NOVELUNITS
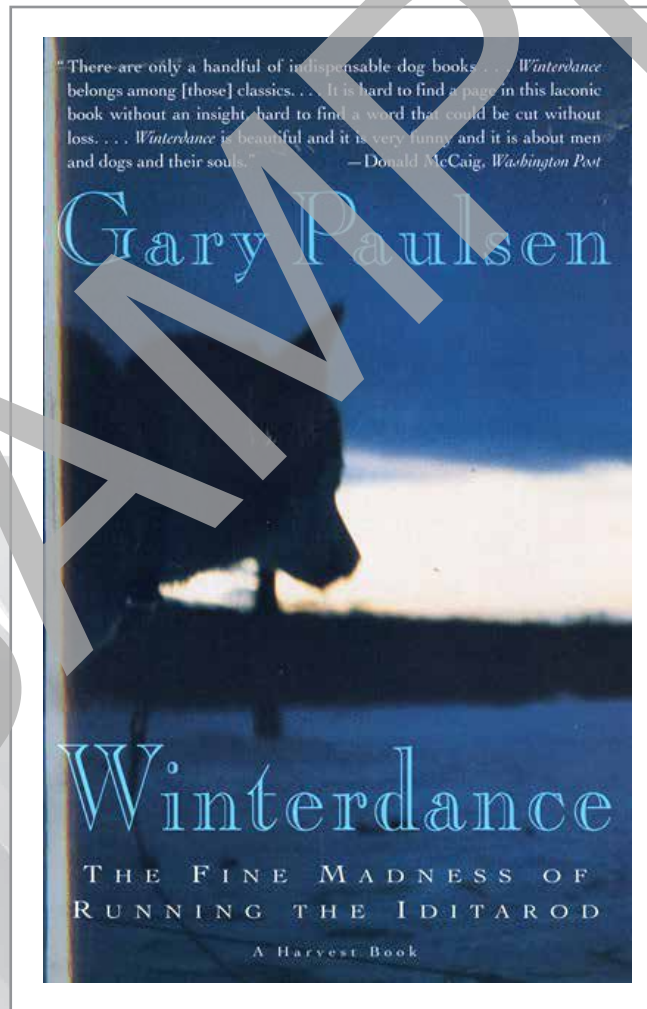
COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Winterdance

Gary Paulsen

READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Winterdance

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!

Table of Contents

Skills and Strategies

Thinking
Analysis, evaluation,
persuasion, research,
brainstorming, problem
solving

Writing
Short story, journal, letter,
newspaper article,
description

Listening/Speaking
Debate, testimonial, drama,
monologue, storytelling,
personal experience

Comprehension
Inference, prediction,
compare/contrast, pros/cons,
concept map

Literary Elements
Character analysis,
cause/effect, story map,
metaphor, simile

Vocabulary
Glossary, analogies,
crossword puzzle, word map,
synonym, antonym

Fine Arts
Drama, poetry, drawing,
designing

Across the Curriculum
Geography, science,
social studies

Genre: nonfiction; biographical

Settings: Minnesota and Alaska

Point of View: first person

Conflict: person vs. self; person vs. nature

Tone: humorous; exciting

Style: candid narrative

Date of First Publication: 1995

Summary

Winterdance chronicles the sled-dog racing adventures of the author, Gary Paulsen, from his love of dogs and trapping through the plans, preparation, and racing of the Iditarod to the end of his racing days. Paulsen relates the excitement and danger of the Iditarod with humor and frankness. The natural beauty of Alaska emerges from Paulsen's vivid descriptions of his experiences.

Characters

Gary Paulsen: author; trains to race in the Iditarod; encounters numerous hardships during the race; learns to "think" like a sled dog

Ruth Paulsen: Gary's wife; very encouraging to him

Cookie: Paulsen's lead dog and close companion

Devil: Paulsen's best sled dog; a constant challenge for Paulsen and the rest of the sled team

Other sled dogs and minor characters throughout

About the Author

Personal: Gary Paulsen was born in 1939. He had a difficult childhood and disliked school, but a librarian encouraged him to read by giving him a library card and a book. Thereafter, he returned to the library regularly for more reading material. Although not a good student, Paulsen became an excellent reader.

After working as a construction worker, a truck driver, an engineer, and a proofreader, Paulsen began to write. Paulsen moved to Minnesota, where he and his wife, Ruth, lived a rustic lifestyle. It was in Minnesota that Paulsen trained for the Iditarod.

Professional: Gary Paulsen began writing while working as a proofreader for a magazine and soon turned it into a very successful career. Paulsen is a voracious reader and furious writer, sometimes working 18–20 hours a day on his writing. As a result, he has completed 175 books and over 200 short stories. Paulsen's novels have made the American Library Association's Best Books list. He has won several awards for his writing, including the Newbery Honor Award.

Using Predictions

We all make predictions as we read—little guesses about what will happen next, how a conflict will be resolved, which details will be important to the plot, which details will help fill in our sense of a character. Students should be encouraged to predict, to make sensible guesses as they read the novel.

As students work on their predictions, these discussion questions can be used to guide them: What are some of the ways to predict? What is the process of a sophisticated reader's thinking and predicting? What clues does an author give to help us make predictions? Why are some predictions more likely to be accurate than others?

Create a chart for recording predictions. This could either be an individual or class activity. As each subsequent chapter is discussed, students can review and correct their previous predictions about plot and characters as necessary.

Use the facts and ideas the author gives.

Use your own prior knowledge.

Apply any new information (i.e., from class discussion) that may cause you to change your mind.

Predictions

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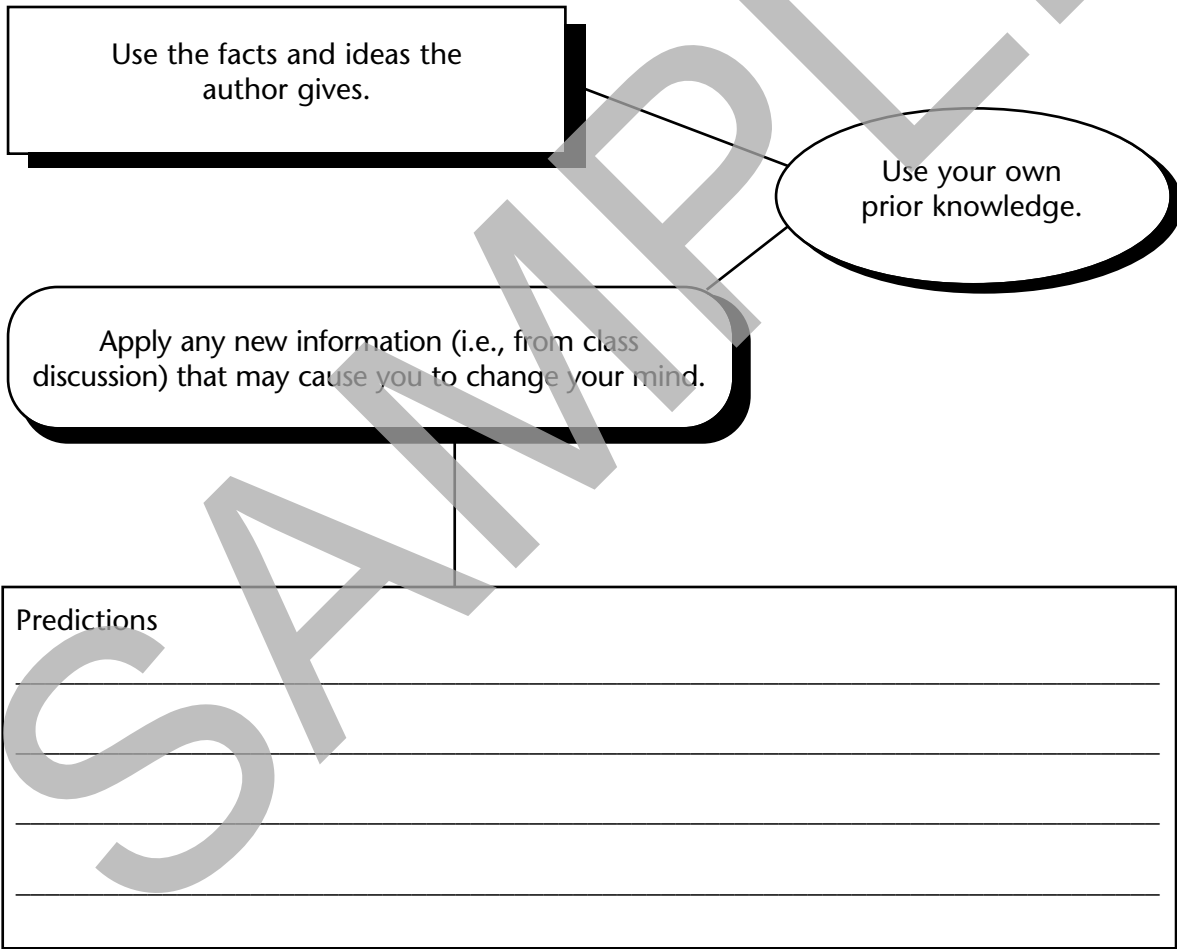
First Snow–Alaska, pp. 95–123

Paulsen describes his and the dogs' enthusiasm for the first run of the season in new snow. He makes a day's-long run in hours due to his team's power and speed. He describes his trip to Alaska and his on-the-job training in dog racing.

Vocabulary

topographic (101)
flailed (102)
horrendous (103)
preposterous (106)
disastrously (109)
nurturing (111)
chaos (118)
daunting (119)

Discussion Questions

1. What drives Paulsen to ignore factual knowledge in favor of running the dogs in the first snow? (*He gets caught up in the excitement, the cold, the snow, the sun, and the dogs. The pull is too strong, and the dogs are screaming in anticipation. pp. 96–97*)

2. Discuss what kind of stamina and characteristics a person needs to travel to the Iditarod. (*Patience—slow going, tires go out, truck may break down, road is difficult, having to stop to take care of dogs; Courage—dangerous trip on highway; Adventuresome spirit—many unknowns; Knowledge—must be able to decide what to do in a crisis, pp. 108–110*)

3. Explain how one would prepare himself mentally, physically, and emotionally for the Iditarod. (*Answers will vary.*)

4. What elements make the "impossible race," as Paulsen calls it, possible? (*adventuresome spirit; inner strength; enthusiasm and power of dogs; good plan; help from vets, mushers, and friends; organized rules of the Iditarod race; mental, emotional, and physical stamina of the mushers; well-trained mushers and dogs; courage and quick thinking of mushers; good lead; tight tug; fearlessness; Answers implied and stated throughout.*)

5. **Prediction:** How will Paulsen fare during the Iditarod?

Supplementary Activities

1. Social Studies: In groups, design a fundraiser for some worthwhile cause, just as people did to help fund Paulsen's run in the Iditarod.

2. Poetry: Create an acrostic that describes the first snow in the novel.

3. Writing: In groups, select a component of the Iditarod and write at least five rules for it. Compare your rules with the official Iditarod rules (www.iditarod.com—active at the printing of this guide).

4. Geography: Locate a map of Alaska. Trace the Iditarod route (northern and southern routes) from Anchorage to Nome.