

Hatchet

by Gary Paulsen

When Brian Robeson finds himself alone in the Canadian wilderness with nothing but the clothes he is wearing, a tattered wind breaker, and the hatchet his mother gave him as a going away present, he must get back to the basics in order to survive.

THEMES

survival, secrets, problem-solving, responsibility

Young Listener Unabridged Audio

I. PRE-TEACHING

A. These terms should be defined and discussed:

consuming, drone, lurched, tundra, grimacing, spasm, arc, chant, wallow, spiraling, abated, keening, throb, massively, agony, hummocks, murky, pulverized, lushly, tart (adj.), ruefully, twinge, receded, tang, rivulets, skittered, slithering, rasping, gingerly, wincing, imbedded, haunches, tendrils, painstaking, gratified, eddied, dusk, dormant, bluff, gnarled, refracts, exulted, rectify, sulfurous, corrosive, camouflage, incessant, stymied, furor, predator

B. Consider the following questions:

1. What would you do if you found yourself alone with only the clothes on your back? How would you survive?
2. How do you think people first made fire? Why was it so important to early people?
3. If you had no tools, except what you could find outside, how would you make them?

II. PRESENTATION

A. Understanding the Story:

1. Begin with Chapters 1 - 6: What happens to the pilot of the small plane? What does Brian have to do? Where does he crash? Why does he call the mosquitoes vampires? What does he do to control his thoughts about hunger? What does he remember his English teacher saying? Why does he decide to stay near the lake? What are some of his concerns? Where does he find shelter? How does he improve upon it?
2. Advance to Chapters 7 - 13: How does Brian keep from getting lost? What does he conclude is the most important rule of survival? How do his sleep patterns change? What does he dream that night? How does he learn to make fire? What does he see from the top of the mountain? Why doesn't the fish spear work? How does he feel after the plane leaves? What are the "two true things" he learned that night?
3. Complete the story with Chapters 14 - Epilogue: What does Brian figure out about hunting the birds? What does he discover about patience? What is his plan for getting to the tail of the airplane? What does dropping the hatchet mean? How does he get it back? What is

the worst shock of being in the plane? How does he react to what he finds in the survival pack? How is he rescued?

B. For Discussion:

1. How are Brian's feelings about time changed by his experience?
2. What does Brian mean when he says, "Discoveries happened because they needed to happen." In what ways is this true for Brian? In what ways might it be true of people in the past or today?
3. In what ways does Brian's experience mirror the experience of prehistoric people?
4. Trace Brian's feelings of triumph and of despair. In what ways does he mature because of his experience? At what point does he feel his life has started over? What does he mean when he says he feels "reborn"? How does this help him survive?
5. In what ways is Brian changed forever by his experience in the wilderness? What do you feel he will be like when he returns to civilization?

IV. 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 character. Since the story is mainly about Brian, students can go deeper into his character. Have them include his excitement, his cleverness, his mistakes, his sense of humor.
2. During his experience, Brian learns to listen carefully and to observe details in a different way than he had before. Have students go to a place outside and take time to listen and watch. Then have them write a description of this place.
3. Have students write about their favorite foods and what they would miss if they were in a situation like Brian's.
4. Have students write a story about Brian after he returns home. Would everything be the same as before? Why or why not? Follow up with a reading of *Brian's Return*,

the sequel to *Hatchet*. They might also read *Brian's Winter*, the alternative sequel to *Hatchet*. Have them discuss and compare the three books.

5. As students listen to the tape, have them pay attention to the author's use of strong verbs, such as "his eyes snapped open, hammered open" or "stagger-tripped his way back to the bank." Have them list effective verbs they hear.
6. Have them listen to the tape again and pick out one scene they feel is the most effective in showing how Brian grows during his experience. Have them listen for the words, tone, and rhythm the author uses to capture this favorite scene.
7. Have students read other stories of survival, such as *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel DeFoe, *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, *Adrift* by Steven Callahan, *Deathwatch* by Robb White, or short stories by Jack London like "To Build a Fire."

B. Art and Music:

1. Have students select music that might accompany some of the scenes. Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* might be appropriate.
2. Have students make a bulletin board about the story, including the wilderness, the lake, Brian's cave and shelter, his inventions and tools like the bow and arrow and the fish spear. Include a collage of survival stories from newspapers and magazines.
3. Have students go outside by themselves and sit quietly with a drawing pad. Have them draw something they see, like a tree, a rock, an animal. Discuss how this makes them feel and how it helps them see things more clearly.

C. Social Studies:

1. Have students read myths about the discovery of fire, such as the Greek Prometheus bringing it to earth. Why did the gods punish him for this?
2. Working in groups, have students make up a survival game. Give them a list of items they might take with them into the wilderness. Then have them come to a consensus about which items are the most important and which the least. This is a good exercise in group dynamics.

3. Have students find out how prehistoric people made discoveries and inventions to ensure their survival. On which of these discoveries and inventions does our own way of life depend?

D. Science and Math:

1. Have students find Canada on a map and learn about the wildness. What animals live there? What are the seasonal temperatures? They might make a relief map and include the animals, trees, lakes, and rivers. Or make a guidebook to help others identify animals and/or plants indigenous to the Canadian wilderness.
2. Have students research about early humans. How might they have found and tamed fire? Made tools? Developed weapons?
3. Have students plot the route the plane might be taking before it went down. How long is the trip as planned? About where would they say Brian ends up?
4. Have students learn about animal tracks. Have them find the tracks of backyard animals or birds, sketch them and, in class, use reference books to identify them.
5. Have students come up with a list of ways to keep from getting lost in the wilderness.

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