

Discussion Questions for *Into Thin Air* by Jon Krakauer

(Some questions taken or adapted from <http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-into-thin-air/topicsfordiscussion.html>, <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/thinair>, and <http://www.manitowoc.lib.wi.us/readers/guides/intothinair.htm>.)

1. Did you like the book? Why or why not? Do you think these people are crazy?
2. Why do you think the surviving members of the 1996 expedition met with so much criticism and negative press?
3. What is the significance of the fact that more guides than clients were lost on the mountain during the expedition?
4. Krakauer lays a large portion of blame on himself for the misinformation regarding Andy Harris. Given the altered condition that the human brain undertakes at that altitude combined with his lack of oxygen, should Krakauer shoulder the amount of blame he does? Is his survival guilt purely a product of him surviving, or a reflection of personal responsibility in the tragedy that occurred?
5. Do others bear blame for what happened that weekend on Everest? If so, who?
6. Each year, clients pay large sums of money for the chance to climb to the top of Mount Everest. Krakauer points out that many of them are ill-suited for the expeditions due to lack of relevant climbing experience. What role did money (and the subsequent sense of entitlement that goes along with it) play in the events that unfolded on Everest?
7. Why do you think neither Hall nor Fischer ever stressed a firm turn-around time for their teams on the morning of the summit push?
8. Both Hall and Fischer angled to have Krakauer on their teams because of the free publicity that would go along with it. How do you think Krakauer's role as a journalist impacted the events that unfolded?
9. Sandy Pittman was widely criticized for her actions on Everest after she returned to New York City. Many reporters and columnists demonized her approach to the summit, with one going so far as to blame the entire tragedy on her. How much responsibility, if any, do you feel she should shoulder?
10. Pittman is one of a handful of people on the mountain who feel they were not presented in a balanced manner. While Krakauer is definitely critical of certain individuals, do you feel he presents an even or uneven picture of the people and events that transpired?
11. After *Into Thin Air* was published, Anatoli Boukareev and Krakauer had a public battle over the guide's actions on the summit day. Boukareev's actions, as described in the book, resulted in many other professional climbers picking sides as to whether a client, such as Krakauer, is in a position to criticize an experienced Everest climber. What do you think?
12. Some critics have labeled *Into Thin Air* as a telling look at the business behind high-altitude climbing while others feel it was simply a means for Krakauer to cash in on the tragedy of others. Do you feel this is a worthwhile, cautionary tale or an exploitative tattle-tale book?
13. Has anyone here done any mountain climbing? Tell us about it. Does this book make you want to climb mountains? Did it alter your opinion of mountain climbers? Is mountain climbing a worthwhile endeavor?
14. Are there questions you would like to ask?