

Touching the Void

Joe Simpson

A Before Reading

- 1 *"This is a true story about two young men who climbed one of the most difficult and dangerous mountains in the world. It is an incredible story of courage and survival."* (page 8)
- a Why do you think these two young men wanted to climb such a dangerous mountain?
Now compare your ideas with the explanation on page 8.
- b What problems do you think they might have while climbing? Write a list.
Example: *Becoming too cold*
- 2 The story includes vocabulary connected to mountains, climbing and camping. Some of these words are in the box below. Decide if they are parts of a mountain, equipment for climbing or equipment for camping and write them in the table.

tent slope helmet rope stove peak/summit
ice screw sleeping bag gas canister crampon

Parts of a mountain	Equipment for climbing	Equipment for camping

Now check your answers with the pictures on page 6-7. Add any extra words from the pictures to the table.

- 3 The climb takes place in the Cordillera Huayhuash mountain range. Which country do you think this is in? Use the information on page 8 to complete the table about this mountain range.

Mountain range	Cordillera Huayhuash
Country	
Continent	
Highest peak in the range	
Height of highest peak	
Second highest peak in the range	
Height of second highest peak	

- 4 Look at the dictionary definition in your *Macmillan Essential Dictionary* for *void*:

Why do you think Joe Simpson chose the title *Touching the Void* for his book?

Now compare your ideas with the explanation in *A Note about the Story* on page 5.

B While reading

- 5 During the climb, Simon and Joe face serious dangers and problems but also find ways to deal with each one and survive. Keep a record of how they deal with the problems in the list.

Problems and dangers	How they deal with the danger
darkness	<i>daylight/head torches and batteries</i>
injury (a broken leg and frostbitten fingers)	
falling down the mountain side	
falling down crevasses	
storms and bad weather	
hunger/thirst	
losing hope and dying	

- 6 Following the accident and cutting of the rope, Joe finds himself on the ledge in the crevasse with a deep dark drop below. He takes the difficult decision to abseil further down into the crevasse (page 44). Imagine you are Joe and a journalist has asked you:

How did you feel when you saw the rope had been cut?

Why did you abseil further down into the crevasse? Was it a difficult decision?

Write your answers to these interview questions.

C After Reading

- 7 a When Simon thinks he has killed Joe, he knows that people will ask 'Why did you cut the rope?' He says *"I could hear their questions in my mind, but I had no answers."* (page 46)

Imagine that you are Simon and that Joe had not survived. Write a letter to Joe's parents explaining what happened and why you cut the rope.

Dear Mr and Mrs Simpson,

- b Did Simon make the right decision to cut the rope? Would you have done the same? If you were Joe, would you forgive Simon?

- 8 When Simon is sorting out Joe's possessions, he says *"I found his diary too. He had written something almost every day, even on the plane from London"* (page 56).

Imagine you are Joe and write a paragraph for your diary, either from the plane journey from London

the camp at the bottom of Siula Grande, before the climb

your hospital bed when recovering from the accident

9 *Touching the Void* was made into a highly successful documentary film in 2004.

Write a short summary for a cinema guide explaining what the film is about and encouraging people to go and see it. Remember to mention:

the characters

the location

the key moments

important themes, eg friendship, trust, facing death and survival

why people might enjoy it

10 Go to Joe Simpson's website www.noordinaryjoe.co.uk to:

- find out more about Joe, his life and his likes and dislikes

- see photos of Joe's trip to Siula Grande

- find out more about Joe's other books and projects