



**Classroom Guide for  
SACRED MOUNTAIN:  
EVEREST**

by **Christine Taylor-Butler**

**Reading Level**

\*Reading Level: Grades 4 and up

Interest Level: Grades 2-8

Guided Reading Level: S

\*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

**Themes**

Native Traditions and Way of Life, Environment/Nature (Mountains and Mountain Ecology), Religion/Spiritual Life, Respecting and Preserving the Environment, Asian/Asian American Interest

**Synopsis**

Mount Everest—a place of mystery, majesty, and unparalleled beauty—rises into the sky higher than any other mountain on Earth. Many stories have been told about the dangers and triumphs of climbing to the summit; but few have been written about the Sherpa, the people who have lived on the mountain for the centuries and consider it sacred.

Known for their bravery, strength, and skill in navigating the mountain's treacherous slopes, Sherpas have played a crucial role in Mount Everest's exploration since the 1920s. In recent years, however, increasing tourism has threatened the mountain's fragile ecosystem. The Sherpa now face the challenge of restoring and protecting this sacred mountain for their future and for the world.

Stunning photographs and engaging text present a unique picture of Mount Everest—its history, its ecology, and especially its people.

**Background**

Mount Everest is the world's highest mountain above sea level, measuring 29,035 feet (8,850 meters) tall. It is located in the Himalaya mountain range on the border of Nepal and Tibet. The mountain was named for Sir George Everest, the British Surveyor General of India from 1830 to 1843. However, the people of Nepal call the mountain Sagarmatha, meaning "Goddess of the Sky," and the people of Tibet and China call the mountain Chomolungma, meaning "Goddess

Mother of the World.” Since the 1920s, many world-class mountain climbers have attempted to reach the top of Mount Everest. This much human activity has caused serious problems for the ecosystems of the mountain, as well as for the environment of the surrounding area.

The Sherpa who today live in the lower regions surrounding Mount Everest are descendants of people who migrated from the Kham province of Tibet hundreds of years ago. The term Sherpa has several meanings and usages. It refers to the people who live near Mount Everest, the language spoken by these people, and a native person who serves as a mountain guide for a climbing expedition up Mount Everest.

**Teaching Tip**

*Sacred Mountain: Everest* may be used to help prepare students for state test nonfiction passages. The book contains various examples of nonfiction text features (captions, maps, timelines, sidebars, etc.) that appear on many state and national English Language Arts (ELA) exams. *Sacred Mountain* may also be used as an adjunct title in May when Asian American Heritage Month is observed.

**BEFORE READING****Prereading Focus Questions**

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background and promote anticipation with questions such as the following:

1. Have you ever heard the word Sherpa? What does it mean? What do you know about the Sherpa? How do you think this knowledge will help you as you read this book?
2. What do you know about mountain climbing? Why do you think people try to climb really tall mountains?
3. Have you ever heard of Mount Everest? What do you know about the mountain? Why is it special? How do you think this knowledge will help you as you read this book?
4. How is reading a nonfiction book different from reading a fiction story? What special features do you have to pay attention to in a nonfiction story?

**Exploring the Book**

Examine the photographs on the front cover of *Sacred Mountain* with students. Mention that the pictures on the left show people they will read about in the book. Ask students what they can tell about the people from the photographs.

Flip through the book and point out the features specific to a nonfiction book: photographs, maps, captions, quotes, headings and subheadings, sidebars, graphics (charts, maps, timelines) glossary and pronunciation guide, acknowledgements, author's sources, Find Out More section, and photograph credits.

### Setting a Purpose for Reading

Have students read to:

- find out who the Sherpa are
- understand what the Himalaya are like
- find out what life is like in the Himalaya region
- discover how the Sherpa have helped mountain climbers

### VOCABULARY

In this book, students are likely to come across many words and terms with which they are not familiar. These words and terms are usually defined in the main text, but remind students to use the Glossary and Pronunciation Guide at the back of the book for extra help and to remind themselves of meanings they may forget as they read through the book.

As they read, have each student compile a list of new or unfamiliar words and terms not listed in the back of the book. Then ask students to look up these words and terms in a dictionary or an encyclopedia and record their meanings. Have students work in pairs to create a sentence for each of the items on their lists to demonstrate understanding or the word or term and how it is used in the book.

### AFTER READING

#### Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop understanding for the content. Encourage students to refer back to passages and photographs in the book to support their responses.

1. Why does the author refer to the mountain as a “sacred” place?
2. Who are the Sherpa? What did you learn about them? How have they impacted the history of Mount Everest?
3. Religion is an important part of Sherpa culture. What are some ways that this is shown in the story?
4. What are some of the festivals celebrated in the Mount Everest region? What do these festivals celebrate?
5. How were the Himalaya formed? Why does Mount Everest continue to grow taller? How tall is the mountain today?
6. What is the weather like on Mount Everest? What did you learn about the different climate zones on the mountain?
7. Where do most Sherpas set up their villages? Why?
8. In what ways do Sherpa families earn a living?
9. What wild animals live on Mount Everest? How do they affect the lives of the Sherpa?

10. What is a Yeti? Do you think the Yeti really exists? Why or why not?
11. Choose one person mentioned in the book who climbed Mount Everest. What did you learn about the person? Summarize the person's journey.
12. Who was Tenzing Norgay?
13. Why does the author state that Mount Everest is at risk? What does that mean? What are some things that are threatening Mount Everest?
14. The last section of the book is called "Hope for the Future." What organizations and people are providing this hope? What are some of the things they are doing to help the people and environment of Mount Everest?

### Literature Circles

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in focusing on the different roles of the group members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to the ones in the Discussion Question section of this guide.
- The **Passage Locator** might choose two or three of the quotes that appear under the section headings and find a passage or passages that relate to the content or message of each quote.
- The **Illustrator** might make a poster or chart of things climbers and other visitors to Mount Everest can do to help preserve the environment and ecology of the area.
- The **Connector** might locate other books about mountain climbing, the Himalaya, or the Sherpa.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of each section of the book that the group reads.
- The **Investigator** might find out about the world's other tallest mountains and the adventurers who climb them.

\*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: *Getting Started with Literature Circles* by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), *Literature Circles: Voice And Choice in Book Clubs and Reading Groups* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and *Literature Circles Resource Guide* by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

### Reader's Response

Use the following questions or similar ones to help students personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals, in oral discussion, or in written form.

1. What did you like about this book? Why?

2. What questions do you have about the Sherpa, the Himalaya, or Mount Everest that the story doesn't answer?
3. Would you like to be a Sherpa? Live in the Himalaya? Why or why not?
4. In what ways is a Sherpa child's life like yours? In what ways is it different? Make a chart comparing your life and a Sherpa's.
5. Have you ever participated in an extreme sport, such as mountain climbing? What training and preparations did you make before you began? Based on your experience, is there anything you would do differently the next time?
6. Should people be allowed to climb a mountain such as Everest? What arguments can you give both for and against this activity?

### **Other Writing Activities**

You may wish to have students participate in one or more of the following writing activities. Set aside time for students to share and discuss their work.

1. Make a diagram of the different climate zones on Mount Everest.
2. Retell George Mallory's or Edmund Hillary's climb as a fiction story. Incorporate some facts and real details, but feel free to use your imagination to develop other parts of the story.
3. Write an article about the importance of the emerging role of women as mountain climbers and guides. Use information from the book (see pages 36-37) plus additional facts you find through research.
4. Pretend you are going to interview someone who has climbed Mount Everest. Make a list of questions to ask the person.

### **ELL Teaching Strategies**

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English language learners or who are learning to speak English as a second language.

1. Read aloud a sentence from the book and have students read it aloud after you, pointing to each word as they speak.
2. Make a recording of the trickier passages for students to listen to. Have them follow along in the book as they listen.
3. Assign ELL students to read the book aloud with strong English speakers/readers.

## INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

Use some of these activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas.

### Social Studies

1. In this book, reference is made to the Dalai Lama, the Buddhist leader of the Tibetan people. Have students research the Dalai Lama and Tibetan culture and history, and present their findings to the group.
2. Some students may be interested in learning more about Buddhism, the predominate religion of the Sherpa. Have students research the following, among any other aspects of Buddhism that they find interesting:
  - principal teachings of Buddhism
  - common Buddhist practices
  - life of Buddha

### Language Arts/Writing

1. The author utilizes some very descriptive “juicy” vocabulary words in this text. For example, in the introduction on page 5 the following words are used to describe Mount Everest: *unparalleled*, *immense*, *shrouded*, *majestic*. Encourage students to select five “juicy” vocabulary words from each section of the book, define the words, and then use each word in a new sentence related to the content of the book
2. Have students write a radio advertisement for mountain climbing guide services. Since no visuals will be used, all relevant information has to be in the ad copy. If students are interested, they can perform a reading of their ad as if they were radio announcers. Sound effects and/or music could be added.

### Math/Economics

1. It is very expensive to climb Mount Everest today. Research online what the typical cost would be per person, including airfare from the United States. Then find out how many people are usually in a group that attempts to reach the summit of the mountain. A climb also takes several months, involving preparation time and acclimation to high altitudes. Research how much time is required for the entire trip. Use the information you have gathered to calculate the total cost of the trip, and the cost per person per day.

If you had access to the amount of money required to climb Mount Everest, how else might the money be spent to benefit the people and/or environment of the Mount Everest region?

2. In the section “Hope for the Future,” the author discusses three organizations that support the region. Have students research further the economic impact each of these organizations is having

on the Everest area. Each organization has a website, which would be a good place to start to look for more information.

### Science

Interested students may want to find out more about the unique wild animals and birds found in the Mount Everest region. Some are mentioned on pages 24-25 of the book. In addition to finding basic information and images, students may want to investigate habitats and survival status.

### Art

Students may wish to create an image depicting one of the festivals described in the book, or a scene that they imagine depicts the view from the top of Mount Everest. Students may use whatever medium they are most comfortable with.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Christine Taylor-Butler** has written more than sixty books for children, including biographies, state histories, leveled readers, and several science and fiction series. An avid reader since she was a child, Taylor-Butler believes that for many children books are their introduction to the vast diversity on our planet. Taylor-Butler is a past president of the Missouri Writers Guild, sits on the board of their children's literature chapter, and is a member of the MIT Regional Educational Council. She lives in Kansas City, Missouri, with her husband and their two daughters. You can visit her online at [christinetaylorbutler.com](http://christinetaylorbutler.com).

Awards and honors *Sacred Mountain: Everest* has received include:

- Best Children's Books of the Year, Bank Street College
- Best Children's Books of the Year, Barnes & Noble Review
- Walter Williams Major Word Award, Missouri Writers' Guild
- Best Books of the Year, Nebraska Library Association
- Society of Midland Authors Award, Juvenile Nonfiction

### Book Information

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## **RESOURCES ON THE WEB**

Learn more about ***Sacred Mountain: Everest*** at:

[http://www.leeandlow.com/books/367/hc/sacred\\_mountain\\_everest](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/367/hc/sacred_mountain_everest)

### **Order Information**

#### **On the Web:**

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/ordering.mhtml> (general order information)

[http://www.leeandlow.com/books/367/hc/sacred\\_mountain\\_everest](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/367/hc/sacred_mountain_everest) (secure on-line ordering)

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