



Himalaya by Michael Palin

Before reading

- Students work in pairs to discuss the questions. They read *About the author* and *About the book* to check their answers.
- In the same pairs (or small groups), students think about Everest Base Camp and brainstorm what they think it is like there. Encourage them to think about the surrounding scenery, the camp itself, and the people there. If they don't know what it is, explain that it is the camp at the base of Mount Everest in the Himalayas. It is where the trekkers camp before attempting to climb the mountain. Accept all reasonable answers but don't confirm ideas at this stage. (This will be revisited in *While reading 4*.)

CULTURAL INFORMATION

There are actually two base camps at Everest: one in Nepal (South Base Camp) and the other in Tibet (North Base Camp), which is the one Michael Palin travelled to. To get to North Base Camp, you pass Rongbuk monastery, the highest monastery in the world. South Base Camp is by far the more popular camp and is visited by thousands of trekkers each year, many of whom just make the journey to the camp, without actually ascending Mount Everest.

While reading

- Students quickly read the extract and put the summaries in the correct order.

Answers

- 1 f 2 c 3 a 4 e 5 b 6 d
- Students read the extract again and answer the questions.

Answers

- He feels great as he has finally slept well. Prior to this he hasn't been sleeping – the difference sleep has made is emphasised by the line *What a difference it makes to everything. The sky looks bluer, the food tastes better.*
- He says the Base Camp is 'nowhere near as romantic as it sounds', implying that he probably expected it to be stunning, but in reality it is overshadowed by a huge stone wall and dirtied with litter.
- No – the phrase *the camp is all but deserted* tells us there are very few people there.
- They look cute and cuddly (*eminently embraceable*) but are bad-tempered (*can turn very truculent*).
- To show that the yaks give a lot to their herders (food, drink, fuel, materials, clothes and transport) but receive very little back in return – they get grass but no affection.

- They are good-natured and have a good sense of humour (*they're jolly company, naturally given to smiling and cracking jokes*).
- He means that they are making fun of him.
- Students now look at the opening seven lines of the extract and consider how they contribute to the mood of the overall passage.

Answers

- He uses a short sentence to create drama, and to highlight the importance of the fact that he slept. (From this we can deduce that prior to this not sleeping had been a big issue.)
- They're written in the present tense – a common feature of travel writing as it makes the descriptions more vivid. This draws the reader into the action as if they are experiencing it, too.
- No, he doesn't. He says what a difference sleep makes to everything, and then compares the yak butter tea to nectar, implying that previously when he hadn't been sleeping well he disliked the taste, but now it tastes delicious.
- No, probably not. He exaggerates in order to be funny and create a light-hearted tone, but also to emphasise his renewed optimism having woken up feeling rested.
- Students now look at some of the words and phrases that the author uses to create the image and mood of the descriptive passage. They can answer the questions in pairs or small groups.

Answers

- He describes the 'wall of stone and shale' and water 'frozen solid', which makes the environment seem quite hostile. He seems disappointed that rather than be greeted by other excited trekkers, he is only met by discarded litter.
- Palin's language is powerful and emotive, describing how the 100-foot wall has been 'dumped' by a glacier which has 'gouged out the valley'. These words have quite violent connotations, which serve to remind the reader – and perhaps the author himself – of the power of nature. He describes the camp as 'all but deserted', creating a desolate image, and the alliteration of 'sodden, scrumpled' to describe abandoned clothing draws the reader's attention to the mess and litter in the camp.
- In the same pairs or small groups as in *Before reading 2*, students look back at the descriptions they brainstormed and compare them to Palin's description, noting any similarities and differences.

After reading

- Students discuss their opinions in small groups. There are no right or wrong answers here, but suggested answers are given below. Discuss ideas as a class.



Suggested answers

- 1** It is light-hearted and amusing in tone.
- 2** Palin comes across as a good observer, amusing and good-natured (e.g. he doesn't mind that the herders make jokes about him). A herder might find it funny meeting an Englishman who isn't used to the Himalayan environment or the traditional food and drink.
- 3** Students now think about a time when they went somewhere that wasn't as they expected. You could brainstorm some ideas first as a class, e.g. a holiday, a new home, a city they visited, etc. Working alone they make notes in the table of words and phrases to describe their expectations versus the reality.
- 4** Students think of stronger words to use to make their descriptions more powerful. They then write a short descriptive paragraph describing their first impressions.
- 5** Students take turns to read their paragraphs aloud in groups.

Follow-on task

If possible, ask students to watch one of the episodes of *Himalaya with Michael Palin* (preferably the one where Palin goes to Everest). Ask them to compare how he comes across on screen with how he comes across in the book. If they watch the Everest episode, they can also compare his description with what they see on screen.