. He also doesn't judge Peak but accepts him. He allows him extra time to complete the assignment and pass at school. He is another important male role model for Peak.*

Triple Venn – see Appendix

As a final look at Characterization, ask students to fill in a Triple Venn Diagram (see Appendix). This will be teacher directed as students fill in one circle with Peak's characteristics, one with their own and one with their partner's traits (the partner they were trying to convince to take the trip or stay home).

Take them step by step through the Venn, even if they are familiar with this graphic organizer.

Ask students to answer these questions and remind them that they need to share why for the "Do you ?s."

- 1) How are the traits of your partner and you the same as Peak?
- 2) How are the traits of your partner and you different than Peak's?
- 3) Do you think you made the right decision persuading your friend to go or not to go?
- 4) Do you think you would like to try and be a mountain climber?
- 5) Finally, have them discuss their answers and how they arrived at them.

Setting

Students should use a variety of their senses to create the paragraphs for the different settings of the novel.

*Differentiate by allowing your "art smart" students to draw and use captions that have the similes and metaphors in them.*

Plot

What IF Analysis– (no student page)

The plotline of a story is complicated. Authors choose to turn the story this way or that way, but WHAT IF they made different choices in the book you are reading? Direct your students to analyze a few sections of the novel as you reach them by bulleting a few directions the story could have turned or twisted. (This section is not in the student pack as it would give away the plot). Complete the first What IF together – do not accept the idea that there would never have been a book. Could Peak have hooked up with his dad in another way??

*A differentiated assignment would be for some of your students to develop the What IF scenarios on their own and/or write an alternative chapter(s).*

**WHAT IF:**

Peak had never gotten caught?

Josh did not come and get Peak?

Peak had never passed his physical? (Peak even wonders about this one.)

There was no Zopa or Sun-jo in the story?

Peak had become seriously ill?

Peak had never gotten to talk with his Mom before taking his last climb?

Peak made it to the top of Everest?

### Conflict

The major conflicts that the storyline takes for Peak are:

Man vs. Man – Father vs. Son

Man vs. Self – Who is he and what is important to him

Man vs. Nature – His climb up Everest

Man vs. Society – Peak broke the laws of society by climbing the skyscraper

### Other Conflict Matches are:

Josh's Mom – Man vs. Man and Man vs. Self

You get the feeling throughout the book that she is at odds with Josh. Also she is worried about her son and if she has been a good mother, making the right decisions for Peak.

Sun-jo – Man vs. Self and Man vs. Nature

Sun-jo must also discover who he is and what he needs to do to conquer Everest.

Zopa – Man vs. Fate

You always get the feeling that Zopa is like a god and that he is in control. There is that inner struggle in the book.

Josh Wood - Man vs. Society

Josh's one big worry is his business. He wants society to see him as a success.

### Conflict/Resolution - Cause and Effect Graphic

(The Appendix holds the Cause and Effect Graphic.) Ask students to keep track of the major events and then determine the cause of the event. Do the first couple together. Next ask students to work with their partner(s) from Frontloading Research. Finally they must do the last few on their own.

#### *Examples:*

*Cause: Peak is bored and dissatisfied with his life. He is confused about who he is and how he fits in. ----->Effect: He climbs skyscrapers and "tags" them in secret.*

*Cause: Peak is caught tagging a building. ----->Effect: Peak is sent to a juvenile hall.*

It is important for you to start this with your students. There is no right answer other than following the circle that a Cause and Effect Graphic can form. I usually ask students to hold the quantity to ten to twelve so that the quality represents the most important and interesting examples. The last few they do on their own will help you understand what they "know and can do" with the strategy of Cause and Effect.

### Theme

I give the students an example of this with the theme of Loyalty. Below are the basic connections but you will be a great help to your students if you write out your own theme connections as I did for Loyalty. *This is also one of the experiences I use for evaluation. I can truly tell if students understand the text after reading their theme connections. I tell the students to, "Write your hands off and empty your brains out!" This is like a test but I do not call it a test.*

Relationships – Peak's family, friendships on the mountain, teacher/student

Survival – Daily life on Mount Everest, Daily life on Everest with(out) Joshua  
Change – Learning to make wise decisions, think of others before self  
Courage – Courage to take chances and the courage to say enough  
Interdependence – Peak becomes dependent on Joshua though he is given a great deal of independence. Peak and Sun-jo are dependent upon each other for support up the mountain. Peak and the “Peas” are dependent upon each other for love.

Other Themes:

Discovery	Natural World
Mt. Climbing	Tibet/Monks
Honesty	Acceptance/Rejection
Hope	Narrative Writing
Guilt	Responsibility
Respect	Traditions

Point of View - Character Flip

Students take on a minor character’s point of view to rewrite a section of the story. As I review students’ writing, I try to look for consistency in characterization. When the story changes because of the point of view, does the story mesh with the character who is now telling it? Are the things said and done typical with that character’s normal behaviors and traits? I love to read these; you will be amazed at your students’ ideas and wonderings. Also, the past tense nature of the book must stay a part of students’ writings.

Style: Literary Devices - I like to look for these with my students as we read and have them mark them in their books, then complete the assignment on their own. Differentiate by asking students to find these devices on their own the night before and then be prepared to lead the reading the next day. If students have their own books they can mark these with symbols such as “fsh” for foreshadowing, “fl” for flashback, “src” for sarcasm and “w/c” for word choice in the margins.

*Foreshadowing*

- p. 2 ¶4 “I wondered if the boulder would be gone by the time I came back through.”
- p. 29 ¶6 “More on that later.”
- p. 40 ¶10 “ ‘We’ll get it tomorrow. No worries.’ ”
- p. 44 ¶4 “ ‘Uh...no, but I’ll give her a call. No worries.’ ”
- p. 59 ¶5 “...which I learned later was everyone’s answer to questions about Zopa.”
- p. 69 ¶10 “... Captain Shek carefully scrutinized...”
- p. 139 ¶3 “Be careful what you say on the radio.”

*Flashback*

- p. 3 ¶1 “I was only two-thirds up the wall...”
- p. 32 ¶1 “I was conceived in a two-man tent under...”
- p. 180 ¶2 “She rarely talked about her parents. They still...”
- p. 182 ¶8 “With some work I could have gotten my climbing condition back. In fact, the reason I went for that...”

*Sarcasm*

- p. 1 ¶3 "...it's not likely that I'm going to find an eraser around here."
- p. 3 ¶4 "That's why there are over six billion people sitting safely inside homes and one..."
- p. 5 ¶1 "To reach the top you must have resolve, muscles, skill, and... A FACE!"
- p. 9 ¶7 "Yes, I just talked with your mother. She said that I had her permission to beat you to death."
- p. 12 ¶2 "...but unlike me they deserve to be there."
- p. 13 ¶2 "...(or more likely someone would take it away and stab me with it)."
- p. 23 ¶9 "Not any for the last seven years to be exact, I thought."
- p. 37 ¶1 "I guess my plan didn't quite work out in the Woolworth building."
- p. 47 ¶5 "...it's a very bad idea to leave your lungs behind."
- p. 49 ¶3 "Obviously Josh had not listened to him."
- p. 51 ¶6 "...but it wasn't from altitude."
- p. 57 ¶13 "...bow out of a return trip to the hotel on the death motorcycle."

*Word Choice – Small Word - Big Meaning*

**Peak** – his name and all the expectations that go with it.

- p. 19 ¶2 and ¶6 "He was **also** my father." "**Act** remorseful."
- p. 22 ¶5 "The prosecutor gave her a **sour** look."
- p. 25 ¶8 "... '**Poof!**' he said."
- p. 43 ¶9 "**Everest**...for a climber, saying that you are stopping by **Everest** is like saying you're going to stop by and see God."
- p. 46 ¶2 "**Katmandu**. For me the name conjured up..."
- p. 52 ¶2 "... Everything I needed to get through the **death** zone."
- p. 125 ¶1 "Not "**we**." I miss you. I want you home."

Other devices to note ☺:

- Alliteration on p. 86 ¶7 "Gathering grist..."  
p128 ¶10 "...weather window right."
- Oxymoron on p. 7 ¶8 "beautiful graffiti."

Genres

Adventure  
Survival  
Contemporary Realistic Fiction  
Geographic Fiction  
Sport Fiction

Special Features

Map  
Picture  
Letters  
*Even the Denouement is a special feature*

(Denouement is included so that readers have closure. They know that Peak is home, safe and truly happy with his family. Roland Smith likes to provide closure to students with “true endings” to his stories.)

### **Socratic Discussion Questions**

(See Socratic Discussion Methods in the Appendix. A rubric is also provided.)

These questions are here to help all students understand the heart of the novel as you read it together or as they read it in their cooperative groups. There are two sets so that you can stop one-third of the way through the novel, pages 1-66 and have a Socratic Discussion and then again at the end of the novel. You can also choose specific questions and hold the discussion at the end. Students can also select which questions they would like to discuss. Be aware that a few questions from each type must be selected to hold an effective Socratic Discussion. The writings from the journal questions and the discussion work serve as a checkpoint and final evaluation. There is no need for a test on the information you will gain from these discussions and the other learning experiences in the unit. I have provided answers but I am sure that your students will develop even more in-depth and sophisticated ones.

#### Questions Set One, pages 1-66

##### **Literal**

1. What happened to Peak’s cheek and ear when he was climbing the skyscraper?  
*Frozen to the side of the building. He had to rip it off to get to the top, he took a layer of skin and it was bleeding.*
2. What is “tagging”?  
*Marking a building with a special symbol or stamp.*
3. When did Peak truly feel regret and shame for having “tagged” the buildings?  
*In the courtroom when he saw the faces of the “two Peas.”*
4. How did Peak begin climbing?  
*Climbing magazines, summer camp, and the instructor was a friend of Peak’s mom.*
5. Why was there a film crew on Everest?  
*To record Peak’s trip up to the peak, which Josh arranged.*
6. What are three types of writing advice the author shares through Peak’s teacher, Vincent?  
*Get the reader “hooked and reel them in”*  
*Write the brutal truth in your own voice – “don’t let society or individuals, or consequences dictate their words”*  
*“Good writers make lousy minglers” – they should be “gathering grist”*  
*Writers must choose what to “leave in or leave out”.*  
*Research what interests you or seems important.*

### **Inferential**

1. Why does Peak think he was caught AND what is his greatest disappointment in being caught?

*He forgot to make sure the building was empty. Now everyone would know that he had “tagged” the buildings – he loved the mystery of no one knowing.*

2. What is a Moleskin and what is its significance in the story?

*It’s a notebook and is where Peak writes his adventures. It is in actuality this book!*

3. Why was Peak in such serious trouble for climbing and “tagging” skyscrapers in New York?

*A boy tried to mimic Peak and he died.*

4. Why did the judge agree to Peak leaving with his Josh?

*Because it would get him out of New York and the publicity would die down.*

5. Why did Zopa make the boys walk up to the Base Camp instead of ride AND carry extra gear?

*Build up their endurance.*

6. How does Roland Smith feel about the porters, herders, and yaks on Everest?

*Refer to p. 109 and 110. He feels that they are very important; this is an author commentary on the plight of these people on Everest today.*

### **Evaluative**

1. Do you think it was a wise decision for Peak to go with his father?

*Various answers – and yes, he had a choice.*

2. What types of regrets do you have?

*Various answers –will be sensitive.*

3. How can you avoid regret?

*Various answers – wise choices, listening*

4. What or who affects your decisions – big or small?

*Various decisions*

### Socratic Discussion Questions Set Two (pages 67 – End)

#### **Literal**

1. How does a “brain function... at high altitudes?”

*It doesn’t – you go into hazes and black-out a bit because of the loss of oxygen.”*

2. Why is climbing a “solo” sport? What does it take to get to the top?

*Your own strength, determination, wisdom, perseverance, selfishness*

3. Why is 26,000 feet considered to be the “death zone?”  
*The oxygen is so sparse that you begin to die a bit as oxygen cells can never be replaced. Also, because the path to the summit is “littered with corpses.”*

### **Inferential**

1. Why is Captain Shek such a threat?  
*He could stop the climb, send them all home, close down the business, arrest them, send Sun-jo to the work camps along the road, and kill one of them.*
2. What is the difference between a Rock Rat and a Rock Weasel?  
*A Rock Rat just cares about the climb itself. A Rock Weasel is all about the politics, publicity, advertising sponsorships, and endorsements. The climbing is secondary. What a Weasel can “weasel out” of the climb is what is important.*
3. Why can a Gamow Bag save a life?  
*Completely controlled environment with pure oxygen.*
4. What is significant about Roland’s statement on p. 154. “You don’t have to be alone to feel alone.?”  
*Various answers – These will be fantastic.*
5. What did Rolf’s letter mean to Peak?  
*It meant that Rolf was really Peak’s dad because he showed genuine concern and took the time to write and to tell him he was missed. Peak realizes that Rolf truly loves him as a son.*
6. What types of changes did Holly Angelo go through?  
*A wee bit less garish – quieter; grew stronger and more self-reliant – could have made it to the peak; helped Peak and Sun-jo when they were sick; became kinder and more considerate – agreed to publish Sun-jo’s story not Peak’s.*
7. What is the significance of Gulu’s story in the novel?  
*Represents how the mountain can change a life – there will be many answers to this – it would be a great question for students to ask Roland Smith on his website. It also represents what an author keeps in a story and what is taken out of a story so that it is engaging to the reader.*
8. What types of changes did Peak go through physically, intellectually, emotionally, and socially?  
*Physically – he grew stronger and his lungs changed so they could withstand oxygen deprivation  
Intellectually – Peak began to realize more about writing skills as he reflected on all Vincent had taught him. He grew mentally tough, learning everything about climbing Everest.*

*Emotionally – This is where Peak changed the most. He changed from a selfish boy who climbs skyscrapers for kicks to a selfless young man who chose to stop before he reached the top of Everest so that Sun-jo could have the glory, money, etc. He understood that when you care about someone you put their needs before your own. He also realized that the love of his family – his whole-real family, including Rolf was more important to him than the climb or even Josh. Peak also realized that in his own way Josh did care about him.*

*Socially – He learned to trust and listen to Zopa, Sun-jo, Yashi, Yogi. He learned to have fun with Sun-jo and not doubt his loyalty. He learned to think of others before himself – allowing Sun-jo to have the fame.*

9. How are building a wall and building a story the same? Hint: p 144 should help you as Roland Smith shared the “wall” section of the comparison; now you share the “writing” part.

*When a story is built, not all the ideas will fit. Even if an idea or a section is good it may not fit and so it must be **edited** out. Some of the ideas might not be clear enough for others to understand so they will have to be **revised**. **Editing and revising are two important pieces of the writing process. Here is a good point for a mini-lesson reviewing this process.***

10. How does the phone call from Peak’s mom change him?

*The phone call grounds him. It reminds him who he is – who he is connected to – that he has a family at home “good and caring heart...most important muscle you have. I love you, Peak.” – Everest is NOT all he has; it does not define him. It also helps him focus on what he is about to do and how it may affect him. He has been so involved with everyone else at the camp, he lost himself for a time. Peak’s mom helps him remember what it will take to get to the top.*

11. Why did Peak change at the summit of Everest?

*Sun-jo needed to reach the top but Peak wanted it. It was a spectacular show of sacrifice and selflessness on the part of Peak. Peak needed to get home to his family and so did Sun-jo but only one of them needed to bring something back with them. Peak also felt he was paying the “life debt” for what Zopa’s son had done for Josh.*

12. Will Peak ever go back to Everest?

*He says that he has had enough on p. 237 but one never knows? He might go back for his dad?? Or he might go back with his own son someday???*

### **Evaluative**

1. Why did Josh bring Peak with him to Everest?

*Build up his business, fame, get to know him a bit better*

2. Why is climbing Everest not a competition between Peak and Sun-jo but a battle against life or death?

*Climbing is a “solo” sport. One step, even going to the bathroom, could kill you.*

3. Peak received no grades at this school. If you did not receive a grade for any of your work in your classes, what would change?

*Various answers get them thinking about process not product.*

4. What does Roland mean by, “The point is that we won’t know what the story is about until we know how the story ends.”

*The end of every story determines what needs to happen in the plot. If a character dies, the writer has to figure out who does it, why it happens, how it happens, when it happens. It is the backward design.*

5. Zopa complimented Peak at the end of a climb and Peak says it was “a whole tank of O’s flowing into my bloodstream.” How do compliments make you feel and why are they so important? Who do you most like to be complimented by?

*Various answers – revealing and may be deeply personal.*

6. Did Joshua Woods love Peak? Was, is, he a good father?

*Various answers – My opinion based on novel events: He doesn’t know him well enough to LOVE him, care – yes – good father – no! p. 182 – “To climb at Josh’s level you have to be completely selfish...” Good dad?? P. 195 “He’s under strict orders to keep you alive. If he doesn’t, your mom will kill me.” If Peak dies, Josh is more worried about being in trouble than losing his son. That whole letter is creepy!*

7. What did Peak learn from his visit to Everest?

*Home and family are what is important and real. (The mountain and Josh are pieces of his life not his life.) I am sure students will come up with much better morals than mine. ☺*

8. Which character will you remember the most and why?

*Various answers, I share in the packet that mine are the “two Peas.”*