

**Grammar for Writing: Teaching Activities**

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| **Writing Learning Focus:** | | * Creating a fast-paced narrative that emphasises the drama of a situation | | |
| **Grammar Learning Focus:** | | * How lexical verb choices and clause patterns combine to create textual rhythm | | |
| **Context:** | *Touching the Void* is a first-person account of Joe Simpson’s climbing accident in the Peruvian Andes. The extract marks the point where Joe realises that he has sustained an injury that will probably result in his death. | | | |
| **Let’s Talk!**  Give the opening discussion about the list of verbs enough time to allow students to explore a range of ideas.  In the highlighting task:   * Check they can quickly locate the finite lexical verbs, for example by reading the extract in the present tense*: I kick my right leg..my knee explodes…bone grates….*   In whole-class discussion:   * Extend understanding of the descriptive work done by lexical verb choices by substituting alternatives and evaluating impact, in terms of meaning, sound effects and textual rhythm. Consider structure: where in the extract there is a greater density of lexical verbs and where these tail off, e.g. by overlaying a ‘temperature chart’ indicating degrees of dramatic intensity. * In discussion of sentence variety, push the idea of textual rhythm i.e. deliberate variation in sentence length and type used to speed and slow the action, to emphasise key words and sound effects. Make sure they can see that 1 verb = 1 clause and note that the terms single-clause and multi-clause sentence can be less confusing for students than the terms simple, compound and complex. Encourage evaluation of choices through prompts e.g. Is the list of three verbs (ruptured, twisted, crushed) overdone? Is ‘My knee exploded’ too stark and grisly? Many of the sentences start the same way, with ‘I’. Is this too repetitive? Could it/should it be avoided? The last sentence is comparatively plainly worded – what idea does this help to reinforce? * Support pair collaborative writing with prompts to promote structured talk, e.g:   + provide a still image from the film of *Touching the Void* and use to gather vocabulary and ideas for the task   + provide a list of lexical verbs from Simon’s account and use in own sentences or as stock to trigger own choices | | | **Activity Outline:**  Whole class: Display a list of lexical verbs selected from the text (*kicked, exploded, screamed, grated, rushed, ruptured, twisted, crushed, driven, dug, pounded, slip, spin*). Ask students to speculate what genre of text these may have come from and the possible topic of the text. Take brief feedback.  Teacher: Display a front cover of the book and, if you like, watch a trailer for the film version e.g. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wxLcRNPptZI  Briefly fill out the details of Joe Simpson’s climbing accident. Review the list of verbs from the text and clarify/revise students’ initial speculations in the light of this further information.  Whole class: Read together the extract from Touching the Void, highlighting where these verbs are used. Discuss the work that these lexical verbs do in creating the vivid description of the accident e.g. by pointing out relative lack of adjectives and adverbs.  Teacher: Read the extract aloud again, asking students to listen for changes in rhythm. You can ask them to highlight the 2 shortest sentences and the 2 longest sentences (or the ‘loudest’/most dramatic’; ‘quietest/least dramatic’) and share responses. Remind that sentence variety involves different length sentences as well as different types, and highlight examples in the text e.g. *My knee exploded/It wasn’t just broken, it was ruptured, twisted, crushed, and I could see the kink in the joint and knew what had happened.*  Whole class: Remind that *Touching the Void* is a joint narrative between Joe Simpson and his climbing partner, Simon Yates, each writing their account in the first person. Establish writing task: how would Simon describe Joe’s accident? Write the next paragraph, from Simon’s point of view, aiming to convey the drama of the event through choice of lexical verbs and deliberate variation of sentence length and type.  Pairs: Collaborative drafting of follow-on paragraph, written in first person, from Simon’s perspective.  Suddenly there was a sharp tug as the rope lashed out taut across the slope. I was pulled forward several feet as I pushed my axes into the snow and braced myself for another jerk. Nothing happened. I knew that Joe had fallen, but I couldn’t see him, so I stayed put. I waited for about ten minutes until the tautened rope went slack on the snow and I felt sure that Joe had got his weight off me. I began to move along his footsteps cautiously, half expecting something else to happen. I kept tensed up and ready to dig my axe in at the first sign of trouble.  Whole class: Provide the original for comparison (see opposite). Which version do they think is the most dramatic – Simon’s or their own – and why?  Suggested differentiation of this task:   * give pairs a cloze version of Simon’s account and ask for lexical verb choices * give pairs a cut-up version of Simon’s account and ask them to re-structure   In each case, emphasise focus on best choices for heightening pace and drama of the situation. | **Text example:**  from *Touching the Void*  I kicked my right leg against the slope, feeling sure it wasn’t broken. My knee exploded. Bone grated, and the fireball rushed from groin to knee. I screamed. I looked down at the knee and could see it was broken, yet I tried not to believe what I was seeing. It wasn’t just broken, it was ruptured, twisted, crushed, and I could see the kink in the joint and knew what had happened. The impact had driven my lower leg up through the knee joint.  I dug my axes into the snow, and pounded my good leg deeply into the soft slope until I felt sure it wouldn’t slip. The effort brought back the nausea and I felt my head spin giddily to the point of fainting. I moved and a searing spasm of pain cleared away the faintness. I could see the summit of Seria Norte away to the west. I was not far below it. The sight drove home how desperately things had changed. We were above 19,000 feet, still on the ridge, and very much alone. | |