



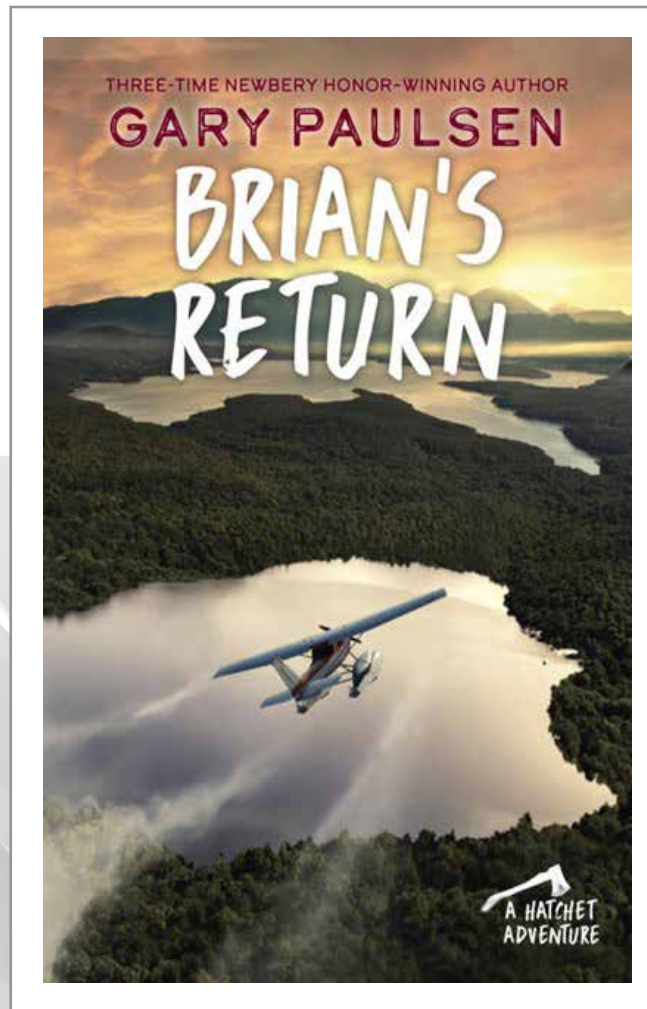
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Brian's Return

Gary Paulsen



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Brian's Return

Gary Paulsen

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

ISBN 978-1-50203-642-1

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Table of Contents

Summary.....	3
About the Author	3
Background Information	3
Characters	4
Initiating Activities.....	4
Vocabulary Activities.....	5
Six Sections	6
Each section contains: Summary, Vocabulary, Discussion Questions, and Supplementary Activities	
Post-reading Discussion Questions	15
Post-reading Extension Activities	16
Assessment.....	17
Scoring Rubric.....	31

Skills and Strategies

Comprehension

Prediction, cause/effect, sequence of events, research, drawing inferences

Literary Elements

Character analysis, plot, literature, figurative language, plays, story mapping, theme, humor, mood, point of view, genre

Writing

Essay, narrative, humorous, descriptive, creative writing, point of view

Critical Thinking

Compare/contrast, supporting details, recall, summarization, evaluation

Listening/Speaking

Interpersonal relationships, discussion

Vocabulary

Synonyms/antonyms, definitions, context clues, illustrations and photographs

Across the Curriculum

Social Studies—current events, geography, interpersonal relationships, history, map skills, anthropology; Math—real-world applications, graphs, charts; Science—biomes, animal behavior, engineering, ecology, food chains; Physical Education—hiking, canoeing, archery, outdoor life; Occupational Education—counseling; Art—painting, graphic illustration; Art History—impressionism

Genre: adventure fiction

Setting: an American city and the Canadian wilderness

Point of View: third-person omniscient

Themes: survival, nature, the human spirit, following dreams, self-reliance, determination

Conflict: person vs. person, person vs. nature, person vs. society, person vs. self

Style: narrative

Tone: introspective

Date of First Publication: 1999

Summary

Brian Robeson has returned home after being marooned in the northern wilderness for several months following a plane crash. After having relied on himself for so long, Brian has a difficult time readjusting to normal life—especially high school. He now enjoys spending time alone and speaking with his counselor, Caleb, about his experiences in the woods. Through his conversations with Caleb, Brian realizes he longs to return to the wilderness and decides to do just that. Over time, Brian acquires the supplies he will need for his trip. In the northern woods near the Canadian/U.S. border, Brian faces several challenges but ultimately finds that he is more comfortable in the wilderness than urban civilization. At the close of the novel, Brian is uncertain how long he will remain in the woods or if he will return home at all.

About the Author

Gary Paulsen grew up in the northern woods of Minnesota and spent much of his childhood exploring nature. For nearly 12 years, he and his family lived completely in the wilderness. During this time, Paulsen supported his family with supplies obtained from nature. He drew on these personal experiences while writing his novels about outdoor life. Paulsen has raced in several Iditarod dogsled races in Alaska and wrote *Dogsong*, a 1986 Newbery Honor book, depicting these types of races. He also wrote the Newbery Honor books *The Winter Room* and *Hatchet*. Paulsen and his wife have homes in New Mexico and on a boat in the Pacific Ocean.

Background Information

The Brian series began with Gary Paulsen's 1987 Newbery Honor book, *Hatchet*. When the single-engine plane in which Brian is traveling crashes in the northern wilderness, he must learn to survive on his own in the wild. In response to reader requests, Paulsen wrote *The River* and created *Brian's Winter* as an alternate sequel to *Hatchet*. The author wrote *Brian's Return* for readers who want to know what happens to Brian after he returns home from the wilderness. *Brian's Hunt*, written in 2003, concludes Paulsen's series of Brian books.

Chapters One–Three

Brian Robeson reminisces about his time in the wilderness and how he felt part of the natural world. Because he now craves solitude, Brian appears aloof to his high school classmates. After inadvertently angering Carl Lammers, a fellow student, Brian seriously injures Carl in a fight. Brian is referred to a retired police officer for counseling.

Vocabulary

teeming
kindling
billowed
carnivorous
agony
velocity
Kevlar
semblance
solitude
incessant
aloof
perplexed
reverted

Discussion Questions

1. As Brian tries to stay healthy and comfortable in the woods, he discovers that natural means are often more effective than man-made solutions. Do you find this to be true or not? Think of examples to support each position. (*Answers will vary.*
Suggestions—Natural means: smoke to repel insects, exercise to ward off disease; Man-made solutions: insect repellent, vaccines, antibiotics)
2. How does Brian compare himself to a hawk? (*Brian only hunts for food, like a hawk. He does not take pleasure in hunting but does so because he must eat.*)
3. Explain what Brian means when he thinks to himself, “Man proposes, nature disposes. He hadn’t conquered nature at all—he had become part of it. And it had become part of him, maybe *all* of him” (p. 4). (*Nature is ultimately in control. Brian did not tame nature, he allowed himself to become part of it.*)
4. Brian wants to fit in at school and go back to being normal. Is this really possible after what he experienced in the wilderness and the notoriety he gained from it? (*Answers will vary.*)

Suggestion: No, it is not possible because Brian feels that all things related to high school and city life are insignificant and boring compared to life in the wilderness and the struggle for survival.

5. Do you agree with Brian’s assessment of video games and extreme sports as silly, imaginary games? If you had lived in the wilderness for an extended period of time, do you think your opinion would be closer to Brian’s? How do you think the author, Gary Paulsen, feels about video games and extreme sports? (*Answers will vary. Gary Paulsen probably feels the same as Brian about video games and extreme sports.*)
6. Did Brian go too far in his fight with Carl? Do you agree with Brian’s behavior in the fight? (*Answers will vary. Justification for Brian’s behavior may include that Brian went into “survival mode” when Carl tried to hit him. In Brian’s state of mind, Carl simply became a threat [like the wild animals that Brian dealt with in the wilderness] to Brian’s life, and this threat had to be eliminated. Some may feel that Brian’s behavior was not justified—that Brian should have recognized the situation as unthreatening and walked away from the fight.*)
7. Should Brian have been arrested for his role in the fight? (*Answers will vary.*)
8. Explain what Brian means when he says that it wasn’t him that beat up Carl Lammers. (*Brian was not completely himself; he became “animal-boy” [p. 13]. His response to Carl’s blow was an automatic reaction focused on survival. However, his behavior appeared overly aggressive to others who didn’t fully understand Brian’s previous experiences.*)

9. How important is it to “see into [someone’s] heart” (p. 14) in a situation? Have you ever been misunderstood? *(To see into someone’s heart is to understand his motives in a particular situation and the driving force behind them. It is important to understand someone’s motives, especially if the outcome is an unintended one. Even if the person’s intentions are not malicious, as in Brian’s situation, the person must still face the consequences of his/her actions.)*
10. **Prediction:** Judging from his reaction at the end of Chapter Three, how do you think Brian will interact with his counselor?

Supplementary Activities

1. **Literary Analysis:** Begin the Character Chart on page 25 of this guide. Continue to fill in your chart as you read the novel.
2. **Writing:** Write an essay expressing your opinion on hunting. Be sure to differentiate between hunting as a sport and hunting for survival.
3. **History:** Reread the section of Chapter Two that tells how beavers created the clearings where many European cities are currently located. Write a report about the founding of London and Paris.
4. **Plot:** Begin the Story Map on page 26 of this guide. Continue filling in information about the story as you read.
5. **Physical Education:** Take a field trip to a nature preserve or environmental center where students can hike, canoe, and try archery.
6. **Literature:** Read Henry David Thoreau’s essays on nature. Use these readings as a way to further understand Brian’s love of the outdoors. Write an essay that discusses how Thoreau viewed nature.

Chapters Four–Six

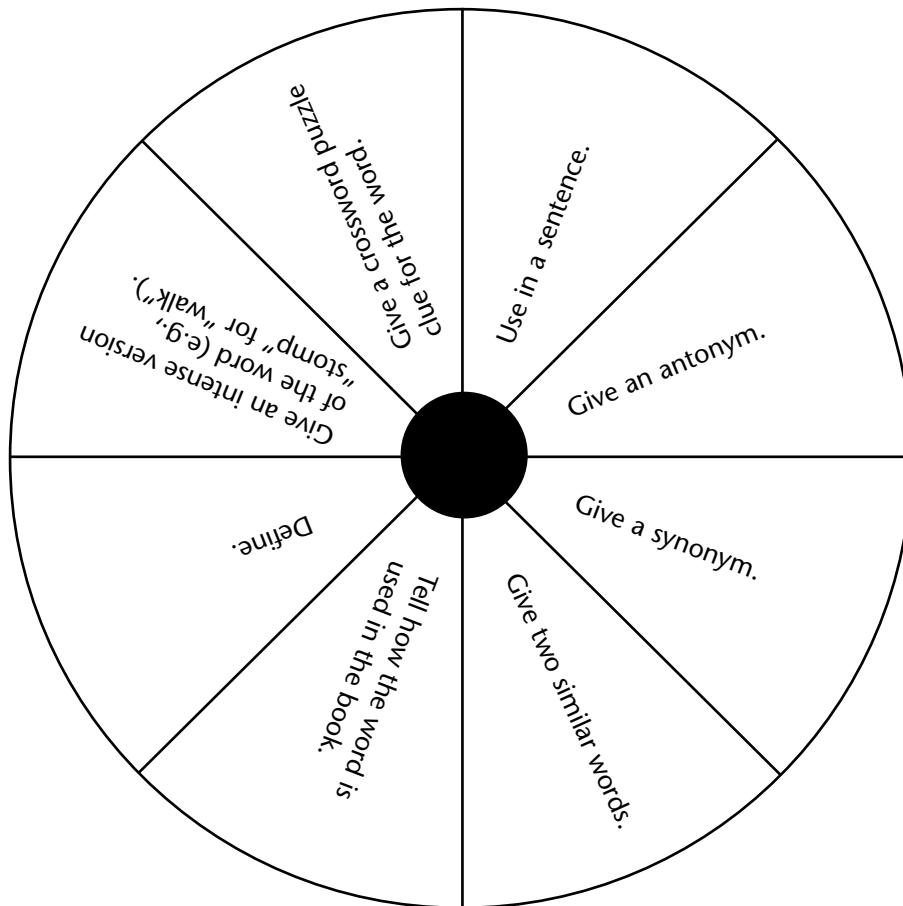
Brian visits Caleb Lancaster for a counseling session. After listening to Brian’s descriptions of life in the northern woods, Caleb concludes that there is nothing wrong with Brian; it is just that Brian wants to return to the wilderness. Caleb enjoys learning about Brian’s life in the woods so much that he asks Brian to visit him again to continue his story. To cope with the isolation of high school, Brian begins making a list of the things that he would need to be able to live in the woods. Over time, Brian purchases these items and, with Caleb’s encouragement, concludes that he must return to the wilderness.

Discussion Questions

1. Brian did not have problems fitting in the first year he was back in civilization. Why did his problems materialize later? Is this what you would expect if you were Brian or his family? *(For the first year, Brian was just glad to be home, where there was plentiful food, water, and he was comfortable. His problems begin when he tires of the sights, smells, and sounds of the city that are a stark contrast to his quiet solitude in the wilderness. Brian begins seeing the problems of young people his age as petty in comparison to what he faced. This could be either expected or unexpected to the reader—expected because such a long period of solitude must have had an effect on Brian’s core identity or unexpected because up until this point, Brian hadn’t had much trouble readjusting.)*

Vocabulary Wheel

Directions: Write each vocabulary word on a piece of paper (one word per piece). Make a spinner using the circle below. Now play the following game with a classmate. (It is a good idea to have a dictionary and thesaurus handy.) Place the papers in a small container. The first player draws a word from the container. The player then spins the spinner and follows the direction where the pointer lands. For example, if the player draws the word “epoxy” and lands on “Define,” the player must define the word epoxy. If the player’s partner accepts the answer as correct, the first player scores one point and play passes to the second player. If the player’s partner challenges the answer, the first player uses a dictionary or thesaurus to prove the answer is correct. If the player can prove the answer is correct, the player earns two points. If the player cannot prove the answer is correct, the opposing player earns two points. Play continues until all the words have been used. The player with the most points wins.



Metaphors and Similes

A **metaphor** is a comparison between two unlike objects. For example, "he was a human tree." A **simile** is a comparison between two unlike objects that uses the words *like* or *as*. For example, "the color of her eyes was like the cloudless sky."

Directions: Complete the chart below by listing metaphors and similes from the novel, as well as the page numbers on which they are found. Identify metaphors with an "M" and similes with an "S." Translate the comparisons in your own words, and then list the objects being compared.

Metaphors/Similes	Ideas/Objects Being Compared
1. Translation:	
2. Translation:	
3. Translation:	