

Teacher Guide

Grades 7–8

# Hatchet

Gary Paulsen

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# HATCHET

by  
Gary Paulsen

## Teacher Guide

Written by  
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### Note

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## Skills and Strategies

### Thinking

Predictions, brainstorming,  
compare/contrast, research,  
critical thinking

### Comprehension

Decision-making, sequencing,  
cause/effect

### Writing

Report, poetry, transcript, letter,  
book review, journal entry

### Listening/Speaking

Oral presentation, discussion,  
interviewing

### Vocabulary

Definitions, parts of speech,  
pronunciation

### Literary Elements

Genre, theme, point of view,  
character analysis, figurative  
language, conflict/resolution

### Across the Curriculum

Science—Cessna 406, common  
tree types, protein, refraction,  
weather emergencies; Sports—  
fishing, hunting; Social  
Studies—Native Americans,  
geography/maps; Art—miniature  
model, sketch, ink portrait,  
photojournal, painting, illustrated  
dictionary, collage

7. What new possibilities might the plane present for Brian? (*Answers will vary. Though Brian has already learned to survive in the wilderness, having some “civilized” survival items could help him tremendously. Useful items might include packaged food, a first-aid kit, a radio transmitter, flashlights, purified water, a toolkit, clothes, blankets, etc. The plane also presents a challenge, however, since only the tail end is above water. Brian will have to swim to the plane and dive down into it.*)
8. **Prediction:** How will Brian get into the plane, and what will he retrieve from it?

### Supplementary Activities

1. Literary Devices: Continue adding to your comparative language chart. Examples: **Similes**—“...[the moose came] down on him like a runaway truck” (p. 141); “...[the moose’s] hair went up—like the hair on a hairy leg...” (p. 142); “wind like the sound of a train” (p. 145); **Metaphors**—“[the moose] was like a lying pear (p. 132); moose: brown ball of fur (p. 141); **Personification**—“The sound was coming for him... The sound wanted him” (p. 144).
2. Science/Weather: Create a tornado emergency plan for your home. Research the safest places to take shelter during a tornado, and then explain what you have learned to your own readers. Also, make a list of supplies you and your family would need in the event of a tornado.

### Chapters 17–Epilogue

Brian builds a raft and pushes it to the plane. He retrieves the plane’s survival kit, which contains food, matches, an emergency transmitter, and a rifle among other “treasures.” Brian tries the emergency transmitter but, thinking it broken, gets inside. He decides to have a “feast” and is surprised when a plane, whose pilot heard the emergency transmitter signal, lands on the lake. Thus, as quickly as Brian was thrust into the wilderness, he is able to leave it changed forever. After his rescue, Brian researches the wild plants and animals he found in the wilderness and continues to be plagued by “the Secret.”

### Discussion Questions

1. Explain the order Brian follows as he rebuilds his camp. (*Brian rebuilds the fire pit—fire provides heat, protection, and a place to cook—and finds enough wood to keep the fire going all day and into the night. He takes a short rest to regain some energy and then rebuilds his shelter with salvaged pieces from the previous camp plus new material. The shelter is important because it provides a refuge from predators and natural elements. Brian also makes a new bed of pine boughs so he will have a comfortable sleeping spot. He sleeps again to heal and gain energy. The next day, Brian remakes his fish spear so he can feed himself. With his gas can, his rifle, and his camp rebuilt, Brian can concentrate on reaching the survival pack in the plane.*)
2. Describe the raft Brian builds. Why does he decide to wait a day to paddle out to the plane, and what does this decision demonstrate about Brian? (*Brian builds the raft from interwoven tree limbs since he does not have rope with which to tie the limbs together. After realizing that the raft will be difficult to push in the water, Brian decides to wait until the next day to paddle out to the plane, since he will likely need several hours of daylight to do so. Answers will vary, but students should note that Brian has learned to practice patience, especially when it is a matter of safety.*)

| Vocabulary |             |
|------------|-------------|
|            | incessant   |
|            | intact      |
|            | refine      |
|            | ruefully    |
|            | stymied     |
|            | pronounced  |
|            | rivets      |
|            | stabilizer  |
|            | frenzied    |
|            | propel      |
|            | oblivious   |
|            | unwittingly |

- Why do you think Brian thinks about his parents as he attempts to reach the plane? (*Answers will vary, but students should note that after Brian missed the last plane he lost all hope of being rescued. Living in the wilderness for this long, Brian likely feels there is little to no hope that he will ever be saved. However, Brian seems very optimistic about what he might find on the plane. Perhaps the thought that items on the plane could help him get rescued makes Brian unafraid to think about his family again.*)
- Why is Brian disappointed when he first reaches the plane? How does he solve the problem? (*Brian realizes there is no obvious way into the plane—at least not that he can readily access. He solves the problem accidentally when, out of frustration, he bangs his fist to the side of the plane, puncturing the aluminum wall. Using the hatchet, Brian is able to cut and peel back small pieces of aluminum to make an increasingly bigger hole.*)
- Why is Brian angry with himself for dropping the hatchet? What does he mean when he thinks “the hatchet was, had been him” (p. 112)? (*Brian is furious with himself for dropping his most important tool and says aloud, “That was the kind of thing I would have done before...Not now.” [p. 162]. Answers will vary, but most students will recognize that the hatchet has come to define Brian’s identity, since he has used it to make fire, tools, weapons, and a shelter. He arrived with the hatchet, and it has become almost like a companion to Brian.*)
- Why does Brian nearly die while inside the tail of the plane? (*Brian is underwater, searching for the survival pack when he sees the remains of the pilot in the cockpit of the plane. This horrible sight makes him vomit and then breathe in water. He nearly drowns, but he instinctively kicks his legs, which propel him to the water’s surface.*)
- Why does Brian consider the items in the survival pack “treasure”? If Brian had had the pack with him immediately after the crash, do you think he would have been as thankful or resourceful? (*Brian considers the pack’s contents “treasure” because they do like gifts to him. The lighters and matches provide fire, which Brian needs it, and the food packs provide food Brian doesn’t have to hunt. The rifle will allow Brian to kill game from longer distances, and the sleeping bag and foam pad will provide more comfort than the pine boughs Brian has been using. Answers will vary, but most students will likely say that Brian wouldn’t be as thankful or resourceful if he had had the survival pack from the start. Having to fend for himself for two months has made Brian grateful to now have food, bedding, and other luxuries on hand. He has also become increasingly crafty, learning to provide for his basic needs with just a few natural materials.*)
- Why does having the rifle and lighters make Brian feel strange? (*The two manufactured items give Brian an advantage over nature that he didn’t have before. With a rifle, Brian doesn’t have to know the outline of a foolbird or to strike low to spear a fish. With a knife, he doesn’t have to revere animals like the wolf or bear. With a lighter, Brian doesn’t have to know how to produce sparks and use them to make a fire. The rifle and lighters give Brian power over nature, but he seems to prefer fitting into and connecting with his surroundings rather than superior.*)
- Why is the arrival of the plane surprising to both Brian and the reader? How is this timing ironic? (*Brian has not seen a plane since the last search plane that he missed. Knowing that his location is way off the pilot’s chart, Brian had given up on anyone ever finding him. The plane also arrives with little to no warning. Unbeknownst to Brian, the emergency transmitter he turned on stayed on. The timing is ironic because Brian gets rescued just as he thinks to himself that he can survive on the contents of the survival pack for some time.*)

10. How is Brian different after returning home? (*He is physically changed with regard to body weight and body fat. He has developed excellent reflexes and has become more thoughtful about what he says aloud. Food never ceases to amaze him—especially the large quantities in grocery stores. Brian also develops an interest in nature—particularly the wildlife he encountered during the nearly two months he was stranded. He also dreams of the wilderness.*)
11. How does Brian’s return to civilization affect others? (*For several months, Brian is interviewed and photographed constantly. One writer even wants to write a book about Brian’s experience. Joy at Brian being alive also brings his parents closer, although the couple ultimately does not reconcile.*)

### Supplementary Activities

1. Literary Devices: Complete your figurative language chart. Examples: **Similes**—“wrinkled as a prune” (p. 159); “... [Brian] took air like a whale...” (p. 160); **Metaphor**—the inside of the plane: a birdcage (p. 163)
2. Writing: Imagine you are a magazine writer who interviews Brian after his rescue. Write a transcript of your interview.

## Conflict

The **conflict** of a story is the struggle between two people or two forces. There are four main types of conflict: person vs. person, person vs. nature, person vs. society, and person vs. self.

**Directions:** In the space provided, list four conflicts Brian experiences and justify why you identify it with that particular type of conflict. Then, explain how each conflict is resolved in the story.

person vs. \_\_\_\_\_

| Conflict | Resolution |
|----------|------------|
|          |            |
|          |            |

person vs. \_\_\_\_\_

| Conflict | Resolution |
|----------|------------|
|          |            |
|          |            |

person vs. \_\_\_\_\_

| Conflict | Resolution |
|----------|------------|
|          |            |
|          |            |

person vs. \_\_\_\_\_

| Conflict | Resolution |
|----------|------------|
|          |            |
|          |            |



# Character Web

**Directions:** In each oval below, write an adjective that describes Brian's personality. Then, fill in each dotted rectangle with a detail about Brian that illustrates that part of his personality.

