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Review: The Top of the World: Climbing Mount Everest

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Jenkins, Steve, *The Top of the World: Climbing Mount Everest*. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1999, ISBN 0395942187, Ages 10 and up.

Awards: Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, Orbis Pictus Award, Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Medal

Description

Beginning with the geography, history, political and even religious significance of the highest point on earth, the author draws readers into the challenges of climbing Mount Everest. He quickly pays tribute to those who have attempted to scale its peak. Beginning in 1921 with the first attempt by Sir George Everest, for whom the mountain is fittingly named, to the successful scaling by Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay in 1953, Jenkins deftly describes and illustrates the risks that are involved in such a feat.

Thoroughly researched, this volume draws in the visual learner with its compelling torn and cut paper collages. Layers of color in earth, sky, and snow give a depth and mystery befitting the subject. The crumpled paper and wispy fabric add the mixed feelings of frustration of failed climbers and the almost otherworldly success of those who managed to beat all odds to reach the top.

Jenkins gives warnings about cold, wind, frostbite, and death. Yet, the book ends on a triumphant note with the success of a climber demonstrating that elation belonging only to the elite who have reached the highest point possible for humans.

Critique

Steve Jenkins does nothing if not respect his readers. Whether the holder of the volume is a child or an adult, the author and illustrator of this fascinating book speaks directly to his audience as if plans were already in process for a trip to climb the formidable mountain.

This volume will find a welcome in the classroom, home, and library. For teachers who plan social studies units on China, mountains, snow, or heroes, this is great addition across grade levels. For anyone who enjoys unique artistic expression, this picture book is a winner.

Character Themes: Courage, Boldness, Perseverance