

Constructing Big Air *By Jillian Sullivan*

Introduction

“Will the jump I’ve made be high enough? Is it safe?” Constructing Big Air explores the sense of responsibility that a designer feels when he has to build the snowboarding jump for a competition in Queenstown. The fact that his friend is the one to test the jump amplifies his sense of responsibility.

Reason for reading

You could use this book with your students:

- to explore ideas about responsibility and safety
- to learn about the steps and skills involved in designing and building a snow jump
- to explore ways in which the author engages the reader.

Setting the scene

Draw on your students’ prior knowledge. If necessary, introduce concepts or vocabulary to help them access the story. Also communicate the reason for reading.

- Brainstorm ideas about snowboarding. “Have you ever been snowboarding or seen this sport on TV? What tricks can snowboarders do?” Alternatively, you could elicit prior knowledge through a postbox or “think, pair, share” activity. Write key vocabulary on the board.
- Print Template A – the KWLH chart. (This will either be at the end of this document, if you have printed the entire teachers’ guide, or as a separate file on the Gilt Edge website.) Alternatively, create a KWLH chart on the board. Have the students fill in the first two columns with what they know and want to know about snowboarding, specifically snow jumping. After reading, they can fill in the final two columns (what they learned and how they learned it).
- Introduce any vocabulary that your students may need to access the text, for example, “guinea pig”. Refer to Worksheet 3 for a list of potentially unfamiliar words. You could carry out this activity before or after reading. (See “Taking a closer look – Exploring language”.)
- Tell your students that this story is about a guy who designs a snow jump for a big event in Queenstown.

Getting stuck in

Choose the prompts that you feel your students need. Remind them to note any unfamiliar words and check for clues to the meanings in the text or images. The meanings of words in bold text are in the glossary at the back of the book.

- End page 4 – “Where is the snow jump? How do you think they got the snow onto it? How is the narrator feeling? How do you know? Do you think Heath will make it?” If you haven’t done so already, discuss the meaning of guinea pig, encouraging the students to look for clues to its meaning in the text. “How would you feel being the guinea pig?”
- End page 5 – “Were you right? What’s a 540? What does ‘give the all clear’ mean?”

- End page 7 – Check that your students understand that the story has gone back in time. “Why can’t the narrator (the designer) do the jump himself? What skills might he need to design a snow jump?”
- End page 11 – “What does the narrator do when he checks out the site? What is the most important thing he needs to decide? What skills can you see he needs so far?”
- End page 13 – “What are the main things going on here?”
- End page 15 – “What is the main thing going on here? How much work is involved in building the ramp? Does this surprise you? Why or why not? How much do you think it would cost?”
- End page 17 – “What is the narrator’s concern here?”
- End page 19 – “What things does the narrator do here to make sure the riders are safe?”
- End page 21 – “How relaxed do you think the narrator is? What makes you say that?”
- End page 23 – “What’s a 720? How is the narrator feeling now? What makes you say that?”

Taking a closer look

Choose suggestions that suit your students and reason for reading.

Exploring ideas and opinions

- Ask for your students’ opinions of the story and encourage them to justify those opinions.
- Have the students complete Worksheet 1 (the three-level thinking guide) and discuss their responses in pairs, in small groups, or as a class.
- Your students could summarise the main steps that the narrator takes to design and build the jump, referring in particular to pages 8 through 15.
- Refer to the narrator’s statement “I try to design jumps that give thrills to both the riders and the spectators” (page 7). “What else is the narrator concerned about when designing a snow jump?” Elicit the idea of safety and discuss the sense of responsibility the narrator feels. “How dangerous do you think this sport is? Would you want to design a snow jump like this? Why or why not?” You could also discuss the students’ opinions on spending money on this sort of sporting event.
- Have your students revisit the text and identify ways that the narrator makes sure the jump is safe. Their ideas might include that he puts salt on the snow, measures and calculates things carefully, takes photos, does drawings, makes sure the run-out area is smooth, checks the weather, puts a worker at the bottom of the steps to limit the number of riders, makes sure the jump is well lit, keeps an eye on the jump, and places workers on the side to maintain the snow. The students could align the safety precautions with their summaries of the main steps the narrator takes to create the jump.
- Have the students complete the KWLH chart with things they’ve learned about snow jumping.

Exploring character

- “What sort of person do you think the narrator is? What about Heath? What makes you say that?” Have the students use their summaries of the steps involved in creating the jump to identify the skills and characteristics they think the narrator has.

Exploring structure

- Give the students the statements from Worksheet 2 and have them sequence them in the correct order. You may need to support your students to identify the difference between the order in which the story presents the events and the order in which the events actually happened. You could use the worksheet to identify the “order in the story” first. You could then create a class timeline that shows the “order in time”. (Note that the information on pages 6 to 16 happens before that on pages 2 to 5 and pages 17 to 23. Also note the shift to the present tense on page 8, even though the information is in the past. Your students might identify that some of the statements aren’t actually events but concepts that apply at any time, for example, “The riders need to be going twenty kilometres per hour to clear the gap.”)

Exploring language

- Cut out the words and definitions from Worksheet 3 and muddle them up. Hand them out to individual students and have them find their correct “partner”.
- As an alternative to the above, divide the class into two groups and have them complete Worksheet 4a and Worksheet 4b respectively. This activity involves the students in creating the definitions, which they then use to test the other group.
- Your students could work in small groups to cluster vocabulary (from the worksheet, their earlier brainstorming, and/or the text) into sets of their choice, for example, snowboarding moves, words to do with the jump, words for types of people – or even nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. They could also practise using the words in sentences.
- Explore some of the ways in which the author engages the reader. You could refer to the way she begins the story “in the action” before going back in time, asks rhetorical questions (especially on pages 3, 4, and 21), uses the present tense for past action (see page 8), relates the events from the designer’s point of view, uses casual and/or slang language, and so on.
- Have your students complete Worksheet 5 – the cloze activity.

Moving beyond the text

Choose activities that suit your students and reason for reading.

Reading

- Read the GO for IT magazine designed to complement this book – White Slide.

Writing

- Write a review of Constructing Big Air. Remember that a review should give people insight into the story (without telling them the plot) and help them decide whether they want to read it or not. Outline your likes and dislikes and reasons for them. Discuss things like whether you find the title engaging, whether the presentation of the designer’s point of view is effective, and so on.
- Write a job application to build a snow jump, outlining your skills and the safety precautions you will take.

Research

- Research more about snowboarding, including its history, its dangers, and its popularity worldwide.

Debating

- Hold a class debate on whether cities should spend money on events for dangerous sports like snow jumping.

WORKSHEET 1

Constructing Big Air – Three-level thinking guide

- Level 1 – Reading on the lines (interpreting what the text says on a literal level)
- Level 2 – Reading between the lines (inferring, or interpreting what the text might mean)
- Level 3 – Reading beyond the lines (evaluating ideas by relating them to other knowledge)

Students write “agree” or “disagree” beside each statement and then discuss their responses in pairs, in groups, or as a class. The value of this activity lies in the discussion it generates as students justify their views. The activity is not intended as a test for comprehension.

LEVEL 1	Agree/disagree
The Big Air jump is a snow jump high in the mountains.	
Heath only just clears the gap.	
Salt keeps the snow soft.	
The Big Air competition is held in Queenstown.	
The site for the jump is an old skating rink.	
The higher the drop-in ramp, the shorter the gap.	
The drop-in ramp is seven metres high.	
The gap before the landing is fourteen metres long.	
The riders must go twenty kilometres per hour to get over the gap.	
The tower is built three weeks before the event.	
The run-out area needs to slope away from the landing.	
The planks nailed to the ramp stop the snow from sliding down.	
The competition takes place during the day.	

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LEVEL 2	Agree/disagree
Heath is crazy to be the guinea pig.	
Heath makes sure the jump is safe for everyone else.	
The job of building the jump is a huge responsibility.	
The designer can't test the jump himself.	
The designer is very good at mathematics.	
The designer builds the ramp for the competition organisers.	
The designer is very good at seeing where the jump will go.	
The jump tower is a temporary structure.	
It is good that it snows before the competition.	
The designer's biggest fear is rain.	
The designer is disappointed after three months of hard work.	
LEVEL 3	Agree/disagree
Designing snow jumps requires previous snow-jumping experience.	
Designing snow jumps takes a lot of skill and intelligence.	
Snow jumping is a spectator sport.	
Practice makes perfect.	

Sheet 2 of 2

Worksheet designed by Barbara Freeman, Wellington, New Zealand, 2007

WORKSHEET 2

Constructing Big Air – Restore the order

Photocopy this worksheet. Cut out the statements and mix them up, keeping an intact master copy for yourself. Give each student a statement. Ask them to arrange themselves so that their statements are in the order of the story. To check that the order is correct, they can read their statements aloud in turn.

Ten metres up the tower, my friend Heath bends to strap into his snowboard.
Heath is the one willing to be the guinea pig and try out the jump for everyone's safety.
I throw handfuls of salt onto the snow to harden it.
I give the all clear, and the riders grab their boards.
Three months earlier, I had been given the job of building the jump.
I have to check out the site.
I take photos of the site and make measurements.
The most important thing is the design of the drop-in ramp.
The riders need to be going twenty kilometres per hour to clear the gap.
A scaffold company starts building the tower two weeks before the event.
Boards are attached to the sides of the ramp to hold the snow in.
A local ski resort provides truckloads of snow.

Ten metres up the tower, my friend Heath bends to strap into his snowboard.

Heath clears the gap and stomps his landing.

I am very relieved.

The riders rush to get as many practice jumps in as possible.

Spotlights shine on the gap and the landing area.

The spectators begin to arrive.

The competition begins.

Three months of hard work have paid off.

Sheet 2 of 2

Worksheet designed by Barbara Freeman, Wellington, New Zealand, 2007

WORKSHEET 3

Constructing Big Air – Match the meaning

Cut out the words and definitions, muddle them up, and have your students match them.

Word	Definition
gap	the space between the take-off ramp and the landing area
VIP	very important person
massive	very large
guinea pig	someone used in an experiment, usually to test the safety of something
540	a move where the jumper spins one and a half times around sideways
spectators	people who watch a sport or event
site	the place where an activity happens
calculating	using mathematics to work something out
drop-in ramp	the steep ramp that riders go down at the top of a jump
take-off ramp	the upward-curving part of the ramp at the bottom of a jump
nail	to perform perfectly (slang)

Word	Definition
scaffold	a supporting structure, usually made out of steel
run-out area	the place where riders come to a stop after landing a jump
emcee	“master of ceremonies”, or host of a show
amped	amplified, playing very loudly (slang)
720	a move where the jumper spins twice around sideways

Sheet 2 of 2

Note that some words above may have other meanings in other contexts.

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WORKSHEET 4a – GROUP A

Constructing Big Air – Vocab swap

- Divide the class into two groups and give half Worksheet 4a and half Worksheet 4b.
- In the second column, each group writes definitions for the words in the first column. Where a word has more than one meaning, they may need to check the page listed.
- They then fold the first column out of sight and swap sheets with the other group.
- That group guesses the original word and writes it in the third column. They can go to the page listed if they need help. For an extra challenge, they can guess without referring to the page.
- You could make this a fun competition and give points for every correct word.

Word	Definition (Group A)	Word (Group B)
gap (p. 3)	(p. 3)	
massive (p. 4)	(p. 4)	
540 (p. 5)	(p. 5)	
site (p. 8)	(p. 8)	
drop-in ramp (p. 10)	(p. 10)	
nail (p. 10)	(p. 10)	
run-out area (p. 12)	(p. 12)	
amped (p. 20)	(p. 20)	

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WORKSHEET 4b – GROUP B

Constructing Big Air – Vocab swap

- Divide the class into two groups and give half Worksheet 4a and half Worksheet 4b.
- In the second column, each group writes definitions for the words in the first column. Where a word has more than one meaning, they may need to check the page listed.
- They then fold the first column out of sight and swap sheets with the other group.
- That group guesses the original word and writes it in the third column. They can go to the page listed if they need help. For an extra challenge, they can guess without referring to the page.
- You could make this a fun competition and give points for every correct word.

Word	Definition (Group B)	Word (Group B)
VIP (p. 4)	(p. 4)	
guinea pig (p. 4)	(p. 4)	
spectators (p. 7)	(p. 7)	
calculating (p. 9)	(p. 9)	
take-off ramp (p. 10)	(p. 10)	
scaffold (p. 12)	(p. 12)	
emcee (p. 18)	(p. 18)	
720 (p. 22)	(p. 22)	

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WORKSHEET 5

Constructing Big Air – Fill in the gaps

Add your own words in the spaces to make this passage come alive!

By five o'clock the lights are and on. I've placed all the way down the tower so that it like daylight on the run-in ramp. Spotlights on the gap so the riders don't feel like are launching out over Lights shine on the too. Each light placed so it won't shine in the snowboarder's

Just as the sun starts, the spectators begin to arrive. The judges are set up and in their tent. The DJ has the music up. The competition is to begin.

Try writing your own ending to the story.

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