

Touching the Void-Language and Structure

LANGUAGE:

Literary Terms:

- You need to be familiar with the following terms in discussing the language of the novel: (i) narrative hook-the writer hints that something dramatic is going to happen (ii) dramatic irony-the audience knows more than some of the characters (iii) personification-when objects are given human qualities or feelings (iv) imagery-words used to make actions, objects and characters more vivid; metaphors and similes are examples of imagery.

Motivational Language:

- Joe's character uses many phrases at the beginning of the book to help him overcome the challenges he is about to face. (P18 & 24)
- He is a strong character and does not like to admit defeat.
- The use of short sentences and exclamation marks show us his energy and exuberance.
- This is also seen in the dialogue between Joe and Simon-P78.

Representing the Different Voices:

- When attempting to escape the mountain, Joe describes the 'voice' that helps him know what to do.
- He uses language to help us understand the difference between this commanding voice and the lethargic state of mind he finds himself in.
- The 'voice' relies on short phrases and direct orders (imperatives) P167-68.
- Simon has an abrupt way in his narrative. He is sharp with Joe (P38) and this abrupt style continues when he questions his action of cutting the rope.

Language to Build Tension:

- The **narrative hook** relates to the potential for disaster in the novel before disaster has even struck. See reference to anecdotes of other climbers and Joe's concern about the weather.
- Joe uses short phrases and repetition to make the climbing sound breathless and difficult. P92
- Joe also uses questioning to add to the tension once he has fallen as he wonders about his survival. P106
- Focus on the words Joe/Simon uses to convey how they are feeling at a particular point. Look at verbs/adjectives and explain what they indicate to us about how they are feeling/emotions/attitudes at a certain point.

Capturing the Beauty and Cruelty:

- Joe uses language powerfully to describe the landscape. One technique is to use the senses. P28

- Both Joe and Simon see the mountain as alive at times-**personification**. This gives the mountain a power over them and highlights their lack of control over this extreme environment. P144

STRUCTURE:

The Practice Climbs:

- The practice climbs are used to explain to us some of the dangers of climbing.
- This allows us to understand the situation better when disaster strikes later in the novel.

The Opening and Closing of Chapters:

- The opening and closing of chapters are used to capture our attention. Most end with the closing of a day, but occasionally Joe ends when he has made a bold choice, making us wait to know the consequence of his decision.
- Equally the opening of a chapter is dramatic, "I woke up screaming." P156. We are hooked immediately as we wonder what disaster has befallen Joe now.
- Simple openings, "It was cold..." are blunt and make us feel as if we are hearing Joe speak.

Changing Narrative Perspectives:

- The most powerful structural device is the changing narrative perspective. To hear Simon's version of cutting the rope and his descent is important in making us realise he made the right choice.
- Changing perspectives also allows us to know more than the characters themselves. This allows for dramatic pauses between action.
- The overall structure of the book could be split in two: (i) focuses on the dangers from taking on challenges which climaxes in Joe's accident (ii) focuses on what it takes to survive with the climax being Joe's eventual arrival at base camp.

REVISION CHECK:

Language and Structure:

1. What technical terms are used to describe the landscape in the opening chapter? QUOTE also.
2. How does Joe describe the sky just before Simon cuts the rope?
3. What sort of punctuation does Joe use to show that he is in pain at the bottom of the ice cliff?
4. When Simon begins his account after Joe has fallen down the ice cliff what do we know that he doesn't?
5. What time does Joe think it is when he is approaching base camp?
6. What is the impact of the opening chapter? **Begin with:** Joe uses the opening chapter to help the reader by...
7. How does Joe use the structure of the book to make the reader concerned for his survival? **Begin with:** There are two important moments when Simpson cleverly organises events to concern the reader: the first is...