

# The River



By

Gary Paulsen

A Novel Study  
by Nat Reed

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**About the author:** Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, visit [novelstudies.org](http://novelstudies.org).

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## Suggestions and Expectations

This curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. Each chapter of the novel study focuses on two chapters of *The River* and is comprised of five different activities:

- Before You Read
- Vocabulary Building
- Comprehension Questions
- Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (p.7) as well as a **Checklist** (p.6) are included so that students may track of their completed work.

**Every activity need not be completed by all students.**

### Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases. . . including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story . . . **and many others.**

**Themes** which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include: wilderness survival, personal initiative and responsibility, selflessness, and adjusting to new and difficult circumstances.

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## List of Skills

### Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms & antonyms
3. Identifying/creating *onomatopoeia*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Listing compound words
7. Identifying/creating similes
8. Use of singular/plural nouns
9. Using content clues: analogies
10. Identifying parts of speech
11. Determining alphabetical order
12. Identification of root words
13. Identifying/creating *alliteration*

### Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

### Plot Activities

1. Complete a 5 W's Chart
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Identify *cliffhangers*
4. Identify the climax of a novel
5. Write a synopsis
6. Predict and outcome
7. Complete a Sequence Chart
8. Identify *foreshadowing*

### Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Compare two characters
3. Understand concepts such as *meeting a challenge*
4. Relating personal experiences

### Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write an editorial on an issue
3. Write a letter to a friend
4. Complete an Observation Chart
5. Practice brainstorming
6. Conduct an interview
7. Write about personal feelings
8. Write a Book Review
9. Prioritize survival items
10. Practice group work

### Art Activities

1. Design a cover for the novel
2. Create a Storyboard.

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## Synopsis

Brian is contacted by government researchers who propose that Brian reenact his survival experience - this time taking Derek, a psychologist, along to record their experiences. Derek is convinced that Brian's experiences will help others survive such wilderness ordeals.

With Brian's parents' reluctant permission, he and Derek are dropped off at a remote lake, not far from Brian's former adventures. Brian insists that only an emergency radio and a couple of knives are left behind with them.

During the first few days the two survivalists find events to be proceeding smoothly - too smoothly for Brian's liking, however this comes to a shattering end when their camp is struck by lightning and Derek is seriously injured. Unable to revive his friend from unconsciousness, and with their radio inoperative, Brian realizes he must get Derek to civilization. Using a map he discovers in Derek's suitcase, Brian determines that he might be able to reach a trading post located about a hundred miles away, by journeying down a nearby river.

Brian quickly assembles a raft, straps Derek aboard and guides the water-logged craft on a harrowing trip down the Bowtie River to the trading post where emergency help is summoned. (Courtesy of the publisher)

## Author Biography

Gary Paulsen

Gary Paulsen, a renowned author of novels for young people, presently lives in New Mexico. Three of Gary Paulsen's novels have been acclaimed as Newbery Honor Books: ***Hatchet***, ***Dogsong***, and ***The Winter Room***. ***The River*** is Gary's exciting sequel to ***Hatchet***. His other novels include: ***Brian's Winter*** (sequel), ***Brian's Return*** (sequel), ***Canyons***, ***The Crossing***, ***Dancing Carl***, ***The Island***, ***Popcorn Days and Buttermilk Nights***, ***Sentries***, ***Tracker***, ***Woodsong***, ***The Legend of Red Horse Canyon***, ***Escape From Fire Mountain***, ***Danger on Midnight River***.



Gary Paulsen is an avid outdoors-man who competed in the Iditarod, a dog sled race across Alaska. He also frequently sails the Pacific Ocean.



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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Chapter 1 - 2



### Before you read the chapter:

The main character of *The River*, Brian Robeson, has already survived a very traumatic experience (being stranded in the wilderness for several weeks with only a hatchet). *The River* is a sequel to the exciting adventures described in the novel *Hatchet*. Describe what long-lasting effects you think such a difficult experience would have on a person like Brian.




### Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence. [Be careful, some words may be appropriate for more than one sentence - try to pick the best fit.]

insist	publisher	sauteed	sincerity
embarrass	evasive	psychologist	counselor

1. The school \_\_\_\_\_ was of the opinion that Mandie's fears were groundless.
2. Following her confession, all of Bente's friends were convinced of her \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The police officer found the suspect's responses to be quite \_\_\_\_\_.
4. "I must \_\_\_\_\_ on everyone present taking off their shoes," the tour guide said.
5. Adding \_\_\_\_\_ mushrooms to the recipe ruined the taste.
6. My camp \_\_\_\_\_ loved to tell ghost stories in the evening.
7. My mother has been the \_\_\_\_\_ of our town's newspaper for more than ten years.
8. Joanne has very thick skin, so it is almost impossible to \_\_\_\_\_ her.

# Questions



1. A strong atmosphere is able to create a particular mood in a story. For instance, an old abandoned house may evoke fear and mystery. The appearance of certain people will also lend to the atmosphere that an author is striving to create. What atmosphere is created by the opening paragraph of Chapter One? How does the author achieve this atmosphere?


2. The **setting** of a story includes not only where but when the story takes place. What is the setting of Chapter One and Two?


3. Describe how Brian's life changed after his experiences described in the novel, *Hatchet*.


4. Who were the three men with and what did they propose to Brian?


5. What was the purpose of the survival school?


6. Brian thought that he had survived his experiences in the wilderness mainly due to luck. What experience does he cite as proof of this?


7. Brian gives a two-word title to his survival experience. What is it?

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8. Brian and his counselor had differing opinions on how the survival experience had impacted Brian. What were these two differing opinions?


9. Why did Brian believe that he had truly *discovered* fire?


## Language Activities



### A. Investigation.

It is important to understand the basics of what happened to Brian in the adventures described in the book, *Hatchet*. Complete either of part a or b below.

a) If you have already read *Hatchet*, write a brief synopsis of the novel below. Be sure to cover all of the important facts of the story that you remember.

b) If you have not already read *Hatchet*, find a synopsis of the book (either found on the back cover of the novel or online at a site such as [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)) and write a brief synopsis of the novel below. Be sure to cover the important facts of the story.


## B. Homophones

The first two chapters include a number of examples of words that have homophones – **air** – **heir** and **write** – **right** are two sets of examples of homophones. Two words are **homophones** if they are pronounced or spelled the same way but have different meanings.



Use each homophone in a sentence showing the meaning of each quite clearly.

### Example 1

Homophones	Sentence
1. stares	
2. stairs	

### Example 2

Homophones	Sentence
1. weight	
2. wait	

### Example 3

Homophones	Sentence
1. reel	
2. real	

C. Place the following words from these chapters in **alphabetical order**.

suits	1.
stepped	2.
smiled	3.
short	4.
shrugged	5.
special	6.
situations	7.
something	8.
studying	9.
slowly	10.

**D.** Brian refers to a previous adventure with a **porcupine**. The porcupine is one of nature's most fascinating animals.



Using resources found in your school library or on the Internet research four interesting facts about this amazing creature.

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

**E. To be done in pairs or small groups.**

During Brian's first adventure (described in *Hatchet*) he copes with only a hatchet. As you might imagine, this was a most difficult ordeal.



If you were abandoned in the Canadian wilderness for three weeks what would you take with you if you had to fit it into an average-sized backpack? Remember there is no electricity and you are out of cell phone range. List the items you would take with you below. You may not take more than a total of ten items with you.

1.		6.	
2.		7.	
3.		8.	
4.		9.	
5.		10.	

# Extension Activity



## Tell (and Draw) it Like it Is

Use the three boxes to tell and show the beginning, middle and ending of these chapters.

Beginning Picture	Beginning:
Middle Picture	Middle:
Ending Picture	Conclusion: