
NOT BORING MEDIA

THE BLIND MAN WHO CLIMBED EVEREST

High-Interest Nonfiction Reading Passage

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- ✓ Reading Passage
- ✓ Comprehension Questions
- ✓ Answer Key
- ✓ Teacher Guide

GRADES 4-6 • LEXILE ~750L • DOK LEVELS 1-4

Reading they'll actually do.

TERMS OF USE

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WHAT'S INCLUDED

- ✓ High-interest nonfiction reading passage (300-400 words)
- ✓ 6 comprehension questions spanning DOK levels 1-4
- ✓ Complete answer key with explanations
- ✓ Teacher guide with standards, pacing, and extensions

Questions or feedback? Leave a review or message us through TPT!

THE BLIND MAN WHO CLIMBED EVEREST

On May 25, 2001, Erik Weihenmayer stood on top of Mount Everest—the highest point on Earth. What made this achievement extraordinary wasn't just the physical challenge. Erik had been completely blind since age 13.

Erik lost his vision to a rare eye disease called retinoschisis. As a teenager, he fell into depression, feeling like his life was essentially over. But his father refused to let him give up. He pushed Erik to try rock climbing, and something clicked. Erik discovered that climbing wasn't just about seeing—it was about feeling the rock, listening to his teammates, and trusting his other senses.

Climbing Everest without sight presented unique challenges. Erik couldn't see the dangerous crevasses that could swallow a climber whole. He couldn't spot the deadly ice formations called seracs that could collapse without warning. He had to rely completely on his team, who attached bells to their ice axes so Erik could follow the sound. They would describe the terrain in detail: 'Three steps up, then reach right for a hold.'

The climb took two months. Erik faced brutal conditions—temperatures dropping to minus 30 degrees, oxygen levels so low that every step felt like running a marathon, and fierce winds that threatened to blow climbers off the mountain. At one point, a teammate fell into a crevasse right in front of Erik, dangling by his rope until the team could pull him out.

When Erik finally reached the summit, he couldn't see the spectacular view that stretched across the Himalayas. But he could feel the sun on his face, the wind in his hair, and the knowledge that he had done what many thought impossible.

'I didn't climb Everest to prove anything to the world,' Erik later said. 'I did it to prove something to myself—that blindness doesn't have to define what's possible.'

Since Everest, Erik has continued pushing boundaries. He's climbed the highest peaks on all seven continents and kayaked the entire length of the Grand Canyon.

Word Count: 329 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: National Geographic

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1

At what age did Erik Weißenmayer lose his vision?

- ☐ A) At birth
- ☐ B) Age 7
- ☐ C) Age 13
- ☐ D) Age 21

2

How did Erik's team help him navigate while climbing?

- ☐ A) They used a special GPS device
- ☐ B) They attached bells to their ice axes
- ☐ C) They held his hands the entire way
- ☐ D) They used a trained guide dog

3

Why did rock climbing appeal to Erik after losing his sight?

- ☐ A) It was easier than other sports
- ☐ B) He could use senses other than vision
- ☐ C) His doctors recommended it
- ☐ D) He wanted to become famous

4

Based on the passage, what role did Erik's father play in his recovery from depression?

- ☐ A) He gave Erik money for climbing equipment
- ☐ B) He refused to let Erik give up and pushed him to try new things
- ☐ C) He climbed Everest with Erik
- ☐ D) He found doctors to restore Erik's sight

5

Which statement best captures the main message of Erik's story?

- ☐ A) Blind people should avoid dangerous activities
- ☐ B) Mount Everest is too dangerous for most climbers
- ☐ C) Physical limitations don't have to limit achievement
- ☐ D) Teamwork is more important than individual skill

6

Erik founded an organization called No Barriers to help others with disabilities. Based on his experiences, what qualities would this organization likely emphasize?

- ☐ A) Competition and winning against others
- ☐ B) Adaptation, teamwork, and personal growth
- ☐ C) Avoiding risky situations
- ☐ D) Focusing only on safe indoor activities

ANSWER KEY

The Blind Man Who Climbed Everest

1. C) Age 13

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage states that 'Erik had been completely blind since age 13.'

2. B) They attached bells to their ice axes

DOK 1 — Recall. The passage explains that teammates 'attached bells to their ice axes so Erik could follow the sound.'

3. B) He could use senses other than vision

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage states 'Erik discovered that climbing wasn't just about seeing—it was about feeling the rock, listening to his teammates, and trusting his other senses.'

4. B) He refused to let Erik give up and pushed him to try new things

DOK 2 — Inference. The passage states that Erik's 'father refused to let him give up. He pushed Erik to try rock climbing, and something clicked.'

5. C) Physical limitations don't have to limit achievement

DOK 3 — Analysis. Erik's quote summarizes this theme: 'I did it to prove something to myself—that blindness doesn't have to define what's possible.' His continued achievements reinforce this message.

6. B) Adaptation, teamwork, and personal growth

DOK 4 — Extended Thinking. Erik's success came from adapting his approach (using sound instead of sight), relying on teammates, and pushing his personal limits. These values would logically form the foundation of his organization.

TEACHER GUIDE

The Blind Man Who Climbed Everest

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1 — Refer to details and examples in a text
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.4 — Determine meaning of words and phrases
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.8 — Explain how author uses evidence
- NGSS — Connections to scientific practices

PACING OPTIONS

- Quick Read (10-15 min): Passage + questions 1-4
- Standard (20-25 min): Full passage + all questions
- Deep Dive (35-40 min): Add discussion + extension

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Erik said he climbed Everest to prove something to himself, not to the world. What's the difference between these two motivations?
- Erik's father pushed him to try rock climbing when he wanted to give up. When is it helpful for others to push us, and when might it be harmful?
- Erik relied completely on his team to climb Everest. How does depending on others require a different kind of strength than doing things alone?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Try navigating a familiar room blindfolded for five minutes. Write about which senses became more important and what challenges you faced.
- Research one of the other peaks Erik climbed (he completed all Seven Summits) and create a fact sheet comparing it to Everest.
- Design a piece of adaptive equipment that could help someone with a disability participate in an outdoor activity they love.

DIFFERENTIATION

- Struggling: Pre-teach vocabulary, partner reading
- Advanced: Add research, compare to related events
- ELL: Visual supports, pre-teach context

SOURCE

- National Geographic / Wicab Inc.