

Sample Pages from

The Sign of the Beaver

by Elizabeth George Speare

A Teaching Guide

by Margaret Whisnant



The Sign of the Beaver
by Elizabeth George Speare
A Novel Teaching Pack
by Margaret Whisnant

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Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1

- Thinking that his father might return with some last minute advice, Matt stands at the edge of the clearing where he had gone out of sight among the trees. But Matt's father does not return. Matt is really alone in the wilderness.
- Matt has helped his father cut trees and build the log house. He has helped plant the corn and pumpkins that are sprouting from the ground.
- Matt has been alone in the quiet before when his father had gone into the forest to hunt for hours on end. But this time, the silence is different.
- His father's leaving is part of the plan the family had worked out in the winter of 1768 back in Massachusetts. His family would be the first settlers in a new Maine township where his father had purchased land.
- In the spring, Matt and his father would travel north to claim their plot of land, clear a patch of ground, build a cabin, and plant some corn. In the summer, his father would go back to Massachusetts for his mother, sister, and the new baby, who would be born while they were gone. Matt would stay behind to guard the cabin and the corn patch.
- The cabin has only one room. A sleeping loft for Matt and his sister would be added before winter. There is no window, but his father has promised that one day there would be a window with real glass.
- The log chimney, not as safe as a stone chimney, is also temporary. Matt doesn't intend to let a flying spark burn the cabin after all the work of building it.
- On the morning of his leaving, Matt's father has expected to return in six or seven weeks. He suggests that Matt make notches on sticks, seven notches per stick, to keep track of time. Matt is to start looking for his family's return when he gets to the seventh stick.
- Before he leaves, Matt's father gives him the watch that once belonged to his grandpa. He is to remember to wind it each time he puts a notch in a stick.
- Matt gets a lump in his throat. The watch is the finest thing his father has ever possessed.
- The man also leaves his best rifle behind for Matt. It is the first sign that he is uneasy about leaving his son behind.
- Now alone, Matt takes down his father's rifle, thinking he would take one shot to get the feel of the gun. He whistles as he loads the black powder and the lead bullet. Outside, Matt misses his shot at a squirrel. He could do better with his own gun. His father's rifle is going to take some getting used to.
- Back in the cabin, Matt begins to realize that time is going to move more slowly than he has expected. Seven sticks mean his family will return in August. Before then, Matt will have had his thirteenth birthday. He supposes his father has forgotten that.

Chapter 2

- By the second day, Matt decides that he likes living alone. He enjoys doing his chores without listening to advice about how they should be done. As the days pass, he discovers that there is never enough time for all that must be done.
- The cabin is finished, but Matt has been left with the task of chinking the spaces between the logs with clay from the creek bank. Trees have to be felled to provide more sun for the corn, and the growing underbrush has to be kept away from the cleared ground. Wood has to be chopped and stacked against the cabin wall.
- Twice in the first few days, Matt has let the cooking fire go out forcing him to restart the flame with shredded cedar bark and his flint. He had been mighty hungry before he was able to coax the spark back into a cooking fire.
- The corn patch needs constant tending—water from the creek, weeding, defending against the crows and the wild night creatures.
- Once, Matt sits up all night defending the corn and sleeps away half the next day. It is the second time he has let the fire go out.

Vocabulary Lists with Definitions

Arranged in Story Order

Set One

Chapter 1—Chapter 9 (Thirty Words)

coiled Gathered or contracted in a circular way; wound into continuous, regularly spaced rings, one above the other. (p. 2)

blunderbuss A short musket of wide bore and flaring muzzle, formerly used to scatter shot at close range; a person regarded as clumsy and stupid. (p. 4)



Blunderbuss

ruefully In a manner that expresses sorrow or regret; regretfully: sorrowfully; sadly. (p. 5)

trudged Walked in a heavy-footed, weary, or laborious manner; tramped. (p. 5) (**plodded** p. 57)

horrid Shockingly dreadful; causing horror; extremely unpleasant or disagreeable; nauseating; sickening; vile. (p. 9, 42)

solitary Alone; without companions; living or existing alone. (p. 9)

rummaging Searching thoroughly or actively through, especially by handling, turning over, or disarranging the contents of; ransacking; disarranging; messing up. (p. 10)

quavering Quivering or trembling; speaking with a trembling voice; shuddering; faltering. (p. 10)

mournful Feeling or expressing sorrow or grief; lamenting; sorrowful; forlorn. (p. 10)

peered Looked narrowly, searchingly, or with difficulty, as if to see something more clearly; peeped out or appeared slightly; focused; gazed; gawked; squinted; stared. (p. 12)

vaguely Not clearly expressed or indicated; in a manner lacking definite shape, form, or character; indefinitely; hazily; nebulously. (p. 15)

sprawled Sitting or lying in a relaxed position with the limbs spread out carelessly or ungracefully; spread out, extending, or distributed in a staggering or irregular manner, such as vines; slouched; slumped. (p. 16)

begrudging Being reluctant, hesitating, or unwilling to give, grant, or allow; envying the possession or enjoyment of another. (p. 17) See also **grudgingly** (p. 34)

burly Large in bodily size; stout; sturdy; brawny. (p. 18)

shambles A scene, a place, or a thing in disorder or a state of destruction; a total mess. (p. 20)

salvage Save; reclaim; rescue; the act of saving endangered property from loss; the rescue of a ship, its crew, or its cargo from fire or shipwreck. (p. 20)

abruptly Suddenly or unexpectedly; ending or changing suddenly; bluntly; hurriedly. (p. 27, 63)

scorn An open display indicating hatred, disrespect, or contempt of something; to despise, put down, or mock; to look down upon. (p. 31) (see **scornfully** p. 38)

incomprehensible Difficult or impossible to understand; puzzling; unintelligible; perplexing. (p. 31)

defiance A daring or bold resistance to authority or to any opposing force; open resistance; open disregard; insolence; rebellion. (p. 31, **defiant** p. 65)

glowered Looked or stared with anger, dislike, or contempt; **scowled** (p. 31); sulked; glared. (p. 31)

detested Hated; disliked immensely; felt disgust for. (p. 32)

disdainfully **Scornfully** (see page 38); hatefully; indifferently; snobbishly; in a manner to indicate that something is unworthy of notice or response. (p. 33)

rigid Stiff or unyielding; firmly fixed or set; rigorous and unyielding; marked by an unwillingness to change or adjust. (p. 33)

shrugged Raised and contracted the shoulders, expressing indifference; disregarded; minimized; ridded oneself of. (p. 39)

spliced Joined together by the intertwining of strands, such as ropes or two parts of a rope; uniting by overlapping and binding the ends, such as timber; joined; united. (p. 40)

nonchalantly In an indifferent, unconcerned, or unexcited manner; casually; effortlessly. (p. 41)

ordeal A difficult or painful experience; trial; tribulation; test. (p. 41)

contemptuous Showing or expressing a lack of respect for something considered worthless, vile, or mean; disdainful, scornful; disrespectful. (p. 41)

gleaming Flashing or beaming with light; sending forth a beam of light. (p. 42)

Dictionary Digs

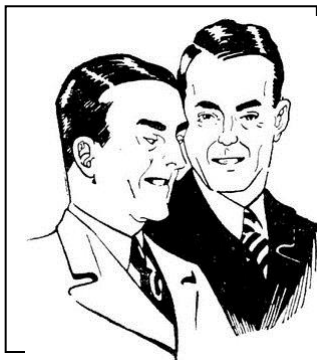
Set One

Chapter 1—Chapter 9

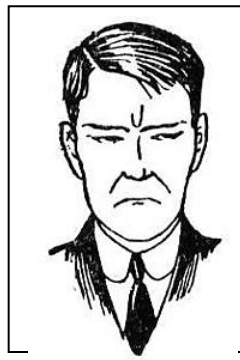
Grab your favorite dictionary and use it to find correct answers to the following questions about some important words from Chapters 1 through 9. Write the **letters** of your answer choices in the blanks to the left.

- _____ 1. A characteristic of a **rigid** thinker is (A) an unwillingness to change or adjust, (B) giving careful thought to all decisions, (C) the tendency to ask the opinion of others and consider all possibilities.
- _____ 2. The word **sprawled** is *most* likely to be used to describe (A) a very tall building, (B) the way a person is sitting or lying, (C) the darting motion of a school of fish.
- _____ 3. A *synonym* for **ruefully** is (A) regretfully, (B) improperly, (C) candidly.
- _____ 4. Which of the following respellings is the correct pronunciation of **nonchalantly**?
(A) nōn-chə-lānt'lē, (B) nōn-shā'lənt-lē, (C) nōn-shə-lānt'lē
- _____ 5. A person living a **solitary** existence is (A) a member of a very large family, (B) living alone, (C) depending upon someone else for food, shelter, and clothing.
- _____ 6. Which word can be substituted for **salvage** in the following sentence without changing its meaning?
*We were able to **salvage** most of the contents of the storage building after the storm.*
(A) replace, (B) identify, (C) save.
- _____ 7. The word that is **not** an *antonym* of **mournful** is (A) enthusiastic, (B) melancholy, (C) jaunty.
- _____ 8. To say that someone is **begrudging** the payment of a debt means that he or she is (A) not able pay the debt, (B) repaying the money resentfully or reluctantly, (C) eager to pay the debt on time and in full .
- _____ 9. An **incomprehensible** message is (A) both surprising and urgent, (B) received without prior warning, (C) difficult or impossible to understand.
- _____ 10. Which of the following caricatures *best* illustrates the meaning of the word **glowered**?

(A)



(B)



(C)



- _____ 11. A **contemptuous** remark is (A) complimentary, (B) disrespectful, (C) made in jest.
- _____ 12. The word that is **not** a *synonym* for **disdainfully** is (A) affectionately, (B) hatefully, (C) snobbishly.
- _____ 13. The *best* example of something likely to be **spliced** is (A) electrical wires, (B) broken eyeglasses, (C) fruit juice mixes.
- _____ 14. A **horrid** odor is also probably (A) enticing, (B) nauseating, (C) engaging.
- _____ 15. The *most likely* cause of a **quavering** voice is (A) laryngitis, (B) fear, (C) annoyance.

Short Answer Questions

Chapter 1—Chapter 2

1. What plans did Matt's family make during the winter of 1768?
2. Why did Matt's father leave him alone in the wilderness to guard the log house they had built and the corn and pumpkins they had planted?
3. How long did Matt's father plan to be away?.
4. What two important objects did Matt's father leave with his son before he left?
5. How did Matt plan to keep track of time while his father was away?
6. In addition to the endless task of chinking the spaces between the cabin's logs with clay from the creek bank, what other chores did Matt have to take care of?
7. Why was it important that Matt not let the cooking fire go out?
8. How did Matt provide food for himself?
9. What was the status of the Indians who lived in the area?
10. Though Matt was happy with his life alone in the wilderness, what uneasy feeling did he sometimes have?

Chapter 3—Chapter 4

1. How did Matt answer when Ben asked if he were alone?.
2. What did Ben say when he spotted Matt's rifle hanging over the door?
3. According to Ben, how were the Penobscots different from most of the other Indians who had left the area?
4. Why did Ben hate the French, especially the Jesuit priests?
5. What did Matt think about doing during the night?
6. What problems did Ben's theft of the rifle create for Matt?
7. What were the results of the bear's rampage inside the cabin?
8. How had the bear been able to get inside the cabin?
9. Describe Matt's efforts to save some of the flour.
10. How was Matt planning to find food now that the rifle, the flour, and the molasses were gone?

Chapter 1: Pages 1-6
Chapter 2: Pages 7-10

Write either **True** or **False** in the blank before each statement.

- _____ 1. Matt had helped his father build the log house and plant corn and pumpkins.
- _____ 2. During the time they had been together in the wilderness, Matt's father had never left him alone before.
- _____ 3. In the winter of 1768, Matt's family made plans to move from Massachusetts to Maine, where Matt's father had purchased land.



- _____ 4. Matt's father had left him alone to go back home and fetch his mother, sister, and the baby who had been born while they were in Maine.
- _____ 5. Matt and his father had made sure the cabin was completely finished before the rest of the family arrived.
- _____ 6. Matt's father expected to return in less than a month.
- _____ 7. Matt's father had suggested that he make notches on sticks, seven notches to a stick, to keep track of time.
- _____ 8. Just before he left, Matt's father gave his son his watch, and he left the best rifle behind.
- _____ 9. Matt expected his family to be together in their new home near the end of August.
- _____ 10. By the time his family returned, Matt would be thirteen years old.

Chapter 3: Pages 11-18

Chapter 4: Pages 19-21

Write either **Yes** or **No** in the blank before each question.

- _____ 1. Was Matt inside the cabin and unaware of Ben's presence when he came from out of the trees and into the cabin clearing?
- _____ 2. Did Matt tell Ben his father would be gone for a long time?
- _____ 3. Did Matt invite Ben to stay for supper before the man could ask for himself?
- _____ 4. Judging from the way Ben ate, did Matt think he hadn't eaten for some time?



- _____ 5. Did Ben admire the rifle hanging over the door?
- _____ 6. Was it Ben's story that the people in the river town had it in for him and that he had gotten away just in time?
- _____ 7. After supper was finished, did Matt invite Ben to spend the night in the cabin?
- _____ 8. When he had been about Matt's age, had Ben spent winters hunting and trapping with the Indians?
- _____ 9. Had many of the local Indians moved to Canada after a number of them had been killed in the war or taken by the sickness?
- _____ 10. According to Ben, did the Penobscots, who hadn't learned that they no longer owned the land, still hunt and trap in the area and then go off for the big hunt in the fall?
- _____ 11. Had Ben fought in the recent war against the French?

Chapter 5: Pages 22-25

Chapter 6: Pages 26-31



the bees
the keg of molasses
the pond
a pair of moccasins

Saknis
Attean
watching him
a crutch
Robinson Crusoe

hunting grounds
birds and rabbits
Hallowell
the beaver

From the list above, choose the name or phrase that fits each of the clues below and write it in the blank. **All** answers will be **used at least once**. **Some** answers will be **used more than once**.

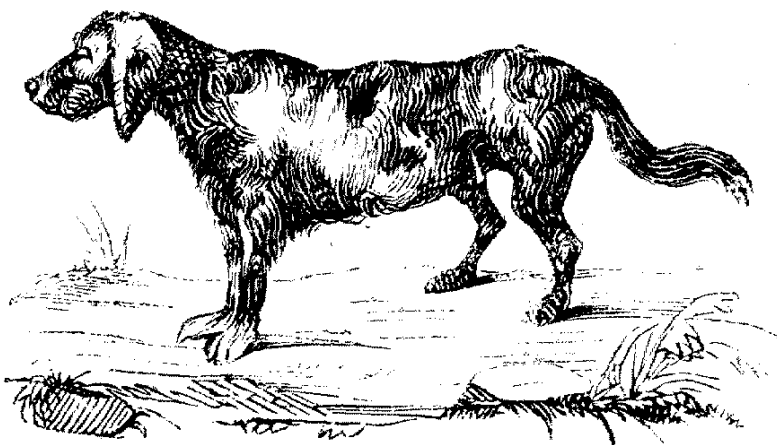
- _____ 1. After Matt was attacked by the swarm of bees, this person carried him like a baby back to the cabin.
- _____ 2. Matt's father had said they were better left alone.
- _____ 3. Saknis wanted Matt to teach Attean to learn white man's signs so he wouldn't give away this.
- _____ 4. After the bear destroyed this, Matt could not stop thinking about the bees and their honey.
- _____ 5. Upon hearing his grandfather's proposed treaty with Matt, he yelled, "*Nda*," glowered at the old man, and stalked out of the cabin.
- _____ 6. Saknis and Attean had immediately come to Matt's rescue when he was attacked by the bees because they had been doing this.

Chapter 10: Pages 45-50

Chapter 11: Pages 51-58

Write the **letter** of the correct answer in the blank before each question.

- _____ 1. Attean agreed to hear more of **Robinson Crusoe** after Matt assured him that (A) Friday did not become a slave, (B) there would be no more reading lessons, (C) he would skip the bad parts.
- _____ 2. What word did Matt avoid as he read more of the story to Attean? (A) *savage*, (B) *master*, (C) *servant*.
- _____ 3. Matt began to think that Friday could have (A) survived without Robinson Crusoe, (B) taught Robinson Crusoe a thing or two, (C) escaped any time he wanted.
- _____ 4. After Matt finished reading, Attean surprised Matt by inviting him to (A) go fishing, (B) visit with grandfather, (C) see his village.
- _____ 5. Attean fished with (A) a pole and twine, (B) his bare hands, (C) a spear he made.
- _____ 6. When Matt fell into the water, Attean (A) pulled him out, (B) laughed out loud, (C) watched him with a mocking grin.
- _____ 7. Using the hook that Attean made, Matt (A) lost his fishing line to a large fish, (B) caught a fish, (C) was not able to attach the worm properly.
- _____ 8. Attean started a fire using his knife and (A) a stone with bits of quartz in it, (B) two pieces of birch bark, (C) two maple twigs.
- _____ 9. When Matt said that Attean's words to the fish he threw back must have worked, Matt saw the Indian (A) look uneasy, even embarrassed, (B) show some interest in his opinion, (C) smile for the first time.
- _____ 10. With seven notches on seven sticks, Matt knew that (A) he needed to start storing supplies for the winter, (B) it was August and his father would be returning soon, (C) he should finish chinking the cabin against the autumn chill.
- _____ 11. Because there was no longer any need for Attean to bring fish or meat, Matt (A) tried to discourage him from coming, (B) made the reading lessons shorter, (C) didn't understand why he kept coming.
- _____ 12. The dog that Attean sometimes brought was (A) unattractive and battle-scared, (B) a young, frisky pup, (C) a wolf that Attean had raised.



WHOLE BOOK TEST

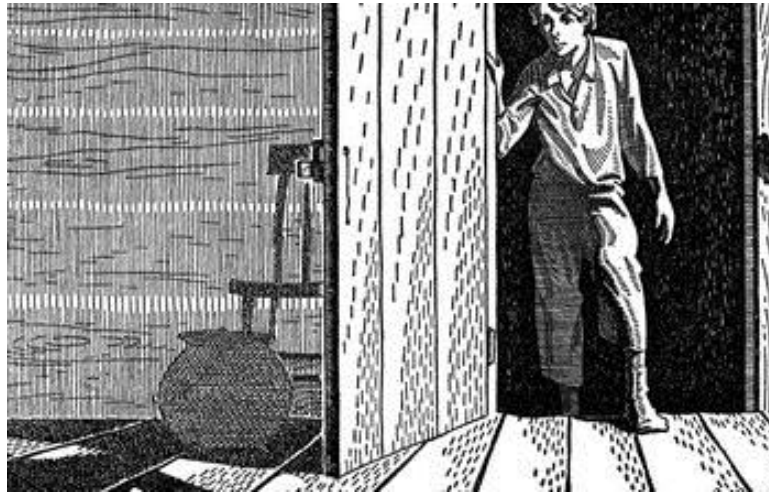
Write either **True** or **False** in the blank before each statement.

- _____ 1. The cabin Matt and his father built was located in Massachusetts.
- _____ 2. Matt would be thirteen years old when his father returned with his mother, sister, and the new baby.
- _____ 3. Matt used the watch his father left with him to keep track of the days and weeks until his family was scheduled to return.
- _____ 4. Matt lost the rifle his father gave him in a hunting accident.
- _____ 5. Matt was in the cabin when the bear came and destroyed his food.
- _____ 6. Saknis and Attean had been watching Matt when he tried to get honey from the bee tree.
- _____ 7. Saknis was Attean's grandfather.
- _____ 8. Attean was eager to learn to read because he didn't want to be cheated by white men's treaties in the future.
- _____ 9. Attean was about five years older than Matt.
- _____ 10. In the beginning of their relationship, Attean brought food to Matt in exchange for reading lessons.
- _____ 11. Matt skipped parts of **Robinson Crusoe** as he read the book to Attean.
- _____ 12. Attean did not like the idea of Friday being a slave to Robinson Crusoe.
- _____ 13. Attean taught Matt to catch wild animals by setting snares.
- _____ 14. As an act of mercy, Attean killed the fox the boys found caught in the steel trap.
- _____ 15. Attean's people did not use iron traps because they had no money to buy them.
- _____ 16. Matt made friends with Attean's dog the first day they met.
- _____ 17. Attean's dog was a young wolf cub he had rescued from a bear.
- _____ 18. The sign of the beaver carved on a tree meant no Indians other than the beaver family could hunt in the area.



Think, Write, Create

Chapter-by-Chapter



Chapter 1—Chapter 2

In the spring of 1769, Matt traveled with his father from Massachusetts to Maine to prepare a new home for his family.

- What responsibilities fell upon Matt in clearing the land, building a house, and providing a food supply?
- How were Matt's duties different from the chores you are assigned as part of the work that must be done for your family?
- Do you think Matt's parents were unreasonable in expecting certain things from him? Add details to support your answer.
- By comparison, do you think the adults in your life demand too much from you? Explain your thinking.

Matt and his father went ahead to Maine and left the rest of the family behind.

- How do you explain the fact that Matt's family did not move from Massachusetts to Maine as a complete group?
- Under what conditions might modern families sometimes have to separate in order to move?

During the winter of 1768 Matt's family worked out the plans for their move from Massachusetts to a new home in Maine. Today, several centuries later, families are still motivated to leave familiar surroundings in pursuit of a better life. Modern movers must deal with some of the same details that Matt's family encountered. There must be, for example, a structure waiting for occupancy, appropriate transportation for the journey, and a workable sequence for leaving and arriving. Available **resources** for carrying out moving plans, however, have changed dramatically.

Make notes that compare the moving plans and resources for Matt's family with those of a modern family. Then write a composition about ***Moving Plans—1768 and Today***. Add a final paragraph that summarizes your observations and conclusions. (See **Graphic Organizer #1**)

Think, Write, Create

Whole Book Activities

Attean explained that the sign of the beaver carved on the tree reserved the surrounding area as hunting grounds for the family of the beaver. Other Indians respected the sign and its implications. Then, Attean proved his integrity as a member of the beaver family by refusing to free a fox trapped on land marked by the sign of the turtle.

- Explain how the Indians' system of marking and respecting territory worked well for the way they lived. Why wasn't land ownership by individuals a logical option?
 - Cite facts from the story to indicate how the presence of white settlers and trappers was tearing apart the Indians' system of co-existence and respect for each other.
 - Why wasn't the Indian method of sharing the land workable for Matt's family and the other settlers who were moving into the area?
 - Explain why ***The Sign of the Beaver*** is an excellent title for this book. How does it summarize the conflict that boiled between Indians and white settlers?
 - When this story takes place, how does it seem that the conflict is being or will be resolved?
 - Suggest one other possible, appropriate title for this book. Explain your thinking.
-

When Matt and Attean first met, Attean detested the white boy. Matt was not pleased that he had to deal with such a sullen, belligerent pupil.

- Explain why Attean didn't like Matt even before he met him. How does knowing his past experiences shed light on his reaction to his grandfather's treaty with the white boy?
 - Attean began a relationship with Matt out of respect and obedience to his grandfather's wishes. Why was Matt motivated to take on the daunting task asked of him?
 - Explain how, at the end of the story, Matt had become more like Attean while Attean had adopted very little, if any, of Matt's ways. How was this situation ironic? Was this the original intent when Saknis made his treaty with Matt?
-

It was a common interest in the story of Robinson Crusoe that formed the first chain in the friendship and mutual respect that grew between Matt and Attean.

- Do you think one boy benefited more than the other from the reading of ***Robinson Crusoe***? Explain your answer.
- Do you have a favorite book from your early childhood? Why do you think this particular story has remained a vivid part of your memories? Did it lead you to look at the world a little differently, or was it simply entertaining and fun?

During the winter of 1768 Matt's family worked out the plans for their move from Massachusetts to a new home in Maine. Today, several centuries later, families are still motivated to leave familiar surroundings in pursuit of a better life. Modern movers must deal with some of the same details that Matt's family encountered. There must be, for example, a structure waiting for occupancy, appropriate transportation for the journey, and a workable sequence for leaving and arriving. Available **resources** for carrying out moving plans, however, have changed dramatically.

The New Home	
<i>How Matt's family provided. . .</i>	<i>New homes for modern families. . .</i>

<i>Transportation for Matt's family. . .</i>	<i>Modern transportation resources. . .</i>
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<p><i>The journey—people, possessions, food, etc.—for Matt’s family. . .</i></p>	<p><i>General technique(s) for today’s families. . .</i></p>
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