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## Sample MonkeyNotes

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# *Hatchet*

by

**Gary Paulsen**

1987



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by Diane Clapsaddle

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## KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

### SETTING

The story takes place in Hampton, New York, and the forests of Northern Canada, in the present day.

### LIST OF CHARACTERS

#### Major Characters

**Brian Robeson** - A thirteen year old boy who, on the way to spend the summer with his divorced father in Canada, is involved in a plane crash and must learn to survive in the Canadian woods.

**The Pilot** - An older man, perhaps named Jim or Jake (Brian can't remember), who flies the boy toward northern Canada until he has a heart attack and dies at the controls.

**Brian's parents** - His mother is the object of the Secret that obsesses Brian's thoughts. His father.....

### CONFLICT

**Protagonist** - The protagonist is Brian Robeson who is only a thirteen year old boy when life forces him to call upon all of his intelligence and innate skills to find a way to survive when his.....

**Antagonist** - The antagonist is Nature and all its dangers as well as its beauties. Brian must learn to live within the boundaries that Nature forces upon him and accept his fate. Another antagonist is Brian himself as.....

**Climax** - The climax of the story occurs when Brian finally finds a way into the tail of the plane after a tornado dislodges it from the bottom of the lake. Within it are the "treasures" he believes he.....

**Outcome** - After Brian obtains the treasure from the tail of the crashed plane, he finds an emergency transmitter which he accidentally turns on. He doesn't realize he's done so, because there is so perceivable change in it, and he disregards it while he takes pleasure from all the other supplies he finds in the.....

### SHORT PLOT/CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

Brian Robeson, a thirteen year old boy traveling in a small airplane to Canada to spend the summer with his father, is involved in a plane crash in an uninhabited part of the Canadian woods after the pilot dies of a heart attack. Brian then must find a way to survive and in the process, discovers much about.....

### THEMES

The theme of **never giving up** is one of the most prevalent themes in that we are shown throughout the story that without hope, life is meaningless. Brian learns this the hard way, but it is what sustains him when.....

Another theme is **perseverance and determination**. This is especially seen in how Brian learns to solve problems that will potentially be life-threatening. He calls upon his.....

Additional themes are detailed in the complete study guide.

### MOOD

At times, the mood is just sad as Brian thinks about the Secret that led to his parents' divorce; at other times, it is fearful as he learns to deal with the dangers Nature throws at him; finally, it is.....

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY**

Gary Paulsen was born on May 17, 1939, in Minnesota. He constantly moved as a child, because his father was in the military. Both of his parents were alcoholics, and he often used books as an escape. Early in his adulthood, he held many jobs to support himself, including being a trapper and.....

## **CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES**

### **Chapter One**

#### **Summary**

This chapter begins with Brian staring out the window of a Cessna 406, a small airplane carrying him north from New York to the tundra of Canada to live with his father for the summer. He is thirteen years old and the only passenger on this plane, piloted by an older man named either Jim or Jake, a name Brian cannot remember. He has never flown in such a small plane, but that doesn't concern him as he thinks about the events that had led to his taking this flight. His parents have just divorced, and all the solid things in his life have shattered. Furthermore, he is overwhelmed with what he calls the Secret, something he knows about his mother that makes him weep every time he thinks about it. He is so involved with his thoughts that even the pilot doesn't seem real, rather a mechanical part of the plane itself.

To make conversation and pass time, the pilot shows Brian how to handle the controls, including the rudder pedals. The boy turns the plane and brings her right and left. The pilot notes that flying is just like every thing else: it just takes learning. Brian goes then back to his thoughts of the Secret, which led to his mother wanting a divorce that left his father totally confused. His custody was placed with his mother except for the summers when he would live with his father who was a mechanical engineer working in the northern oil fields. To Brian, it is all talk and words.

Suddenly the plane lurches to the right, and Brian sees the pilot rubbing his shoulder and smells the gas the pilot has emitted. Brian remembers then the fabric bag in the rear of the plane which is a survival pack containing emergency supplies in case they had to land suddenly. The pilot seems to have no control over the gas he passes, and he continues to rub his arm and shoulder and wince with pain.

In between his concern for the pilot, Brian remembers the ride to the airport with his mother and how she tried to talk to him about what had happened. He couldn't bring himself to tell her what he knew about her. So she changes the subject and gives him a present she has bought him for the trip. It is a hatchet with a steel handle and rubber handgrip. It is held within a leather case with a brass-riveted belt loop. She insisted he try it on and he would have refused, but he couldn't bring himself to hear how thin her voice would be if he didn't. She thinks he looks like "her little scout" and speaks tenderly like she used to do when he was sick. It made him want to cry again and he had turned away from her once more. However, the hatchet still hangs from his belt.

The pilot had now become worse and tells Brian that he has never felt anything like this pain before. He is suddenly jolted backward in the seat and tells Brian that he thinks his chest is coming apart. Brian knows now that that man is having a heart attack. Then, the pilot's eyes roll back into his head, and the smell becomes even worse. Now Brian knows he is totally alone in a plane with no pilot and the horror that thought brings utterly stops him.

#### **Notes**

This chapter lays down the two greatest problems that Brian is facing: his parents' divorce and being alone in a pilotless plane. It also presents several examples of foreshadowing. First, the fact that the information about his mother is capitalized into the word Secret indicates how devastating this information is for him. Second, the pilot teaching him how to control the plane prepares us for him landing the plane himself. Third, the pilot's sudden concern with a pain in his shoulder and arm foreshadows his death of a heart attack. Finally, the fact that

his mother gave him a hatchet as a going away gift prepares the reader for Brian's need for a basic tool to survive in the woods.

## Chapter Two

### Summary

At first, Brian is so frightened by his aloneness in this plane without a pilot that he is unable to do anything. His thoughts go back and forth between calling for help, giving the pilot CPR, and trying to figure out what he should do to land the plane. He finally acts by leveling out the plane the way the pilot had shown him. Then, he notes the words on the dash board - Transmitter 221 - and he recognizes the radio. He knows that he has to get the headset off the pilot. In the process of pulling the microphone switch from the pilot's belt, his elbow bumps the wheel, pushes it in, and starts the plane on a shallow dive. He releases the switch, grabs the wheel, and finally levels off once again. He puts on the headset and microphone switch and calls out for help, but no one answers. In his frustration, he pounds and screams on the wheel, causing it to jerk up and.....

## OVERALL ANALYSES

### CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**Brian Robeson** - He is a thirteen year-old boy when the story begins and a thirteen year old man when it ends. He comes to the experience of survival alone in the woods with deep emotional pain over his parents' divorce and little knowledge about how to take care of himself. However, in the fifty-four days that he is missing, he evolves into a mature, more patient, more compassionate young man. Even though the.....

**The Pilot** - Although he appears very little in the story, he represents the unexpected moments in life, when his death forces Brian to learn how to save himself. He seems to be a kind person, and the.....

**Brian's Parents** - They are with Brian all the time in his mind as he learns to survive in the wilderness. His father comes to him in a dream to help him figure out a way to make a fire. His father's hurt and confusion over the divorce is also ever-present in Brian's consciousness. He thinks of his mother when he.....

### PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The story is a narrative told omnisciently about Brian Robeson's fifty-four day survival in the Canadian wilderness after a plane crash. It is told in the motif of a bildungsroman as we view.....

### THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

The theme of **never giving up** is one of the most prevalent themes in that we are shown throughout the story that without hope, life is meaningless. Brian learns this the hard way, but it is what sustains him when he faces the most difficult challenges to his survival. It is an important idea for the reader who.....

Another theme is **perseverance and determination**. This is especially seen in how Brian learns to solve problems that will potentially be life-threatening. He calls upon his intelligence, memory, and youth to overcome such experiences as creating fire, fighting off a moose, building .....

Additional themes are detailed in the complete study guide.

### RISING ACTION

The rising action begins in chapter one when Brian's plane crashes in the Canadian wilderness and he is forced to find a way to survive. It continues with him .....

## FALLING ACTION

The falling action occurs when the plane lands and Brian is rescued. It continues with.....

## POINT OF VIEW

Third-person Omniscient. It is written omnisciently as if viewed by a source outside all the action.

## OTHER ELEMENTS

### FORESHADOWING

There are several other literary devices that pop up at various times in the story. One of the most prevalent ones is **foreshadowing** which frequently presents clues of something that will happen later in the novel. Some examples of foreshadowing include:

- 1.) The fact that the information about Brian's mother is capitalized into the word Secret indicates how devastating this information is for him.
- 2.) The pilot teaching him how to control the plane prepares.....

### IRONY

Another element that is important to note is **irony** – when something happens, or is seen, or is heard that we may know, but the characters do not, or that appears opposite of what is expected. Some examples of irony include:

- 1.) It is ironic that Brian's mother gives him a hatchet as a gift before he leaves, because it is the tool that will mean survival for him.
- 2.) It is ironic that the tornado had somehow, when crossing the lake, changed the.....

### MOTIFS

Another literary device used by the author is **a motif**. This device allows the author to run an important idea throughout the story by using images to create the thought for the reader. There are two motifs used in *Hatchet*:

- 1.) Bildungsroman which is a motif whereby a young boy grows, matures, and comes of age. The reader sees this in the following ways: he saves his own life when he escapes the submerged airplane; he comes to realize he is his own best asset; he learns to build a shelter and find food; he learns that.....

## IMPORTANT QUOTES - QUOTATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The following quotations are important at various points in the story: (Aladdin Paperbacks, New York, New York, 1987):

- 1.) “ ‘All flying is easy. Just takes learning. Like everything else. Like everything else.’ “ (pg. 5; This quote emphasizes what Brian will come to know about survival: everything can be learned.)
- 2.) “If you keep walking back from good luck, he thought, you'll come to bad luck.” (pg. 40; Here, Brian shows his first sense of despair.).....

## SYMBOLISM/MOTIFS/IMAGERY/SYMBOLS

Other elements that are present in this novel are **symbols and metaphors**. Symbols are the use of some unrelated idea to represent something else. Metaphors are direct comparisons made between characters and ideas. There are many symbols and metaphors used by the author such as:

- 1.) Brian's mother sitting in a station wagon with a strange man with blonde hair symbolizes the Secret he can't tell which brings him tremendous pain.

- 2.) The reflection of a large bird flying from the top of the real forest symbolizes that Brian, too, can be free and fly when he accepts that he is responsible for saving himself.....

## IMPORTANT / KEY FACTS SUMMARY

**Title:** Hatchet

**Author:** Gary Paulsen

**Date Published:** 1987

**Meaning of the Title:** It refers to the tool that had been given to him by his mother merely as an observation that he was heading into Canada but which became the most important tool to assure his survival.

**Setting:** Hampton, New York and the forests of northern Canada.

**Protagonist:** Brian Robeson who comes of age after crashing in the Canadian wilderness.

**Antagonist:** The greatest antagonist is the forest and all its dangers, but the other antagonist is Brian himself who must call on all of his strengths and intelligence to survive life in the wilderness.

**Mood:** At times, the mood is just sad as Brian thinks about the Secret that led to his parents' divorce; at other times, it is fearful as he learns to deal with the dangers Nature throws at.....

## STUDY QUESTIONS - MULTIPLE CHOICE QUIZ

- 1.) When the pilot teaches Brian how to control the plane, it is an example of
- deus ex machine
  - foreshadowing
  - irony
- 2.) Brian's reaction to surviving the plane crash is to
- fall asleep
  - scream for help
  - swim back to the plane to save the pilot.....

## ANSWER KEY

1.) b 2.) a 3.) c 4.) b 5.) a 6.) b 7.) c 8.) b 9.) c 10.) a 11.) c 12.) c 13.) a 14.) b 15.) b

## ESSAY TOPICS - BOOK REPORT IDEAS

- 1.) Explain what you think would have happened between Brian and his parents if he had never crashed and why you believe this.
- 2.) What is the Secret and why is it eating at Brian's emotions?  
Explain how Brian's character changes over the fifty-four days he is lost. Give .....

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*END OF SAMPLE MONKEYNOTES EXCERPTS*

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