

Reading Strategy: As you read, think of what you know about mountains. Connect it to new information in the story.

Wendy Booker

and the Seven Summits

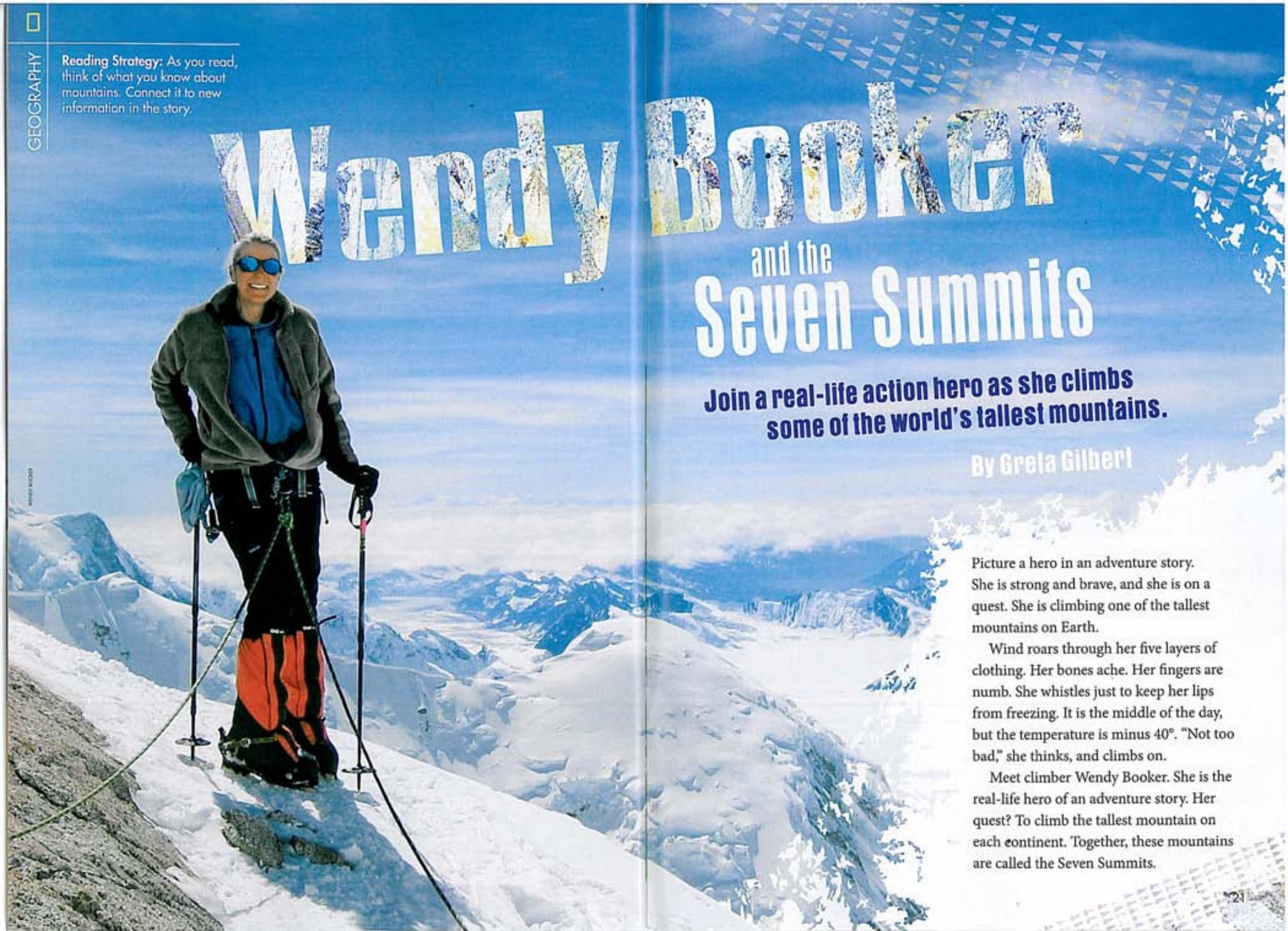
**Join a real-life action hero as she climbs
some of the world's tallest mountains.**

By Greta Gilbert

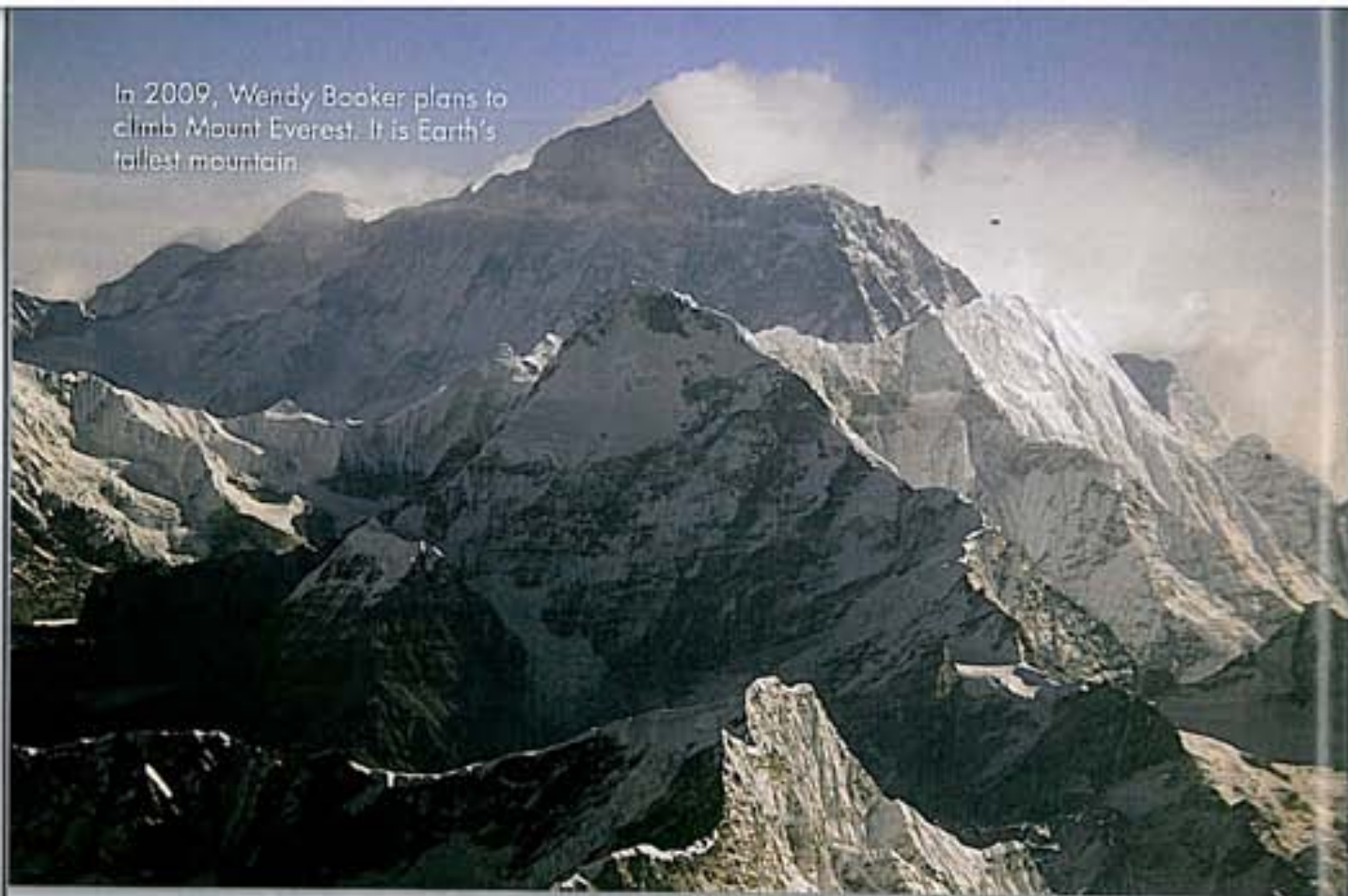
Picture a hero in an adventure story. She is strong and brave, and she is on a quest. She is climbing one of the tallest mountains on Earth.

Wind roars through her five layers of clothing. Her bones ache. Her fingers are numb. She whistles just to keep her lips from freezing. It is the middle of the day, but the temperature is minus 40°. "Not too bad," she thinks, and climbs on.

Meet climber Wendy Booker. She is the real-life hero of an adventure story. Her quest? To climb the tallest mountain on each continent. Together, these mountains are called the Seven Summits.



In 2009, Wendy Booker plans to climb Mount Everest. It is Earth's tallest mountain.



The Seven Summits

Booker's quest started in Alaska. She wanted to climb Mount McKinley, the tallest peak in North America. It took two tries before she sweated and trudged her way to the top in 2004. When she finally made it, she wondered, "Now what do I do with myself?"

She made a bold choice: To climb all Seven Summits. Booker headed to Africa to tackle Kilimanjaro in 2005. It is one of the most famous mountains on Earth.

Each day on Kilimanjaro was different, Booker says. One day, she saw vines that Tarzan might swing on. Another day, she saw trees that Dr. Seuss could have drawn. "I called them poodles on sticks," she says. She loved seeing something new each day.

peak: mountaintop

In 2006, Booker climbed Mount Elbrus. It towers over Europe. A year later, she climbed Aconcagua in South America.

This year, she scaled Vinson in Antarctica. Vinson was tough. Booker had to crunch her way through thick snow. She used a special kind of ax to climb on ice.

Then there was the snowstorm. Snow was falling fast and thick. Booker couldn't see anything at all. She and her guide groped their way back to camp to wait for better weather. Then they tried again.

Yet Vinson has been her favorite climb so far. "I found my joy," she says. Battling the ice and snow, she realized, "There was nowhere else I wanted to be."

groped: used their hands to find

The Invisible Enemy

A hero in an adventure story usually has some sort of enemy. Booker does, too. It is multiple sclerosis (MS), a serious disease.

MS attacks nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord. These cells send messages throughout the body. Damage from MS means that nerves cannot do their jobs correctly.

MS can make people dizzy. It can make muscles hard to control. Or, as in Booker's case, it can make parts of the body totally numb. Yet Booker doesn't let that stop her. With her disease, she climbs on.

Help From Friends

Every hero gets discouraged. When that happens to Booker, she thinks of Jim Cleere's students and former students in Massachusetts. The kids at Donald McKay K-8 School in East Boston have been cheering her on for several years.

Before each climb, the students give Booker a bag of gummy bears. While climbing, she carries a picture of her young fans on her backpack, along with a pink flag that they all signed. At the summit, Booker eats the gummy bears and calls the kids on a satellite phone.

Booker visits the children whenever she can. She talks about her adventures and lets kids check out her gear. Each year, she leads a class up a mountain so kids can learn about the adventure of climbing. They practice holding onto rocks and trying to find the right places for their feet.

Climb On!

Soon, Booker will need more gummy bears. She'll climb Kosciuszko in Australia. Next year, she'll face the tallest summit of all—Asia's Mount Everest. If she succeeds, she will be one of few women who have climbed all Seven Summits. She will be the first woman with MS to do so.

No matter what happens, Booker will climb on. "I want to inspire others," she says. "Especially young people. They should not see obstacles as mountains in their way."

You may never climb a mountain. Yet you can still be the hero in your own adventure story. Think about *your* Seven Summits and how you can climb them!



Wendy Booker climbs a wall of ice on Mount Rainier, Washington.

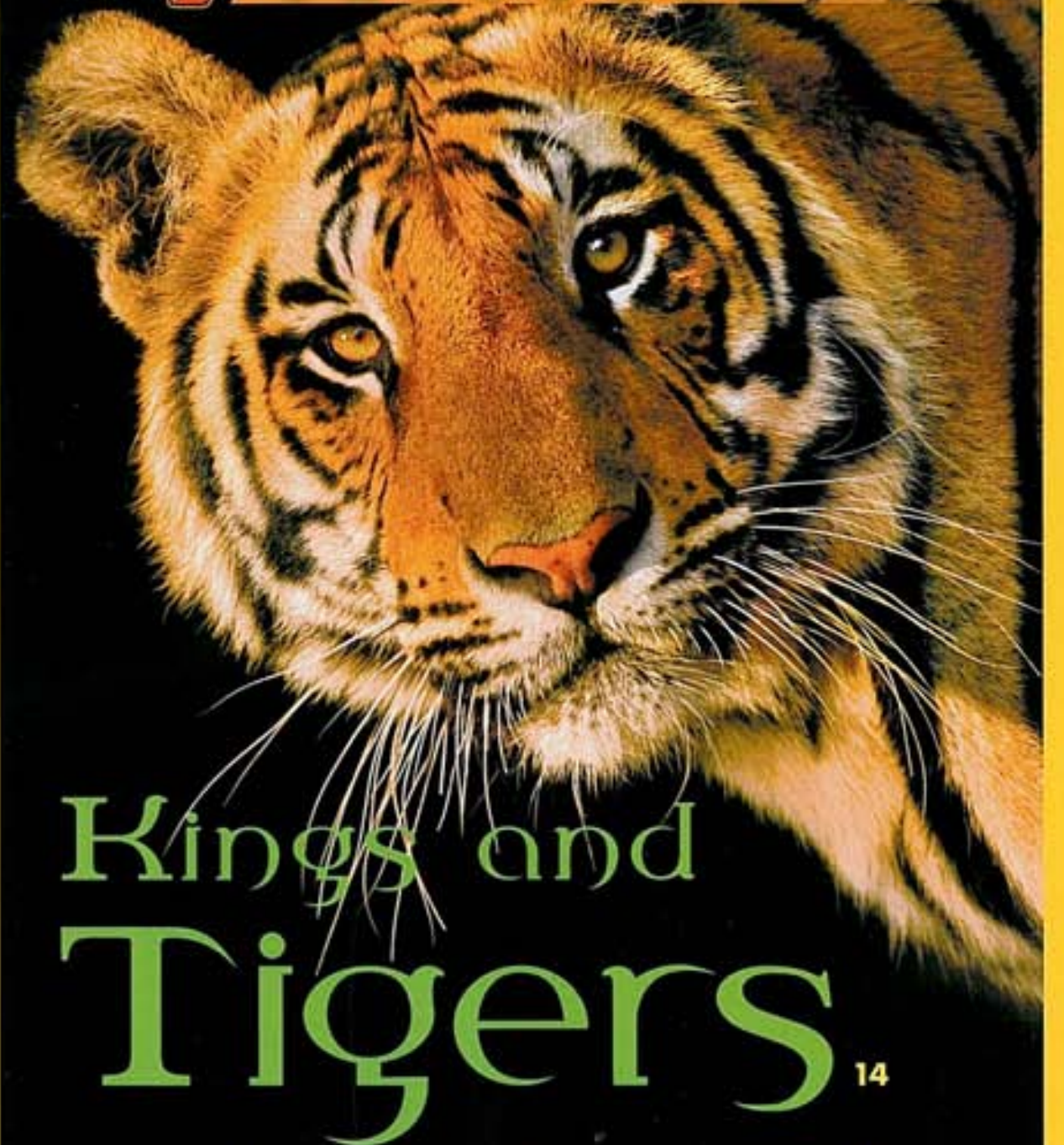
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Kings and Tigers ¹⁴

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