**Eruption
by Steve Olson**

**About the Book**

For months in early 1980, scientists, journalists, and nearby residents listened anxiously to rumblings from Mount St. Helens in southwestern Washington State. Still, no one was prepared when a cataclysmic eruption blew the top off of the mountain, laying waste to hundreds of square miles of land and killing fifty-seven people. Steve Olson interweaves vivid personal stories with the history, science, and economic forces that influenced the fates and futures of those around the volcano. Eruption delivers a spellbinding narrative of an event that changed the course of volcanic science, and an epic tale of our fraught relationship with the natural world.

**About the Author**:

Steve Olson is an award-winning science writer. He is the author of Mapping Human History: Genes, Race, and Our Common Origins, which was one of five finalists for the 2002 National Book Award for Nonfiction. A consultant writer for the National Academy of Sciences as well as for other organizations, Olson has also written for such publications as the Atlantic Monthly, the Washington Post, Scientific American, and Wired.

**If you enjoyed this book*:***

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* Chernobyl 01:23:40 by Andrew Leatherbarrow
* The Great Quake by Henry Fountain
* Astoria by Peter Stark
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**Discussion Questions**

1. Do you remember when the eruption happened? What do you remember from the news and other media?
2. What surprised you the most about the events leading up to the eruption? Did you learn anything new about any part of the eruption (blast, ash clouds, floods, landslides)
3. Why does Steve Olson insist that those who died when Mt. St. Helens exploded were not at fault? How did those people end up being left in harm's way? Was any one person to blame? Was it a systemic failure? Or was it simply a fateful chain of events?
4. Talk about the system of "red zones" and "blue Zones." How did they work (or not work)?
5. Why was the growing bulge on the side of Mount St. Helen's not given the significance it deserved? How much did scientists understand and how much was conveyed to the public?
6. How did the long history of the area—the railroad, the logging industry, land grants and public set asides—contribute to the confusion before and devastation during the eruption.
7. Discuss the explosion itself. What surprised you most?
8. How has the eruption of Mount St. Helens altered the scientific understanding of volcanoes, as well as the resilience of nature?