



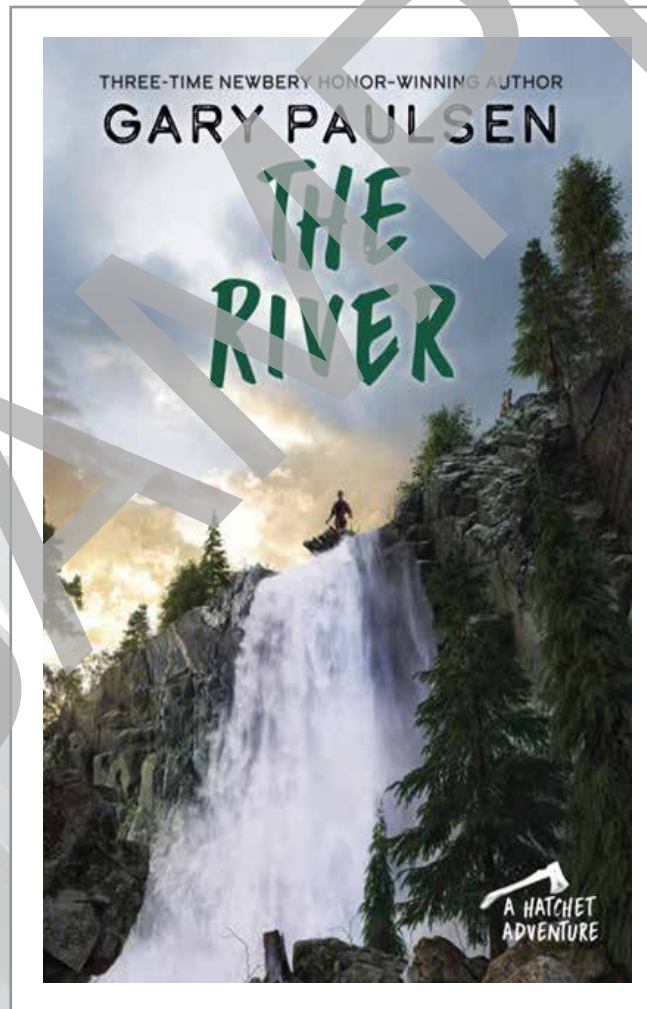
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The River

Gary Paulsen



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The River

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

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Plot Summary | 3 |
| Background on the Author..... | 4 |
| Initiating Activities..... | 5 |
| Twenty-Four Chapters | 7 |
| Chapters contain: Vocabulary Words and Activities, Discussion Questions, Predictions, Supplementary Activities | |
| Post-Reading Questions for Discussion and Writing | 21 |
| Extension Activities..... | 22 |
| Writing Evaluation Guide | 26 |
| Assessment for <i>The River</i> | 27 |

Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Brainstorming, classifying
and categorizing, evaluating,
analyzing details

Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing,
inference

Vocabulary

Context, root words,
prefixes/suffixes

Listening/Speaking

Participation in discussion,
interviews, pantomime

Literary Elements

Character, setting, conflict,
irony, plot development

Writing

Resume, diary, poem, news
article, report on experience,
list, description

Plot Summary

A year ago, Brian Robeson survived alone for 54 days in the Canadian wilderness with only a hatchet. Now the government wants Brian to fly into a remote lake with psychologist Derek Holtzer to show Derek how he did it so survival skills can be taught to others who may need them.

Over his mother's objections, Brian agrees to go. The single-engine plane that takes them to the wilderness lake brings memories of his ride the summer before—the pilot's fatal heart attack and Brian's crash landing in the lake. By the time this plane glides to a stop, Brian has made a decision: unloading the mound of survival equipment would make the trip worthless. If the equipment stays, he'll go back home. Derek agrees to leave the equipment, but is able to convince Brian they should at least keep the radio.

After a miserable night of mosquitoes and rain—made worthwhile by the sight of a beaver swimming across the moonlit lake—Brian and Derek find a flint rock for fire-starting, berries and nuts to eat, and a depression in the side of a hill to be made into a shelter. Things go so well, in fact, that Brian is soon dissatisfied with the lack of challenge in the expedition.

His boredom doesn't last long. When lightning hits the shelter, Brian is stunned and Derek is put into a coma. After much deliberation—and the realization that he is totally responsible for another human being for the first time in his life—Brian decides to build a raft and, taking Derek, head down the river that flows south out of the lake. Their goal is a trading post about 120 river miles away.

The undertaking proves to be exhausting, frustrating, and terrifying. The raft is difficult to steer, and at one point Brian falls asleep and loses his bearings. Worse yet, he is haunted by waking nightmares and thoughts of pushing Derek's 190 pounds into the river and going on alone. Then they reach the rapids, and the river takes control of the raft, throwing Brian off to tumble among the boulders, and hurtling on down the river with Derek still tied to it.

Bruised and half-drowned, Brian must swim after the raft, which he finds only by a stroke of luck, with Derek still aboard and alive. After more paddling, Brian hears a dog bark and sees a dock. The dog, a small boy, and the boy's parents all appear on the dock, and Brian's ordeal is over.

Back home, Derek regains consciousness and sends Brian a thank-you gift: a brand-new canoe. The attached note reads: "Next time it won't be so hard to paddle. Thanks."

Brian's life in the "real world" will continue as before, but he won't be the same person. He knows now that for him, the feeling of being really alive will always come from meeting the kinds of challenges possible only in the wild country.

Vocabulary • Discussion Questions

Writing Ideas • Activities

Chapters 1-4

Vocabulary

| | | | |
|---------------|----------------|---------------|------------------|
| porcupine 5 | pamphlets 6 | *game 7 | *digital 7 |
| *ground 8 | sauteed 8 | reborn 9 | evasive 9 |
| acceptance 11 | marveled 12 | *cue 12 | *operation 12 |
| precaution 12 | marooned 13 | unique 13 | psychological 13 |
| *stunned 13 | *contract 14 | clambered 14 | aspect 16 |
| vetoed 16 | terrain 16 | altitude 16 | flinched 16 |
| throttling 16 | quickenened 17 | amphibious 17 | revert 19 |
| rectify 19 | outburst 20 | droning 20 | *repellent |

Vocabulary Activity: Words With More Than One Meaning

The starred words have more than one meaning or distinctly different shades of meaning. For example, wild **game** and a **game** of chess are not related in meaning, but insect **repellent** keeps away mosquitoes just as the smell of sour milk is **repellent** to human beings and keeps us from drinking it. Ideas can be repellent, too—another shade of meaning. Have students give sentence-examples of starred words. Have them look up meanings of any list words with which they are unfamiliar.

Discussion Questions

1. Who is the main character? (Brian Robeson) Why is he famous? (A year ago, he survived alone in the Canadian wilderness for 54 days. His story is told in a previous novel, *Hatchet*.)
2. Why have the three men in dark suits come to see Brian and his mother? (They teach survival skills for the government, and want to learn from Brian.) Where is Brian's father? (Brian's parents are divorced, and his father lives elsewhere. Students who have read *Hatchet* may recall that Brian's father works in the oil fields in Canada.)
3. What experience does Brian recall about fire? (He threw his hatchet at a porcupine and by chance hit a rock that gave off sparks.) How does he feel about that? (He feels he *discovered* fire just as ancient men did, and is aware of how important a discovery that was to those who lived eons ago. He feels a connection with them.)

-
4. In what ways is Brian more like early American settlers than most boys his age? (He is very aware of his natural surroundings and finds himself always watching for game and listening for the birds to warn of danger approaching.) If you go to a park, what are you “tuned in to”?
 5. Why does Brian like to cook and eat so much? (His worst problem during the time he spent alone in the woods was hunger. Now he has a great appreciation for food.)
 6. What wasn’t Brian able to explain to the counselor? (The counselor seemed to feel Brian needed to identify how his wilderness survival experience had injured him mentally and emotionally; Brian could not seem to make him see that he was not **less** after the experience, but **more**.) Why do you think the counselor couldn’t grasp what Brian tried to explain?
 7. Brian learned **acceptance** while he was in the woods. What do you think acceptance is? Is it good to always accept everything? (Students may debate whether it is best to accept things that are not likely to change, or to make an effort to change them. They should also identify things which can not ever change—the death of a friend, for example—and discuss the importance of accepting such things.)
 8. Try to put yourself in Brian’s mother’s place. How would you feel about Derek’s proposal? How did she feel? (She felt the idea was insane.)
 9. What do you think Brian meant by “I...learned something there. About how to live—I mean how to *live*”? (We know Brian appreciates the simple things now—like food and dishes and a stove—but there have been psychological changes in him too. There are echoes of Thoreau’s “simplify, simplify” here. Perhaps what Brian means is that he learned to appreciate the simple fact that he was alive despite the odds against him.)
 10. Why was Derek chosen to accompany Brian? (He is a psychologist, and the government is especially interested in the mental/emotional aspects of survival.) Has Derek been on a survival trip before? [Derek has “little or no survival knowledge” (page 16).]
 11. What thoughts made Brian suddenly feel afraid? (They were dependent on one engine and one pilot. He recalls how, before, the pilot had died of a fatal heart attack, leaving Brian to crash-land into the lake.) What relaxes Brian? (This pilot is much younger, doesn’t seem a bit worried as he listens to rock music and flies the plane.)
 12. The previous summer, Brian had to “revert” in order to survive. What sorts of activities do you think comprised this reversion? (provision from the land of shelter, food, fire) How did Brian “rectify” when he came home? (Although the mall’s confusion made him sick and dizzy, he forced himself to go there repeatedly until he got used to it.) Have you ever forced yourself to get used to something that bothered you?

-
13. Next to hunger, what does Brian recall as one of the roughest aspects of the Time? (mosquitoes)

PREDICTION: What is “all wrong”? What problems will develop?

Chalkboard Activity

Brian feels the equipment is “too much” and “all wrong.” From page 20, make a list of the equipment on board. Then use the list and students’ knowledge to complete a T-chart like the one below.

| Survival With Equipment | Survival Without Equipment |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| tent will provide shelter food is included in equipment matches are included in equipment | must find or build shelter—how? must find natural food—what? must find fire rocks—how? |

Writing Ideas

1. Use information from the T-chart to write a compare-and-contrast paragraph about survival with and without equipment. Include your own views. What kinds of equipment and supplies would be permissible on a “survival” trip?
2. When Brian first came home, the mall made him sick and dizzy. Write a descriptive paragraph about the mall you imagine in Brian’s town in upstate New York. How are people dressed? What kinds of shops are there? What noises do you hear? What do you smell?
3. Imagine a scenario where you find yourself stranded in a remote area. What three things would you like to have with you?