Vocabulary

- **compete**: try to win a contest
- **amateur**: someone playing a sport or doing a job for no pay
- **reef**: underwater rock or coral near the surface of the ocean
- **pressure**: a strong feeling of needing to get something done
- **challenging**: not easy, testing a person’s skills
- **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 an avalanche when they ski or snowboard.

**VIDEO**: Watch Dalton and his friends talk about surviving an avalanche. [scholastic.com/actionlink](http://scholastic.com/actionlink)
On a snowy Saturday last year, Dalton Anderson was happily engaged in one of his all-time favorite activities—snowboarding with his friends Payton Weber and Wyatt Baird.

Suddenly the boys heard a loud cracking sound, and the snow around them began speeding downhill. It was an avalanche!

Danger on the Slopes

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

The fast-moving snow collided with Dalton’s body. “It pushed me around like a rag doll,” he remembers.

Payton’s body was virtually buried under snow. He could breathe, but the densely packed snow surrounded him like cement, effectively trapping him. Wyatt’s circumstances were more alarming—his head had disappeared under two feet of snow. The tip of one boot protruded, indicating his location.

Only Dalton remained above the snow, able to move freely. Dalton acted quickly—he had learned about avalanches from a television program, and he knew that there was no time to go for help. Wyatt could suffocate in minutes.

Using only his hands, Dalton dug Payton free—along with Payton’s shovel and cell phone. Payton called 911, and together the two boys dug Wyatt out.

Speeding Snow

The boys were smart—and extremely fortunate. All too frequently, people who get caught in an avalanche don’t survive. Avalanches happen where snow accumulates in layers of varying density, each snowfall depositing a fresh layer. In an avalanche, one layer of snow becomes detached and slides over another.

Within about five seconds, an avalanche can accelerate to nearly 100 miles per hour. Nobody can run, ski, or snowboard that fast. It’s practically 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, a massive amount that will flatten everything in its path—including trees, houses, and, of course, people—as it races downhill.

**To the Rescue**

Increasing temperatures, powerful winds, or heavy snowfall can trigger an avalanche. In addition, people frequently cause them when they hike, ski, or snowboard. Their weight causes fragile layers of snow to crack, allowing a **slab** to break free.

When someone has been buried by an avalanche, rescue workers must respond rapidly. Most avalanche **victims** don’t survive more than 30 minutes beneath the snow.

Among the most efficient rescue workers are avalanche dogs. These animals train for a year or longer before becoming certified. They practice regularly by locating their trainers hidden under deep snow.

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

**Snow Safety**

The most effective way to avoid being injured by 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 indications of **unstable** snow, such as cracks.
- Hike up mountains in single file. That way, you’ll displace less snow as you walk.

- Go to **www.avalanche.org** for more tips.

**Life and Death**

If an avalanche does happen, being prepared is essential to survival. Traveling in a group, equipped with a shovel, may have saved Wyatt’s life.

Thanks to Dalton’s quick thinking, Wyatt was buried for only about seven minutes. Nevertheless, he was hospitalized for days. It took weeks for his lungs to fully recover.

The teens’ unnerving experience hasn’t dampened Dalton’s enthusiasm for snowboarding. However, this winter he enrolled in an avalanche-safety class. “I want to learn more about snow conditions and how I can avoid being in dangerous situations,” he explains.
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  C a book
   B a TV show  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  C a loud crack
   B singing  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  C hawks
   B horses  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.

Answers are in the Teaching Guide.