

# Brian's Winter

by Gary Paulsen

What if Brian Robeson (from *Hatchet*) had not been rescued from the wilderness until winter? Would the skills he learned over the summer and fall be adequate to survive the harsh Canadian winter?

## THEMES

adventure, survival, problem-solving, responsibility, courage, one with nature

Young Listener Unabridged Audio

## I. PRE-TEACHING

### A. Have the class define and discuss these terms:

marooned, torment, averted, eluded, rummaging, significance, solitary, clinical, sheepishly, trundle, ransacking, adversary, thunderheads, grimaced, famished, grenade, detonating, dimension, humidity, physics, lethargy, migrating, crude, fletch, gorged, stash, venison, gingerly, terminal, hygiene, stymied, hummock, skittering, sulfurous, devastating, dismal, supple, butane, mutation, simultaneously, maneuver, momentum, animosity, tangy, muted, crystallized, limber, plausible, hallucinating, scrupulously

### B. Before beginning the story, discuss the following questions with the class:

1. Have you ever been outside on a very cold day? What did you wear to keep warm? What would you do if you found yourself in extreme cold with no winter clothes?
2. Have you ever been camping in the woods? What supplies did you need to bring? What would you do if you forgot something important?
3. How did prehistoric people survive cold winters? What did they do for shelter? For clothes? For food?

## II. PRESENTATION

### A. Understanding the Story:

1. Begin with Chapters 1 - 5: How does Brian feel when he discovers the food supply is gone? What does he have to do the longer he stays? What warnings does he foolishly ignore? What does the large bear do to him? What problem does he encounter when he makes arrows for his new bow? What does he learn when he draws the arrowheads? What problems do the rains cause? How does he keep his shelter warm? What does he remember about flint? How does he make clothes for winter? Why does he apologize to the doe when he skins her?
2. Advance to Chapters 6 - 12: What does Brian realize about the skunk? Why does he turn it into a pet? How does the skunk save his life? What happens the first time he tries to use his bow? What does he realize he'll be doing with it? In what ways does Brian feel the snow is more beautiful than any he has ever seen? What

memory do the moose tracks evoke? What happens when he shoots the moose? How does he get the carcass back to camp? What is the weather like after that? What does he eat for Thanksgiving dinner? What is he thankful for?

3. Complete the tape with Chapters 13 - Epilogue: What wakes Brian up that morning? What causes the trees to explode? Why is it difficult to move in the snow? How does Brian get the deer meat back to camp? What appalls him about the wolf kill? How does he know the shots he hears are not trees exploding? What does he think the line in the ice could be? Why hadn't the Cree man wanted to bother him? What does the Cree man want to learn from him? How is Brian rescued? How does he feel about leaving?

### B. For Discussion:

1. Trace the tools Brian invents and how he goes about it. Which ones does he make mistakes with? What does he learn from his mistakes?
2. In what ways does Brian become one with nature? How does he feel about killing animals in order to eat and dress himself? Why does he apologize to the animals when he kills them?
3. How does Brian's sense of humor help him survive? What other traits does he have that help him? How might we prepare ourselves for an experience like Brian's?
4. What does Brian learn about the difference between work and play? When does work become play? How can we bring this attitude into our own lives?

## III. EXTENDING THE LESSON

Give students the opportunity to work with partners, groups, the whole class, or alone.

### INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS:

#### A. Language Arts:

1. Have students put together a character list featuring the different traits of the main characters. Since this story has only one character, have them go deeper into a study of Brian's character. In what ways is he foolish? In what ways is he wise? What traits help him survive?

2. Have students write about a decision they made or something that happened to them and then have them answer the question: "How would their lives be changed if they had made a different decision or the event had not happened?" Discuss how small decisions and events can lead to huge changes in our lives.
3. Have students write a poem based on the story. They might write Brian's expression of regret to the deer or the moose when he kills them. They might write a humorous poem about having a skunk for a pet. They might write about the special beauty of winter.
4. If they have not already done so, be sure students read Gary Paulsen's *Hatchet*, *The River*, and *Brian's Return*. How does staying for the winter change Brian from the way he is when he is rescued before winter? Have students listen to the Foreword in *Brian's Winter* about why Gary Paulsen decided to write this book.

### B. Art and Music:

1. Assign a group to select records, tapes, or CDs from the library that serve as appropriate background music to some of the scenes. Many composers, such as Vivaldi and Respighi, have written pieces imitating birds. They might listen to "Winter" from the *Four Seasons* by Vivaldi as well.
2. Have students make a bulletin board about the story. Cover the board in white to show the vastness of the wilderness. They could paint bare trees and evergreens on the paper, show the animals Brian encounters, his weapons, the other items he makes.
3. Have students paint the color of the sky as Brian describes it. Another group might paint the snow. What colors would they use besides blue for the sky or white for the snow? Have them look at the sky at different times of the day and keep a watercolor journal that captures the colors they see.

### C. Social Studies:

1. Have students learn about the religious beliefs of Native American peoples. How were they able to justify the killing of animals when they also considered them gods? Students might read some of the folktales of the Cree or other peoples and hold a storytelling session.

2. Have students find out how early people were able to survive and thrive without our modern inventions. How might they have discovered fire? Weapons? Agriculture? The wheel?
3. Have students discuss how someone might be changed by an experience in the wilderness like Brian's. How would their values change? What would they learn?

### D. Science and Math:

1. Have students learn about birds and their calls and songs. They might listen to recordings of bird calls or go on a bird watching trip as a class.
2. Have students learn about survival in the wilderness in the winter. How do people in the Arctic work and live? What tools do they need? What are we learning from scientists living in these inhospitable regions?
3. Have students learn about the kinds of animals that live in the frozen north. How has nature designed them to survive the harsh winters?
4. Have students find out about flint. Why is this the best stone for making arrowheads? What else might it be used for?
5. Brian was able to invent things because he learned from his mistakes or "trial and error". Have students find out how inventors such as Thomas Edison learned from their mistakes. How can we learn from our mistakes?

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