

DID MALLORY MAKE IT?

THE STORY OF GEORGE MALLORY is about who he was as a person, but it's also about the meaning of exploration. Two important geographic milestones marked the beginning of the 20th century—the conquest of the North Pole in 1909 and the South Pole in 1911. The Third Pole, as Everest was dubbed, was the remaining prize for the exploration community. This goal launched three English expeditions in 1921, 1922, and 1924. The mountain was known to be the highest in the world, yet its formidable flanks had not been surveyed or attempted. A member of all three expeditions, Mallory was the person who defined Everest climbing. In 1921 his expert mountain sense opened the route on the north side, which is still climbed today. By 1922 the climbers knew the route, the timing of the monsoon, and the demands altitude places on the body. Mallory returned for his third attempt in the spring of 1924.

— excerpt from Conrad Anker's forward to *Mystery on Everest: A Photobiography*, by A. Salkeld

GUIDING QUESTION

Could George Mallory and Sandy Irvine have been the first to reach the summit of Everest?

Students gather evidence from the film and related activities to make a case for whether Mallory and Irvine in 1924 were the first to reach the summit of Mount Everest.



Materials

- Notebook for note-taking while viewing film
- Large Sheets of Paper
- Markers

Film Clips

- *Finding George Mallory's Body*
- *The Second Step*
- *Last Sighting*

DIRECTIONS

1. Focus students on George Mallory's motivations.

Before viewing the film, have students read "Who Was George Mallory?" and think about his motivations and those of his country in supporting the expedition. Asked about why he wanted to climb Mount Everest, Mallory replied, "For the stone from the top for geologists, the knowledge of the limits of endurance for the doctors but above all for the spirit of adventure to keep alive the soul of man." Then he added, "Because it's there," which became his most famous phrase. Let students know that as they view the film they will explore the elusive mystery of whether George Mallory's death occurred before making it to the summit of Mount Everest, or after.

2. Have students view the film, noting new information about the 1924 climb.

Before students see the film, let them begin to analyze film clips such as "Finding George Mallory's Body" and "The Second Step" for clues about whether Mallory and Irvine reached the summit. When students view *The Wildest Dream*, have them take notes about any evidence supporting whether Mallory and Irvine made it to the summit. If there is evidence that they did not make it to the summit, have them record that as well.

3. Review new information from the film.

Ask students: *What was the main purpose of Conrad Anker's and Leo Houlding's expedition?* Guide students to appropriate ideas, such as to retrace the steps of George Mallory and Andrew Irvine; to investigate the route, clothing, timing, and altitude impact of the 1924 expedition; and to decide if it was humanly possible to ascend the second step and reach the summit.



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“One very significant item was missing: the photo of his wife Ruth, which he’d promised to leave on the summit.”

– Conrad Anker

4. Explain facts and implications.

Put students in groups of three to brainstorm. Have students generate facts related to the outcome of Mallory’s final climb. Encourage students to recall not only information from the movie, but also information from previous activities. Ideas might include: the effect of altitude on the ability to climb, the effects of cold, the challenge of the second step, Mallory’s determination, the night goggles and the possibility of reaching the summit at night, no photo of Mallory’s wife, the location of Mallory’s body on the mountain, and others.



5. Have students create a chart of Facts, Implications, and Conclusions

In the three-column chart drawn on a large sheet of paper, have each group label the first column “Facts,” the second column “Implications,” and the third column “Conclusions.” In the first column, students write facts gleaned from the film and previous activities. In the second column, students think of what this fact implies about whether Mallory reached the summit. In the third column, students can state whether or not this fact and implication leads to a yes or no conclusion about Mallory reaching the summit. Give one example to help students begin:

- In the *Fact* column: George Mallory’s tinted snow goggles were in his pocket.
- *Implications* column: Mallory was probably climbing after sundown, because he would need the goggles to prevent sun blindness during daylight.
- *Conclusions* column: He may have made the summit, since he was climbing so late in the day.



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EXAMPLES OF CHART CONTENT: DID MALLORY AND IRVINE MAKE IT?

Students should generate their own recollections, deductions, inferences, and conclusions for this activity. Below are examples:

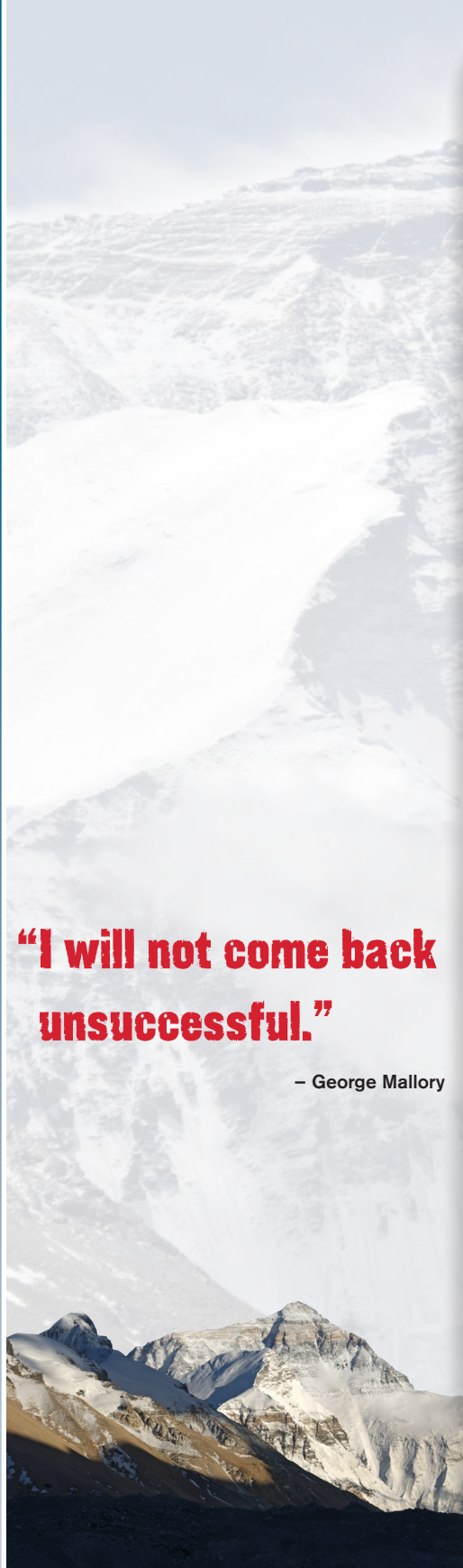
Facts	Implications	Conclusions
Goggles in pocket	Mallory was climbing after dark.	Yes – Mallory was still climbing at later than 7:00 p.m. Enough time to summit.
Odell spotted Mallory on summit ridge at 12:50 p.m.	He was heading to summit at 12:50 p.m., six hours before dark.	Yes – Mallory could have made it to the summit and back down to ridge above the location of his body within those six hours.
Oxygen supply was enough for a quick summit attempt. Mallory and Irvine planned to leave camp at 8:00 a.m. and travel light and fast.	Mallory and Irvine would have been freezing cold, exhausted, and out of oxygen after 11 hours (8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.).	No – This was beyond human endurance and capability. He probably could not have made the summit.
Mallory claimed he would not come back unsuccessful.	Mallory would have pushed beyond normal human capacity to summit.	Yes – Mallory was capable and motivated to summit and probably did.
Conrad Anker free-climbed the second step. George Mallory was famous for his amazing and natural climbing ability.	George Mallory was capable of free-climbing the second step.	Yes – Mallory was determined and capable of the climb, so was probably successful.
Irvine was almost snow-blind and suffering symptoms of altitude.	In his condition Irvine was probably not capable of making the summit.	No – Mallory and Irvine could not have made it together.
The photograph of Ruth, Mallory's wife, was not in his pocket. Mallory had promised his wife to leave her photograph on the summit.	Mallory would have had the photograph unless he had left it on the summit.	Yes – They must have made it, since the photograph was not found.

“I will not come back unsuccessful.”

– George Mallory

6. Debate whether Mallory and Irvine succeeded in their dream.

Did they make it? Have students hold a debate based on the facts, implications, and conclusions drawn from the film and additional research if time allows. Then discuss as a group why this question continues to be the subject of debate, as Edmund Hillary of New Zealand is still considered the first to summit Mount Everest. Have students write individually or as a group a summary of their own conclusion, with additional facts or evidence they think could be found in the future to further support their conclusion.



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“Mountain climbing doesn’t produce material goods nor does it provide a service. Mountains are representations of goals in our lives. Your dreams may be in the mountains or in the world around you; they are worth striving for.”

– Conrad Anker, in *Mystery on Everest*

EXTENDING THE LESSON

What does Mallory's, Irvine's, and other climbers' determination to ascend Everest say about human nature? Have students research others who have climbed: Edmund Hillary, the first to reach the summit; Junko Tabei, the first woman to reach the summit; Apa Sherpa, who has reached the summit more than anyone else; Erik Weihenmayer, the first blind person to reach the highest point on Earth. Students can also look for other mountaineering feats to which climbers aspire, beyond Everest.

Building on knowledge from activities before and after viewing the film, have students write an essay about what climbers have to consider when they make the decision to attempt to climb Everest, and second, decisions made every step of the way in trying to reach the summit of Everest. What are the potential consequences of their decisions? Why do students think climbers are willing to take the risks and make the sacrifices?

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Lowry, N., “Who Was George Mallory?”

<http://movies.nationalgeographic.com/movies/the-wildest-dream/mallory>

Salkeld, Audrey, *Mystery on Everest: A Photobiography of George Mallory*, National Geographic Society: 2000.

