

## **A Summary of Escape to Last Man Peak**

**Escape to Last Man Peak** is an adventure novel written by Jamaican author Jean D'Costa and was first published in 1975. The book chronicles the adventures of ten orphans, who lost their caretaker Miss Brown (Matron), to a deadly pneumonia virus (referred to as the "sickness"). After the pneumonia outbreak, the country was plunged into a state of emergency, as the disease raged through the country claiming many lives. They Later learned, by a desperate and sick looking policeman, that they would be taken to a labour camp, with the fear of being captured by the state to be put to work, the children began to plan their escape.

The story is told from the perspective of an eleven year old girl, **Nellie Atkins**. She along with nine other orphans; **Jimmy** who is fourteen years old, was the default leader of the group as he was the oldest, **Pauline** who is a few months younger than Jimmy teams up with him to manage the group, she assumes the matriarchal role and takes care of the younger ones, **Wuss Wuss** eleven years old, is a reserved albino boy, who became the hero of the group, as he saves two persons from drowning, **Gerald** who is also eleven years old and whose wit and smartness helped to save the group, **Sylvia** who is of Chinese decent is the same age as Pauline, and also the know it all in the group, **Myrna** who is nine years old, has a strong mental acuity, **Frankie** who is ten years old, has a very large appetite for food, **Pet** and **Precious** who are six year old twins; set out on a journey to Last Man Peak in order to escape their dilemma. This particular journey was initiated by the discovery, that Wuss Wuss was the heir to a

sizeable plot of real estate at Last Man Peak in the parish of Trelawny, that his grandfather Taata had died and left for him. After much consideration the group decided to go with Wuss Wuss to Last Man Peak. Headed by Jimmy and Pauline, they gathered their belongings and took off on their journey, making two stops at their neighbours. First they stopped by Mr. Henry, whose wife has died of the virus, and he also fell victim to the disease. Seeing no hope of a future with his dog (Bess) he proceeded to give the dog to Jimmy who is now the new master. After an emotional farewell, they left Mr. Henry's house and made their way over to Old Teacher Mack. Being the resourceful person he is, he gave them some useful gifts such as seeds for Wuss Wuss to plant on his property and he gave Pauline and Myrna books, and lent them some advice on how to travel incognito and the best routes to take in order to complete their journey safely.

Finally they began a treacherous path through forests, fields and hills, sleeping in old deserted buildings by the way. While sleeping one night Nellie and Jimmy heard approaching footsteps to their camp, Bess quickly intervened and scared the assailants away with a large growl and barking frantically. The following day they had a more than frightening encounter with a cult group wearing white robes and red veils, who surrounded and attacked the children in a narrow gorge, injuring the dog Bess and Wuss Wuss with a knife. They had a huge confrontation, but with the help of Bess they were able to defend themselves and escape alive. Shortly after that raucous, as they continued on their journey, they were shot after by a woman with a rifle. Everyone ducked to avoid bullets and were able to escape.

The group trying to avoid anymore human confrontation, took a steeper path to reach their destination. While doing so one of the children notice that Bess is missing. The group was thrown into a frenzy, not knowing how to approach this new crisis. While resting near a ravine, Wuss Wuss heard crying sounds coming from down in it and went to investigate the matter. The sounds led him straight to Bess, a donkey and two young children stuck in a pool of water at the bottom of the ravine. Seven year old Ronald, a baby later called (Fudge), Bess and the donkey were carefully rescued by Wuss Wuss, who was actually a skilled swimmer, with the help of Pauline and Nellie.

With three new members added to the group, they fed themselves, rested, and continued on their journey to the other side. While embarking on their journey, they were surprised by a friendly Rastafarian guy, who gave them a place to rest for the night. They were introduced to the Jarretts who put on a feast for them and they were satisfied and rested for the next leg of their journey. They left Brown's Town with two calves, given to them by the Jarrett's for their Christmas gift. They headed toward Martha Brae River where they camped out for the evening. After the previous confrontations they were quite dejected to hear of a dangerous gang in Good Hope, a district they had to pass through, who were reeking havoc on the people of Trelawny. Gerald quickly devised a plan which he thinks will take them through Good Hope safely. While the Good Hope gang were in their house, the kids masqueraded themselves in ghostly costumes and paraded on their front lawns, making eerie noises in the pitch dark of night. There was pandemonium as the Good Hope gang fled for their life, screaming and wailing, believing that what they saw, were ghosts. They had a big laugh and then continued on to Windsor the community just before Lat Man Peak. After all their

adventures they finally reached their destination at Last Man peak. The author uses the pattern of the classic novel to unravel the adventures in this novel.

Throughout the novel the author juxtaposes the theme of **hope** displayed by the children, to the despair and desolation of the country in a time of grief and destruction. There are several instances where the children are used as channels of inspiration, for the creative and unique survival skills that they displayed. When they met the kind Rastafarian (Isaiah) and the Jarrett's, who gave them two calves for Christmas, that was an allusion to the hope that they will see Christmas. This theme was also illustrated when the Jarrett's told them that "they are a sign of better things to come" that was also very symbolic of the hope they represented for the country.

The themes of **sickness**, **death** and **despair** are illustrated throughout the novel, via the outbreak of the deadly pneumonia virus, which claimed many lives, and plagued the whole country. Death was one of the major themes as the story opens with the death of Matron, Mr. Henry's wife, the "dead house" that the policeman referred to in chapter one, and the hospital was finally burnt down killing more people. Despair was also one of the themes used by the author to convey the intense morbidity and finality of death. The whole idea of a labour camp brought more despair for the kids, who didn't want that kind of confinement and intense labour.

Throughout the story the theme of **journey** was seen through the children's sojourn from Spanish Town to Last Man Peak. It was also depicted in the emotional and mental journey that they had to go through to assert their own independence as adolescents and pre-teens.

The theme of ***independence*** is illustrated through the ten children, who have learnt to survive and fend for themselves in the great outdoors. Pauline assumes the matriarchal role and proves to be very responsible and caring, especially for the younger ones. She along with Sylvia, Myrna and Nellie cared for and fed two young children Ronald and a baby (fudge), who they found stranded in the Ravine. She also displays extreme concern, like that of a mother; for everyone's safety and well being and is willing to take full responsibility, if anything should go wrong with them, as Matron had told her.

