

ENG 260

Spring 2021

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Class notes—Week of Apr. 12, *Hatchet*, Chapter 11-Epilogue

*Hatchet* has not only won literary awards, but has been popular with young readers for more than three decades, as attested by the “more than 4.5 million copies sold” blurb on the cover of our edition. I enjoyed reading it, but I’m not sure I was as deeply impressed by it as I had hoped to be. I will be, as I said in the last set of notes, very curious to see what you all thought of it.

My favorite passage from the second half of the novel is the part on page 173 where Brian reflects on how the survival rifle he has just recovered from the emergency kit will change his relationship to his surroundings. Modern technology seems to be too powerful; certainly Paulsen depicts it here as driving a wedge between humans and nature. Paulsen himself is a lover of nature who has spent much time in harsh outdoor conditions in Minnesota and Alaska. According to Wikipedia, it seems that when he was Brian’s age, Paulsen was forced to hunt for most of his own food in the woods of Minnesota, because his alcoholic parents were not providing for him.

Paulsen later expanded this novel into a five-book series, but when he first published it, the Epilogue was intended to wrap up Brian’s story. I was interested by what details were included in the brief Epilogue and what were left out. Clearly, from what he includes, Paulsen is very invested in the details of wilderness survival and the long-term physical and psychological effects that an ordeal like Brian’s might have on someone. Despite telling us how much Brian has changed, however, all he has to say about Brian’s home life is that “things rapidly went back to normal” (181). To me, it seems that Paulsen is really only interested in the “wilderness” portion of the story and that Brian’s continuing life in “civilization” is not important to him. Again, let me know your thoughts in the discussion boards or in your reviews!

Questions to Answer 2-4 Sentences:

1. The book’s title is *Hatchet*, and the cover features an image of one. What is the significance of the image of a hatchet in this text?
2. Why do you suppose the author, Gary Paulsen, includes the backstory here about Brian’s parents divorcing? How is this significant to the plot?
3. Both this book and *Indian Captive* could be seen as sharing a “survival in the wilderness” theme. How would you compare the two?
4. When I described the plot of *Hatchet* to my husband, he remarked that the book sounds very male-oriented, which I think is accurate. I have read that authors of children’s books prefer to write novels with a male protagonist, because both boys and girls will read these books, but only girls will want to read a book about another girl. What do you think? Does *Hatchet* seem more likely to appeal to male-gendered readers? Are there others of the books we have read so far that seem more oriented to readers of one gender or the other?
5. What lessons does Brian learn throughout the novel?
6. Does Brian’s survival seem realistic to you, or does the author give him too many lucky breaks?