

## Reading Guide to *Peak* by Roland Smith

### ABOUT THIS BOOK

When fourteen-year-old Peak Marcello's long-lost father presents the opportunity for them to summit Everest together, Peak doesn't even consider saying no – even though he suspects there are a few strings attached. And if he makes it to the top before his birthday, he'll be the youngest person ever to stand above 29,000 feet. It's not a bad turn of events for a guy who's been stuck in New York City with only skyscrapers to (illegally) scale.

Here, in Peak's own words, is the exhilarating, gut-wrenching story of what happened on that climb to the top of the world – a climb that changed everything. Welcome to Mount Everest.

### ABOUT THIS AUTHOR

Roland Smith was born and raised in Portland, Oregon. When he was five years old his parents gave him an old manual typewriter that weighed more than he did! It was his favorite possession. He spent hours in his room clacking away on that old typewriter. Of course, when he was five he didn't know how to spell and he barely knew how to read, but he loved the sound and the look of the letters on the crisp white paper.

Things haven't changed much since then. He still spends several hours a day in his room clacking away and he still loves the sound of the keyboard and the look of the letters and words that eventually turn into stories. The only difference is that he can read now and he spells a lot better.

Wanting to write led him to working with animals. He was going to Portland State University majoring in English so he could become a writer. One day he was looking at the job placement board hoping to find part-time work and he saw an opening at the children's zoo in town. He got the job. Soon after he started at the zoo, two agoutis escaped from their cage and disappeared into the park surrounding the zoo. (Agoutis are very large rodents from South America). His boss told him to go out into the park and catch them. He didn't know at the time, but she was playing a joke on him. Everyone thought the agoutis would never be seen again. He not only found the agoutis, but he managed to catch them and bring them back to the zoo. His boss was shocked!

Another time he was walking through the zoo with the Animal Keeper Foreman. They came around a corner just as someone accidentally let a Hisna bird out of a cage. Without thinking, he jumped up and caught it with his bare hands and put it back in the cage. Catching these animals was pure luck, but the Zoo Foreman was so impressed he offered him a full-time Animal Keeper position in the BIG zoo. He accepted thinking that he'd work there for a year or two and perhaps his

experiences would make good material for a book. Little did he know that he would be working with animals for over twenty years and that the work would take him all over the world. He continued to practice his writing while he worked in the zoo, but it was hard because his animal work took a lot of time. Eventually, he published a few books and left the zoo so he could write full-time.

Roland and his wife, Marie, live on a small farm south of Portland. He spends his days in his basement office writing stories that usually include animals. If he's not writing he's traveling -- doing research and taking photos for upcoming books. Or, he is out visiting schools -- something he loves to do! His writing led him to animals and his work with animals led him back to writing. It's funny how things work out. He spent over twenty years working with animals. Now he's going to spend the next twenty years writing about animals...as well as a few other things.

### **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. What happened to Peak's cheek and ear when he was climbing the skyscraper?
2. What is "tagging?"
3. When did Peak truly feel regret and shame for having "tagged" the buildings?
4. How did Peak begin climbing?
5. Why was there a film crew on Everest?
6. What are three pieces of writing advice the author shares through Peak's teacher Vincent?
7. Why does Peak think he was caught; what is his greatest disappointment in being caught?
8. What is a Moleskin and what's its significance in the story?
9. Why was Peak in such serious trouble for climbing and "tagging" skyscrapers in New York?
10. Why did the judge agree to Peak leaving with his dad Josh?
11. Why did Zopa make the boys walk up to the Base Camp AND carry extra gear instead of ride?

12. How does Roland Smith feel about the porters, herders, and yaks on Everest?
13. Do you think it was a wise decision for Peak to go with his father?
14. What types of regrets do you think about?
15. How do you avoid regret?
16. What or who affects your decisions – big or small?
17. How does the “brain function... at high altitudes?”
18. Why is climbing a “solo” sport? What does it take to get to the top of Everest?
19. Why is 26,000 feet considered to be the “death zone?”
20. Why is Captain Shek such a threat?
21. What is the difference between a Rock Rat and a Rock Weasel?
22. Why can a Gamow Bag save a life?
23. What is significant about Roland Smith’s statement on p. 154, “You don’t have to be alone to feel alone?”
24. What did Rolf’s letter mean to Peak?
25. What types of changes did Holly Angelo experience?
26. What is the significance of Gulu’s story in the novel?
27. What types of changes did Peak experience physically, intellectually, emotionally and socially?
28. How are building a wall and building a story the same? Hint: p 144 should help you as Roland Smith shares the “wall” section of the comparison. Now, you share the “writing” part.
29. How does the phone call from Peak’s Mom change him?
30. What changed at the summit of Everest?

31. Will Peak ever go back to Everest?
32. Why did Josh bring Peak with him to Everest?
33. Why is climbing Everest not a competition between Peak and Sun-jo but a battle against life or death?
34. Peak has no grades at his school. If you did not get a grade for any of your work or your classes, what would change?
35. What does Roland Smith mean by, "The point is that we won't know what the story is about until we know how the story ends."
36. Zopa compliments Peak at the end of a climb and Peak says it was "a whole tank of O's flowing into his bloodstream." How do compliments make you feel? Why are they so important? Who do you most like to be complimented by?
37. Does Joshua Woods love Peak? Is he a good father?
38. What did Peak learn from his visit to Everest?
39. Which character is the most memorable?