

A Teacher's Guide to
Brian's Winter
by Gary Paulsen

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Introduction to the Teacher's Guide

The Intended Use

The purpose of this teacher's guide is to give the teacher ideas about how to present *Brain's Winter* to students. Not all the suggestions have to be followed. In fact, it would probably be a heavy burden for the students if they had to complete everything suggested in this guide. Therefore, the teacher is free to pick and choose whatever he thinks will be most beneficial to his students.

Watch For These Headings

"Those Weird Words"

Many times teachers simply tell students to define vocabulary words which are found in the book. However, it is very possible that no learning takes place through this exercise because it simply involves copying a definition from the dictionary. Therefore, instead of having them simply writing a definition, try this exercise.

Have the students...

1. Write the definition of the word in their own words.
2. Write a creative sentence using the word.
3. Think of a memory device that will help them remember what the word means.

"Those Descriptive Words"

Gary Paulsen's style of writing is usually very simple, yet very descriptive. So there may not always be vocabulary words which children do not know. Therefore, the teacher can focus on helping the students identify descriptive words and practice their own descriptive writing.

This activity can be done for each chapter, or as the teacher sees fit.

Have the students...

1. Identify one descriptive verb, adverb, adjective, noun, and sentence. Aim for ones that convey a strong visual image.
2. Look up the words in a thesaurus, and find a good substitution for the words.
3. Rewrite the descriptive sentence in their own words in a way that also conveys a strong visual image.
4. Cite the page of the words used.

"It's Question Time"

This section can be used for the basis of class discussion or a writing assignment.

"Look It Up!"

This will usually involve minor research. Most of the information can most likely be found in an encyclopedia.

Regarding Content

Keep in mind that questionable content can serve as an opportunity to teach the students why something is wrong. Here are a few warnings.

pg. 33 After becoming frustrated Brian says, "To hell with it. I'm going hunting."

pg. 44 This reference, along with a couple others, mentions Brian peeing on a stump in order to mark his territory.

Chapter 5 and a few others may seem a little graphic because it describes killing, gutting, and cleaning animals by Brian and vicious wolves (Chapter 17).

p. 62 Irreverent use of God's name. "And god knew what would have happened if he *had* hit the bear..."

Projects

There are many different projects and activities throughout the lesson guide. Most of the time they are related to the information found in the chapter.



Before Reading the Book



Suggestions for Classroom Activities

Brian's Winter involves the exciting topic of survival in the wilderness. This sets up an excellent opportunity to open a child's imagination. Before getting started with the book, explain to the class about the general plot of the book. [Example introduction: Brian Robeson is a thirteen-year-old boy who becomes stranded in the Canadian wilderness after his plane crashes. His only resources are few supplies and his ingenuity. He successfully survives the summer. However, winter is fast approaching....] If there is a large number of students, divide the class into small discussion groups. Have them consider what items they would include in a survival pack. Once the brainstorming is done, have them narrow their survival pack to five items. Obviously, this will require the students to support and defend the reasoning behind their decisions. Finally, meet back as a group, and have each group share their survival pack ideas.

Another possible topic of discussion is how living in the wilderness for an extended period of time would change a person. What would be the cause of these changes? How hard would it be for Brian to come back to his life in civilization? What difficulties would he have in school? Would it affect his social life in any way?

A third topic of discussion could be based on Brian's experience of survival through the summer months, and how this could help him survive through the harsh winter.

Keeping a Journal

This is a project which will take place throughout the course of the book unit. Have the students pretend that they are Brian. They are to keep a diary of the events which take place in the book. The students will add to their journal after each chapter. This project will give the students something to shoot for when they are reading. Instead of reading just for the sake of reading, hopefully they will think about what is happening so that they can write down what they think should be included in their diary. This may also help them to become more personally involved in the book. It will also help the teacher determine whether the students are keeping up on their assigned reading.

Part One: Fall

Chapter 1

Those Weird Words

1. After the plane crash that **marooned** him in the wilderness....(pg. 5)
2. ...and shot several times into a dirt **hummock**. (p. 9)
3. ...near a small clump of **hazel** brush. (p. 9)
4. ...he quickly **averted** his eyes... (p. 9)
5. the arrow did not hit a **vital** place... (p. 10)

Those Descriptive Words

Have the students...

1. Identify one descriptive verb, adverb, adjective, noun, and sentence. Aim for ones that convey a strong visual image.
2. Look up the words in a thesaurus and find a good substitution for the words.
3. Rewrite the descriptive sentence in their own words in a way that also conveys a strong visual image.
4. Cite the page of the words used.

It's Question Time

1. What method of cooking does Brian find to be the best one? Why?
2. What are some signs that Brian misses his life at home?
3. What are some of the signs of winter that Brian is not noticing?
4. Does Brian seem to feel satisfied with his situation in life?

Extended Discussion

(This thematic topic may be discussed starting with this chapter, but may also continue as the class works through the book.)

Brian exhibits a strong appreciation for nature and respects the animals which live in the wilderness. Find examples in the book which show Brian's concern for wildlife conservation.

Chapter 2

Those Weird Words

1. Several times he had seen a **solitary** wolf... (p. 16)
2. ...he ran kind of a **circuit**. (p. 16)
3. and then sheepishly **trundle** away. (p. 19)

Those Descriptive Words

(See introduction)

It's Question Time

1. How would the blue jays go about warning Brian when something was moving in the woods?
2. What mistakes does Brian make concerning storing his food in connection with the bear encounter? What could he have done differently?
3. How does Brian react, both mentally and physically, to the presence of the bear? What would you have done if you were placed in the same situation?
4. What does it mean for a bear to sit "back on his haunches"? (p. 19)
5. What is the result of the Brian's encounter with the bear? Would you consider him fortunate to get away with bruises and minor scratches from the bear's claws?
6. After the encounter with the bear, what does Brian decide that he needs to do regarding his weapons?
7. What would you do in order to either prevent another bear attack or defend yourself against another one?
8. What lesson(s) does Brian learn after this bear experience? (p. 21 "Always, *always* pay attention to what was happening.")

Look It Up!

1. There are many animals which are described in this chapter. Have each student pick an animal which they will look up in an encyclopedia. They should write down specific characteristics of **that** animal, such as where it lives, what it eats, what it looks like, what its predators are (if any), or any other interesting facts.
2. How big is a bear in real life? Have them find the answer and compare its size to something in every-day life.

Chapter 3

It's Question Time

- 1) Explain how Brian made his bow. (p. 22)
- 2) At the beginning of the chapter, how does Brian describe how he felt in his sleeping bag?
- 3) Analyze Brian's clothing. Is he ready for winter? What should he do about this? (p. 23)
- 4) How does Brian winterize his shelter? Would you do the same or something different? (p.24)
- 5) Describe some of the signs of cold weather? (p. 24)
- 6) How does Brian solve the problem of making stronger arrows to kill larger animals?

Think About It

- 1) Brian has a problem. He needs a fire in his shelter to keep him warm during the winter. But the fire will cause his shelter to fill with smoke. What should he do about this? Either describe how you would solve this problem by describing your idea in words or by drawing a picture.
- 2) Brian has another problem. His light clothing will not keep him warm very well during the cold winter. What should he do about this? Brainstorm different ideas about what he could use for clothing. Write down your ideas.

Art Opportunity

At the end of this chapter, Brian uses charcoal from the fire to sketch what he did that day. Have the students make their own sketches of a scene in the book, either on a piece of paper or on poster board. This activity may be saved until the end of the book, which will give them more scenes to choose from. Post them around the classroom for everyone to see, and have them think of possible titles for the sketch.

Chapter 4

Those Weird Words

- 1) he found to his **immense** surprise... (p. 34)
- 2) A kind of **lethargy** came over him... (p. 35)
- 3) ...and **scrutinized** it once more... (p. 41)

Those Descriptive Words

- 1) the fire "blazed merrily" (p.35)
- 2) "...let the sun cook his bones..." (p. 35)
- 3) the flint was "as sharp as a razor" (p. 39)

It's Question Time

- 1) What problem does Brian run into concerning the heavy rain?
- 2) How did the rain effect Brian's success at hunting? (p. 34)
- 3) Brian discovers a way to have a fire inside his shelter. How does he do it? (p. 36)
- 4) How does Brian make his shelter water proof? (p. 36-37)

Look it Up!

Page 35 makes mention of a flock of geese. Have the kids try to find other names for groups of animals, for example, a school of fish. There are some weird ones out there. Have some fun with it!

Chapter 5

Those Weird Words

1) ...he still had to **fletch** them (p. 44)

It's Question Time

- 1) What are some more signs that winter is coming soon?
- 2) What treasure does Brian find in the woods? Would you consider it a treasure? How would the circumstances of your life affect your opinion of this matter? (p. 46)
- 3) What was it that bothered Brian about the deer? (p. 47)
- 4) How does Brian use pine sap to help him? (p. 50) Do you think this would work?
- 5) What dangerous animal does Brian meet at the end of the chapter?

What Do you think?

Your state has many different hunting laws. Can you think of different licenses that you need for hunting? What are the reasons for these laws? Have the students look up what the laws are for their state.

Look it Up!

Even though it is a very small animal, the skunk is very dangerous. Have the students look up skunk in the encyclopedia. Find out specific facts about its dangerous defense weapon. Consider this marvelous ability in the light of creation vs evolution. Could a skunk ever develop this ability by pure chance?

Chapter 6

Those Weird Words

- 1) After developing the **acquaintance** with the skunk... (p. 55)
- 2) and was **stymied** on where to get a string... (p. 56)

It's Question Time

- 1) What dilemma develops for Brian regarding the skunk?
- 2) What does Brian name the skunk? Why does he pick this name?
- 3) Brian actually begins to look forward to seeing the skunk. Why would he look forward to this?
- 4) How is Brian coming along with his bow and arrow? What improvements does he make?

Just a Little Math

Brian gets his arrow to go 200 yards. How far would this be in feet? Think of an object and measure it. Then figure out how many of those objects it would take to fill up a length of 200 yards.

Write a Letter

Brian knows only a little about winter. He's experienced snow and cold weather, but he could always go inside and warm up. Now he is in Canada. How cold does it get there? What is the weather like in Canada during the winter? Write a short letter to Brian and tell him what he should expect for the next few months.

Think About it

Fire is a very important necessity for survival in the winter wilderness. If you were out of matches, what are the possible ways that you can start a fire? What factors affect how well a fire burns?

Chapter 7

Class Discussion

This chapter is very short, yet very exciting. Brian has a ferocious encounter with a bear. But he is able to get out of it alive, thanks to his friend Betty. Have the students explain in their own words the exciting bear encounter.

A Quick Question

What new weapon does Brian create? Why is this an important invention?

Catechism Application

There is a sentence in this chapter (page 62) where God's name is used rather irreverently. "And god knew what would have happened if he *had* hit the bear with an arrow." The natural reaction to this is to try to ignore and skip over it. However, this serves as a good opportunity to ask the children about this sentence. Is it okay for God's name to be used in this way? Does this go against any of the commandments? Have them rewrite the sentence so that God's name is not taken in vain.

Part Two: Winter

Chapter 8

Word Exercise

For the following words, have the students define the word in their own words. Then have them find a word that means the opposite, that is, find an antonym.

- 1) pitiful (p. 68)
- 2) crude (p. 69)
- 3) clunky (p. 69)
- 4) instantly (p. 70)
- 5) comfortable (p. 72)

Literary Techniques

“It was cold and low and gray and raining, a dismal rain...” (pg. 67) Normally we don’t write sentences using “and” like this. However, the author does this on purpose. What effect does it have on the sentence? Would the sentence be much different if commas were used instead of “and.”

Art Activity

Brian goes through a drastic change in clothes. Draw a picture of what you think he looked like before he was stranded in the wilderness. Then draw a picture of what you think he looks like based on what you learn from this chapter.

Why???

With the new arrival of snow, Brian realizes three things. “Would be easy to see. Would be easy to follow. Would be much easier to hunt.” (p. 72) Explain why each of these is true.

Chapter 9

Those Weird Words

- 1) "...and moved into a large stand of **brambles**..." (p. 75)
- 2) "...he saw they had a **cloven hoof**..." (p. 75)
- 3) "...he'd given them a wide **berth**." (p. 76)

Word Exercise

Have the students define the word in their own words and write a synonym for it as well.

- 1) fluke (p. 74)
- 2) dodged (p. 74)
- 3) simultaneously (p. 75)
- 4) tightening (p. 77)
- 5) handicap (p. 78)

It's Question Time

- 1) The first sentence in this chapter says that Brain has a butane lighter. Where did he get this?
- 2) What does Brain feast his eyes on? Why? (pg. 73)
- 3) Why do you think Brain shakes his head? Look to the previous paragraph for a clue. (pg. 73)
- 4) Why does the hair on Brian's neck stand up? (p. 75)
- 5) Brian is attacked by something near the end of the chapter. What is it? Describe how Brain kills the animal.

Look It Up!

Brian sees a rabbit with several white spots on it. Brain doesn't remember seeing spotted rabbits before. Is something happening to the rabbits? If so, what is happening? Try to find out whether rabbits actually are able to change the color of their fur. (This is yet another evidence of God's marvelous design of creation.)

Chapter 10

Word Exercise

Have the students find a 3 words that rhymes for each word below.

- 1) squirmed (pg. 80)
- 2) shoulder (pg. 81)
- 3) popped (pg. 83)
- 4) skinned (pg. 84)
- 5) crawled (pg. 85)

Literary Techniques

Find some examples of alliteration in this chapter or in any other chapter. Here are some examples:

- 1) "pounding pain" (pg. 80)
- 2) "long look" (pg. 81)
- 3) "full five minutes" (pg. 82)

Content Questions

- 1) Brian dreams of something holding him down. What does he discover that is actually holding him down when he wakes up? (pg. 80)
- 2) About how big was the moose (length, height, and weight)? (pg. 81)
- 3) What made Brian sad?
- 4) What oxymoron does Brian use to describe the moose? (pg. 81)
- 5) What does Brian crave? (pg. 84)

Chapter 11

Those Weird Words

- 1) ... “gray wisps of clouds...” (pg. 86)
- 2) “He was not idle.” (pg. 87)
- 3) ... “it had dried sufficiently to work.” (pg. 88)
- 4) ... “it was only half supple...” (pg. 89)
- 5) ... “hadn’t accumulated to any depth...” (pg. 89)

Those Descriptive Words

This chapter is filled with a lot of description. Therefore, this would be a good chapter to have them do the this word exercise.

Literary Techniques

Have the students find examples of similes and metaphors in this chapter or in any other chapters.

Here are some examples:

- 1) ... “his body felt as if he’d been sleeping in a cement mixer.” (pg. 86)
- 2) ... “howled through the trees like something insane.” (pg. 87)

What Would You Do?

In this chapter, it rains for eight straight days. What would you do if you were cooped up for that long? Can you think of any games or activities that you would do in order to try to pass the time?

Art Activity

The moose that Brain kills is very large. Draw a picture of Brian standing next to the moose in order to show about how big the moose is compared to Brain.

Chapter 12

Critical Thinking Questions

- 1) What problem does Brain have with walking in the snow? Can you think of any ways that would help a person walk better on snow? What factors determine how you can walk on top of snow?
- 2) What special food does Brain prepare for his Thanksgiving meal? How does his Thanksgiving meal compare to your Thanksgiving meal?
- 3) Brain is Thankful for many things. But does the book say to whom his thanks is directed? Is any credit given to God? Who or what does Brain credit for blessing him? Where should our thanks be directed? Examine your life and think about how thankful you have been lately. Is this something we should probably work to improve? What are some Bible passages which talk about being thankful and how much God blesses us?
- 4) Judging by the context, how is the word “lord” used in this sentence? “...to be thankful for the deer and the moose, lord, the moose like getting a whole food store and to be thankful...” (pg 95) What are the possible definitions of lord? What do the words Lord and LORD mean? Is there a difference?
- 5) Brian is shocked when he hears the gunshot. Who or what do you think it is? (pg. 96)

Chapter 13

Onomatopoeia Practice

Have the students pick out examples of onomatopoeia from this chapter or any other chapter.

Here are some examples from chapter 13:

- 1) crack (pg. 97)
- 2) pop (pg. 97)

It's Question Time

- 1) When does Brain hear the gunshots?
- 2) What does Brain do when he hears the gunshots?
- 3) What did you think the gunshots were?
- 4) What do the gunshots turn out to be?
- 5) What causes the trees to crack and explode? Do you think Brain's theory is accurate?

Those Weird Words

- 1) ... "blistering crack of sound." (p. 97)
- 2) ... "dozing **intermittently**..." (p. 98)
- 3) ... "slightly bigger in **diameter**..." (p. 101)

Look It Up!

Brain runs out into the cold air without any clothes. It can be very dangerous to have your skin exposed to very cold weather for an extended period of time. Find out what happens to a person when he is exposed to very cold weather without proper covering? Under what conditions and how long does it take for a person to get frostbite? What are the results of this injury?

Chapter 14

Those Weird Words

- 1) "...and had a **vague** idea..." (p. 106)

Look it Up!

The first part of this chapter mentions that when the temperature rose, it snowed. Find out under what conditions will it most likely snow. For example, is it more likely to snow when it's -32 F or 32 F? Can it snow when the temperature is 35 F? What other conditions must exist before it snows? Why doesn't freezing rain come down when it's very cold outside?

It's Question Time

- 1) Brain makes a realization on page 104. "The truth was, it could be fatal." What is he referring to and what does he mean by this?
- 2) There is a very detailed description of how Brain makes his snowshoes. However, Brain's snow shoes probably do not look like the snowshoes that you are accustomed to seeing. What do you think his looked like? Draw a picture to illustrate your idea? Or illustrate the process of making the snowshoes, drawing a picture for each step. Do you think you could make these? Do you think they would work?
- 3) What problem does Brain run into when he tries to use his snow shoes? What does he do to fix the problem? Does it work? Why is this so?

Science Project

Brain describes how he uses the bones as a food source. He boils the bones to make a jelly-like stew. What is the jelly-like substance? Does it have any nutritional value? Try making the jelly-like stew in class by boiling some chicken bones. (Note: teacher should try this beforehand in order to see what happens.)

Chapter 15

It's Question Time

- 1) The first page describes Brian not going outside until about 10 o'clock. Since Brain does not have a watch, how could he tell what time it was? This is a possible opportunity for a project. Have the students go outside at different periods of the day to observe the position of the sun. **WARNING!** Make sure they do not look directly at the sun! This can be very dangerous. You can still tell where the sun is without looking directly at it. (pg. 112)
- 2) Brain get 15 paces away from a deer when he is hunting. About how far is this? Have you ever been that close to a deer or other wild animal before? (pg. 114)
- 3) The deer dies much quicker than the moose. Why is this? When deer hunters go hunting, what part of the animal do they aim for? (p. 115)
- 4) Brain refers to killing the deer as "a different kind of murder." (p. 115) What do you think about this statement? Is it murder to kill animals? Defend your answer.
- 5) Why does Brain wish that he had missed the deer? (p. 115)

Chapter 16

It's Question Time

- 1) Page 119 describes Brain one who has become a "creature of winter." What is meant by this? Where does he consider his home?
- 2) Brain goes exploring. What does Brain observe on his exploration? Why doesn't Brain like what he sees? What affect does this have on him?
- 3) Once again, Brain hears popping sounds. But why can't it be trees exploding? What do you think the popping noise is from this time?

Chapter 17

It's Question Time

- 1) Brain discovers a straight line. Why does this grab his attention? What is it?
- 2) "Ahh, he thought - another person in the world." (pg. 127) Brain obviously knows that other people exist in the world. So why does this thought go through his mind?
- 3) Brain had been in the wilderness for a long time. Estimate how long he had been there.
- 4) Brain appears shocked to find people. Why is this? How do you know that Brain is shocked? (pg. 130)
- 5) Did you expect that Brain would find people?

Epilogue

- 1) Do you think Brain is happy about being rescued and going home?
- 2) Will Brain be able to adjust to society when he returns home?
- 3) How has this experience changed Brain?
- 4) Do you think that Brain will want to return to his home in the wilderness?
- 5) What are some advantages and disadvantages regarding living by yourself in the wilderness?
- 6) Would you ever want to experience the same thing that Brain experienced?
- 7) Have you learned any practical survival techniques from reading this book? Describe what you have learned.
- 8) At the beginning of the guide, this was listed as a pre-reading question. "Another possible topic of discussion is how living in the wilderness for an extended period of time would change a person. What would be the cause of these changes? How hard would it be for Brain to come back to his life in civilization? What difficulties would he have in school? Would it affect his social life in any way?" Have the students compare their previous responses to what they think, now that they have read the book.

Find a Theme

Ask the students to come up with a theme for this book. Page 94 offers a possible theme for the book, despite the fact that the word 'belch' is in this phrase. "What he wanted more than anything was out, to be back in the world. To have all that stuff and be back in the world and then to go to a movie, no to sit and watch a football game and belch and..." This emphasizes the point of taking things for granted. Brain describes a simple scene. All he wants to do is watch a movie or a football game. This is something that most people have an opportunity to do quite often. However, most people don't realize how good they have it. We have been greatly blessed, but we don't usually realize this until those blessings are taken away. Through this experience, Brain truly gains appreciation for food, clothing, and shelter. How often do we even think about these things? And if we hardly think about these things, how much less do we take time to appreciate and thank God for these basic, yet very important, blessings?