

Hatchet by Gary Paulsen
Student Comprehension Guide

Dear Students,

We will be exploring the novel Hatchet, by Gary Paulsen, for the next several weeks. Along the way, you will learn about surviving in the wilderness. You will also see how the main character, Brian, responds to problems in his life. Sometimes he makes good decisions; sometimes he does not. However, he learns very valuable lessons just like you have already learned in life and will continue to learn in the future.

Remember to always answer with complete sentences (a subject and a verb), not just one word. Also, remember to consult your Word Hint List if you cannot figure out what a word from the book means. I hope you enjoy Hatchet!

Sincerely,
Miss Dake

Passage 1

Chapter 3, p. 28-30: *Crashing and making it to shore*

1. What or who screamed and roared against the water?

2. Brian was caught in the airplane by two different objects that almost kept him from escaping. What were these?

3. What is meant by "...he was gone, gone from it all, spiraling out into the world, spiraling out into nothing. Nothing." (p. 30)? What is this passage trying to tell us about what is happening to Brian?

Passage 2

Chapter 5, p. 43-45 and p. 47-51: *Thirsty, hungry, and lost*

1. Why did Brian decide it was okay to drink the lake water (p. 44)?

2. Why did Brian believe people would be able to find him (p. 47)?

3. Brian thinks about the actors he has seen in the movies who were trying to survive in the woods. He thinks that those people made it look fun and easy to survive in the forest, but it is actually very difficult. What words does Brian use (top of p. 49) to let you know that he is being *sarcastic* as he describes the movies?
4. What lessons does Brian remember from his English teacher, Perpich (p. 49-51)?
5. What items does Brian have with him (p. 50-51)?

Passage 3

Chapters 6 & 7, p. 64, p. 67-70, and p.73-75) *What is there to eat?*

1. Why did Brian get so sick?
2. What did Brian see his mother do and why did this upset him so much?
3. Why did Brian start crying?
4. How were the raspberries different from the gut cherries?
5. Why do you think the bear looked at Brian and walked away without attacking him?

Passage 4

Chapter 9, p. 87-93: *Building a fire*

1. What did Brian try to use as tinder or kindling to make a fire?

2. Why did he tear up the twenty-dollar bill?

3. How long did it take Brian to rip the birch bark into slivers the size of pieces of hair?
(p. 89)

4. What did Brian learn and not learn from his school science classes about how to make fire?

5. Why do you think Brian called the fire his friend?

Passage 5

Chapter 10, p. 94-96: *Tending and relying on the fire*

1. Why did Brian not want to leave the fire?

2. What did he do so that he could tend the fire (keep it going)?

3. Name 3-4 ways that the fire will help Brian.

Passage 6

Chapter 12, p. 110-112: *Fishing: necessity is the mother of invention*

1. How was Brian's first spear different from his second one?

2. Why did Brian think a bow and arrow would be better than a spear?

Passage 7

Chapter 12, p. 115-118: *Come back, plane!*

1. How did Brian know the plane was coming closer?
2. What did he do to try to signal the plane?
3. Why was his action not successful?
4. How did Brian feel when he realized the plane had gone? Choose 3 adjectives of your own that describe him at that moment.

Passage 8

Chapter 13, p. 121-123, 127: *Despair, then renewed strength and growth*

1. Why was Brian so depressed that he wanted to die?
2. What was Brian thinking to himself that night when he tried to cut himself?
3. What was Brian thinking to himself when he woke up the next morning and saw the blood?
4. What event does Brian say changed him in a very deep way?

Passage 9

Chapter 16, p.142-146: *First meat*

1. What did Brian already know about cleaning a bird so it could be eaten?
2. What did he do the bird to prepare it for cooking? List his steps, starting after the kill, up until he took his first bite.

Passage 10

Chapter 16, p. 155-158: *Storm and optimism*

1. What kind of storm destroyed Brian's shelter?
2. What else did the storm take from him?
3. How does Brian feel at first, after realizing he has lost everything?
4. What does he decide to do?

Passage 11

Chapter 19, p. 184-191: *The survival pack*

1. Choose 2 items from his survival pack and tell what he thought he could do with them.
2. Brian didn't like the rifle. Why not?
3. Why was the pilot so surprised when he found Brian?
4. What item from the survival pack led to Brian's rescue?

Passage 12

Epilogue p. 192-195: *Back at home*

1. List 3 ways that Brian changed as a result of living for 54 days alone in the wilderness.
2. List the true names for what Brian called gut cherries, nut bushes, rabbits, foolbirds, small food fish, turtle, and wolves.
3. What happened to Brian's parents after he returned?

Word Hints

Hatchet

by Gary Paulsen

(Note: This list contains words from Passages 1 only as a sample of what the entire document would look like. As an activity, students could be given only the list of words and asked in small groups to come up with definitions and synonyms.)

Passage 1 Chapter 3, p. 28-30: *Crashing and making it to shore*

Took on detail	became clearer as he got closer
field of vision	what was in front of him; what he was able to see
channel of fallen trees	a long area where the trees were dead and on the ground
eased back on the wheel	pulled the wheel very slowly to change speed or direction
Nose	the very front, curved tip of the plane
Wrenching	Twisting and getting stuck
Windshield	The large pane of glass that the pilot or driver looks through, like in a car
Shattered	Broke into many tiny pieces
Drove him back into his seat	Pushed him hard, forcing him to sit down
Raked at the seatbelt catch	Clawed with his fingers and fingernails trying to get the seatbelt undone
Clawed up	Grabbed with his fingers and fingernails
Vomited	Threw up
Muck	Dirt, mud
Windbreaker	A light jacket made of nylon that usually has a hood
Blades of grass	Each piece of grass

Passage 2 Chapter 5, p. 43-45 and p. 47-51: *Thirsty, hungry, and lost*

Snapped/hammered open	Opened very quickly because he was startled by a noise
Viciously	With lots of anger and aggression
Foul	Bad smelling, like something rotten or dying
Blister	The skin bubbles up into sores because it was burned
Peel	When the skin comes off of a person, animal, or fruit
Stiffness	Not able to move easily, soreness
Limbs	Branches of a tree, or arms/legs of a person or animal
Teetered	Almost falling down, dizzy, tipping back and forth
Gulps	Swallowing as much as you can at one time
Threw up	Vomited
Stagger-tripped	Walking around unevenly, almost falling
Mounted extensive searches	Organized many people and planes/vehicles to look for someone
Courses	The routes that airplanes fly
Amphibious planes	Planes that can land on the water as well as the land
Bushplanes	Small two-person planes that explore the wilderness
Floats	Hollow structures that keep something or someone from sinking in the water
Brush	Thick bushes and grasses
Matches	Small sticks with a substance on the end that lights (makes fire) when rubbed against a rough surface
Be/think/stay positive	Expressions that mean think about good things instead of bad things
Clipper	Something that clips or cuts; used on fingernails, bushes/trees, and sometimes hair
Blade	The sharp edge of a knife or hatchet that is used for cutting
Tatters	Rags; ripped into pieces