

# All about conquering Everest: On top of the world

This article tells the story of the first people to reach the summit of Everest. This significant moment can be studied in history, in English, or across the curriculum, using the lesson ideas below. For more articles and lesson maps, visit [schools.theweekjunior.co.uk/lesson-ideas](http://schools.theweekjunior.co.uk/lesson-ideas)

## English in context

### Vocabulary work

The following activity ideas develop vocabulary using the article:

- Look at new vocabulary from the text e.g. **summit**, **obstacle**, **crevasses**, **exposed**, **knighthood**, **Sherpa** etc. Discuss the word class and meanings. Add an action to help remember the word.
- Play Word Class Race. Ask the children to skim and scan the text to find ten noun, verbs and adjectives. Use sticky notes in different colours to sort the words. Discuss the words that could be in two different categories e.g. race. Create oral sentences in pairs to show the words in context. Reward ambitious vocabulary choice or complex sentence structure.
- Use the mountain investigation in the Geography section (see Cross-curricular opportunities) to practise and consolidate the use of superlatives and comparative language e.g. taller, shorter, wider, bigger than, smaller than, the most difficult etc. Revise spelling patterns and rules alongside this. Look at the syllable count in the words and discuss how the suffix changes if the original word ends in a y. e.g. easy to easiest.
- The above activity may lead to a game. In table groups, the children should write as many comparative and superlative statements as they can about Everest in two minutes. Each sentence is worth one point. They then share their sentences. If a sentence is duplicated by more than one group, the table loses that point. The team with the most sentences left, once all the sentences have been shared, is the winner!
- Alphabetical adjectives: *I climbed the mountain and saw a/an \_\_\_\_\_ sight!* Play this like the game, I went to the shops and bought. Play individually around the classroom taking each letter in the alphabet in turn. Use to extend vocabulary choices and consolidate understanding of new words.



### Reading comprehension

Use the article to answer the following questions in a whole class reading session, a grouped guided reading session or as an independent task:

1. Why did Hillary choose Norgay to accompany him on his expedition?
2. Which part of the mountain is the last to be attempted?
3. Look at the section 3, *The climb begins*. How does the author suggest that the ice is dangerous?
4. What does the word 'wedged' suggest about the final moments of the climb?
5. Name **three** things that Hillary and Norgay did once they finally reached the peak of Everest?
6. Drawing ideas from the text, what qualities do you think Sherpa Tenzing and Hillary possess?
7. What phrase does the author use to show the reader that not all of the 4,000 people who have climbed to the summit are expert mountaineers?
8. Why is it important for climbers to use bottled oxygen?
9. How did Hillary show his gratitude to the Sherpa people?
10. Using information from the text, decide whether the following statements are true or false:
  - A) Above 8,000 feet is the deadliest altitude for climbers without bottled oxygen.
  - B) Hillary saved Norgay's life at one difficult point during the expedition.
  - C) The 1953 expedition carried over 5,000 tonnes of luggage.
  - D) Sherpas still work today assisting climbers up the highest mountain the world.



### Writing tasks

The following ideas use the article to develop writing:

- Use hot seating and interview a teacher or confident child in the role of either of the climbers in order to ascertain their feelings and emotions during the climb. Following this, create a newspaper report/TV news report of the achievements of Hillary and Tenzing.
- Write a non-chronological report or fact sheet about famous mountains of the world. This can include the work linked to Geography (see Cross-curricular opportunities). The children may wish to share this with another class.
- Write a diary entry as Hillary. Describe the ascent up the mountains including the sights and sounds. Tell the reader about the obstacles that were faced along the way and the emotions at various points in the expedition. Link this to the race between the nations and the need for the British to conquer the mountain first as a source of national pride.
- Remind children that Sherpas are still climbing the mountain today as a means of supporting their families. Write an application to join a new expedition up the mountain as a Sherpa looking for a job. *What qualities would you need? How would you persuade your reader that you are the best person for the job?*



# Cross-curricular opportunities

## Maths



- Linked to the Geography activity investigating famous mountains across the world, pose mathematical problems for the pupils to solve. For example: *How much higher is Mount Kinabalu than Ben Nevis? How high are Mount Everest and Mount Huang altogether? Which is taller, Monte Fitz Roy and Mount Kailash, or Mount Everest and Aoraki Mount Cook? What is the total height of all the mountains? What is the average height of the mountains?*
- Set the children a practical maths challenge involving weight and reading scales. Decide what would be useful items to take on a mountaineering expedition e.g. clothes, food, water, maps, first aid kit, camping stove etc. Children will then be able to weigh each object and create a list of the items they feel it is most practical to take. *How much weight is it realistic to carry up the mountain?*

## Geography



- Investigate where Everest is in the world using atlases and Google Earth. Look at further images. Identify the countries that the Himalayas span and the continent in which they can be found.
- Investigate other mountains in the world e.g. Mount Kinabalu in Borneo, Mount Huang in China, Aoraki Mount Cook in New Zealand etc. Identify the countries and continents where they can be found. Investigate how high they are and rank them accordingly. Make sure to include Ben Nevis!
- Use the images on the article to name the parts of the mountain. This would be a good opportunity to introduce/consolidate the terminology to describe the physical features of the mountain. **Peak:** Pupils should use the term peak or summit. Many children simply refer to this as the top of the mountain. **Ridge:** where two sides of mountain meet. **Glacier:** like a frozen river, the ice slowly moves down the mountain. **Moraine:** rock debris deposited in front of an advancing glacier. Children could draw and label a diagram to show what they know.

## Design/Technology



- Link with Science. Children can investigate which materials make the best thermal insulators. Using this knowledge, they can design, build and test a flask to see how much heat it retains after five minutes. This could also link to reading scales and temperature work in maths. If you test the flask with hot chocolate, the children could drink it afterwards as a reward!

## PSHE



- Sir Edmund once said, "It is not the mountain we conquer, it is ourselves. If you can overcome your fear, you are frequently able to extend yourself far beyond what you normally regard as your ability." Use this as a starting point to discuss pupils' fears. Pupils could interview each other. Children could write a top tip on a post-it note for overcoming their fears. These can then be built into a classroom display.

## Science



- Identify and group materials as solids, liquids or gases. Look at the ice covering the mountains and identify that ice is a solid, as it melts it becomes water and if it gets even hotter it would become water vapour and evaporate. Pupils can sort and group materials according to their properties.
- Children can investigate the melting point of three familiar materials e.g. ice, chocolate and butter. They can then use a thermometer to measure temperature and record their results in a table or line graph. Pupils can then discuss how accurate their predictions were and whether melting is a reversible change.
- This could be developed further. Each group could agree a simple hypothesis e.g. 'If I add salt to ice cubes, they will melt faster than when sugar and sand are added to ice cubes.' Children can discuss what makes a fair test and test according to their plans.



## Art



- Use the work of David Hockney. In particular, look at a variety of his landscapes, including his work that depicts mountain scenes. *How did he create each of the examples? What medium did he use? What kinds of colours does he use? Does he use a range of colours? How does Hockney create texture in his work?* Show pupils a colour wheel and discuss the use of opposite colours for different elements of his landscapes and neighbouring colours to build up texture.
- Cut up a landscape into pieces and ask the children to recreate it in the artist's style. Use this as an opportunity to practise colour mixing.
- Create a landscape representing one of the mountain ranges investigated in Geography.

## Music



- Listen to In the Hall of the Mountain King by Grieg. The children may recognise the music, as it was an advert for a famous British theme park. *What do the children think is happening in the piece? Who could possibly be involved? Which instruments can they hear? Do they represent a particular character in their imagination?*
- Create a storyboard based on their ideas when listening and appraising the piece. The storyboard could then be used as a basis for writing.



# On top of the world



Discover the story behind one of history's greatest achievements.

On 10 March 1953, a huge British expedition set off on an extraordinary journey from Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. More than 350 porters, 20 Sherpas (local people famous for their ability to work at high altitudes) and 10 mountaineers walked for almost three weeks until they reached Mount Everest, setting up a camp on the south side of the mountain. Their aim? To conquer the highest peak in the world – something that had never been done before. On 29 May – 64 years ago this week – they reached the top. Read on to find out how they achieved it.

Thousands of climbers have walked in Hillary and Norgay's footsteps.

**EVEREST TODAY**  
More than 4,000 people, many with limited climbing experience, have reached the top of the mountain.

**DEADLY PEAK**  
282 people have died climbing the mountain between 1921 and 2016.



## 1. The race is on

British teams had been trying to climb Everest since 1921. By 1953, however, other countries were also competing for the prize. The year before, a Swiss team had come within about 250 metres of the summit. The race was on for a British expedition to reach the top.



## 2. Hillary and Norgay

Among the British team's members were Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay. Hillary was a beekeeper from New Zealand who had learnt to climb in the country's Southern Alps before joining a British expedition to the Himalayas in 1951. He described himself as "a small and rather lonely child". Norgay was the leader of the expedition's Sherpas. He had worked on Everest expeditions before and was very experienced.



## 3. The climb begins

The first major obstacle was the Khumbu Icefall, a huge stretch of jagged ice that tumbles down from a glacier. There are deep cracks called crevasses, and lumps of ice the size of houses – more people have died here than on any other part of the mountain. After establishing a path through

the icefall, the expedition moved supplies and equipment up a valley called the Western Cwm. At one point, Hillary fell into a crevasse and Norgay saved his life. The expedition eventually reached the South Col, a flat, exposed area between Everest and Lhotse, another peak.



## 4. The final push

After passing the South Summit, Hillary and Norgay reached a rock face. Hillary wedged his body between the rock and a layer of ice and pushed himself to the top. This stretch is known as the Hillary Step. On 16 May 2017, a UK climber reported that the Hillary Step had collapsed, perhaps weakened by the 2015 earthquake, but local climbers say that it's still there.



**HEAVY LOAD**  
The 1953 Everest expedition carried four and a half tonnes of luggage and supplies.



## Who are the Sherpas?

Sherpas like Tenzing Norgay are natives of the highest regions of the Himalaya mountains. Because their ancestors have lived at very high altitudes for thousands of years, Sherpas' bodies have adapted to work effectively with very little oxygen. This makes them excellent climbers. After retiring from mountaineering, Sir Edmund Hillary and his wife founded a charity called the Himalayan Trust. The charity helps to provide education and healthcare for Sherpa people, many of whom still work as guides on Everest expeditions today.

## The Death Zone

Climbers refer to altitudes of more than 8,000 metres above sea level as the Death Zone. At that height, the air is so thin (it contains so little oxygen) that the human body cannot get enough of it to stay alive for long. Almost all climbers use bottled oxygen to prevent exhaustion and altitude sickness.



## 5. On top of the world

At 11.30am on 29 May 1953, Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay reached the summit and became the first people ever to stand at the highest point on Earth, 8,848 metres above sea level. They shook hands, hugged and took photographs to prove that they really had reached the top. After eating some food, they set off back down the mountain to tell their team and the world what they had done. News of the British expedition's success was announced in London on the day before Queen Elizabeth II was crowned. It was a source of huge national pride. Hillary and the expedition's leader, John Hunt, were given knighthoods.



**WOW!**  
Hillary left behind a crucifix, and Norgay, who was a Buddhist, made a food offering on the summit.