

ENG 260

Spring 2021

Dr. Angela Fulk

Class notes—Week of Apr. 5, *Hatchet*, Chapters 1-10

I have seen *Hatchet* recommended for upper elementary readers, ages 10-12. As the silver medallion on the cover indicates, it is a Newberry Honor Book. This is the first time I have included it in the course, and in fact the first time I've read it, so I will be interested to get your reactions. (The book was written in 1987, which was the year I graduated high school and began college, so it was not available for me to read in childhood, as the other four books we've read were.) *Hatchet* was so successful that the author wrote four sequels to turn it into a series. Gary Paulsen, the author is still alive, and has written many more novels for teens/young adults.

I'd like to share a section from a textbook on children's literature that I pulled from my shelf. The passage that it's commenting on is on pages 28-29 of our book. Go to these pages and reread the last two paragraphs of Chapter 3 and the first two paragraphs of Chapter 4, then read this passage:

In *Hatchet*, Gary Paulsen develops person-against-self and person-against-nature conflicts for his major character, 13-year-old Brian; these two major conflicts are entwined throughout the book. For example, Paulsen creates an excellent transition between unconsciousness at the end of Chapter 3 and consciousness at the beginning of Chapter 4. [In the passage you've just looked at], notice how Paulsen ties together the two most destructive experiences in Brian's life: the plane crash that could have killed him and the secret about his mother that caused his parents' divorce....Symbolically, the secret is the first thing Brian remembers after waking from unconsciousness. Paulsen reveals the destructive nature of the secret through flashbacks, as Brian's memory returns, and through comparisons between the hate that cut him like a knife and the sharp pain caused by the crash. As Brian gains confidence and ability to survive in the Canadian wilderness, he gains understanding about his parents' conflict and his ability to face his own person-against-self conflict. (*Through the Eyes of a Child: An Introduction to Children's Literature*, by Donna E. Norton, page 83)

One of the questions I gave you for discussion this week was about how Paulsen intertwines the back story of the divorce with Brian's current predicament. This may give you some ideas about how both elements are key to Brian's growth within the novel.

Our edition of *Hatchet* includes a teacher's guide in the back on pages 182-86. Those of you who are future teachers will probably want to look at it, especially if you think you might use this book in a classroom.