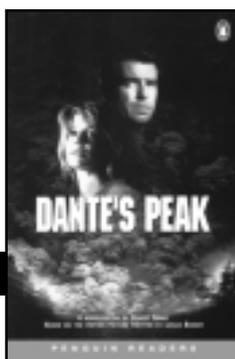


## Teacher's notes

## Dante's Peak

by Dewey Gram



## SUMMARY

**D**ante's Peak was written in 1997 as a novelization of the film of the same name.

Dante's Peak is a small town in the north west of the United States, situated on the side of a volcano that has been inactive for thousands of years. When the mountain starts showing signs of activity, Harry Dalton, an expert on volcanoes, is sent to investigate the movement. Harry finds a volcano which he believes is going to erupt in a very short time, but he finds that no one in the town is willing to listen to him. Even his own boss feels that he is exaggerating the danger, and that Harry is over-reacting because his girlfriend was killed in a volcanic eruption some months previously. Then the volcano starts to erupt, and everyone realizes that Harry was right. But has this realization come too late to save the town?

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The original screenplay for the film 'Dante's Peak' was written by Leslie Bohem. Bohem is a scriptwriter who has written the screenplays of other Hollywood films, for example 'Daylight', in 1996, which starred Sylvester Stallone. His move into scriptwriting a few years ago marked a dramatic career change from being a bass guitarist with the rock band Sparks during the 1970s and 1980s. He was also a songwriter.

The novelization of 'Dante's Peak' was written by Dewey Gram, whose other film novelizations include 'True Lies', 'Sneakers', 'The Ghost and The Darkness', and 'Fallen' (1998). Dewey Gram has also written other novels.

## ABOUT THE FILM

'Dante's Peak' is a romance and an adventure film. The activity of the volcano in the film was very well researched and the descriptions and scenes of the volcanic eruption are considered to be very accurate, as well as very exciting and dramatic. The director, Roger Donaldson, knows a lot about volcanoes himself and once considered a career in geology before moving into film. One of the film's consultants was a volcanologist who, with others, predicted the violent eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines in 1991, and in doing so was instrumental in saving thousands of lives.

## BACKGROUND AND THEMES

The placement of the town Dante's Peak in the Cascade Mountains of Oregon and Washington States (in the USA) was no accident. It was in this area that the United States experienced one of its worst ever volcanic eruptions, in 1980, when Mount St Helen's erupted. The volcano had been dormant for over 120 years when it started showing signs of activity in early 1980. It erupted in May 1980, when the top of the mountain was blown off by the force of the explosion and its height was reduced by about 400 metres. More than sixty people died and an area of 600 square metres was devastated. The volcano continues to spit steam and ash today. The book is therefore based on a reality which people in that area of the United States know very well.

One of the most important themes of the book is the conflict between humanity and nature, and the fact that we should never take nature for granted. The main character of the book, Harry Dalton, an expert on volcanoes, is trying to rebuild his life after his girlfriend was killed in a volcanic eruption. Although he suspects that the volcano at Dante's Peak is going to erupt, he feels that it is possible that he is now over-anxious about other people being killed in the same way as his girlfriend, and that this anxiety is affecting his judgement. For this reason he is prepared to put aside for a while his own suspicions about the volcano at Dante's Peak, and listen to his boss, who believes that there is nothing to worry about. This decision in fact has tragic consequences for the town.

Harry is a man with a great affinity and respect for volcanoes and for nature in general. He is therefore willing to take notice of the subtle changes in nature which point to the danger, such as the acidity of the water and the number of dead trees in the area. On the other hand, his boss and his colleagues place their trust in the computers and other man-made machines that monitor the volcano - and they are proved wrong in the end. Nature wins and takes her revenge on Paul Dreyfus - Harry's boss - as he loses his life in the eruption. In this way, the story acts as a warning not to place too much trust in modern technology, but to respect the old ways of interpreting nature's signals.

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The other main theme of the book is the influence that commerce can have on people's lives and fates. Dante's Peak is about to receive a large investment from a wealthy businessman who wants to build a winter holiday complex there. This would make the town much richer than it is, and the plan is enthusiastically supported by the members of the business community in the town. When Harry Dalton arrives with his predictions of a volcanic eruption, the business people do not want to listen to him, as they know that a volcanic eruption, or even rumours of one, would ruin their plans. They are happy to support Paul Dreyfus's opinion and to refuse to believe Harry. In doing so, they allow something far worse to happen to the town than the loss of the anticipated holiday complex.

## Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the reader, and supplement those exercises. Supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book can be found on the photocopyable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of discussion and pair/groupwork questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

## ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

(Ask students to do the exercise under 'Activities before reading the book' on page 3 of this Factsheet before doing this activity.)

- Put students into pairs. Ask them to look at the front of the book and at the pictures inside the book and to say which country they think it takes place in. Then tell the students that the book is about a volcano (explain what a volcano is). If they are surprised that the story is located in the United States, tell them the true story of Mount St Helen's (see Background and Themes).
- Ask if any students have seen the film 'Dante's Peak'. If any have, find out what they thought of it: What kind of film is it? Did they enjoy it? Why?

## ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

## Chapters 1-4

Write the following sentences on pieces of paper and photocopy them. They are 'thoughts' of people in the story.

- 'Why did she have to die?'
- 'He never does things I ask him to do!'
- 'A woman as the mayor? But she's pretty and very nice.'
- 'I can make this town into a big holiday centre.'
- 'Oh no! He mustn't talk to Elliot Blair!'
- 'She isn't doing the right things for my grandchildren.'

Divide the class into groups of six students. Give each group the six sentences. Each student takes a sentence and reads it out - they can add details if they want. The

other students guess 'who' they are and who/what they are thinking about.

## Chapters 5-8

Put students into pairs. Ask them to read page 20 again - where Harry rescues Terry. The students are Harry and Terry. They make their conversation in the volcano. Help them if necessary, e.g. they talk about what happened, how Terry feels, if they are frightened. Students write the conversation and read it out to the class.

## Chapters 9-13

Divide students in pairs:

One student is Harry Dalton, when he gets back to his office. He has to explain what happened at Dante's Peak. The other student works with Harry. He/she is upset and wants to hear all about it. He/she asks questions about what happened.

## ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

(Students should do this after the final exercise on page 4 of this Factsheet.)

Put students into groups. They talk about 'nature' (they look this up in their dictionaries) in groups. Ask them to decide whether Harry or Paul was right: Harry believed in nature and the things nature said about the volcano, but Paul believed in what the computers 'said'. Ask students to talk about this question: Is it always right to believe nature (the acid in the lake, etc.) or is it better to believe modern machines?

## Glossary

It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the 'Before You Read' sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

## Chapters 1-4

- acid** (n) this looks like water but is very dangerous because it eats into things and kills or destroys them
- ash** (n) this is grey and is there after a fire
- businessman** (n) this man works for a company
- earthquake** (n) a strong and sudden movement of the ground
- explode** (v) to burst (break) with a loud noise
- gas** (n) this is like air; people use it to make light and heat
- mayor** (n) people choose this person to be the head of the town
- rock** (n) this is very hard and is part of the ground
- scientist** (n) this person studies our world and learns things about it
- volcano** (n) this mountain sometimes explodes (see above) and hot rock (see above) comes out of the top

## Chapters 5-8

- explosion** (n) this is when something bursts (breaks) with a loud noise
- helicopter** (n) this flies in the air and carries people in it; it is a small round 'aeroplane'
- lava** (n) hot rock (see above) that comes out of a volcano (see above)
- robot** (n) this thing can move and do jobs that people usually do

## Chapters 9-13

- engine** (n) this makes cars and aeroplanes move



## Student's activities

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Students can do these exercises alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only activities are marked.

### Activities before reading the book

Read the introduction on page v of your book. Answer the questions.

- (a) What is Dante's Peak?
- (b) Why does the town have a problem?
- (c) Find the names of two people in the story.
- (d) Who was in the film 'Dante's Peak'?

### Activities while reading the book

CHAPTERS 1-4

#### Chapters 1 & 2

- 1 Answer these questions.
  - (a) What is Harry Dalton's job?
  - (b) Why did Harry take a year away from his office?
  - (c) Why does he go to Dante's Peak?
  - (d) Why does the mayor of Dante's Peak go to the school?
  - (e) Why is the mayor unusual?
  - (f) How many people are there in Rachel's family?
  - (g) What does Rachel think about Dante's Peak?
  - (h) Who is Elliot Blair and why is he important for the town?
- 2 What do you think about the people in the story?
  - (a) Is Harry Dalton strong or weak? Why?
  - (b) Is Rachel Wando interesting or boring? Why?
  - (c) What is going to happen when they meet?

#### Chapters 3 & 4

- 1 Are these sentences right or wrong? Put the wrong sentences right.
  - (a) The woman dies in the lake because the water is very hot.
  - (b) The water is very hot because it was a sunny day.
  - (c) Rachel wants Harry Dalton to meet Elliot Blair.
  - (d) Ruth doesn't think there is a problem with the mountain.
  - (e) Harry is happy about the acid in the lake.
  - (f) There is nothing strange about the mountain and the lake this year.
- 2 Look at these people and places from the story:  
Harry, Rachel, Ruth, the town, the mountain  
Which of these words is about each of the people or places above? Why?  
angry, beautiful, dangerous, forgetful, friendly, hardworking, quiet, sad, strong

## Dante's Peak



CHAPTERS 5-8

#### Chapters 5 & 6

- 1 These sentences are all right. Find sentences in the story which tell you this.
  - (a) Harry wants to tell the people of the town something.
  - (b) The people at the meeting aren't happy about Harry's news.
  - (c) They don't want to tell Elliot Blair about the volcano.
  - (d) Paul Dreyfus thinks Harry is wrong.
  - (e) Rachel doesn't know which man is right.
  - (f) Rachel is a businesswoman in the town.
  - (g) There is another small earthquake.
- 2 Who says these things?  
Rachel Wando, Harry Dalton, Paul Dreyfus, Les Worrell
  - (a) 'I know about the money, but we're talking about people.'
  - (b) 'Do we have a big problem?'
  - (c) 'The volcano is sleeping, not dead.'
  - (d) 'Do you know that people will die?'
  - (e) 'I don't think the volcano is going to explode.'
  - (f) 'Perhaps you're wrong about our volcano.'

#### Chapters 7 & 8

- 1 What happens first, second, third, fourth ...? Write 1-10 next to these sentences.
  - (a) A large rock breaks Terry's leg.
  - (b) The scientists meet the men from the town in the bar.
  - (c) Harry goes into the volcano to look for Terry.
  - (d) Terry goes into the volcano.
  - (e) Harry, Stan and Terry leave the equipment on the mountain.
  - (f) Harry and Paul have a fight.
  - (g) Acid slowly starts to flow into the lake.
  - (h) Harry and Terry take the robot to the mountain.
  - (i) There is another earthquake.
  - (j) The helicopter takes Harry and Terry back to the town.
- 2 These sentences are about people or things in the story. Who or what is each sentence about?
  - (a) She's very beautiful.
  - (b) It can see for the scientists.
  - (c) He follows the robot down inside the mountain.
  - (d) He starts to climb down into the volcano.

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## Student's activities

- (e) He pulls some rocks away.
  - (f) He is afraid of the old volcano.
  - (g) He doesn't think there is a problem.
  - (h) He doesn't want to leave Rachel.
- 3 Read the last paragraph of Chapter 8 again. What do you think is going to happen in Chapter 9?

### CHAPTERS 9-13

#### Chapters 9 & 10

- 1 Complete the sentences.
- (a) Harry and Rachel go to her house ...
  - (b) Lauren wants ...
  - (c) The water is ...
  - (d) Harry, Rachel and the children go ...
  - (e) Rachel tells the people to ...
  - (f) The volcano starts to ...
  - (g) At Rachel's house they find ...
  - (h) Harry and Rachel drive through ...
  - (i) Some people pay ...
  - (j) Ash gets in the helicopter's engine and ...
- 2 In pairs, write Graham's letter to Rachel (page 28).

#### Chapters 11 & 12

- 1 Talk about these questions with other students.
- (a) Why was it impossible for Harry, Rachel and the others to go back down the mountain on the road?
  - (b) Why did they take the small boat?
  - (c) Why couldn't the boat finish its journey across the lake?
  - (d) Why did Ruth help the others, do you think?
  - (e) What happened to Paul Dreyfus?
  - (f) How did Harry and the others get back to Dante's Peak?
- 2 Do people in the story think these things or do they know them? Write T (think) or K (know) next to each sentence.
- (a) There are rocks on the road near Ruth's house and they can't go back down it.
  - (b) They are going to be OK when they find the boat.
  - (c) There is a lot of acid in the lake.
  - (d) Harry can get to the tree and pull the boat in.
  - (e) Ruth dies because she wants to help Rachel and the children to live.
  - (f) Harry, Rachel and the children can drive across the lava.

#### Chapter 13

- 1 Which one of the two words in *italics* is right?
- (a) When Harry, Rachel and the children drive into

Dante's Peak, they are *happy/sad*.

- (b) Harry knows that they must get into the *ground/river*.
- (c) They can't get *into/out of* the mine.
- (d) Harry wants to go and get *some food/the radio*.
- (e) They are in the mine for *two weeks/two days*.
- (f) The end of the story is *happy/sad* for Harry and Rachel.

- 2 These are the important people in the story:

Harry Dalton, Rachel Wando, Paul Dreyfus, Ruth, Les Worrell

Which people do you like? Which people don't you like? Why?

### Activities after reading the book

- 1 Finish the story with the words from the box .

acid earthquake equipment explode killed lake  
lava mayor mine problem radio rocks scientist  
townspeople volcanoes

Harry Dalton was a <sup>1</sup>..... . He worked with <sup>2</sup>..... . He went to a small town called Dante's Peak. He met the <sup>3</sup>..... , Rachel Wando. After a small <sup>4</sup>..... , Harry thought there was a problem with the volcano and he asked the other scientists to bring some <sup>5</sup>..... to watch the volcano. Harry's boss, Paul, didn't think that there was a <sup>6</sup>..... and he told the <sup>7</sup>..... not to leave their homes. Then the volcano started to <sup>8</sup>..... . Harry and Rachel went to find Rachel's children and Ruth (the children's grandmother), and they watched the hot <sup>9</sup>..... flow into Ruth's home. They couldn't get back to the town by car because there were <sup>10</sup>..... on the road, so they took Ruth's boat across the <sup>11</sup>..... , but the water in the lake was <sup>12</sup>..... . The boat stopped and Ruth got in the water and pushed it, but the acid <sup>13</sup>..... her. Harry, Rachel and the children went back to the town and went into the <sup>14</sup>..... . Harry called for help on the <sup>15</sup>..... . Two days later, the earthquakes stopped and they left the mine.



Dante's Peak is a 1997 disaster film directed by Roger Donaldson, written by Leslie Bohem, and starring Pierce Brosnan, Linda Hamilton and Charles Hallahan. The film portrays the effect of a volcano erupting near a small town in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. Plot. Set in the fictional town of Dante's Peak, Washington, located in the northern Cascade Mountains, the film is somewhat based on the real-life eruptions of Mount Vesuvius in 79 AD, Mount St. Helens in 1980 and Mount Pinatubo in 1991. "Dante's Peak" is constructed about as skillfully as a disaster movie can be, and there were times when I found it working for me, sort of. But hasn't this genre pretty much been played out to the point of exhaustion? Once you know the premise (volcano, tornado, killer bees) you can guess the story line. Starting in this case with a volcano, we know there will be: --Ominous portents of doom on a seemingly ordinary day, such as people being boiled alive in a hot springs, too many dead trees in the middle of summer and alarming seismic A vulcanologist arrives at a countryside town recently named the second most desirable place to live in America, and discovers that the long dormant volcano, Dante's Peak, may wake up at any moment. Director: Roger Donaldson.