



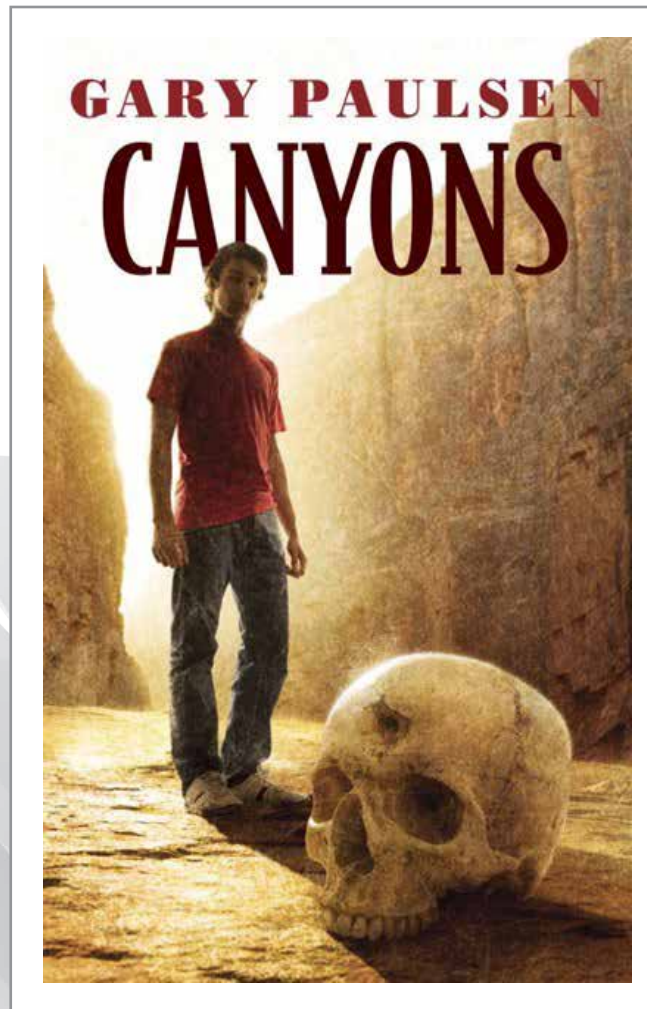
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# Canyons

Gary Paulsen



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# Canyons

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!

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## Table of Contents

<b>Summary</b> .....	3
<b>About the Author</b> .....	3
<b>Initiating Activities</b> .....	6
<b>Section-by-Section</b> .....	13
Chapters contain: Vocabulary Words and Activities, Discussion Questions and Activities, Predictions, Postreading Activities	
<b>Culminating Activities</b> .....	34

## Skills and Strategies

### Thinking

Brainstorming, research,  
investigation

### Comprehension

Predicting,  
comparison/contrast

### Writing

Description, summarizing

### Vocabulary

Word mapping, vocabulary  
activities

### Listening/Speaking

Dramatization, reports

### Literary Elements

Story elements, characteriza-  
tion, plot summaries,  
foreshadowing

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**Summary:**

Gary Paulsen's 1990 book intertwines the stories of Coyote Runs, a nineteenth century Apache young man killed on his first raid, and Brennan Cole, a twentieth century teen-age runner. When Brennan discovers Coyote Runs' skull, which never received a proper burial, strange things begin to happen. Brennan is overwhelmed by the "presence" of the skull; he knows he is involved somehow with the skull. John Homesley, Brennan's biology teacher, assists in identification. When Brennan decides he must take the skull to a proper resting place, he is led by unexplainable knowledge of the area and survival in the canyons, a kind of supernatural communication from Coyote Runs.

**About the Author:**

Gary Paulsen was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 1939. He now lives in Leonard, Minnesota. During Paulsen's growing-up years, he moved many times because his father was in the standing Army.

He has worked as a teacher, field engineer, editor, soldier, actor, director, farmer, rancher, truck driver, trapper, professional archer, migrant farm worker, singer, and sailor.

Without formal writing training, he was hired as an associate editor and learned on the job. He spent about a year editing and considers it the best of all possible ways to learn about writing.

**Organization of this Guide:**

Comprehension questions, vocabulary words, and plot summaries are provided for every chapter. Supplementary activities are included after every three chapters. Teachers can choose activities with their particular groups in mind.

**Vocabulary Approach:**

The reading level of *Canyons* is 5. Considering also the content and issues of the story, we have included it with books for grades 7-8.

It is suggested that a portion of the reading instructional time daily be used for vocabulary activities. Vocabulary challenge words are identified chapter-by-chapter. Of particular note in this book are words which have multiple meanings depending upon context, words used in describing the book's setting, and words used by the Apaches.

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## Chapter 1: “Quickening”—Pages 3-6

### **Plot Summary:**

The reader meets Coyote Runs, a young Native American boy, anxious to be accepted as an adult. His friend Magpie reports that he’s heard stories that there will be a new raid and Coyote Runs will go along to hold the horses and see how it is to be on a raid.

### **Vocabulary:**

bluebellies 4

lucifer stick 4

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Who was Coyote Runs? *(a fourteen-year-old Native American young man who was anticipating keenly his move into manhood)*
2. Why was the word “man” used so many times in this chapter? *(to emphasize Coyote Runs’ desire to move from childhood to manhood)*
3. What was the time of the story? How do you know? *(The references to raids and forts suggest nineteenth century times of Indian wars.)*

## Chapter 2—Pages 9-13

### **Plot Summary:**

The reader meets Brennan Cole, a teen-ager, who lives in El Paso, Texas.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Why doesn’t Chapter 2 have a title when Chapter 1 had a title? *(Answers vary, but include idea of uncertainty and need to read more chapters to understand.)*
2. What characters are met in Chapter 2? *(Brennan Cole, Brennan’s mother, his mother’s friend)* How do you think they’ll figure in the story? *(Answers vary.)*
3. What is the importance of the last sentence in the chapter? *(Answers vary, but may reference foreshadowing.)*

## Chapter 3: “Dust Spirits”—Pages 15-18

### **Plot Summary:**

Coyote Runs prepares himself for his first raid.

### **Vocabulary:**

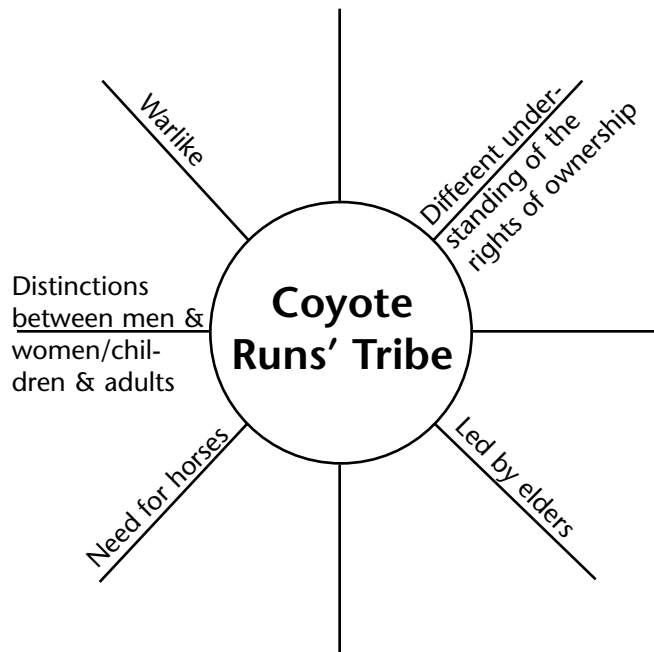
wash 15

goad 18

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**Discussion Questions:**

1. Why was everything perfect in Coyote Runs' view in this chapter? (*He was to go on the next raid, Magpie had lent him a pony, and the spirits of the dust gave him a sign of approval.*)
2. What was the plan for the raid? (*to ride to the low river bank, leave the extra horses with Coyote Runs to watch, and then take horses from the Mexican ranchers*)
3. Consider differing viewpoints. How would the view of horses be different for the Mexican ranchers, the Apaches, the U. S. soldiers? (*ownership and accompanying rights*)
4. What have you learned of Coyote Runs' tribe thus far in the book?



**Supplementary Activities:**

1. Consider entering adulthood. In small groups brainstorm ways different cultures make the passage. (See graphic on next page.)

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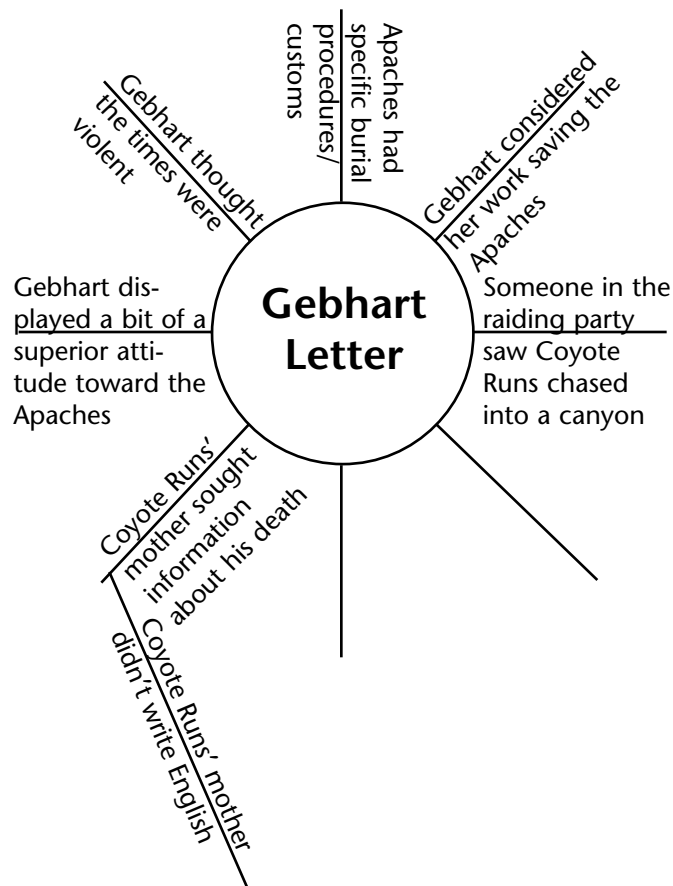
**Vocabulary:**

retrieve 146

herbal tea 149

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What does Brennan learn from Amelia Gebhart's letter? Try to list as many bits of information as you can.



2. Why did Col. John McIntire lie? (*Answers vary—McIntire was protecting his soldiers. He didn't know the truth. He was embarrassed or feared reprisal if he told the truth.*)
3. What does Brennan understand as his mission in regards to the skull? (*He must return the skull to a proper burial place.*)
4. Reread the final paragraph of the chapter and predict how the story will end.