



The Drop

Jeff Ross

Reading level: 2.8

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AR Quiz #143874

Book Summary

Alex's goal in life is simple: to snowboard all day, every day. His ultimate dream is to be part of the Backcountry Patrol, an elite group of snowboarders who patrol the ungroomed slopes of British Columbia. But first, he and three other young hopefuls (Dave, Bryce and Hope) must endure a series of tests, which takes them to remote and dangerous terrain.

When Bryce disappears, the teens are left with Sam, their dubiously qualified instructor, and no links to the outside world. As Alex and Hope scramble to find out what happened to Bryce, they must confront their own fears of the whiteout conditions and the ominous, mysterious drop.

Prereading Ideas

- What do you know about extreme sports? Are you a fan? Are you a participant?
- Is there a sport or activity that you enjoy so much that you think you could do it forever?
- Would you risk your life for someone you barely know?

Connecting to the Text

Plot

- The first few lines of *The Drop* are exciting and full of action. They make the reader want to read more!
 - ◆ Go over the first few paragraphs with students, discussing what the author does to set the scene up in such an exciting way.
 - ◆ Have students examine a piece of their own creative writing. How can they change the first few paragraphs to engage the reader quickly—perhaps with action, dialogue or an immediate problem?
 - ◆ Have students revise their writing.
 - ◆ After revising, ask students to switch their stories with a partner, providing both the “before” and the “after.” Have students provide constructive feedback about the changes and then incorporate this feedback.
- Have students sketch the sequence of events at the beginning of chapter 2, as Alex takes the drops. Discuss with students how the clear writing makes it easy to picture what’s happening in the story. They can sketch the sequence in several panels, like a comic strip. Encourage them to attribute thought-bubbles to Alex: What might he be thinking as he comes into the second drop too fast? What is he thinking as he sets up for the final drop? What is he telling himself?
- Discuss with students: *The Drop* seems to move from one exciting event to another, with each challenge that the characters face being even harder—and scarier—than the last.
 - ◆ Have students cite examples from the text to support this observation.
 - ◆ As a class, using the SMART Board or overhead projector, create a graphic organizer or graphic representation of how this happens. For example:



- ◆ Divide students into pairs. Task each pair to come up with an original plotline where things go from bad to worse to worse to an eventual resolution. Invite them to use familiar characters, if they like: Red Riding Hood, Harry Potter, Dora the Explorer or even Spongebob.
- Make an overhead of the following list, or put it up on the SMART Board. Discuss with students some of the things that make a good story:
 - ◆ a plot that is exciting, suspenseful, baffling or extraordinary
 - ◆ interesting situations that are well explained and believable
 - ◆ characters you care enough about to make you want to keep reading
 - ◆ characters you can relate to and who change and grow as they make decisions to solve problems

- ◆ descriptions that make you feel like you're there
- ◆ a variety of settings
- ◆ a fast start—action, danger, humor
- ◆ situations that provide an emotional response and give you something to think about
- ◆ a good ending with problems solved and characters getting what they deserve

Using these criteria, have students write a critical review of *The Drop*. Students should ensure their review touches on a number of the criteria with examples and reasons for their assessment.

Character

- Through dialogue, narrative, and his characters' reactions to each other, the author creates clear pictures of his characters. Have students choose one character from *The Drop* and make a character web for that person. Include such things as appearance, personality traits, fears and desires, and actions.
- Part of making your characters believable is writing realistic dialogue for them. If a character says things that you know nobody would say in the real world, then the story just won't work. Here's a strong bit of dialogue from *The Drop*, before Dave takes on a nerve-wracking challenge in chapter 1:

"Just go, Dave," Hope said.

"I'm going. I'm going."

"Then goooooo."

Discuss with students the fact that this short exchange illustrates the characters' feelings about each other. Can you see Hope's impatience in her words? Can you hear Dave's hesitancy? Have students select several passages from *The Drop* where the dialogue is particularly strong or convincing. They should be prepared to explain their choices to the group. Did any students select the same passages? What makes these passages realistic?

- What makes a book interesting to read is seeing how the characters grow and change as they work their way through the main problem and other, smaller issues. How does Alex's perception of Sam and the other Backcountry Patrol hopefuls change as the story evolves? Have students create a "character evolution timeline," starting from the beginning of the book and ending at...the end. Along the timeline, have them make notes on how Alex perceives each character and how those perceptions change throughout the story.
- Conflict is what keeps a story moving along. It's what makes things interesting! Typically, plots follow one of four basic patterns of conflict:
 - ◆ *Person against nature.* Tension comes from the character's battle against strong forces of nature.
 - ◆ *Person against person.* Tension comes through the conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist.

- ◆ *Person against society.* Tension comes from the main character's struggle against some societal factor that must be overcome.
- ◆ *Person against self.* Tension is created as the protagonist faces internal conflict; the hero has two or more courses of action and must decide which course to take.

Guide students in a discussion of the kind of conflict pattern in *The Drop*. Is there more than one, depending on which part of the story you look at? Which one predominates?

- The characters in *The Drop* often speak to each other using sarcasm. Take, for example, this excerpt from chapter 10, where the group is trying to figure out who could have kidnapped Bryce:

"We have to find out who took Bryce," Hope yelled. "Someone took him over the drop."

Sam squinted at her. "Why would you say that?"

"We found tracks out there. The only place they could have gone was over the drop."

"What kind of tracks?"

"Yeti," I said. "Snowmobile, what else? You do know how rich Bryce's family is, right?"

How does the use of sarcasm add to this exchange between the characters? How does it hint at the characters' emotional states?

Theme

- One of the themes in *The Drop* is that people aren't always who they first appear to be. Provide examples from the book where this is evident. Can they think of a fable, story or other book where first impressions are misleading?
- Challenge students to think of two or more themes that run through the book.

Point of View

- *The Drop* is told from Alex's point of view. Have students write a scene from the story from the point of view of a different character. Try writing as Sam in the scene where he discourages the group from going out to look for Bryce; as Hope in the scene where she decides which spot to take the drop; as Dave as he flees the gun-wielding Sam down the mountainside.
- Ask students to consider how the story would be different if it was told in the third person point of view. What are the advantages or disadvantages of using the first person? Third person?

Vocabulary

Snowboarding has its own unique vocabulary. Have students read the definitions for the following words. Assign students to choose a number of words and use them in a sentence. Can they use five of the following terms in a short paragraph about snowboarding?

binding: a plastic strap that encircles a boarder's boot and secures the boot to the snowboard

bounce turn: in deep powder, you ride like the ground beneath you is a giant trampoline. You need to push down and jump out of the powder to turn. This ends up making boarders look like they are bouncing down a mountain.

carve: to turn quickly and with control on a snowboard

chute: a narrow opening that runs between two or more obstacles (rocks, trees, etc.)

extreme verts (vertical drops): a very steep incline

face-plant: falling on one's face or front side after being pitched forward or falling

half-pipe: almost exactly what it sounds like; similar to an empty swimming pool with a curved bottom. Half-pipes are popular spots for skateboarders, snowboarders and BMX bike riders to perform tricks.

heli-boarding: using a helicopter to get to spots where lifts and gondolas don't go; most often done on the backside of a mountain

incline: a hill or slope

outcropping: a place where the rocks or trees jut out from the side of a mountain

patrol: the first aid and hill safety organization at a ski resort

rail: a long bar or rail, often metal, embedded in the snow, usually parallel to the direction of the hill so that riders can slide down it on their skis or board

sapling: a young tree

Yeti: also known as the Abominable Snowman; a huge, mythical, white, ape-like creature that poses grave risks to humans

Connecting to the Curriculum

English

- Authors know they can move a story along with strong verbs. Briefly review verbs with your class. Introduce them to verbs that show action in a descriptive way. For example, here's the first line of *The Drop*: "The helicopter pitched forward, almost tossing me out the open door." Discuss how the story is enriched by using strong verbs. Have students find a dozen other sentences in *The Drop* where the author uses strong verbs. Make an organized list of these sentences and underline the verbs that really make them come to life!
- Explore with students how to write a screenplay. Watch a section of *Stand by Me*, *E.T.* or *Edward Scissorhands*. Discuss setting, dialogue and the importance of stage direction. Have students choose a section of *The Drop* and adapt it for a screenplay.
- Browse employment listings on your local newspaper's website. Invite students to use these listings as a guideline in creating a job posting for Backcountry Patrollers, using points from the book.
- Put students into groups of three or four. Give them fifteen minutes to figure out a list of "Big Questions" from *The Drop*. Model effective discussion moderation for the students, then invite each group to lead a class discussion about one of their "Big Questions."

Health/Personal Planning

- Fear is a natural feeling that we all experience from time to time. It's there for a reason—to help keep us safe. Alex and Hope are correct to feel fear in tackling the Drop to try and find Bryce.
 - ◆ Discuss with students: Do you think they're right to set their fear aside to try and save their groupmate—or are they taking stupid chances? What would you do in a similar situation?
 - ◆ Have students team up in pairs or in groups of three to create a *Feeling the Fear* chart. On a large piece of paper, create two columns. In one column, brainstorm situations where fear is helpful to our self-preservation and safety. In the second column, brainstorm situations where our fear prevents us from taking the risks we need to take in order to grow.

Science

- Have students research hypothermia, and construct a timeline showing hypothermia's progressive effects on the human body.
- Learn about avalanches. Start at the National Snow and Ice Data Center: <http://nsidc.org/snow/avalanche>. Divide students into groups or pairs, and have each group become experts on one of the following subareas of avalanches:
 - ◆ Why avalanche awareness? (2 people)
 - ◆ Who gets caught in avalanches? (2 people)
 - ◆ When and where avalanches happen (3 people)

- ◆ Anatomy of an avalanche (2-3 people)
- ◆ Avalanche factors: what conditions cause an avalanche? (4-6 people)
- ◆ How to determine if the snowpack is safe (2 people)
- ◆ Avalanche gear (2-3 people)
- ◆ Tips for avalanche survival (3-4 people)
- ◆ Avalanche danger scale (2 people)
- ◆ Avalanche quick checks (2 people)

Using the jigsaw learning strategy, have each small group learn about their selected portion of avalanche knowledge. Allow about twenty minutes for students to assemble and organize their information. Then each group takes a turn presenting what they've learned to the class, using visual aids or even dramatizations where appropriate.

Physical Education

- Alex and his groupmates all want to be part of the Backcountry Patrol. Whether in the backcountry or on the hill, the job of a patroller is to help keep skiers and boarders safe on the hill, and to respond to accidents when they happen. First-aid training is an important part of the job description, as is the ability to move an injured person off the hill. Has anyone in the class had any first-aid training? Why is it important? What sorts of accidents might happen on a ski hill or in ungroomed areas such as the forest?
- Off-trail boarding is a significant part of *The Drop*. But there are dangers attached to going off-trail in the backcountry. Discuss with students: what might be the dangers of riding off-trail? (Avalanches, drops, getting lost, freezing to death, suffocating in deep snow.) Why would a person choose to ride off-trail? Why would they choose not to? What precautions should a person take before riding off-trail?
- A snowboard is made up of one piece, like a surfboard or skateboard. Once the snowboarder's feet are attached to the board, he or she can't move them in relation to the board. The snowboarder controls the board by shifting his weight and turning. Have students pretend their feet are attached to the floor. Which ways can they still move? Can they touch their toes? How far can they bend their knees without lifting their feet or losing their balance?
- Investigate injuries caused by snowboarding (usually these involve the wrists, knees and head). How do these injuries differ from skiing injuries? How can students guard against them?

Connecting to the Students—Discussion Questions

1. When Alex finds himself stuck in the snow near the Drop, he begins to panic. Write about a time when you've been in a similar situation, where you had to call upon your wits to keep you safe.
2. After Alex carries Keith Richards down the mountain, Hope doubts she'll be able to do the same with a similar dummy the next day. But Sam interrupts, reminding her how important it is not to say that you can't do something. Saying *can't* means you *won't be able to*, he tells them. Do you agree? How does your ability and willingness to believe in your ability to do something affect the outcome?
3. Sam drinks while he's in charge of the Backcountry Patrol hopefuls. He's also quite slack in terms of making sure the group remains safe. Discuss how this behavior puts the group at risk. What should Sam be doing differently?
4. Alex sometimes listens to a corny old song called "Oh, What a Feeling." Explain about a song that has special meaning for you. Why do you like it? What does it remind you of?
5. How does Alex's impression of Hope change as the story unfolds? Discuss a time when you or your friends jumped to similar conclusions about someone's personality without having the full facts. How were you wrong in your impressions?
6. When Dave says he doesn't like Bryce, Alex corrects him, saying that really, he's intimidated by Bryce. What does it mean to be intimidated by something or someone? Think of a time or situation when you have felt intimidated. Were you able to conquer the feeling? Or did it get the better of you?
7. In the hospital, Sam tells Alex it's never worthwhile to try to be someone other than who you are inside. "People have to accept that they are who they are," he says. As you see it, what is the wisdom in this observation?

Author's Note

Dear Reader,

I had been skiing for eight years before I first strapped on a snowboard. The next day I sold my skis, bought a snowboard, and have never skied again. I have nothing against skiing, it just doesn't, for me, have the same sense of freedom which snowboarding does. I think it has something to do with holding onto poles, as well as the wobbly look skiers get when one ski decides to shoot off in its own direction. Snowboarding is a culture as well. Having started in the sport when it was relatively young, I have been able to watch it progress in popularity, skill and technology. When I first began snowboarding, the bindings were little clamps attached to the board and the board itself was only rounded and raised at the front. We had to fight to ride even on the major ski hills; backcountry boarding was a staple as these were often the only places we could go.

Everything has changed now and snowboarders are as common as skiers. There are even ski patrol snowboarders. I wrote this book based on the experiences I've had backcountry boarding, and the sense of freedom I found in the wild, strapped to a sheet of fiberglass.

I hope you enjoy it.

Jeff Ross

Resources***Writing Screenplays***

www.screenwriting.info

Skiing and Snowboarding

Avalanche safety and information

www.avalanche.ca/cac

National Snow and Ice Data Center

<http://nsidc.org/snow/avalanche>

Canadian Ski Patrol

www.csps.ca

National Ski Patrol

www.nsp.org

Crazy backcountry heli-snowboard footage!

www.youtube.com/watch?v=E6rQ1yB6rj8&feature=related

Canadian Snowboard Federation

www.canadasnowboard.ca

Canadian Association of Snowboard Instructors

www.casi-acms.com

Snowboarding backgrounder

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snowboarding>

Books

- Basich, Tina and Kathleen Gasperini. *Pretty Good for a Girl: The Autobiography of a Snowboarding Pioneer*
- Brouwer, Sigmund. *Wired*
- Echols, Jennifer. *The Ex Games* (Romantic Comedies)
- Gustaitis, Joseph Alan. *Snowboard* (Winter Olympic Sports)
- Hart, Lowell. *The Snowboard Book: A Guide for All Boarders*
- Kalman, Bobbie and Kelley MacAulay. *Extreme Snowboarding* (Extreme Sports No Limits!)
- McNab, Neil. *Go Snowboard: Read It, Watch It, Do It* (CD book)
- Reed, Rob. *The Way of the Snowboarder*
- Ryan, Kevin. *The Illustrated Guide to Snowboarding*
- Smith, Jim. *The Art of Snowboarding: Kickers, Carving, Half-Pipe, and More*
- Thorpe, Holli. *Snowboarding: The Ultimate Guide* (Greenwood Guide to Extreme Sports)
- Withers, Pam. *Peak Survival* (Take it to the Extreme)

Author Biography

Jeff Ross has been hurtling himself down mountains on a piece of fiberglass and hoping for the best for as long as he can remember. He grew up near Collingwood, Ontario, where he learned to ski, snowboard, skateboard and injure himself in fantastic and unique ways. Jeff lives in Ottawa, Ontario, where he teaches English and Scriptwriting for Television and Animation at Algonquin College. He is humored on a daily basis by his wife and two sons. *The Drop* is his first novel.

Author Website

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