

Hatchet

by Gary Paulsen



A Teaching Guide

by Margaret Whisnant

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A Novel Teaching Pack
by Margaret Whisnant

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A thirteen-year old boy
alone,
in the Canadian wilderness.
Lost.
His only means of survival,
his own wits
and
a hatchet.



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Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1

- Because of his parents' divorce, thirteen-year-old Brian Robeson finds himself boarding a single engine Cessna 406 for the oil fields of northern Canada where he plans to spend the summer with his father, a mechanical engineer.
- A bitter Brian knows a secret and blames his mother for the divorce.
- During the silent trip from New York to Hampton, Brian's mother gives him a hatchet, which he is wearing on his belt when he boards the bushplane.
- In the air, the pilot allows Brian to take control of the plane for a quick flying lesson.
- Into the flight the pilot has a massive heart attack, causing the plane to veer to the side and fly off course.
- Brian is alone, without a pilot, flying seven thousand feet in the air above the Canadian wilderness.

Chapter 2

- The pilot is dead, and Brian tries to help himself by flying the plane but manages only to pull the nose up and push it down.
- Brian doesn't know his location or the meanings of the dials in the cockpit.
- Brian manages to make contact using the plane's transmitter, but the signal is weak and soon lost.
- Brian thinks about his choices of waiting for the plane to run out of gas or pushing the throttle to make the plane go faster and crash sooner. He decides to keep the plane going where at least he is safe.
- Not only does Brian not know his original course, he has no idea how much the plane has gone off course.
- Mentally Brian practices his plan for bringing the plane down when it runs out of gas by slowing it and landing in a lake.
- As Brian is trying to make contact by radio, the plane runs out of gas.

Chapter 3

- A series of errors causes the plane to drop too quickly so that it crashes through trees before it slams into a lake.
- Brian frees himself from the submerging plane and pulls himself out through the shattered front window.
- A screaming Brian struggles through the water to shore.

Chapter 4

- In Brian's memory is the secret of seeing his mother with a man in a strange station wagon.
- Brian remains on the shore halfway in the lake for most of the day until he crawls away from the water and sleeps.
- Awake before dawn, Brian is bruised and in pain but grateful to be alive.
- With the rising sun, Brian is attacked by swarms of mosquitos that clog his nostrils, pour into his mouth, and cause his eyes to swell shut. They leave when the sun is fully up.
- Brian sees that he is at the base of an L-shaped lake surrounded by small hills with evergreens, some leafy trees, small brush, and thick grass. A rocky ridge sticks out over the lake.
- The lake contains fish and a beaver dam.
- At first Brian thinks his new surroundings are silent, but then he begins to hear the noises of the wilderness.
- Drained of energy, Brian leans against a tall pine and sleeps.

Vocabulary List with Definitions

(Arranged in to Story Order)

- drone** A continuous low dull humming sound (p.2)
- lashed** Secured or bound, as with a rope, cord, or chain; struck a blow as if with a whip; made a caustic verbal attack; thrashed (p. 7)
- grimacing** Making a sharp contortion of the face as in expressing pain, contempt, or disgust (p. 10)
- audible** Heard or able to be heard (p. 10)
- rigid** Stiff; not flexible, not moving; strictly maintained (p. 11)
- massive** Affecting a large area of bodily tissue; huge; on a large scale (p. 12)
- turbulence** Instability in the atmosphere; a state of violent disturbance and disorder (p. 14)
- ultimately** At last; in the end; eventually (p. 14)
- intervals** The amount of time between two specified instances, events, or stages (p. 24)
- visualize** To form a mental image of (p. 24)
- remnants** A surviving trace; something left over; a remainder (p. 36)
- abating** Reducing in amount, degree, or intensity; decreasing (p. 38)
- viciously** Severely or intensely; fiercely; in an evil or savage manner (p. 43)
- murky** Cloudy; lacking clarity; dark, dim or gloomy (p. 45)
- frantic** Highly excited with strong emotion or frustration; frenzied (p. 47)
- extensive** Large in spatial extent or range, or amount (p. 47)
- amphibious** Able to operate both on land and in water (p. 48)
- intense** Extreme in degree, strength, or size (p. 51)
- diminish** To make smaller or less or cause to appear so (p. 57)
- pulverized** Pounded, crushed, or ground into fine particles. (p. 58)
- lush** Having or characterized by luxuriant vegetation; abundant; plentiful (p. 62)
- tart** Having a sharp pungent taste; sour; a pastry shell with shallow sides, no crust, and various fillings (p. 64)
- ruefully** Done in such a way as to cause, feel, or express sorrow or regret; pitifully or compassionately (p. 65)
- welted** Characterized by a ridge or bump on the skin caused by a lash, a blow, or a bite (p. 69)
- gorge** An instance of gluttonous eating; a deep narrow passage with steep rocky sides (p. 74)
- initial** Of, or relating to, or occurring at the beginning; first; designating the first letter or letters of a word (p. 83)
- imbedded** Deposited in a partly inclosing mass, as of clay or mortar; within (p. 86)
- ignite** To set fire; to cause to burn (p. 87)
- tinder** Readily combustible material, such as dry twigs, used to kindle fire (p. 87)
- exasperation** A state of annoyance; frustration (p. 87)
- tendrils** Things, such as ringlets of hair, that are long, slender, and curling; twisting threadlike structures by which a plant, such as a grape vine, grasps another object or plant for support (p. 88)
- incredibly** Astonishingly; unbelievably (p. 89)
- dormant** Inactive but capable of activating (p. 99)
- convulse** To shake or agitate violently; shake; to move with irregular or involuntary muscular contractions (p. 101)
- bonfire** A large fire built outdoors, as for signaling or celebrating an event (p. 106)
- gnarled** Knotty or misshapen (p. 107)
- flailing** Waving or swinging vigorously; thrashing (p. 110)
- persistent** Refusing to let go or give up; never ceasing; relentless (p. 115)
- abrupt** Unexpectedly sudden; curt; brusque (p. 116)
- tension** The act or process of stretching something tight; the condition of being stretched tight; tautness (p. 121)
- partially** To a degree; not totally (p. 123)

Dictionary Hunt

Use your favorite dictionary to find answers to the following questions. Write the letter of the answer in the blank before the number.

- _____ 1. Which of the following is **not** something that can be **pulverized**?
(A) water, (B) rock, (C) wood
- _____ 2. Two definitions of the word **lashed** are *secured or bound, as with a rope, cord, or chain* and
(A) *a vicious verbal attack*, (B) *disappeared without warning*, (C) *held captive in secret*
- _____ 3. Which of the following is **not** a correct definition of **drone**?
(A) a male bee, (B) a pilotless aircraft operated by remote control, (C) a high-pitched ringing sound
- _____ 4. Where is the **most likely** place to find **turbulence**?
(A) on a highway, (B) in the atmosphere, (C) underground
- _____ 5. Choose the word that **best** completes the following sentence:
We hiked all day, stopping to rest at five-mile _____.
(A) intensities, (B) intersections, (C) intervals
- _____ 6. What is the **noun** form of the word **visualize**?
(A) visualizing, (B) visualization, (C) visualizer
- _____ 7. Which of the following phrases does **not** represent a correct, clear use of **extensive**?
(A) gave extensive press coverage to, (B) a price too extensive for our limited budget,
(C) extensive damage due to the storm.
- _____ 8. Which word is an **antonym** of **diminish**?
(A) prolong, (B) wane, (C) recede
- _____ 9. Find the **incorrect** definition for **welted**.
(A) having swollen ridges or bumps on the skin, (B) flogged, (C) a type of pliable leather
- _____ 10. **Gorge** means *to stuff with food* and
(A) a deep narrow passage, especially one between mountains, (B) a hawk's head,
(C) a type of seedy, thick skinned fruit that grows on strong vines.
- _____ 11. What is another way to spell **imbedded**?
(A) imbeded, (B) embedded, (C) immbded
- _____ 12. Which of the following is **not** good **tinder**?
(A) dry twigs, (B) newspaper, (C) plastic bags
- _____ 13. Of the following choices, the **most likely** to have **tendrils** is
(A) a grape vine, (B) an octopus, (C) a rose bush
- _____ 14. The **best** synonym for the word **dormant** is
(A) dead, (B) inactive, (C) menacing
- _____ 15. What is the **noun** form of the verb **convulse**?
(A) convulsion, (B) convulsive, (C) convulsing

Short Answer Questions

Chapter 1

1. As he sat in the copilot's seat of the single engine Cessna 406, what did Brian start thinking about?
2. What was the first sign that there was something wrong with the pilot?
3. How long had Brian's parents been divorced?
4. What was the location of the oil fields where Brian's father was working?
5. In addition to some drilling equipment, what else was being carried in the rear of the plane?
6. Why did Brian have a hatchet on his belt when he got on the plane?
7. What happened to the pilot?

Chapter 2

1. Why did Brian put his hands on the control wheel and try to raise the plane?
2. What did Brian see when he looked out the window?
3. Why did Brian touch the dead pilot though he did not want to do so?
4. Why did Brian start screaming and crying?
5. What decision did Brian have to make?
6. What was Brian's landing plan?

Chapter 3

1. What was Brian thinking as the plane went down?
2. What happened to the plane before it hit the L-shaped lake?
3. How did Brian get out of the submerged plane?

Chapter 4

1. What had Brian seen at the Amber mall?
2. It was evening when Brian went to sleep. What time was it when he awoke?
3. Brian had no broken bones from the crash, but what was the condition of his forehead?
4. What had Brian never once heard mentioned in all his reading or movies he had watched?
5. Describe the area around the lake.
6. How did Brian trace his current condition back to the Secret.
7. What life did Brian see in the lake?
8. Where was Brian when he went to sleep again?

Chapter 1

Pages 1-12

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

- _____ 1. Brian was thirteen years old.
- _____ 2. Brian had known the man who was flying the plane for several years.
- _____ 3. The single engine plane, in which Brian was a passenger, was flying over small towns and villages in upper New York state.
- _____ 4. Brian still cried every time he thought about the divorce that had separated his parents and changed his life.
- _____ 5. The pilot talked to Brian almost constantly once the plane was in the air.
- _____ 6. Brian was seated in the copilot's seat of the plane.
- _____ 7. The pilot allowed Brian to take over the controls of the plane for a few minutes.
- _____ 8. It was Brian's father who wanted the separation and divorce from his mother.
- _____ 9. Brian lived with his mother during the school year, but his father had custody in the summer.
- _____ 10. Brian's parents had been divorced for over a year.
- _____ 11. The bush plane was taking Brian to spend the summer with his father in the oil fields of Canada.
- _____ 12. In addition to Brian, the plane was also carrying drilling equipment.
- _____ 13. Brian noticed that the pilot rubbed his shoulder and arm and that he had gas which made the plane smell bad.
- _____ 14. Brian and his mother did not speak during the long drive to the airport.
- _____ 15. Brian knew a secret about his mother, but he wouldn't talk to her about it.
- _____ 16. Brian's mother bought the hatchet for him to use in the woods while he was with his father.
- _____ 17. Brian put the hatchet on his belt because his mother forced him to do it.
- _____ 18. The pilot had a heart attack and died while the plane was in the air.
- _____ 19. The pilot's leg jerked during his last jolt, which turned the plane to the side.
- _____ 20. When the pilot died, Brian immediately grabbed the plane's controls.



Chapter 3

Pages 26-30

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

- _____ 1. Did Brian think he was going to die?
- _____ 2. Was there a lake right in front of Brian?
- _____ 3. Did Brian turn the plane just a bit to the right in order to reach the lake?
- _____ 4. When Brian saw the lake above the nose of the plane, did this mean he had the right speed and altitude?
- _____ 5. Did the channel of fallen trees keep Brian from crashing into the forest before he reached the lake?
- _____ 6. Did the plane make its first contact with the earth when it hit the lake?
- _____ 7. Was the plane still in one piece when it went into the water?
- _____ 8. Were the screams that Brian heard coming from a wild animal?
- _____ 9. Did Brian escape from the plane through the broken windshield?
- _____ 10. Did Brian start running when he reached the shore of the lake?



Chapter 4

Pages 31-42

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

- _____ 1. In his unconscious state, Brian remembered seeing his mother sitting in a station wagon with a blond man he did not know.
- _____ 2. Brian was in pain from the trauma of the crash, but he had no broken bones.
- _____ 3. Brian slept the first night under the shelter of a blanket of pine needles.
- _____ 4. With the warmth of the morning sun came clouds of insects that attacked Brian, causing his eyes and face to swell.



- _____ 5. Brian was finally able to protect himself from the biting insects with the tattered bits of his windbreaker.
- _____ 6. The water in the lake was murky and dull.
- _____ 7. Green was the predominant color in Brian's surroundings.
- _____ 8. The area where Brian crashed was flat and covered only with pine trees.
- _____ 9. At the inside corner of the L-shaped lake was a beaver lodge.
- _____ 10. There didn't seem to be many fish in the lake.

Think, Write, Create

Chapter Activities

Chapter 1

After giving Brian a brief flying lesson, the pilot said to him “All of flying is easy. Just takes learning. Like everything else. . .”

- What are some things that you find easy to do, as the pilot said, simply because you have the necessary skills? Who taught you or how did you learn?
- Think of a person you admire—an athlete, an entertainer, a mechanic, a teacher—who makes the work they do look easy. Along with learning, what part do you think effort, talent, goal setting, and attitude play in this person’s success?
- Do you think the pilot is correct in believing that “learning how” is all a person needs to do? Explain.
- What is something you would like to be able to do well enough to make it look easy? What steps would you need to take in order to reach your goal?

Which of the following do you think is the **best** description of the way Brian was reacting to his parent’s divorce? Find evidence from the first chapter to support your choice.

*My father doesn’t understand. I’m the only one who really knows what happened.
The divorce is my mother’s fault because she wanted it to happen.
Lawyers, judges, and visitation rights--I hate all of them.*

Chapter 2—Chapter 3

Having decided to let the plane fly until it ran out of gas while trying the radio every ten minutes, Brian worked out a plan for landing the plane. He ran a picture of how it would go over and over in his mind.

- How did Brian’s plan compare with the actual way he landed the plane? Was planning ahead of any value? Explain.
 - Do you think it’s a good idea to work out a difficult situation in your imagination before you face it for real? Give examples from personal experience to support your thinking.
-

Chapter 4

After swimming free from the submerged plane, Brian found himself lying with his face and chest on the shore and his legs still in the lake. It was the beginning of the evening and night that introduced him to the wilderness.

Begin with Brian’s location at lake’s edge and use the following phases of the sun as a guide to explain what Brian was thinking and experiencing at each point:

the late sun coming across the water

evening

the darkness of night and the promise of dawn on the lake

the coming of dawn and sunrise

Write a composition about Brian’s **Introduction to the Wilderness**. (See **Graphic Organizer #1**)

Brian tried to decide if he was having good luck or bad luck? What do you think? Was Brian’s predicament a matter of luck or something else entirely different?

Think, Write, Create

Whole Book Activities

Brian thought his father did not understand the cause of the divorce because he did not know the Secret.

- Do you think Brian was right in believing that his father didn't know the reason for the divorce? Explain your thinking.
 - Would it have been better for all concerned if Brian had told his father the Secret? Why or why not?
 - Speculate as to what would have happened if Brian had talked to his mother about the Secret during their ride to the airport.
 - How did the Secret hurt Brian possibly even more than it hurt his parents?
-

Brian put the hatchet on his belt to please his mom, though he was angry with her and thought wearing it was hokey.

- Why do you suppose Brian's mother bought the hatchet for him in the first place?
 - How would Brian's struggle to survive have been changed if he had not controlled his anger toward his mother and refused to wear the hatchet onto the plane?
 - Explain why both the ideas in the following statement are true. *Several times, Brian blamed his mother for the awful situation he was in when, in fact, she made it possible for him to survive.*
-

Trying to make sense of the surreal situation he was in, Brian kept reminding himself to slow down and think in simple short thoughts.

- How did this idea make it possible for him to do the things necessary for his initial survival? How is his approach like the idea of *one step at a time*?
 - How can the *keep it simple—one step at a time* technique serve as a guide to achieve or complete any complicated task? Give examples
-

Brian realized that his time in the wilderness was changing him so that he no longer just noticed things. He was learning to really hear and see them—to know what they were and what they meant.

- Think of **five** ordinary sounds that are parts of your daily life—such as a school bell—and explain how each one is of value.
 - What are **five** things (not people) that you see every day but don't really notice or have an appreciation for. Why is each one important?
 - How would your life be diminished if any of the sounds or sights that you picked were suddenly gone?
-

An Introduction to the Wilderness

After swimming free from the submerged plane, Brian found himself lying with his face and chest on the shore and his legs still in the lake. It was the beginning of the evening and night that introduced him to the wilderness.

Begin with Brian's location at lake's edge and use the organizer below to make notes about what Brian was thinking and experiencing at the following phases of the sun:

the late sun coming across the water

evening

the darkness of night and the promise of dawn on the lake

the coming of dawn and sunrise

Use your notes to write a composition about **An Introduction to the Wilderness**.

Brian collapses at lake's edge with his face and chest on the shore and his legs still in the water. . .

Brian sees the late sun coming across the water. . .

When Brian opens his eyes again, it's evening.

Brian awakes again to the darkness of night, but the light gray sky across the lake signals the start of sunrise. . .

Brian watches the coming of dawn and sunrise.