



**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# **Harris and Me**

Gary Paulsen

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

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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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**ISBN 978-1-50203-841-8**

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## Skills and Strategies

### Thinking

Brainstorming, research,  
decision-making, critical and  
creative thinking

### Comprehension

Predicting, evaluating decisions,  
summarizing, sequencing

### Writing

Essay, book chapter, summary,  
poetry, journal, review, comics

### Listening/Speaking

Oral presentation, discussion,  
group brainstorming

### Vocabulary

Definitions, parts of speech,  
context clues, synonyms/  
antonyms

### Literary Elements

Setting, conflict, tone,  
characterization, point of view,  
theme, figurative language,  
foreshadowing

### Across the Curriculum

Art—collage, caricature, comic  
strip, diorama, sketch; Health—  
splint, alcoholism; History—early  
1950s United States, Gene Autry  
movies; Science—dairy farming,  
simple machines (i.e., pulley)

**Genre:** fictional memoir/vignettes

**Setting:** Midwestern farm in early 1950s United States

**Point of View:** first person (unnamed narrator)

**Themes:** family, adventure, belonging, trust, friendship, hard work, coming-of-age

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

**Tone:** conversational, descriptive

**Date of First Publication:** 1993

## Summary

The narrator, now grown, recounts his childhood living with alcoholic parents and being “passed around” to various relatives as a result of unbearable conditions at home. He fondly remembers being 11 years old and spending the summer with his uncle’s family on their farm. More specifically, he recalls the adventures he shared with his nine-year-old cousin, Harris—attacking sows, being attacked by roosters, fighting for food, and reenacting movies with the plow horses. The narrator is grateful for that particular summer and the feeling of finally belonging to a family.

## About the Author

Gary Paulsen is a three-time Newbery Honor recipient. He has written more than 175 books, 200 articles and short stories, and several plays. Throughout his life he has been a carnival worker, an engineer, a ranch hand, a construction worker, and even a dog sled driver, competing three times in the Alaskan Iditarod. Paulsen draws inspiration for his stories from history, nature, and his various experiences. Some of Paulsen’s most popular books include *Hatchet*, *Brian’s Winter*, *Dogsong*, and *The Winter Room*. Paulsen and his wife spend part of the year at their home in New Mexico and the rest of the year on a boat in the Pacific Ocean.

## Characters

**the narrator:** unnamed; recounts being 11 years old and spending the summer on his uncle's farm

**Harris Larson:** the narrator's nine-year-old cousin; mischievous boy who is knowledgeable about farm life

**Glennis Larson:** the narrator's 14-year-old cousin; Harris's sister; responsible and compassionate; disciplines Harris for his foul language

**Clair Larson:** the narrator's kindhearted, hardworking aunt

**Knute Larson:** the narrator's uncle; strong and hardworking; humble, quiet, and wise

**Louie:** the Larsons' farmhand; older man with a big appetite; WWII veteran; whittles in his spare time

**Elaine Peterson:** the narrator's first "crush"

**Deputy Orlo:** sheriff's deputy that drives the narrator to the Larsons' farm and then back home at the end of the summer

## Initiating Activities

1. **Brainstorming:** As a class, brainstorm about "family" using the Attribute Web on page 20 of this guide. Ask students: What constitutes a family? What does family interaction look like? Why are families important?
2. **Social Studies:** Have students research what is required to successfully operate a farm. Students should answer the following questions: What are typical necessary farm structures, animals, crops, and equipment? What might a day in a farmer's life be like?
3. **Genre:** Discuss with students the differences between memoirs and vignettes. As students read the book, continue to discuss the book's genre and whether the terms "memoir" or "vignettes" apply to the book.
4. **History:** Have students research early 1950s American culture. Students should write an essay based on their research. Encourage students to find answers to the following questions about this time in American history: Who was President of the United States? What new technologies existed? Which war ended during this time? What type of government system did America oppose?
5. **Predictions:** Have students complete the I Predict... activity on page 21 of this guide.

## Chapters 5–6

The narrator meets Louie’s pet lynx, Buzzer. Harris informs the narrator that Louie will pay them for mice. The boys follow Knute’s mower to catch the mice, though Buzzer takes most of the narrator’s mice. The narrator is completely exhausted after his first full day on the farm. As he settles into a routine, he and Harris continue to cause mischief. Harris pretends to be Tarzan by jumping from the roof, but his plan is foiled by Ernie’s surprise attack and a misdirected trajectory to the pigpen.

### Vocabulary

harness  
bridles  
bellows  
bedraggled  
tuft  
plodding  
densely  
engage  
sickle  
proprietary  
prematurely  
mimicked  
vaguely  
averted  
diminish  
ensuing  
beckoning  
ventilate  
straddling  
contention  
valid  
retrospect  
intervened  
arc

### Discussion Questions

1. Why is Harris so eager to catch mice? What does he tell the narrator is most important to remember? What does the narrator think about this activity? (*Harris wants to catch the mice because Louie pays one cent for every two mice given to him. Harris stresses to the narrator, "...don't you touch [Buzzer] nor take none of his mice" [p. 51], referring to Louie's pet lynx and its savage hunting nature. The narrator is unsure about this activity, especially since he is followed closely by Buzzer and must forfeit most of his "catch" to avoid a nasty confrontation with the lynx. The narrator is extremely curious as to what Louie does with the mice; in fact he is "dying to know the answer" [p. 59].*)
2. What does the narrator think about the way Glennis treats Harris? Do you agree with the narrator? Why or why not? (*The narrator thinks Glennis is mean to hit her brother. He thinks, "It was like hitting him for breathing" [p. 55], because he feels that Harris's language is a natural part of him that he is unable to change. He notices that Harris does not seem to mind being hit. Harris appears unruffled by his sister's reprimands and seems to expect the continual discipline for his foul language. Note that while it does not bother Harris to be hit by his sister, he does seem to avoid disappointing his father. He may view Glennis as the nagging older sister and his father as the true disciplinarian. Answers will vary.*)
3. Are you surprised to find out that Buzzer is a wild animal? Why or why not? In what ways did the author foreshadow this revelation? (*Answers will vary. The author indicated that the cat was very large when Louie gave it milk earlier in the day, and the*

*narrator sees the cat up close as Buzzer jumps onto a horse. Harris also warns the narrator not to touch Buzzer or steal his mice because Buzzer once almost killed Harris for taking a mouse. The author's description of the cat's size, power, and temperament foreshadows the revelation that the cat is wild.*)

4. The author uses five chapters (almost half of the book) to describe the narrator’s first full day on the Larsons’ farm. Why might the author devote so many pages to a single day? (*Answers will vary. Note that during his first day, the narrator is introduced to farm life and all of the other characters—people and animals alike. The first day on the farm sets the pace for the rest of the story. The narrator's experiences on this first day are representative of his entire stay on the farm and help express to the reader how significantly the narrator's life has changed.*)

5. The narrator believes that Harris thinks everything, except for Louie’s “dream world,” is real. Discuss how your world would be different if you believed that everything you saw on television or read in a book was actually real. How do you think this mentality contributes to Harris’s personality? *(Answers will vary. Harris believes that he is able to do anything he sees in a movie or reads in a book. Consequently, he believes he is capable of performing the same feats as Tarzan or Gene Autry. Harris’s mentality makes him daring because he does not consider that his ideas might fail or go awry. This outlook often leads to trouble and dangerous situations.)*
6. Evaluate Harris’s decision to swing on the rope as Tarzan. With which character from this scene do you most relate—Harris, the narrator, or the sows? Explain. *(Answers will vary. Note that Harris takes a great risk by swinging so far on an old, moldy rope. Characteristics to which students might relate include Harris’s boldness and courage, the narrator’s reasonableness, curiosity, or fear, and the sows’ strength and instincts for self-defense.)*
7. **Prediction:** What other trouble will Harris’s vivid imagination lead to during the summer?

### Supplementary Activities

1. Figurative Language: Examples: **Similes**—“...they were...like two hair-covered dinosaurs” (p. 44); “breathing beneath me like a warm bellows” (p. 47); “cut the hay as neat as scissors” (p. 51); “Harris moved up the ladder like a monkey...” (p. 63); “[The pigs] ran over us like stampeding cattle...” (p. 70); **Metaphor**—the horses: “giants” (p. 45); **Personification**—“...a wave of exhaustion roared over me...” (p. 59)
2. Science: Research the lynx. Make a poster showing what a lynx looks like, where it lives, what it eats, and any special abilities it has. Be sure to cite your sources on the back of the poster. Present your poster to the class.
3. Art: Illustrate Louie’s “dream world” of carved figures.

## Fun on the Farm

Directions: Complete the chart below.

Game	Harris's Rules	The Narrator's Likely Rule Variation
war with the sows		
the Tarzan Leap		
Cowboys and Indians		
Gene Autry reenactments		