

INTO THE DEATH

A MOUNT EVEREST
ADVENTURE

Thirteen-year-old Jordan Romero wanted to be the youngest person to reach the top of Mount Everest.



Main Idea A main idea of the story is the power of determination. What evidence supports this idea?



LOOK FOR WORD NERD'S 7 WORDS IN BOLD

ZONE

Over the decades, hundreds have died climbing the world's highest mountain. But that didn't stop 13-year-old Jordan Romero from trying to reach the top of the Earth.

By Sean McCollum

It was late in April 2010, and 13-year-old Jordan Romero was halfway to the top of Mount Everest, the world's tallest mountain. Jordan, his father, and a team of climbers were on a journey that could, if everything went right, lead them to the highest point on Earth.

So far, so good, Jordan thought. They had already climbed to 23,000 feet—higher than some jets fly. But he knew trouble—and death—could come without warning. Violent snowstorms could trap them. An injury could occur at any time. They could become too weak to continue. **Altitude** sickness, a serious and sometimes fatal condition caused by the lack of oxygen at extreme heights, posed another threat.

But Jordan had been preparing for this **expedition** for months. So he kept placing one boot in front of the other. That, Jordan knew, is how a person makes it to the top of any mountain.

Suddenly, a deep crunching noise sounded behind them. Jordan turned and saw a heart-stopping sight. Huge chunks of ice were tumbling down the slope. The ground beneath him and his dad gave way. Jordan was knocked off his feet and began sliding down the mountain. It was an avalanche!

Was this trip turning into a deadly disaster?

Unmerciful Mountain

Climbing teams began exploring Mount Everest in the 1920s. But it was not until 1953 that two men stepped onto the snowy **summit** and returned to tell about it. Edmund Hillary, from New Zealand, and Tenzing Norgay, from Nepal, found a route from the mountain's south side. Their **feat** is still admired as one of the great accomplishments of human exploration.

At first, only expert mountaineers dared to follow in their footsteps. But by 1980, companies were offering to take less-experienced climbers up the mountain—for a very high fee. (Today, they charge as much as \$65,000 per climber.)

Year after year, the number of attempts grew. Climbers reported being stuck in lines, waiting their turn to stand on the summit. Garbage piled up at base camps. Hillary said Everest had become “a circus.” Experts feared it was only a matter of time before disaster struck.

Their fears came true in 1996 when a blizzard took dozens of climbers by surprise. Eight people suffered **agonizing** deaths in the thin air, high winds, and freezing temperatures.

1. Jordan at the start of his climb.
2. Jordan scales a rocky slope.
3. Sir Edmund Hillary was a celebrity when he returned from Everest.
4. Garbage has piled up on Everest's slopes.
5. Team Jordan sets out from the last base camp.

Most climbers who die on Everest lie where they fall, frozen mummies in the cold, dry air. Retrieving them is too difficult and dangerous. These corpses are gruesome reminders of how risky it is to climb Everest.

Jordan knew that Everest was, in his own words, a “crazy, tough mountain.” Still, he believed if he prepared carefully and showed proper respect for the challenge, Everest would let him reach its summit.

Dreams of Everest

Jordan's quest to climb Mount Everest began in a hallway of his California grade school. As a third grader, he was fascinated by a wall painting of the Seven Summits—the tallest mountain on each of the seven continents. Mount Everest, on the border between Tibet and Nepal, in Asia, dwarfed all the others. “My dad picked me up from school and I told him that I wanted to climb them all,” Jordan recalls. “Especially Mount Everest.”

His father, Paul, took his son seriously. As a paramedic, long-distance runner, and mountain climber himself, Paul believed in setting tough goals. He told Jordan that this goal would be more difficult than anything Jordan had ever done.

Jordan soon proved his idea was more than a daydream. He toughened his body by running and riding his bike. He built



strength by dragging a tire on a chain up and down his long driveway. With his family's help, he organized events to raise money and donations of climbing gear.

Jordan, his dad, and his dad's partner, Karen, formed Team Jordan. During the next three years, they climbed five of the Seven Summits. Jordan learned how right his dad was. Climbing these mountains *was* the most difficult thing he had ever done. Sometimes he broke down in tears. Sometimes he even felt like quitting. But with his family's support, he found the will to reach each peak.

In March 2010, Team Jordan flew to Tibet. Mount Everest was next.

Questions and Criticism

As its Everest attempt approached, Team Jordan was gaining international attention. At 13, Jordan was three years younger than the youngest person who had ever successfully climbed the

MOUNTAIN FACTS AND FIGURES

This map shows the highest mountain on each continent.



The Seven Summits

- Mountain Jordan has climbed
- Mountain Jordan has not climbed

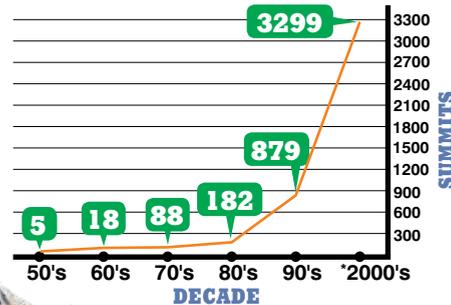
SOURCE: National Geographic Society

EVEREST BY THE NUMBERS*

Attempts	11,000
Summits	4,500
Deaths	220
Corpses still on the mountain	150

*Numbers are approximate

SUMMITS BY DECADE



*Does not include 2010

Desmond Boylan/Reuters/Cornis



mountain. Some critics said that a 13-year-old lacks the judgment to risk his life this way. Others worried the high altitude could damage Jordan's growing body and brain. Some wondered if Jordan's dad was using his son to get attention.

But Jordan and his family felt they were the best judges of Jordan's abilities, and they agreed that Jordan was up to the challenge. "It is not the mountain we **conquer**, but ourselves," Sir Edmund Hillary had said. This was one of Jordan's favorite quotations.

Mount Everest is so tall that it must be climbed in stages. Base camps are set up along the route, where climbers can rest and let their bodies



A triumphant Jordan

adjust to the altitude before climbing to the next camp. Karen, Jordan, and his dad hiked into the first base camp on April 16. They were joined by four Sherpa teammates, Ang, Pasang, Lama Dawa, and Kumar, the talented camp cook. The Sherpa are mountain people native to the area. Since the first explorations of Everest, Sherpa have helped and guided foreign climbers.

By late April, Team Jordan had climbed as high as 23,000 feet. Their bodies were getting stronger in the high altitude.

Then came the avalanche.

Jordan fell and slid. His crampons, the ice-grabbing spikes strapped to his boots, stabbed his dad in the thighs. But the main flow of ice and snow missed them. Not everyone was so lucky. Some distance away, two climbers had also been caught in the avalanche. One was hurt. The other disappeared into a crevasse, a large crack in the ice. His body was never found.

By mid-May, Team Jordan was ready to leave the last base camp. They strapped on their packs and roped themselves together for safety.

This was the big push.

Freezing to Death

On May 21, they reached 26,000 feet—the “Death Zone.” The air was so thin that the lack of oxygen can kill a person in minutes. Jordan and his teammates wore oxygen masks. As they approached 28,000 feet, Jordan spotted “Green Boots.” He was an Indian climber, Tsewang Paljor, who froze to death in 1996. Now his body and lime-green boots are a landmark. The sight

shook Jordan and reminded him to stay sharp.

The sun rose as they reached the final ridge to the summit. This proved to be the hardest part of the climb. They had been climbing for 14 hours. Jordan was exhausted. The temperature was -30 degrees. Strong winds beat against them. On either side, the mountain plunged thousands of feet. If Jordan slipped, his rope might be all that would save him from disappearing forever.

A few more breaths, a few more steps.

And then, there was nowhere higher to go, nowhere in the whole world. Jordan Romero had reached the summit, one of the most spectacular views on Earth. The jagged snow-capped peaks of the Himalaya Mountains poked through the clouds to the east and west. To the north, the Tibetan **plateau** stretched for hundreds of miles. Gazing south, Jordan could see India. He hugged his dad, Karen, and the Sherpa crew. They snapped pictures, their faces peeking out from their hoods. Jordan used a satellite phone to call his mom and sister in California.

Jordan had become the youngest person to ever climb Mount Everest. The record mattered less to him, though, than did the incredible view and thrilling experience, and the knowledge that he had done what he set out to do—one step at a time. 🏔️

WRITE TO WIN!

Jordan was inspired by a quote by the famous explorer Sir Edmund Hillary. “It is not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves.”

What did Hillary mean? Why did his words inspire Jordan? Write a



paragraph explaining your answer. Send it to “Everest Contest” by March 15, 2011. We’ll send 10 winners a copy of Roland Smith’s *Peak*. See page 2 for details.

GET THIS CONTEST ONLINE



WRITE A PARAGRAPH

Sentence Chef



Directions:

1. Read "Into the Death Zone." Then reread the section **Dreams of Everest**, and do the Sentence Chef activity below.
2. Use the color-coded boxes and lines as guides to help you write each part of the paragraph.
3. Remember to back up your statements by including information and details found in the article.
4. When you're finished, copy the entire paragraph onto a separate piece of paper.

THE PROMPT

How did Jordan Romero prepare for climbing Mount Everest?

Topic Sentence After he decided that he wanted to climb Mount Everest, Jordan and his family started preparing for the climb.

Supporting Sentence 1 Explain how Jordan prepared physically for the climb.

Detail Sentence 1 Provide a detail about this. (Hint: What training exercises did he do?)

Supporting Sentence 2 Explain how Jordan and his family prepared financially for the climb.

Detail Sentence 2 Provide a detail about this. (Hint: How did they get the money and gear they needed?)

Concluding Sentence Repeat the topic sentence, but in different words.