

A Curriculum Guide to

This Side of Wild

By Gary Paulsen

About the Book

This Side of Wild is a collection of true stories about the dogs, horses, birds, and even snakes who have taught Mr. Paulsen lessons that have enriched his life and deepened his respect and appreciation for animals. Living a life of extreme adventure, Gary Paulsen has completed two Iditarods in Alaska, survived the Minnesota wilderness, and climbed the Bighorn Mountains in Wyoming. And through it all, he has depended on his animals to guard his life, to lead him through deserts and over mountains, and to rescue him when he is in danger. Mr. Paulsen believes that animals know more than humans can even fathom; the stories in this book could make a believer out of you.

Discussion Questions

The questions below correlate to the following Common Core Standards: (SL.4–7.1) (RL.4–7.1) (L.4–7.1, 3)

1. In the introduction, the author realizes “We are never quite alone.” How does this epiphany affect the decisions he makes in his life?
2. In the preface, what two lessons does Gary learn as a result of being “bitten” by a rattlesnake?
3. How does the author describe the work horse he rode when he was a young boy? How did he get injured on the horse?
4. What experiences led Gary to believe that dogs are smarter than horses?
5. What is Gary’s intention when he returns to Alaska? Why does he purchase and clear four acres of land?
6. Why does Corky surprise Gary? How does Corky become an alarm system? How does Corky learn to protect his friend?
7. What is so unique about Mr. Winnike’s dog, Gretchen? How does Mr. Winnike prove to Gary that, in reality, animals train people?
8. What assignment is Gary given when he joins the army? How does Gretchen help him through his training?
9. When Gary meets Lady Brett and her dog, Faulkner, how does their conversation baffle him?

10. How does Louie's dog, Louise, prove to be a hardworker? How does Louise know what to do with the sheep?

11. Why does Louise get angry at Gary? How does Louise show her anger? What is Paulsen's reaction to Louise's anger?

12. How does Gary's horse, Betty, save the life of a jackrabbit? What is Gary's reaction?

13. Why does Gary say ravens are his medicine bird? What evidence does he use to prove his point?

14. What is Gary's opinion about trapping wild animals? What does he consider worse than trapping?

15. How do the ravens attempt to get even with Gary for catching one of them in a trap? What could it have cost him?

Extension Activities

Life Lessons Learned

This activity correlates to the following Common Core Standards: (W.4–7.3) (L.4–7.1, 2, 3)

Throughout the book, Gary shares lessons he has learned about animals, himself, and life. In small groups, ask students to make a list of eight lessons Gary has learned from his animals and to provide a short synopsis of the events that led to that lesson. Then have each student reflect on a lesson that they have learned from an animal and to write a personal narrative telling the story behind the lesson. Have students share their narratives with their small group and post the narratives in the classroom.

Getting to the Heart of the Matter

This activity correlates to the following Common Core Standards: (RL.4–7.1, 2) (SL.4–7.1)

This Side of Wild is a collection of true stories about events that occurred in the life of Gary Paulsen. On a 4 x 6 card, ask students to name one of the true stories, to write a thematic statement for the story, and then to list supporting details from the book that support the thematic statement. In small groups, have students compare and discuss their thematic statements and details. Then post the cards on a classroom bulletin board.

Are Animals Smarter than Humans?

This activity correlates to the following Common Core Standards: (RL.4–7.1) (SL.4–7.4) (W.4–7.1, 7)

Gary and many of the people he meets in his travels think that dogs are smarter than people. Gary, Mr. Winnike, Brette Howard, and Louie all convey some truth about the intelligence of their dogs. Ask students to reread the sections about these people and to determine their opinion on the question, "Are dogs smarter than humans?" Then, divide the class into four groups, two

“yes” and two “no” groups, and allow each group to find support for their claim using clear reasons and evidence from the book. Arrange for the groups to participate in a panel discussion for their class and other classes and grade levels within the school.

Birds of a Feather

This activity correlates to the following Common Core Standards: (W.4–7.2, 7) (L.4–7.1, 2, 3)

The ravens appear to seek revenge on Gary for inadvertently catching one of their own in a trap. Ask students to research ravens to determine if they have the intelligence to seek revenge.

Working in small groups, have students create raven mini posters, raven fact or trading cards, or a display with visuals and facts as they answer the question: “Do ravens have the intelligence to seek revenge?” Have each group present their findings and visuals to the class.

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