

Touching the Void-Characters

Joe Simpson:

- Joe is the author of the book and is one of the two climbers attempting to climb the west face of Siula Grande.
- He describes the ascent of Siula Grande with Simon P15.
- Joe reaches the summit via the west face P44.
- Joe falls down an ice cliff and shatters his leg P66.
- He is then lowered down the mountain by Simon but falls into a crevasse when Simon cuts the rope P76-109.
- Joe escapes the crevasse P141.
- He crawls off the mountain in spite of his injury, lack of food and water P145-95.
- He makes it safely back to camp P195.

Quotes on Joe-what do YOU think they SUGGEST?

- "I resolved to try some that very night." P4
- "The sudden fright still had me breathing hard and it annoyed me to see Simon climb easily over the difficulties and know that I had lost control and let fear get the better of me." P38
- "I looked back and was amazed to see that Joe had started traversing away from the cliff. He was trying to help himself by contouring round the small rise in front of him." P72
- "...like the paintings by Titian of grossly fat nudes that had mesmerised me at fourteen." P149

Other points to note:

- Joe is the narrator for most of the novel.
- Note how he changes in the novel: (i) at the beginning he seems thoughtful and focused (ii) he later admits to making rash choices that cause the accident (iii) he recounts his pain and at times is delusional-we should question/consider how much of these events have been re-interpreted on hindsight/looking back
- You must also point out the changes in his mental state and emotions but more importantly his determination and strength to survive.

Simon Yates:

- Simon is the other climber attempting to climb the west face of Siula Grande.
- He narrates some of the events in the novel.
- Simon begins to climb Siula Grande with Joe P15.
- Simon reaches the summit with Joe P44.
- Simon slips off the edge of the ridge P47.
- After helping Joe on the descent, Simon cuts the rope when Joe falls off an ice cliff and allows Joe to fall into a crevasse, presuming him to be now dead P101.
- Simon descends the mountain alone (P118), meets Richard at base camp and tells him the truth P127-29.

- Simon finds Joe outside the tents at base camp and arranges for him to get to a hospital P 203-07.

Quotes on Simon-what do YOU think they SUGGEST?

- “I envied Simon his carefree take-it-as-it-comes attitude.” P6
- “He was an easy friend: dependable, sincere, ready to life as a joke...that touch of madness that makes few people special.” P6
- “He had an odd air of detachment.” P69
- “He had suddenly become stern and efficient.” P198

Other points to note:

- Simon’s character is shaped by events in the novel, more so than Joe’s.
- He changes dramatically over the course of the book.
- Note the contrasts: (i) at the beginning he is optimistic and brave (ii) he ignores Joe’s caution about the weather (iii) on the mountain it is up to Joe to persuade Simon that there is a route, even though Simon more often than not takes the lead (iv) at the end of the book Simon is shown as angry and confused, but then efficient in his help for Joe.

Richard Hawkings:

- Richard meets Joe and Simon in Lima and stays at their base camp for the entire expedition.
- He gets as far as base camp and suffers from altitude sickness and decides he will venture no further P3.
- He stays at base camp while Joe and Simon do test climbs P6.
- Richard walks with Joe and Simon until the going gets too tough P15.
- Richard looks after Simon on his return P153.
- Richard presses Simon to leave for Lima P172.
- Richard holds Joe’s leg as Simon inspects the damage P199.

Quotes on Richard-what do YOU think they SUGGEST?

- “He had lived off grubs and berries with pygmies while dug out canoeing through the rainforests of Zaire, and had watched a shoplifter being kicked to death in a Nairobi market.” P3
- “I knew something terrible had happened. I’m just glad you managed to get down.” P129
- “Then he sat near me and talked of the long wait he had endured...until he could bear the uncertainty no longer and had set out to find us.” P129

Other points to note:

- Richard is a minor character, but he plays an important part in helping us understand the events.
- He represents the outside audience that Simon will have to face when he returns from the expedition.
- It is easier for us to empathise with the Richard’s reactions when one of the climbers does not return than it is to consider the reactions of people we have not met in the book.

- He acts as a **plot device** in helping us gauge our understanding and reactions to events as well as when Richard suggests he and Simon leave base camp in chapter 12.

The Local Villagers:

- These are a group of people who Simon, Joe and Richard call on for supplies and help.
- They give Richard a place to stay when he gets lost on his way to base camp P4.
- They sell homemade cheese and provide other food supplies to the climbers P12.
- The girls smile sadly at Simon, showing sympathy for his loss of Joe P176.
- The girls expect to take some of Joe's possessions as they are no longer needed P177.
- Spinoza haggles over the price of the mules that will get Joe off the mountain P203.

Quotes on the locals-what do YOU think they SUGGEST?

- "Three year old Alecia guarded the entrance to the cattle enclosure, preventing the cows and calves from escaping." P12
- "They angered me. What right did they have to feel sad?" P177
- "When Norma reached over and began sorting through the cooking utensils I exploded." P177
- "There was some delay because Spinoza was being bloody-minded about payment for the mules." P203

Other points to note:

- The main role of the villagers in the book is their reaction to the problems the men face on the mountain.
- When Richard is lost he has to 'negotiate' for food and shelter.
- When Joe needs to get down the mountain, near death, Simon has to strike a deal with Spinoza.
- As with the environment, there is little sense of compassion with the locals-their job is survival and the outsiders bring items they need.

REVISION CHECK:

Characters:

1. Where do Joe and Simon meet Richard?
2. What is Simon's reaction when Joe makes mistakes on the climb?
3. How does Simon react to Joe's injury?
4. What things creep into Joe's mind as he tries to get back to base camp?
5. How do Joe and Simon react in the tent after Joe has returned safely?
6. What part does Richard play in the events in the novel? **Begin with:** Richard is important because he helps the reader...
7. How do the characters of Joe and Simon contribute to the events in the novel? **Begin with:** Joe and Simon can be said to be the cause of events because...

