

1.2 Mountains on your mind

+ How do people react to extreme environments?

Our love affair with mountains goes back a long time. In 1815 William Wordsworth wrote a poem inspired by a mountain; you can read the first few lines below, **B**. Until then, most people had thought of mountains and other extreme environments as dangerous places that were best avoided. Through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, ideas changed. People became more adventurous, and began exploring extreme environments. They soon discovered that – yes – mountains are very dangerous!



+ Don't worry if you think Wordsworth's poem is hard – it is. Just think about how his words make you feel. What can you see? **Learn 2 learn**

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- Look at photo A.
 - How does it make you feel?
 - Think of at least five words to describe the mountain.
- Now read the poem (B).
 - What words does the poet use to describe the mountain?
 - How do you think he feels about it?

B Extract from *November 1*, a poem written by William Wordsworth in 1815 ▼

How clear, how keen, how marvellously bright
The effluence from yon distant mountain's head,
Which, strewn with snow smooth as the sky can shed,
Shines like another sun – on mortal sight
Uprisen ...

In 1985 two mountaineers, Joe Simpson and Simon Yates, set off to climb Suila Grande, a mountain in the Andes, South America. Their story is told in Joe's book, *Touching the Void*, and in the film based on the book. Here is a short extract.

C 'Touching the Void'

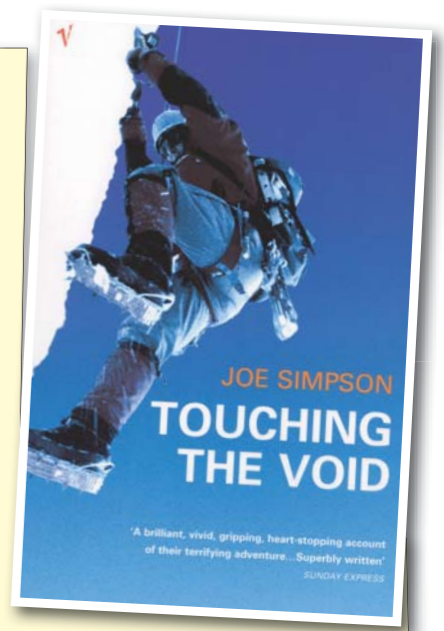
Crouching down on my knees, I turned my back to the cliff edge and managed to get my axes to bite in deeply. I lowered my legs over the cliff until the edge was against my stomach and I could kick my **crampons** into the ice wall below me. I felt them bite and hold. Removing one axe, I hammered it in again very close to the edge (...) I was hanging on to the ice axe, reaching to my side to place the hammer solidly into the wall with my left hand. I wanted it to be perfect before I removed the axe embedded in the lip and lowered myself on the hammer. As the hammer came out there was a sharp cracking sound and my right hand, gripping the axe, pulled down. The sudden jerk turned me outwards and instantly I was falling.

(...) I felt a shattering blow in my knee, felt bones splitting, and screamed. The impact catapulted me over backwards and down the slope of the East Face. I slid, head-first, on my

back. The rushing speed of it confused me. I thought of the drop below but felt nothing. Simon would be ripped off the mountain. He couldn't hold this. I screamed again as I jerked to a sudden violent stop.

Everything was still, silent. My thoughts raced madly. The pain flooded down my thigh – a fierce burning fire coming down the inside of my thigh, seeming to ball in my groin, building and building until I cried out at it, and my breathing came in ragged gasps. My leg! Oh Jesus. My leg!

+ **crampons** - spikes on a climber's boots



explore

- Read the extract from *Touching the Void*. Better still, close your eyes and get someone to read it to you. Try to picture the action in your mind.
- Imagine what might happen next. Continue the story in your own words. You will find out what really did happen in Chapter 3. If you can't wait till then, turn to page 00 to find out (but not until you've made up your own story!).

Discuss

- Talk about these questions with a partner.
 - How did the extract make you feel?
 - What does it tell you about mountains?
 - How is the extract different from the poem?
 - How does this tell you that the way we think about mountains has changed since 1815?

+ This technique – picturing a story in your mind and continuing it – is sometimes called a mind movie. It can help to get your mind really working. **Learn 2 learn**