On Saturday, April 26th, 2003, mountain climber Aron Ralston from Colorado, USA, went hiking in Canyonlands National Park in south east Utah, USA. That afternoon, a boulder fell and trapped his right hand against the canyon wall.

Aron was in a very difficult situation—he had very little water, no warm clothing to protect him from the cold nights, and almost no useful equipment to free himself. He had not told anyone exactly where he was going. He knew that he wouldn’t be missed for days and that a search and rescue operation might not find him in time, if ever.

Over the next few days, Aron tried to free his hand by chipping away stone from the boulder and using a rope to lift the boulder, without success. On his third night in the canyon, Aron had to start drinking his own urine to survive. With no sleep, food, or water, he began to have visions and was convinced he was going to die. He even inscribed the dates of his life on the canyon walls. However, in a final vision he saw a house and himself with a little boy, and realised this was his future life and became convinced that he wouldn’t die.

Late on the morning of the sixth day, he managed to cut off the lower part of his right arm and escape. Then he rappelled down a cliff and hiked ten kilometers before meeting a family who helped him. Finally, he was taken to hospital by helicopter. Aron then had to have many operations on his arm, and he took months to recover. Aron believes his love for his family and friends kept him alive.

THE BACK STORY
After he had recovered, Aron Ralston wrote a book about his experience, called Between a rock and a hard place. Film director Danny Boyle made it into the film 127 Hours.

Losing his arm didn’t stop Aron from being active. When he had recovered, he got a prosthetic arm and then continued to climb and do other outdoor activities. Later, he met a woman he loved, got married, and had a son—a boy like the boy he had seen in his vision in the canyon. One day, he returned with his family and friends to the place where the accident had happened. His young son was with him.

MEDIA LINKS
DVD: The film of 127 Hours is available on DVD. You should note that some of the scenes are quite graphic and may be upsetting to some students.
CD: A recording of 127 Hours is available to accompany the Scholastic Reader.
Books: This reader is adapted from Between a rock and a hard place by Aron Ralston, published by Simon & Schuster.
People and places

Answer the questions.

a) When did Aron have his accident?
   On April the 26th, 2003

b) Where is the Horseshoe Canyon Trail?

c) Which four activities are popular in Canyonlands National Park?

   i) Hiking
   ii) Cycling
   iii) Fishing
   iv) Rock climbing

   How long is the most popular part of the trail?

   Which number on the map shows where Kristi and Megan said goodbye?

Canyons and Canyoning

Talk to your partner. Look at the picture of Aron’s equipment on page 7. Which is the most important piece of equipment in your opinion? Which is the least?

Arrange them in order from the least important to the most important and present your list to the class, explaining why you think this.

Prologue–Chapter 1

1 Correct the mistakes in these sentences.
   a) The first voice brought me hope.
   b) Aron and Brad biked the Slick Rock Trail.
   c) Aspen is a popular place for biking.
   d) The Big Drop Rappel is the hardest part of the trail.
   e) Aron told Brian he would be back for Leona’s party.
   f) Megan, Kristi and Aron all work for the same company.
   g) The girls left their bikes in the car park.

2 Talk to a partner. Imagine you are Kristi and Megan. It is 7 pm on Saturday evening and you are standing by your truck. Aron agreed to meet you at this time but he has not arrived. Why not? What do you think? What do you do? Act out the conversation.

Chapters 2–4

1 Make sentences.
   a) Aron feels happy as 
   b) The multi-tool 
   c) Aron knows he is in trouble when 
   d) The most important thing of all is 
   e) Megan thinks that Aron 
   f) Aron has to stop chipping because 
   g) The rope lands in the right place 

2 Answer these questions.
   a) Why does Aron nearly fall?
      Because his feet hit a pile of loose stones...
   b) Why is it important to always check the weather?
   c) What is the quickest way of getting past the boulders?
   d) Why doesn’t Aron feel any pain immediately after the accident?
   e) What does the second voice tell Aron to be?
   f) Who does Aron think will be the first person to know something is wrong?
   g) How long does Aron think it will take to free his trapped hand?

3 Talk to a partner. Describe a dangerous activity or trip you have done or heard about. Why was it dangerous? What happened? Did you have anything with you to help if something went wrong?

Chapters 5–7

1 Are these sentences true (T) or false (F)?
   a) Aron cuts through the skin of his arm with the knife.
      F
   b) 24 hours after the accident, Aron films a message for his family and friends.
   c) By 6.00 pm on the second night, Aron has only a quarter of a litre of water.
   d) Clear skies mean warmer temperatures.
   e) The raven appears on time.
   f) At 6.30 pm, Brion After calls the police.
   g) Aron drops his water bottle.
Answer the questions.

a) Why does Aron feel optimistic at the start of the second day?
   Because seeing the raven made him feel hopeful.

b) How long does Aron spend trying to lift the boulder?
   Aron thought he heard voices. He was wrong. What did he hear?

c) Where do Aron’s parents live?

d) What does Aron decide to use as a tourniquet?

f) ‘I need a doctor.’

   ………………………………………………………………………………………………………

   g) ‘The police at the carpark told us about you.’

   ………………………………………………………………………………………………………

Work with a partner. One of you is Aron, the other is Eric. It is one year since the accident. Talk to each other and find out what you have both done since your meeting in the canyon.

Chapter 11—Epilogue

1 Put these events in the correct order.

   a) Aron speaks at Sonja’s wedding.
   b) The helicopter arrives.
   c) Aron realises that his nightmare has lasted for exactly 127 hours.
   d) Aron returns to Blue John Canyon.
   e) Eric gives Aron’s climbing bag to one of the rescue workers.
   f) A doctor pushes a needle into Aron’s arm.
   g) Steve, the Park Ranger, introduces himself.

2 Circle the correct word.

   a) The helicopter takes Aron to a hospital in Moab / Aspen.
   b) They land behind / in front of the hospital.
   c) Aron tells his story twice / three times in two hours.
   d) The first / fifth operation was the most difficult.
   e) Aron climbed Mount Moran on August the 31st / September the 4th.
   f) Aron filmed the place where the accident / rescue happened.
   g) The dates of Aron’s life were on the canyon floor / wall.

Aron says that the weeks following the accident were ‘difficult for my family’. Imagine you are Aron’s sister. Write a letter to a friend explaining how and why this was a difficult time for the family.

FINAL TASKS

1 127 Hours is told from Aron’s point of view. Imagine you are a different member of his family and write an account of your experiences from when you first discovered Aron was missing up to the time when he is fully recovered from the accident.

2 Choose five pictures from chapters 1 to 11. Re-arrange them in any order you like to tell a completely different story. You can then record your story and play it while showing the class the five pictures you have chosen.

3 At the end of the book Aron says, ‘Saying goodbye to things from our past is also a new beginning’. What does he mean by that? Do you agree? Discuss your ideas.
VOCABULARY BUILDER

1. Find ‘New Words’ at the back of the book for each of these definitions.

1. A word that describes when you cannot escape because something is stopping you from moving freely. trapped
2. A small, very thin long piece of metal with a sharp point that is used to give people medicine.
3. A piece of material that you tie tightly around an injury to stop blood.
4. A large, black bird.
5. A flying machine.
6. A copy of a part of the body which replaces a part that someone has lost or was born without.
7. This describes what doctors do when they have to cut open someone’s body to mend or replace something which is damaged.
8. To hit something many times in order to remove material.
9. A rough path through open country or a forest.
10. Small flying insects which can bite people.

2. There is a mistake in each of these sentences. Correct the mistakes with words from Canyons and canyoning and Canyoning equipment, pages 6–7.

- Boulder
- Trapped
- Webbing

1. That canyoning is quite round and not too high, I’m going to climb over it.
2. That rock is very steep! John is webbing down it now with a rope.
3. I can use my rope to cut this piece of wood.
4. I must remember to fill my carabiner with water.
5. I’ve put all my equipment in my canyon so it’s easier to carry.
6. You use a lot of different body parts – back, arms, legs – when you boulder between two canyon walls.
7. It’s not a difficult hike through the pipe, but the walls are steep so there isn’t much light.
8. It’s very dark in here. Can you switch on your camcorder so I can see?

Casual language

- ‘Damn it!’ (p.18 and p.52). also ‘Damn!’ (p.33). People say this when they are angry about something. It is not polite, so you shouldn’t use it. When Aron has drunk a lot of his water without thinking about it, and then he realises, he says, ‘Damn it, Aron! Stupid! Stupid! Stupid!’
- ‘Forget it!’ (p.30). You use this to say ‘stop thinking something will happen’ because it is unlikely. When Aron is trapped and he is wondering if there is water at the bottom of the Big Drop Rappel, he then says to himself, ‘Forget it, Aron. You’ll never see water again.’
- ‘Sure!’ (p.31). This is a common way of agreeing with someone. When Brion asks Leona to phone him if Aron returns, she says, ‘Yes, sure.’
- ‘for sure’ (p.31). You can use this instead of ‘definitely’: ‘He said he’d come for sure.’ means ‘He said he’d definitely come.’
- ‘oh dear’ (p.37). You say this when you are worried about something bad that has happened. Aron’s mother says, ‘Oh dear’ when Brion phones her to tell her that Aron is missing.

Choose the right expression to complete the sentences.

1. A: ‘Do you want to go to the cinema?’
   B: ‘Yeah, ………………… . That’s a great idea!’

2. A: ‘Can I borrow your new jacket tonight?’
   B: ‘No, …………………. I’m going to wear it.’

3. A: Jane is very late.
   B: ‘………………… I hope everything is OK, I’m a bit worried about her.’

4. A: ‘Are you going to Jack’s party?’
   B: ‘Yeah, I’m going ………………… . He always has great parties.’
MAKING 127 HOURS (pages 56–7)
Research and Discussion
Students work in groups. Each group is making a short film about how to safely do an outdoor activity of their choosing. Using the library or internet, they should research stories where lack of adequate preparation has led to a bad outcome. Some examples could be: a bear attack while camping; a canoeing, climbing or hiking accident etc. They then get together and discuss the measures necessary to avoid the situations they have researched and how they would best present these measures in a dramatic safety film.

UTAH: A LAND OF PARKS AND CANYONS (pages 58–9)
Design a National Park poster
Students work in pairs. Using the internet or library, each pair finds information about a National Park somewhere in the world where at least two of the activities listed on page 58 can be done. Students write about the park and the activities that can be done there. They make a poster, including a map, showing a suggested route for each activity. They should write a short paragraph beneath their map listing the highlights of the route they have chosen. A map key must also be included.

‘ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE’: DISABILITY AND SPORT (pages 60–1)
Interview
Ask students to imagine they have a disability which, after years of hard work, they have eventually overcome to achieve success in their chosen field. Alternatively, they can find out more about one of the athletes in the fact file and imagine they are that athlete. Put them into pairs to interview each other about the nature of their disability, how it was caused, what problems they have had to face in order to overcome it, and what they have achieved.

DVD/CD FOLLOW-UP
Observation
Watch a short section of the film and then write a number of questions to test students’ comprehension. Divide the class into two teams. Show them your chosen section. Then ask the first person in each team your first question. The first person to answer correctly wins a point for the team. Continue in this way until all your questions have been answered and every member of each team has had the opportunity to answer a question.

Prediction
Stop the film at a certain point and ask students to predict what will happen next. If you prefer, you may give them a choice of three answers, only one of which is correct. Play and check.

Missing Scene
Ask students to imagine that a scene is missing from the film. Their task is to put it back in and decide what images, words, and sound effects might be used to make it as effective as possible. The class could then choose the best ‘missing scenes’ to be included in the film.

ANSWER KEY
Self-Study Activities (pages 62–4)
1 a) hike  b) trail  c) boulder  d) housemates  e) sip
2 a) trapped, amputate  b) bike  c) drop  d) shake  e) chip
3 a) F b) F c) F d) F e) F f) T g) T h) F i) T
4 a) F b) F c) F d) F e) F f) T g) T h) F i) T
5 a) tourniquet  b) bone  c) urinate  d) raven  e) mosquitoes
6 a) licence-plate  b) visions  c) h) d) last
7 a) Aron  b) Leona  c) Brion  d) Mrs Ralston  e) Elliot
8 a) hike  b) ride  c) bike  d) helicopter  e) operation
9 a) 9.27 am on Thursday, May 1st.
10 a) fortunate  b) prosthesis  c) needle  d) helicopter  e) operation
11 a) no
b) No, he manages to break the bones.  c) No, it is very difficult.
d) They are a Dutch family. They give him some water and Eric helps him to walk while Monique and Andy run to the car park to tell the police they have found Aron.
e) By helicopter.
f) Three times: to Eric, to the helicopter pilots, and to the Park Ranger, Steve.
g) About fifteen days. No – it took between 4 and 5 months for Aron to recover because, in the book, he says that by the end of the summer he was the same weight as before the accident.

Resource Sheet Activities
People and places
b) Canyonlands National Park
c) Hiking, biking, mountain-climbing and canyoning
d) 8 kilometres  e) 4
Prologue–Chapter 1
a) The second voice brought him hope.
b) Aron biked alone, he went skiing with his Brad.
c) Aspen a popular place for skiing.
d) The most difficult part is 180 metres behind the Big Drop Rappel.
e) Aron told Leona, not Brian.
f) They work for different companies.
g) The girls left their bikes at the end of the west canyon.

Chapters 2–4
1 a) vii  b) vi  c) d) v  e) ii  f) i  g) iv
2 b) Because a rain storm can be dangerous.
c) Climbing over them.  d) He is too shocked.
e) It tells him to be sensible.
f) Brion After, when Aron doesn’t arrive for work.  g) 150 hours.

Chapters 5–7
1 a) vi  b) T  c) T  d) F  e) T  f) F  g) T
2 a) 4 hours.  b) A small animal moving in the rock.
c) Eaglewood, Colorado.
d) The plastic pipe from the Camelbak.
e) At 2.00 am.  g) 48 hours.

Chapters 8–10
1 a) iii  b) v  c) ii  d) vi  e) vii  f) iv  g) i
2 a) Elliot to Mrs Ralston.  c) Aron to his family.
b) Kyle Ekker to Glen Sherrill.  e) Glen Sherrill to Kyle Ekker.
f) Aron to Eric.  g) Eric to Aron.

Chapter 11–Epilogue
1 The correct order is: b, e, g, f, c, a, d.
2 b) in front of  c) three  d) fifth  e) September the 4th  f) accident
3 g) wall

Vocabulary Builder
1 2. needle  3. tourniquet  4. raven  5. helicopter  6. prosthetic
7. operation  8. chip  9. trail  10. mosquitoes
2 a) rappelling  b) multi-tool
3 a) Chimney  b) Prosthetic  c) Needle  d) Camelbak  e) Climbing bag
4 a) Aron  b) Leona  c) Brion  d) Mrs Ralston  e) Elliot
5 a) hike  b) ride  c) bike  d) helicopter  e) operation

Casual language
1. sure  2. forget it  3. Oh dear  4. for sure

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