

READING CHALLENGE

The Youngest Person to Climb Everest

A 13-year-old boy, the tallest mountain, and a dream that would not stop

Level	A2 — Elementary
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Age Group	Teens (11-16)
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Topic	True Stories
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Duration	~10 min read
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Skill	Reading
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On 22 May 2010, a boy from Big Bear Lake, California, stood on the **summit** of Mount Everest. He was 13 years old. His name was Jordan Romero. At 8,849 metres above sea level, he was standing at the highest point on Earth. He picked up a satellite phone and called his mother. "Mom, I'm calling you from the top of the world," he said. With those words, Jordan became the youngest person ever to climb Mount Everest.

A Dream Begins

Jordan's story started when he was nine years old. One day at school, he saw a large painting in the hallway. It showed the highest mountain on each **continent** — the Seven Summits. These are Everest in Asia, Aconcagua in South America, Denali in North America, Kilimanjaro in Africa, Elbrus in Europe, Vinson in Antarctica, and Puncak Jaya in Oceania. Most people look at a picture like that and think, "How interesting." Jordan looked at it and thought, "I want to climb all of them."

Jordan told his father, Paul Romero, about his dream. Paul was a keen hiker and adventurer himself. Instead of laughing or saying "maybe when you're older," he said, "Let's make a plan." Jordan's stepmother, Karen Lundgren, was also an experienced climber. Together, the three of them decided to train seriously and climb the Seven Summits one by one.

Training and Preparation

Climbing big mountains is not something you can do without preparation. Jordan trained hard every day. He ran up and down the hills near his home. He carried a heavy backpack full of rocks to make his legs and back stronger. He practised climbing on rock walls. He learned how to use ropes, ice axes, and other **equipment** that climbers need on high mountains. He also studied the mountains he wanted to climb — their weather, their dangers, and the best **routes** to the top.

Jordan started with smaller mountains and worked his way up. At age 10, he climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania — at 5,895 metres, it is the highest mountain in Africa. He was the youngest American to reach its summit. Then came Mount Elbrus in Russia (5,642 metres), then Aconcagua in Argentina (6,961 metres), and others. Each mountain was higher and harder than the last. Each one taught Jordan something new about himself and about the mountains.

His **determination** was extraordinary. Other children his age were playing video games or watching television. Jordan was waking up at five in the morning to train. He missed birthday parties and school events because of climbing trips. But he never complained. "This is what I want to do," he told reporters. "The mountains are my classroom."

The Dangers of Everest

Mount Everest is the most famous mountain in the world, but it is also one of the most dangerous. More than 300 people have died trying to climb it. The dangers are serious. At high **altitude**, the air has much less **oxygen**. At the summit of Everest, there is only about one-third of the oxygen you would find at sea level. Your body cannot work properly without enough oxygen. You get headaches. You feel dizzy. You cannot think clearly. Your muscles become weak. This is called altitude sickness, and it can kill you.

Above 8,000 metres, climbers enter what is called the "Death Zone." The human body cannot survive there for long. It begins to shut down. Climbers must use bottled oxygen to breathe. Even with oxygen, they move very slowly — sometimes only a few steps per minute. The cold is also extreme. Temperatures can drop to minus 40 degrees Celsius. Wind speeds can reach 200 kilometres per hour. **Frostbite** can damage fingers and toes in minutes. **Avalanches** — huge waves of snow rushing down the mountain — can bury climbers without warning.

The Climb

Jordan's **expedition** to Everest began in April 2010. He climbed from the north side, through Tibet, because Nepal had set a minimum age of 16 for climbers. The Chinese side had no age limit at that time. Jordan's team was small: his father Paul, his stepmother Karen, and three experienced Sherpa guides — Ang Pasang Sherpa, Lama Dawa Sherpa, and Lama Karma Sherpa.

The team spent several weeks at **base camp** at 5,200 metres. This time was important. Their bodies needed to **acclimatise** — to slowly get used to the thin air. They made practice climbs to higher camps and then came back down. Each time they went a little higher. This helped their bodies produce more red blood cells to carry the limited oxygen.

The final push to the summit began on 21 May. Jordan and his team left their high camp at about 8,300 metres late at night. They climbed in complete darkness, using headlamps to see the route. The temperature was around minus 30 degrees. The wind was strong. Every step was difficult. Jordan later said that during the final hours, he was so **exhausted** that he could only take two or three steps before stopping to rest and breathe.

At 9:45 in the morning on 22 May 2010, Jordan Romero reached the summit of Mount Everest. He was 13 years and 10 months old. He cried. His father cried. The Sherpas cheered. Jordan planted a string of flags from the countries he had visited on his climbing journey. Then he made that famous phone call to his mother.

A World Record

Jordan broke the **record** for the youngest person to climb Everest. The previous record holder was Temba Tsheri Sherpa from Nepal, who had climbed Everest in 2001 at the age of 16. Jordan was three years younger. By 2011, at the age of 15, Jordan had completed all Seven Summits — the highest mountain on every continent. He was the youngest person to achieve this goal too.

The news went around the world. Jordan appeared on television programmes. He was invited to give talks at schools. He wrote a book about his experiences. Many people called him an inspiration — a boy who proved that age does not have to stop you from achieving big dreams.

The Critics

But not everyone was happy. Many experienced climbers and mountain experts were **critics** of Jordan's climb. They said that 13 was too young to make such a dangerous journey. They worried that a child's body and mind are not ready for the extreme conditions above 8,000

metres. Sir Edmund Hillary, the first person to climb Everest in 1953, had said before his death that he thought children should not attempt the mountain.

Some critics were also worried about what Jordan's success might cause. Would other parents now push their children to break his record? Would even younger children try to climb Everest? After Jordan's climb, Nepal raised its minimum age for climbers to 16, and later considered raising it to 18. China also introduced an age limit of 18 for the north side of Everest.

Jordan's father, Paul, defended the decision. He said that Jordan had trained for years. He said that the team had excellent Sherpas and good equipment. He said that they had a clear plan: if the weather was bad or if Jordan felt sick, they would turn back immediately. "Safety was always first," Paul said. "Jordan was more prepared than many adult climbers."

Life After Everest

After completing the Seven Summits, Jordan continued to live an adventurous life. He went on more expeditions, explored new mountains, and became a motivational speaker, visiting schools to encourage young people to follow their dreams. His message was simple: "Find your Everest." He did not mean that every child should climb a mountain. He meant that every person has something big they want to achieve, and they should work towards it with determination and planning.

Jordan also became interested in environmental issues. He saw the rubbish left on Everest by other climbers — old tents, empty oxygen bottles, food packaging — and he spoke publicly about the need to protect mountains and wild places. He joined campaigns to clean up Everest and other mountains.

Today, the debate about young climbers on Everest continues. Most countries now have age limits for the mountain. But Jordan Romero's climb remains a remarkable achievement. A boy who saw a painting on a school wall turned that moment of wonder into a journey that took him to the top of the world. Whether you think he was too young or not, one thing is certain: Jordan proved that with the right training, the right team, and enough determination, extraordinary things are possible — no matter how old you are.

Vocabulary

#	Word	Definition
1	summit	the very top of a mountain
2	altitude	the height of a place above sea level
3	oxygen	a gas in the air that we need to breathe and stay alive
4	frostbite	an injury to the skin caused by extreme cold, usually on fingers, toes, or the nose
5	expedition	a long, organised journey to a difficult or dangerous place
6	base camp	the main camp at the bottom of a mountain where climbers prepare before going up
7	route	the way or path you take to get from one place to another
8	determination	a strong feeling of wanting to do something and not giving up
9	equipment	the special tools, clothes, or machines you need for an activity
10	acclimatise	to get used to a new place or new conditions, especially high altitude
11	avalanche	a large amount of snow that falls quickly down the side of a mountain
12	exhausted	extremely tired, with no energy left
13	record	the best result ever achieved in something, like the fastest time or the youngest person
14	critic	a person who says something is wrong or bad; someone who disagrees
15	continent	one of the seven large areas of land on Earth, like Africa, Asia, or Europe

Comprehension Quiz

1. How old was Jordan Romero when he reached the top of Everest?

- A) 10 years old
- B) 11 years old
- C) 13 years old
- D) 15 years old

2. What gave Jordan the idea to climb the highest mountains?

- A) He watched a film about Everest
- B) He saw a painting at school showing the highest mountains on each continent
- C) His teacher told him to climb a mountain for homework
- D) He read a book about famous climbers

3. Why is it dangerous to climb above 8,000 metres?

- A) Because it is always raining at that height
- B) Because there are dangerous animals
- C) Because there is very little oxygen and the body starts to shut down
- D) Because the rocks are too slippery

4. Who climbed with Jordan on Mount Everest?

- A) His school friends
- B) He climbed alone
- C) His father, his stepmother, and three Sherpa guides
- D) A group of 50 tourists

5. Why did some people criticise Jordan's climb?

- A) Because he did not reach the real summit
- B) Because they thought 13 was too young for such a dangerous climb
- C) Because he broke the rules of the mountain
- D) Because he did not carry his own equipment

Answer Key

Q	Answer	Question
1	C	How old was Jordan Romero when he reached the top of Everest?
2	B	What gave Jordan the idea to climb the highest mountains?
3	C	Why is it dangerous to climb above 8,000 metres?
4	C	Who climbed with Jordan on Mount Everest?
5	B	Why did some people criticise Jordan's climb?