Out of the Death Zone/
Mount Everest Speaks

An article and a poem detail the peril and thrill of climbing Mount Everest.

About the Texts
Lexile Range: 600L-700L
Guided Reading Level: T
DRA: 50

Learning Objectives:
Students will glean the main idea from two passages. The first is an article about a young girl’s adventure climbing Mount Everest, and the second is a poem written from the perspective of the mountain.

Content-Area Connections:
Science: geology
Social and Emotional Learning: determination, overcoming obstacles, taking others’ perspectives

Key Skills: synthesizing, vocabulary, text features, author’s craft, compare and contrast, key details, supporting an opinion, inference, applying ideas, explanatory writing

Standards Correlations
The texts and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.7, R.9, W.2, SL.1, SL.2, L.6

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Storyworks Digital.

Your Teaching Resources
Use these powerful teaching tools for in-class or remote instruction. Find them in this story’s Resources tab.

Video
- “Beyond the Story: Into the World of Mount Everest”

Audio
- Author Read-Aloud: Kristin reads her article!
- Text-to-Speech

Slideshows
- Text Features
- Vocabulary

Differentiation
- Lower-Lexile Article
- Lower-Lexile Read-Aloud
- Lower-level Activities and Quiz

Learning Journey Slide Deck
This ready-made slide deck combines the story, video, and interactive questions. Share it with students as is or customize it to your liking.

Skill-Building Activities to share digitally, print, or project
- Vocabulary
- Close-Reading and Critical-Thinking Questions*
- Choice Board
- Core Skills Workout: Synthesizing*—With Slide Deck!
- Text Features
- Questions for English Language Learners
- Comprehension Quiz*

*Available on two levels

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Step-by-Step Lesson
Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

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1. Preparing to Read

Engage Students and Introduce Vocabulary

- Ask students to study the illustration of Mount Everest on pages 20-21 of the printed magazine or at the top of the digital story page. Have them brainstorm a list of words and phrases that describe the mountain shown.
- Have students look at the headline and subhead of the article on page 20. Then ask them to do the same for the poem on page 26. Ask: How do you think these texts are related?
- Invite a volunteer to read aloud the Up Close box on page 21, or prompt students to read it on their own.
- Distribute or digitally assign the Vocabulary Skill Builder (available in your Resources tab) to introduce challenging words in the article. Highlighted terms: trek, summit, catastrophe, expedition, grit, avalanches, surveyed (in sidebar), grueling, surreal, feat
- Watch the Beyond the Story video, which takes your students into the world of Mount Everest. Then have students discuss what they found interesting or surprising in small groups.
2. Reading and Discussing

- Have students prepare for discussion by reading the article and the poem first. They can read the on-level or lower-Lexile version, or listen to the Author Read-Aloud of either level.
- Discuss the close-reading and critical-thinking questions together as a class. Discuss the SEL Focus either before or after the critical-thinking questions.

SEL Focus

**Determination**

Ask students to reread the article and point out all the details that show Poorna is determined to reach the top of the mountain. Then ask students to reflect on a big achievement they’re proud of that took determination to achieve. (Emphasize that it doesn’t need to be as impressive as climbing the world’s highest peak! It could be as simple as: “I changed schools midyear” or “I finished a difficult book” or “I threw a surprise party for my best friend.”)

Close-Reading Questions

The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form from the Resources tab.

**“Out of the Death Zone”**

1. **In the first section, how does the author get you interested in reading the article?** (author’s craft) Kristin Lewis immediately gets you interested in reading the article by opening with the story of a girl in a life-threatening situation. It makes you wonder whether Poorna will be able to climb through the dangerous “Death Zone” and summit Mount Everest. Because the author doesn’t reveal whether Poorna makes it to the top of the mountain, you want to keep reading to find out.

2. **According to the section “The First Climbs,” how has climbing Mount Everest changed over time?** (compare and contrast) More people are trying to climb Mount Everest now than ever before. Because of that, there is more trash on the mountain and dangerous traffic jams occur. Also, more people have made failed attempts to climb the mountain. The bodies of those who have died have also built up over time.
3. **How did Poorna prepare for climbing Mount Everest?** (key details) Poorna trained hard to climb the mountain. She learned how to climb in cold and icy environments, and strengthened her body with daily workouts.

4. **What arguments for Poorna not climbing Mount Everest are presented in “The Risks”?** (supporting an opinion) Climbing Mount Everest would pose many challenges to Poorna. The mountain is dangerous and has deadly avalanches and winds. The summit is also very high up, which is dangerous for humans, especially a growing kid.

5. **Why does it take so long to climb Mount Everest?** (key details) Climbing Mount Everest takes a long time for several reasons. First, there are many dangers, including snow, ice, rocks, and crevasses, so climbers must move carefully. Second, climbers must take breaks as they move up the mountain to allow their bodies to get used to the height.

6. **Why did Poorna think about her parents and friends when she got close to the top?** (inference) When Poorna was close to the top of the mountain, she almost gave up on her climb. She was probably extremely tired by the time she got close to the top. She says thinking about her loved ones at home made her want to keep going. It’s as though they encouraged her from afar. She wanted to make them proud.

7. **In your own words, describe the “heavy burden” that the mountain in the poem carries.** (synthesizing) Many people have had dreams of climbing Mount Everest. However, it’s a dangerous mountain to climb, so many have not reached the top. The “heavy burden” refers to the fact that many people are not able to reach their dream because the mountain is so treacherous. Being responsible for dashing so many people’s dreams is a heavy burden for the mountain to carry.

8. **Why might someone describe Mount Everest as “a piece of paradise”?** (key details) The people who climb Mount Everest might see it as a paradise because it is a beautiful landscape far above everything else. Also, many different and interesting people climb the mountain. The landscape and the people make it a place like no other that many are drawn to. It’s uniqueness makes it a paradise.

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**Critical-Thinking Questions**

9. **Based on the article and the poem, what characteristics would a person need to summit Mount Everest?** (synthesizing) Answers will vary but may include focus, strength, courage, and commitment.

10. **In your opinion, is climbing Mount Everest a good idea? Would you climb it?** (applying ideas) Answers will vary.
3. Skill Building and Writing

Featured Skill: Synthesizing

- Distribute or digitally assign the Synthesizing Skill Builder. After students complete it, have them respond to the writing prompt on page 26.

4. Collaboration Station

- Have students work together in small groups to plan a trip to Mount Everest using information they learned in the video, the article, and the poem. What supplies will they need to bring with them? What training will they need to prepare?

5. Differentiate and Customize

For Struggling Readers

Both the article and the poem present pros and cons to taking on the exciting and dangerous adventure of climbing Mount Everest. As they read, have students highlight the pros and cons in two different colors. Then have students work in groups to find the strongest evidence from the passages to defend whichever side they agree with.

For Advanced Readers

Many books have been written about climbing Mount Everest. Have students visit the library and choose a book—fiction or nonfiction—that interests them (some suggestions are Everest 1: The Contest and Everest: The Remarkable Story of Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay). Have them share how the experience they read about compares with Poorna’s experience. Then have them write an additional stanza to “Mount Everest Speaks” that describes a scene detailed in the book.

For Multilingual Learners

These two passages present exciting opportunities to introduce descriptive words and phrases to multilingual learners. As you read through the passages as a group, have students collect words and phrases that describe Poorna and Mount Everest. When you're finished reading, have students reflect on what they've read by brainstorming other words they know that could be used to describe Poorna and the mountain.
6. Can't-Miss Teaching Extras

Explore the Storyworks Archive  Read about another explorer of the icy cold in the Storyworks article “Frozen Dreams.”

Explore Geology  Learn about how Mount Everest became the tallest mountain on Earth with this video from TED-Ed.

Learn About Ice Climbing  Climbing Mount Everest requires a special kind of climbing called ice climbing. This article from HowStuffWorks details how it’s done!

Summit Everest  Check out the summit of Mount Everest in 360 degrees at this website from National Geographic.