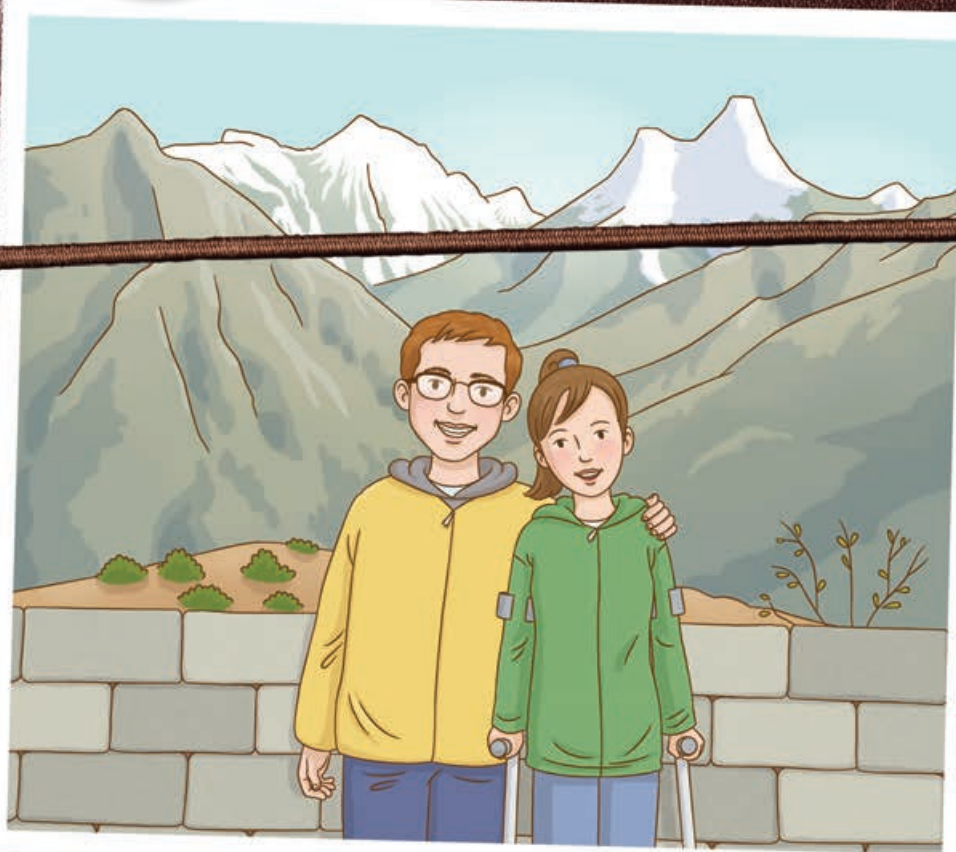
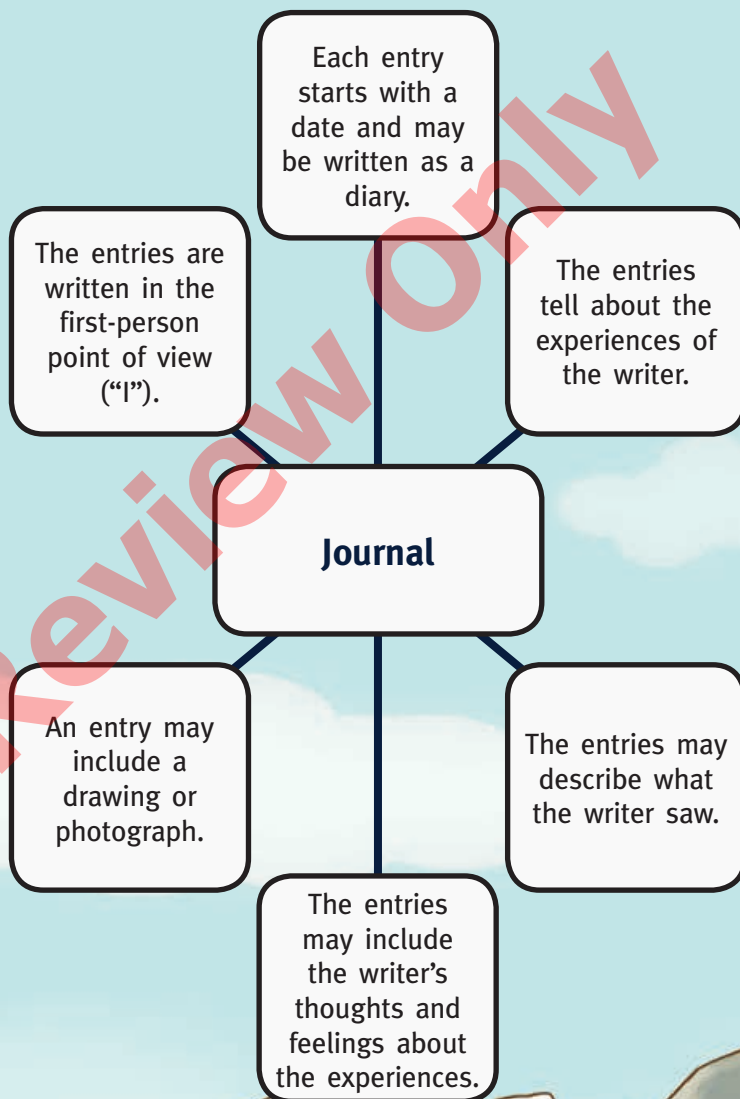


EVEREST DREAMING



Journal

Look for the genre features noted below as you read this book. Use the features to help you understand the text.



© Benchmark Education Company, LLC. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. Printed in Guangzhou, China. XXXX-XX-XXXX

LEXILE® is a trademark of MetaMetrics, Inc., and is registered in the United States and abroad.

E-books and additional digital resources available at benchmarkuniverse.com.

ISBN: 978-1-5322-8021-4

Toll-Free 1-877-236-2465
www.benchmarkeducation.com
www.benchmarkuniverse.com

BENCHMARK EDUCATION COMPANY
145 Huguenot Street • New Rochelle, NY • 10801

1 May, Sydney, Australia

I watched a documentary about summiting Everest today. It was amazing. I still can't wait to climb it myself one day. I was eight years old when I decided I would conquer Mt. Everest. "Why?" my mum had asked when I first said it, on the way to school one morning.

I had thought of many reasons. Maybe it was something about always being small for my age and Everest being so big. Maybe there was something about it that caught my imagination from the first time I saw it on TV—so hot and humid at the bottom and icy cold and snowy at the top, nearly 9,000 meters high.

But the reason that I gave her seemed to stick out in my mind the most. "Climbing the world's tallest mountain feels like the most impossible thing I could ever do," I replied, straight-faced.

My mum laughed and said, "That sounds like something you would do. One of your crazy schemes."

I was always thinking big and aiming high, thanks to my mum. It's entirely possible that I told her the day before that I wanted to be a pilot or a deep-sea explorer. I was always thinking of extreme things I could do, despite having been born with cerebral palsy. CP is a condition where I have muscle coordination issues. When I walk, my legs bend, my feet turn out, and I sway so much, I usually use two sticks to help me stay upright. Otherwise I look and act normal—although I am a lot shorter than most kids my age.

But Mt. Everest was not one of my crazy schemes. It stuck with me, and drives me, even to this day, seven years later.

13 May, Sydney

This morning I fell and scraped my knee, but it didn't hurt too much. Mum said it would heal in no time. She said it reminded her of that time I fell on the first day of school. I woke up early, too excited to sleep. I put on a new dress and my special shoes. I pulled Mum out of bed and rushed her out the door before she could have her morning coffee.

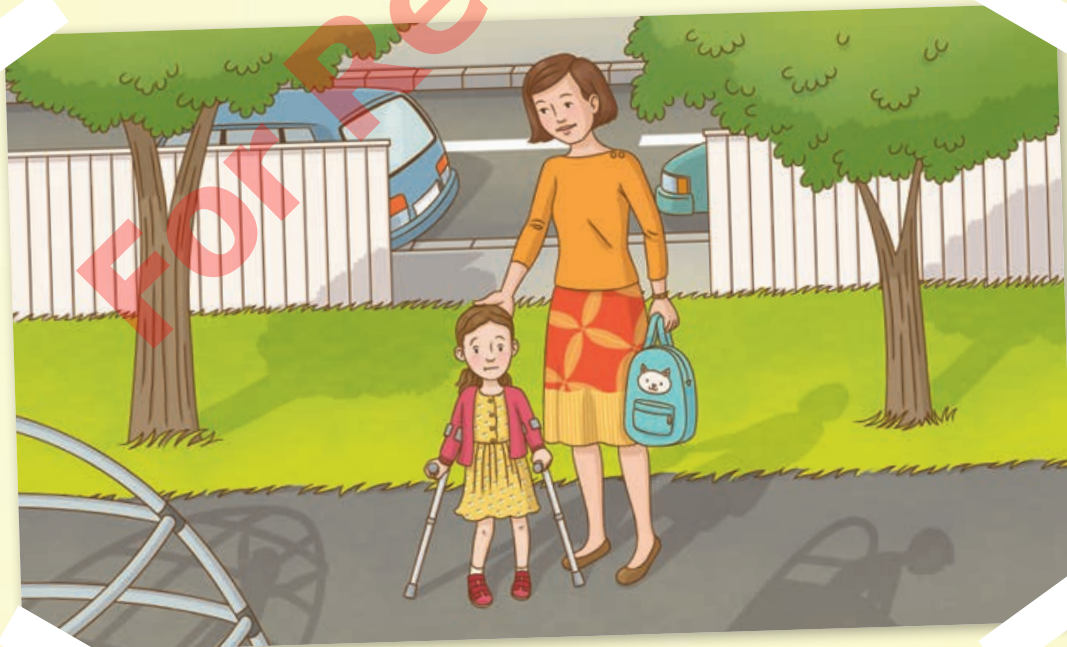
Of course, Mum and I were there before the school even opened. A bunch of kids were jumping and running around the playground. I felt nervous and excited.

"Join in, Ness," Mum said, giving me a nudge toward the other kids.

I took a few steps onto the blacktop and took a spill.

Mum knelt down next to me, offering me a hand.

"Come on, Ness," she said gently, but firmly. "Get up and let's move on." And we did.



*My first day of school—and
ready for an adventure!*

Mum told me later, however, that the other parents had glared at her as though she were the worst mother in the world. But she said she was too proud of me to care. She said that day I showed her my drive to achieve—or resolve, as mum calls it. She wanted me to be as self-sufficient as possible, to try anything and everything, and if sometimes I found I couldn't do something, then to find another way to do it. The physical issues, well, I can deal with them, mostly. It's the mental toughness that's wearisome.

Skinned knee aside, that day wasn't too terrible because it's when I met Zac. He sat next to me in the lunchroom.

"I have no mum," Zac blurted out. It was apparently something he told everyone right away when they met him.

"I have no dad," I said with a shrug.

"I don't know if that's better or worse," Zac said. "Do you want a carrot?"

He has been my best friend ever since.

Today we walked along the beach. We often scramble up the sand dunes and nestle among them, to discuss our hopes and dreams and tricky math problems.

"Where's your dad this week?" I asked.

"Dogsledding in Alaska."

Zac's dad, Mike, ran an adventure tour company and was always going off around the world, taking people trekking the 96-kilometer Kokoda Track through jungle in Papua, New Guinea, or climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro in Africa.

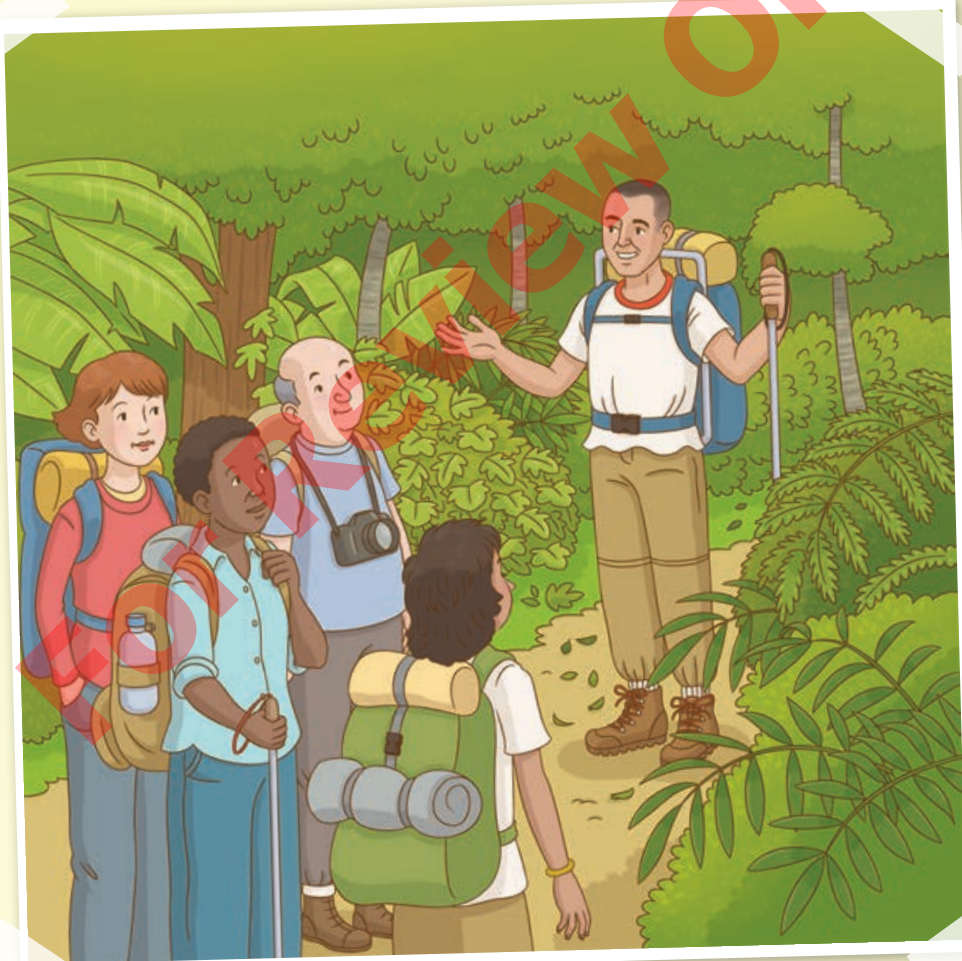
"Don't you miss him?" I asked.

Zac shrugged and said, "I like having Aunt Karen here to watch me when he's gone. She is the best cook."

When I was younger, I used to think Mike was a superhero. He used to tell us about his exploits, and we'd sit listening, wide-eyed with excitement. Of course, my favorite stories would be about Everest.

"Would you miss me if I left to climb Mt. Everest?" I asked Zac.

Zac didn't answer right away. He dug a little hole in the sand and then covered it up. Finally, Zac said, "I wouldn't let you go without me."



Zac gave me this photo of his dad's trip to New Guinea. I'll get there, too, some day.

23 May, Sydney

Today is a Saturday. As with most Saturdays, I spend the day working the cash register at our local grocery store. It's not much of a job, but I love it. When I applied over the phone, the manager said he was looking for someone who could add quickly if ever the register broke down, which apparently it did. I'm excellent at math and knew I could handle it.

When I came in for the interview, the manager, Mr. Andrews, gave me a once-over followed by a tense smile, then said through gritted teeth, "We'll give you a trial run."

I could feel his gaze boring holes through my crutches, and I gave a silent sigh, then said to myself, *Here we go again.*

Everyone said I had a wonderful smile, so I switched it on full beam and asked, "Would you like to test my math skills?"



Human cash register at work

I knew he'd make it difficult so he'd have an excuse to reject me. That really gets my goat, but I knew that he didn't stand a chance.

I've been working here four months now.

Mike came into the store. His face had a line of red where I assumed he'd been wearing goggles in Alaska.

"Hi, Mike. When did you get back?" I asked, a twinge of jealousy diverting my smile.

"Last night. The fridge was stocked with proper meals but no snacks. Still thinking of climbing Everest?"

It was a question that Mike asked me every time he saw me. And, of course, the answer was always the same.

"Ready as ever," I replied. And I always got a charge out of telling him that!

"You'll have to be. It's a difficult, arduous climb," Mike warned. "I have a friend whose adventure tour brought a pack of climbers a few weeks ago. It's tough going on often steep, stony paths. Many got altitude sickness just above three thousand meters. Most of them turned back."

I had heard all of this before, of course. Altitude sickness happens when a person doesn't get enough oxygen into their body. The person will get bad headaches, throw up, and can't breathe properly. If the person doesn't adjust quickly, or start going back down, the altitude sickness can be fatal.

"Have you gone up yet?" I asked, with a slightly raised eyebrow and half smile.

Mike grinned. Although he had gone on dozens of treks, he hadn't been up Everest. "Maybe I'll wait to hear how it was from you before I try," he said.

I beamed at him and said, "I hope it's not a long wait."

10 June, Sydney

Hooray for me! Tomorrow is my birthday. And it's an important one.

Every year, when I blow out the candles, I wish for the same thing: to climb Everest. I know you aren't supposed to tell anyone your birthday wish or it doesn't come true. But I tell Mum every year what I wish for. How else would it actually happen?

For my ninth birthday, a few months after I announced that I was going to climb Everest, I made the wish out loud as I blew out the candles.

Mum just smiled and said, "Let's wait until you're a bit older. And then we'll see."



So, every year I'd get cards with money stuffed into the envelope, because no one knew what else to get me. I deposited everything into my savings account for "if" I did ever get that chance to go to Everest. Mum always says *if*, I always say *when*.

Finally, two years ago, Mum said, “Yes, you can go when you’re sixteen.”

I can barely sleep.

9