

BOOKNOTES

TEACHERS GUIDE

thematic connections

**Survival • Nature
Making Choices
Conservation • Self-Discovery
Fear • Loneliness**

Grades 5 up

about the book

In *Hatchet*, 13-year-old Brian Robeson learned to survive alone in the Canadian wilderness, armed with his hatchet and resourcefulness. In four gripping companion books, Brian again must survive in the woods.

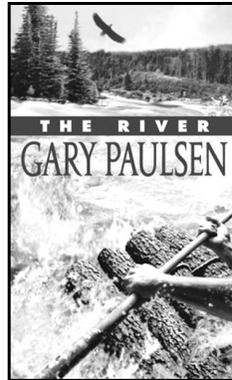
In *The River*, Brian is asked to return to the woods to teach Derek, a government psychologist, survival techniques.

Brian's Winter begins where *Hatchet* might have ended: Brian is not rescued at the end of summer and must build on his survival skills to face his deadliest enemy—winter.

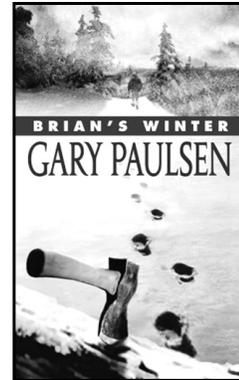
In *Brian's Return*, he faces one of the most difficult challenges of his life. Brian learns what he has known in his heart for a long time: He belongs in the woods.

In *Brian's Hunt*, 16-year-old Brian is alone in the Canadian wilderness when he discovers a wounded dog. Who or what injured the dog? The

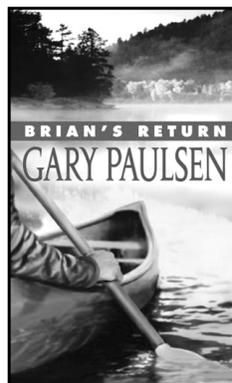
Gary Paulsen The Brian Books



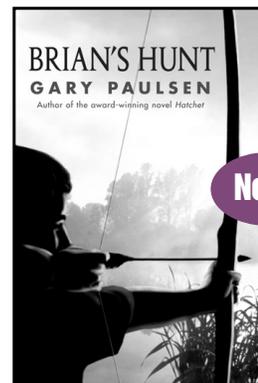
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Listening Library audiobook • 0-553-52620-0



Wendy Lamb Books hardcover • 0-385-74647-4
Gibraltar Library Binding • 0-385-90882-2

dog's tracks came from the north—and Brian fears for his Cree friends, the Smallwoods, who live to the north. With growing unease, Brian and the dog set out on the hunt.

Paulsen's companion novels masterfully explore how a boy's determination and resourcefulness help him to survive and connect with nature in a way he didn't know was possible.

pre-reading activities

In *Brian's Winter, The River, and Hatchet*, Brian Robeson must survive in the northern woods. His most important resource is his own ingenuity.

Divide the class into small groups and have them list items they think are necessary to include in a survival pack. Then challenge each group to decide which five items on their list are the most important. Ask each group to share and support their decision. Ask students to discuss how surviving in the wilderness for a long period of time might change a person's life.

Tell the class that in *Brian's Return* and in *Brian's Hunt*, Brian Robeson cannot adjust to ordinary life and feels that the only way he can be happy is to return to the wilderness. Divide the class into small groups and ask them to brainstorm the many reasons why it might be difficult for Brian to live the life of a typical high-school student.

thematic connections

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Survival—In *Brian's Hunt*, Brian is awakened by a strange animal noise in the night. He searches to find out what animal is making the noise and discovers a wounded dog. The injured dog has a deep and mysterious wound that needs to be stitched up. Ask students to discuss the difficult task Brian has of coaxing the injured dog back to his camp and how he is able to stitch the dog up with no experience.

Ask students how Brian manages to kill and not be killed by the bear that killed his friends, left three children orphans, and injured the dog.

Brian takes some camping gear when he returns to the woods in *Brian's Return* and in *Brian's Hunt*. Ask students to refer to the list of equipment (Chapter 9 in *Brian's Return* and Chapter 1 in *Brian's Hunt*) that he chooses to take with him. Then have them select the items that they feel are absolutely necessary for his survival. How is his return trip different from his other long adventures in the wilderness?

Conservation—Numerous organizations in America are involved in game management. Have students find out the purpose of each of the following organizations: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, National Audubon Society, National Wildlife Federation, and Ducks Unlimited. Ask them to create a poster advertising one of these organizations.

Each state in the United States has game laws. Many states require a hunting and fishing license. Ask students to find out the laws regarding hunting and fishing in their state. Why is it important to have such laws?

Fear—Brian will always have the survival skills necessary to live in the wilderness, but in *Brian's Hunt*, he faces new fears. Discuss the fear that overtakes Brian as he approaches the cabin. Debate whether his discovery will have a lasting effect on him, and make him more fearful. How does fear make him more aware of the signs in nature?

Loneliness—In *Brian's Hunt*, Brian discovers a dog “that filled a hole in his life, filled a loneliness he hadn't ever known existed.” (p. 61) Ask students to discuss Brian's loneliest moments. Brian experiences various emotions when he discovers David Smallhorn dead in his cabin. How does this discovery contribute to a feeling of loneliness?

connecting to the curriculum

Science—Brian learns a lot about animals and how they communicate. Encourage students to select one animal that Brian encounters in *Brian's Return*, *The River*, *Brian's Winter*, or *Brian's Hunt*, and research that animal's method of communication, how it marks its territory, and how it protects itself from predators.

Math—During his time in the wilderness, Brian draws on various math skills to help himself survive. He has to calculate how many days his food will last, and he must estimate distances when he is hunting. Ask students to create a math problem based on a specific incident or situation in either *The River* or *Brian's Winter*.

Social Studies—Brian hunts with tools similar to those used by early hunters. How does Brian know which tools to use in specific hunting situations? Ask students to use the library to research ancient hunting methods. Have them construct a pictorial time line that traces the development of various hunting tools.

In *Brian's Hunt*, Brian's view of hunting is similar to that of Native Americans. For example, he believes that food shouldn't be wasted and that the entire kill should have a purpose. Ask students to identify passages in the book that reveal Brian's views about hunting. Then have them write an article for a hunting magazine that Brian might write.

In *Brian's Hunt*, Brian makes reference to the Canadian Mounties and the Natural Resources Ranger who come to investigate David's cabin. "But in some ways they had no knowledge because they had all the gadgets; they missed the small things because they saw too big." (p. 87) Plan a two-day wilderness camp curriculum for the Canadian Mounties and the Natural Resources Ranger. Explain the gadgets they use. Point out the small things that they missed in their investigation.

Language Arts—Gary Paulsen uses imagery to appeal to all of the senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. Allow students to browse the books and find examples of such imagery. Ask them to use Paulsen's images to create similes.

Bring an assortment of hunting and fishing magazines to class for students to peruse. Ask them to write a short article for one of the magazines that Brian might write discussing his dislike of "professional fishermen" and "professional hunters."

Brian has read Jack London's *Call of the Wild* and feels that there is "a lot of silliness in what he says about the wilderness." (p. 39) Ask students to read London's novel and write an essay that Brian might write entitled "The Wilderness of Brian Robeson vs. the Wilderness of Jack London."

Music—In the Author's Note at the end of *Brian's Return*, Gary Paulsen writes that he is waiting out winter storms before he can set sail on his boat *Felicity*. During the rain, he listens to the music of Mozart. Ask students to find recordings that they think reflect Brian's connection with nature.

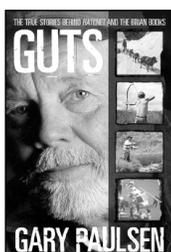
Drama—In *Brian's Hunt*, Brian convinces the school authorities to allow him to home school himself. Ask students to dramatize the conversation between Brian and the school officials. How does Brian justify his argument?

vocabulary/ use of language

The language in *Brian's Hunt* is descriptive and challenges students to think about each word and its application within the context of the story. Such words may include: *horrendous* (p. 11), *discordant* (p. 12), *pulverizing* (p. 16), *inordinate* (p. 21), *meticulous* (p. 21), *desensitized* (p. 26), *monocular* (p. 28), *malamute* (p. 30), *silhouette* (p. 55), and *dubious* (p. 91).

related titles

by theme



Guts: The True Stories Behind Hatchet and the Brian Books

Gary Paulsen

Survival • Self-Discovery • Courage • Hope
0-385-32650-5

The Incredible Journey

Sheila Burnford

Adventure • Friendship
0-440-41324-9

Listening Library Audiobook • 0-553-47806-0

The Haymeadow

Gary Paulsen

Adventure • Coming of Age
0-440-40923-3

Listening Library Audiobook • 0-553-47077-9

The Voyage of the Frog

Gary Paulsen

Adventure
0-440-40364-2

The Sign of the Beaver

Elizabeth George Speare

Cultural Diversity • Survival • Making Choices
0-440-47900-2

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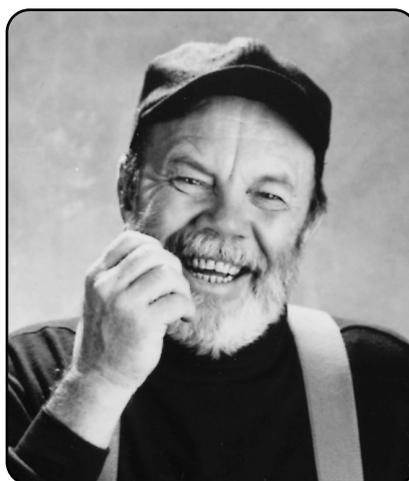


Photo Credit: Tim Keating

about the author

Three-time Newbery Honor winner **Gary Paulsen** developed a passion for reading at an early age. Running away from home at the age of 14 and traveling with a carnival, Paulsen acquired a taste for adventure. His realization that he would become a writer came suddenly when he was working as a satellite technician for an aerospace firm in California. One night he walked off the job, and spent the next year in Hollywood as a magazine proofreader, working on his own writing every night. He completed his first novel later that year.

internet resources

Animal Tracks

www.bear-tracker.com/guide.html

This site is an illustrated guide to animal tracks.

Native Languages of the Americas

www.native-languages.org/cree.htm

This site discusses the Cree people, their language, and their history.

Rocky Mountain Survival Group

www.rmsg.us/cook/cookbake.htm

This site provides links to suggestions for cooking and preserving in the wild.

on the web

Visit the Gary Paulsen Web site at
www.garypaulsen.com

For bios, teachers guides, and more . . .

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www.randomhouse.com/teachers