Vocabulary

**avalanche**: a large amount of snow (or ground) that suddenly moves down the side of a mountain

**suffocate**: die from not being able to breathe

**slab**: a large, flat, thick piece of something

**victims**: people who are hurt by something

**unstable**: shaky, not steady, wobbly

People can trigger avalanches when they ski or snowboard.
On a snowy Saturday last year, Dalton Anderson was having a great time. He was snowboarding with his friends Payton Weber and Wyatt Baird.

Suddenly, the boys heard a loud crack. The snow around them began to slide. It was an avalanche!

**Danger on the Slopes**

“Huge blocks of snow half the size of me came down,” Dalton, 13, said later.

The snow crashed into Dalton. “It pushed me around like a rag doll,” he says.

Payton’s body was almost buried, but he could breathe. The heavy snow around him felt like cement. He couldn’t move. Wyatt’s head had disappeared under two feet of snow. The tip of one of his boots was sticking up.

Only Dalton was above the snow. He had learned about avalanches from a TV show, so he knew that there was no time to go for help. Wyatt could suffocate in minutes.

Using his hands, Dalton dug Payton free. Payton had a shovel and a cell phone. He called 911, and the two boys dug Wyatt out.

**Speeding Snow**

The boys were smart—and lucky. Many people who get caught in avalanches don’t survive.

Avalanches happen on mountainsides, where snow builds up in layers. Each snowfall leaves a new layer. In an avalanche, one layer of snow slides over another.

Within about five seconds, an avalanche can reach nearly 100 miles per hour. Nobody can run or ski or snowboard that fast. It’s almost impossible to get out of the way.

An avalanche gathers snow as it travels. A large one can grow to 10,000 tons of snow. That much snow will flatten everything in its path as it races downhill—including trees, houses, and, of course, people.
To the Rescue

Warming temperatures, strong winds, or heavy snowfall can start an avalanche. But often, people cause them when they hike, ski, or snowboard. Their weight causes weak layers of snow to crack, allowing a slab to break free.

When someone is trapped in an avalanche, rescue workers have to move fast. Most avalanche victims don’t survive more than 30 minutes under the snow.

Some of the best rescue workers are avalanche dogs. These animals train for a year or more. They practice by finding their trainers hidden under deep snow.

A trained dog can search an area in less time than it would take a whole team of humans. Some can smell a person under 10 feet of snow!

Snow Safety

The best way to avoid getting hurt in an avalanche is to stay out of its way in the first place. Here are some things you can do:

• Stay away from places where avalanches have happened recently.
• Look for signs of unstable snow, like cracks.
• Hike up mountains in single file. You’ll move less snow when you walk.
• Go to www.avalanche.org for more tips.

Life and Death

If an avalanche does happen, it helps to be prepared. Traveling in a group and carrying a shovel may have saved Wyatt’s life. Thanks to Dalton’s quick thinking, Wyatt was buried for only about seven minutes. Even so, he was in the hospital for days. It took weeks for his lungs to heal.

The teens’ scary experience hasn’t stopped Dalton from snowboarding. But this winter, he signed up for an avalanche safety class. “I want to learn more about snow conditions and how I can avoid being in dangerous situations,”
Show What You Know

Answer these questions about “Buried Alive.” Fill in the bubble next to the best answer to each question.

1. Dalton learned about avalanches from _______.
   A) his brother  B) a TV show  C) a book  D) a teacher

2. What happened first in his story?
   A) Dalton went snowboarding.
   B) Dalton dug Wyatt out.
   C) Dalton dug Payton out.
   D) There was an avalanche.

3. Just before the avalanche started, the boys heard _______.
   A) rain  B) singing  C) a loud crack  D) a loud whistle

4. _________ can start an avalanche.
   A) Warming temperatures  B) Heavy snowfall  C) People’s weight  D) all of the above

5. Make an inference: Why did Dalton dig Payton out first?
   A) Dalton needed help to dig out Wyatt.
   B) Payton had a shovel to help dig.
   C) He had a cell phone to call for help.
   D) all of the above

6. Trained _____ can search an area in less time than a team of humans.
   A) dogs  B) horses  C) hawks  D) cats

7. Which of these statements is a fact?
   A) Snowboarding is a bad idea.
   B) Friendship is all that matters in life.
   C) Dalton still goes snowboarding.
   D) Snowboarding is fun.

8. Which statement is an opinion?
   A) Dogs can smell people under snow.
   B) Dalton is the greatest friend ever.
   C) An avalanche can travel at nearly 100 miles per hour.
   D) Most avalanche victims don’t survive more than 30 minutes under snow.

9. Part of the reason the boys survived the avalanche was that they _______.
   A) carried a bucket  B) were together  C) brought their dogs  D) all of the above

10. What is the main idea of this story?
    A) Avalanches are dangerous.
    B) Snowboarding is exciting.
    C) Teens can’t be hurt.
    D) Dalton’s mom is proud of him.