



TEACHER'S PET PUBLICATIONS

LITPLAN TEACHER PACK™

for

The River

based on the book by

Gary Paulsen

Written by

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ISBN 978-1-60249-239-4

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A FEW NOTES ABOUT THE AUTHOR
GARY PAULSEN

PAULSEN, Gary 1939- Gary Paulsen was born on May 17, 1939, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is a second-generation American. His father's family emigrated to the United States from Denmark, and his mother's family came from Norway and Sweden. Paulsen's father was a career Army officer, and the family moved frequently. He had few friends and did not do well in school. Due to family problems, Paulsen spent much of his growing-up years with his aunts and grandmother. During these years, he was introduced to books by a friendly librarian, and began reading voraciously.

Paulsen attended Bemidjii College from 1957-1958. He paid his tuition by working as a trapper for the state of Minnesota. From 1959-1962 he worked with missiles in the United States Army. Upon his release, he took courses and became a field engineer. He worked as an aerospace field engineer from 1962-1966. During this time he read an article about flight testing and thought getting paid to write about things he liked would be a good way to earn a living.

In order to break into the writing field, Paulsen made up a resume. He was hired as an associate editor by a magazine in Hollywood, California. Although his supervisors realized he had falsified the resume, they were willing to teach him about the writing business and he worked there for one year. He also worked as a film extra and a sculptor.

The Special War was Paulsen's first book. It was based on his interviews with servicemen who had served in the Vietnam War. In the next twelve years he published 40 books, 200 magazine articles, short stories, and two plays. His topics included hunting, trapping, farming, and young adult and adult fiction. Many of the adventures in his books come from his own experiences. Paulsen has sailed alone to Hawaii, lived in the northern wilderness alone with only a bow and arrow, and driven a motorcycle cross country.

After he published *Winterkill* in 1977, he was sued for libel. He won the case after a long battle. By this time he was almost bankrupt and had no desire to write, so he returned to trapping predators for the state of Minnesota. During this time a friend gave him a four dog sled team. He took the dogs on a seven day run. At the end of the run he resigned from his job, determined not to kill any more animals. Next, Paulsen entered the Iditarod, the 1200 mile long dogsled race in Alaska. A publisher gave him the money to enter the race and asked to be the first to see whatever writing Paulsen did after the race.

Paulsen published *Dancing Carl* in 1983. This was originally a narrative ballet for two dancers, and a short version was shown on Minnesota Public Television. He published *Tracker*, the story of a young boy who is hunting alone for the first time after his grandfather's death, in 1984. This was followed by *Dogsong* in 1985. Paulsen actually wrote *Dogsong* while training his team for the Iditarod. It is the story of a young Eskimo boy who takes his dog team across Alaska. It was a Newbery Honor Book in 1986. *Hatchet*, the story of a young boy lost in the Canadian wilderness for 54 days with nothing but a hatchet, was named a Newbery Honor book in 1988. Several other books have been chosen as American Library Association Best Books for Young Adults, Notable Children's books, and National Council of Teachers of English Notable Books in the Language Arts.

One of his current works is *Madonna*, a collection of stories about some of the strong women he has known. Other works include *The Foxman* (1977), *The Spitball Gang* (1980), *The Crossing*, (1987), *The River*, (1991), *The Haymeadow*, (1992), and *Nightjohn*, (1993).

Mr. Paulsen continues to write and lives in Leonard, Minnesota. He also gives public reading and performances near his home.

INTRODUCTION

This unit has been designed to develop students' reading, writing, thinking, listening and speaking skills through exercises and activities related to *The River* by Gary Paulsen. It includes nineteen lessons, supported by extra resource materials.

The **introductory lesson** introduces students to one main theme of the novel, using one's inner resources in difficult circumstances, through a bulletin board activity. Following the introductory activity, students are given an explanation of how the activity relates to the book they are about to read.

The **reading assignments** are approximately thirty pages each; some are a little shorter while others are a little longer. Students have approximately 15 minutes of pre-reading work to do prior to each reading assignment. This pre-reading work involves reviewing the study questions for the assignment and doing some vocabulary work for 8 to 10 vocabulary words they will encounter in their reading.

The **study guide questions** are fact-based questions; students can find the answers to these questions right in the text. These questions come in two formats: short answer or multiple choice. The best use of these materials is probably to use the short answer version of the questions as study guides for students (since answers will be more complete), and to use the multiple choice version for occasional quizzes. It might be a good idea to make transparencies of your answer keys for the overhead projector.

The **vocabulary work** is intended to enrich students' vocabularies as well as to aid in the students' understanding of the book. Prior to each reading assignment, students will complete a two-part worksheet for approximately 8 to 10 vocabulary words in the upcoming reading assignment. Part I focuses on students' use of general knowledge and contextual clues by giving the sentence in which the word appears in the text. Students are then to write down what they think the words mean based on the words' usage. Part II gives students dictionary definitions of the words and has them match the words to the correct definitions based on the words' contextual usage. Students should then have an understanding of the words when they meet them in the text.

After each reading assignment, students will go back and formulate answers for the study guide questions. Discussion of these questions serves as a **review** of the most important events and ideas presented in the reading assignments.

After students complete extra discussion questions, there is a **vocabulary review** lesson which pulls together all of the separate vocabulary lists for the reading assignments and gives students a review of all of the words they have studied.

Following the reading of the book, two lessons are devoted to the **extra discussion questions/writing assignments**. These questions focus on interpretation, critical analysis and personal response, employing a variety of thinking skills and adding to the students' understanding of the novel. These questions are done

as a **group activity**. Using the information they have acquired so far through individual work and class discussions, students get together to further examine the text and to brainstorm ideas relating to the themes of the novel.

The group activity is followed by a **reports and discussion** session in which the groups share their ideas about the book with the entire class; thus, the entire class gets exposed to many different ideas regarding the themes and events of the book.

There are three **writing assignments** in this unit, each with the purpose of informing, persuading, or having students express personal opinions. The first assignment is to **inform**: students will give information about a nonfiction topic related to the novel. The second assignment is to **persuade**: students will develop a "Brian Robeson" survival product and design a magazine advertisement for it. The third assignment is to express a personal **opinion**: students will discuss an experience that changed them.

The **nonfiction reading assignment** is used as Writing Assignment 1. Students are required to read a piece of nonfiction related in some way to *The River*. After reading their nonfiction pieces, students will fill out a worksheet on which they answer questions regarding facts, interpretation, criticism, and personal opinions. They will also write a short report about the information they researched. During one class period, students make **oral presentations** about the nonfiction pieces they have read. This not only exposes all students to a wealth of information, it also gives students the opportunity to practice **public speaking**.

The **review lesson** pulls together all of the aspects of the unit. The teacher is given four or five choices of activities or games to use which all serve the same basic function of reviewing all of the information presented in the unit.

The **unit test** comes in two formats: all multiple choice-matching-true/false or with a mixture of matching, short answer, and composition. As a convenience, two different tests for each format have been included.

There are additional **support materials** included with this unit. The **unit resource section** includes suggestions for an in-class library, crossword and word search puzzles related to the novel, and extra vocabulary worksheets. There is a list of **bulletin board ideas** which gives the teacher suggestions for bulletin boards to go along with this unit. In addition, there is a list of **extra class activities** the teacher could choose from to enhance the unit or as a substitution for an exercise the teacher might feel is inappropriate for his/her class. **Answer keys** are located directly after the **reproducible student materials** throughout the unit. The student materials may be reproduced for use in the teacher's classroom without infringement of copyrights. No other portion of this unit may be reproduced without the written consent of Teacher's Pet Publications, Inc.

UNIT OBJECTIVES *The River*

1. Through reading *The River* students will analyze characters and their situations to better understand the themes of the novel.
2. Students will demonstrate their understanding of the text on four levels: factual, interpretive, critical, and personal.
3. Students will practice reading aloud and silently to improve their skills in each area.
4. Students will enrich their vocabularies and improve their understanding of the novel through the vocabulary lessons prepared for use in conjunction with it.
5. Students will answer questions to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the main events and characters in *The River*.
6. Students will practice writing through a variety of writing assignments.
7. The writing assignments in this are geared to several purposes:
 - a. To check the students' reading comprehension
 - b. To make students think about the ideas presented by the novel
 - c. To make students put those ideas into perspective
 - d. To encourage critical and logical thinking
 - e. To provide the opportunity to practice good grammar and improve students' use of the English language.
8. Students will read aloud, report, and participate in large and small group discussions to improve their public speaking and personal interaction skills.

UNIT OUTLINE - *The River*

1 Unit Intro Distribute Unit Materials PV 1-4	2 Minilesson: Plot Read 1-4 Study ?? 1-4	3 Study ?? 1-4 PVR 5-7	4 Study ?? 5-7 Minilesson: Foreshadowing Flashback	5 Writing Assignment #1 Nonfiction Assignment
6 PVR 8-11 Oral Reading Evaluation	7 Study ?? 8-11 PVR 12-15	8 Quiz 1-11 Writing Assignment #2	9 Study ?? 12-15 Minilesson: Plot	10 Writing Conferences
11 PVR 16-19	12 Study ?? 16-19 Minilesson: Simile	13 PVR 20- Measurements Minilesson: Plot	14 Extra Discussion Questions	15 Writing Assignment #3
16 Group Work	17 Vocabulary Review	18 Unit Review	19 Unit Test	20 Non-Fiction Assignment

Key: P = Preview Study Questions V = Vocabulary Work R = Read

READING ASSIGNMENT SHEET *The River*

Date to be Assigned	Chapters	Completion Date (Prior to class on this date)
	Chapters 1-4	
	Chapters 5-7	
	Chapters 8-11	
	Chapters 12-15	
	Chapters 16-19	
	Chapters 20-Measurements	

LESSON ONE

Student Objectives

1. To preview *The River* Unit
2. To receive books and other related materials (study guides, reading assignment)
3. To relate prior knowledge to the new material
4. To become familiar with the vocabulary for Chapters 1-4
5. To preview the study questions for Chapters 1-4

Activity #1a

Note to the Teacher: Use this activity if the students have not read *Hatchet*.

Direct attention to the bulletin board display of wilderness areas. (*The River* does not specifically mention the setting, but it is the northeastern Canadian wilderness, the same as in *Hatchet*.) Ask students to describe what they see. Tell students they will be entering a survival school, and will be sent to a wilderness for a week to learn to survive. Have students form small groups and brainstorm what they would do to survive. Have them make a list of the minimum amount of equipment and supplies they think they would need. Also have them make a list of the possible dangers and problems they could encounter. Each group should record their answers on a piece of paper. Invite students to read their ideas aloud. Collect and save the papers until students have finished reading the novel. Tell students that the boy in the story, Brian Robeson, was stranded in the wilderness with only his hatchet, and survived for 54 days. Now the government wants him to do it again so they can learn from him, and better prepare pilots and others who might actually find themselves in that situation. Take a poll and see how many of the students would repeat the adventure if they were Brian.

Activity #1b

Note to the Teacher: Use this activity if the students have read *Hatchet*.

Direct attention to the bulletin board display of wilderness areas. Ask students to name the book they read that had this setting. Invite them to tell as much as they remember about the book *Hatchet*. Have them speculate on what Brian Robeson has been doing since his return to his home in New York. Tell them *The River* takes place about a year after Brian has returned from the wilderness. Some people from a government survival school want him to go to the wilderness again, so they can learn from him how to better train people to survive as he did. Take a poll and see how many of the students would repeat the adventure if they were Brian.

Activity #2

Distribute the materials students will use in this unit. Explain in detail how students are to use these materials.

Study Guides Students should preview the study guide questions before each reading assignment to get a feeling for what events and ideas are important in that section. After reading the section, students will (as a class or individually) answer the questions to review the important events and ideas from that section of the book. Students should keep the study guides as study materials.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1 *The River*
Writing to Inform

PROMPT

You are reading about Brian Robeson, who previously survived for 54 days alone in the Canadian wilderness. All he had with him was a small hatchet. Now, the government has asked him to go into the wilderness with one of their psychologists so they can learn how he survived.

When he returned, Brian did some research on his surroundings. He found out the kinds of animals and plants that had been near the lake. He also read about the history of fire. Your assignment is to find out more about one of the nonfiction topics mentioned in the novel. You will write a short report about your findings.

PREWRITING

Choose a topic or topics that interest you. Go to the library and find as many sources as you can on the topic. Look for encyclopedias, books, magazine articles, videos, and Internet sources. You may want to interview an expert on the topic of your choice.

Think of questions you have about your topic. Write each one on a separate index card. Then read to find the answers, and write them on the cards. Also take notes on interesting and important facts, even if you did not have questions about them. Put each fact on a separate card. Make sure to cite your references. That means to write down the source and the page number for each one.

Arrange your note card in the order you want to use for your paper.

DRAFTING

Introduce your topic in the first paragraph. Tell why you chose it, and give a preview of what the rest of the paper will be about. Then write several paragraphs about the topic. Each paragraph should have a main idea and supporting details. Your last paragraph should summarize the information in the report.

PEER CONFERENCE/REVISING

When you finish the rough draft, ask another student to look at it. You may want to give the student your note cards so he/she can double check for you and see that you have included all of the information. After reading, he or she should tell you what he/she liked best about your report, which parts were difficult to understand or needed more information, and ways in which your work could be improved. Reread your report considering your critic's comments and make the corrections you think are necessary.

PROOFREADING/EDITING

Do a final proofreading of your report, double-checking your grammar, spelling, organization, and the clarity of your ideas.