

# Hatchet Wilderness Survival

Environmental Education Lesson Plan  
Edwards Camp and Conference Center

## Summary:

This is an in depth discussion of a survival situation in a wilderness setting, following the themes of Hatchet by Gary Paulsen. The students will learn about the basics of survival including shelter, water, fire, and food gathering. The students will be delving into the deeper themes of the book including the reasons behind the choices that Brian made and the results of those choices.

## Objectives:

- Review the story of Hatchet with hands on activities
- Talk about why Brian made the choices that helped him stay alive.
- Describe ways humans are dependent on the natural environment (forests, water, clean air, Earth materials)
- Make purposeful observation of the natural world using the appropriate senses.
- Describe how heat is produced through electricity, rubbing, and burning.

## Class Set-up:

- Check all class materials

## Overview:

This class is designed to review the book Hatchet and to cover issues about survival in the wilderness. At each step the instructor should discuss Brian's journey, and state of mind, as well as alternative ways of survival.

This is not just a review of the book but also a chance for the students to step inside the choices Brian Robeson made and think about how they would act in his situation.

## Introduction: (10 min)

Today we are going to explore the world of Brian Robeson from Hatchet. Brian was placed in a survival situation when he was stranded alone in the Canadian Wilderness for 54 days after a plane crash.

"When did Brian realize that he was in a survival situation?"

"What other situations could put in a survival situation?"

"How do you think that Brian felt when he was thrown into his situation?"

## Stop, Notice Surroundings (2 min)

"What is the first thing you should do in a survival situation?"

*Remain Calm and look at your surroundings to make sure you are safe.*

## Water (10 min)

"After Brian woke up underneath the tree what was the first thing that he had to find?"

*Water*

"We are very lucky here in Wisconsin just like Brian that we have lots of water around us, what are some concerns that we could have about the water though?"

*We need to purify the water*

"What are some ways to purify the water?"

*Boiling, filtering, purification tablets, solar still, collecting rain, and collecting rain.*

### **Stay Motivated – Positive Mental Attitude** (3 min)

"After taking care of the immediate things, like water, in order to survive he had to 'STAY MOTIVATED.' Why is that important in a survival situation?"

*Staying motivated or having a "Positive Mental Attitude (PMA)" can make all the difference in a survival situation.*

### **Take Stock of Materials - Got / Haven't Got** (5 minutes)

"Next Brian had to go through the materials that he had to help him survive. What did he have on him?"

*Money, fingernail clippers, the hatchet, tennis shoes, socks, jeans, underwear, leather belt, t-shirt, torn windbreaker, HIMSELF.*

### **Getting Food** (15 min)

"Brian then had to find some food to keep himself alive, what types of food did he eat during the story?"

- *Found – Gut Cherries (Choke Cherries), Raspberries, Turtle Eggs*
- *Caught – Fish, Fool birds (ruffed grouse)*

"What types of food could we find around here?"

*Berries, Greens, Animals, Mushrooms, Pine needles, many others*

Allow the students time to look around the surrounding area to find objects that they think are edible. **Be very careful to explain to them not to eat anything unless you tell them that it is alright to eat.** Remind them of the Gut Cherries.

### **Shelter Building** (20 min)

"Brian built a shelter to make the wilderness "safer" or more livable. What type of shelter did he make?" *Debris Shelter*

"Why would a shelter be important in a survival situation?"

*To protect from the rain, wind, cold, sun, animals, and anything else.*

What did Brian use to build his shelter?"

*A natural rock formation and long dead branches.*

"What might you be able to find in nature to use as a shelter?"

*caves, hollow logs, rock overhangs, snow cavern, low branches on an evergreen*

"What could you use from around here to construct a shelter?"

*sticks, leaves, bark, snow, trees, branches*

Break students into groups of 4-5 and emphasize that they discuss the location and style of shelter they want to build before beginning the work.

Explain that all debris used for shelter building should be "DEAD, DOWN, AND BROWN". This being dead, on the ground (down), and brown. **Students should be cautioned about moving large trees or logs** and should be careful to **not throw sticks** about them as they are building.

Students must choose a location where you can see them, ask your adult leaders to help you walk around keeping everybody on task and asking questions to help them think out what they are doing.

### **Danger Awareness** (5 min)

"What dangers did Brian face in the wilderness?"

*Moose, weather, bear, porcupine, skunk, illness, and injuries.*

"What dangers could you face if you were in a survival situation in this area?"

*Weather, illness, injuries,*

### **Fire Building** (20 min)

"After his encounter with the porcupine, what did Brian decide he needed?"

*Fire*

"How did Brian start his fire?"

*Sparks from his Hatchet*

"Today you are going to have the chance to try and start a fire like Brian did"

Divide the group up into small groups of 2 to 3 students in order to try to start fires in an area that you designate after clearing the area of burnable materials and digging a small ditch to contain the fire.

The students will need to scout for materials to use in their fires, tell them that they should not use any materials larger in diameter than their arms.

After the students have collected materials for their fires demonstrate the flint and steel as well as the fire strikers.

Let them try to start the fires for a good while and then start a fire and have them help feed the fire.

"What are some benefits of a fire?"

*Light, warmth, signals, cooking, and PMA.*

"What are the costs of a fire?"

*Time and energy go into building and maintain the fire.*

**Make sure that all fires are thoroughly extinguished before leaving the area.**

### **Planning for Rescue** (5 min)

“With a fire and a shelter going, Brian could turn to thoughts of being rescued. What things could Brian have done to help in his rescue?”

*Signal fire, mirrors, signs, or others.*

**Rule of Three** – A repeating sequence of three is an international signal for help, such as three whistles or gunshots repeating.

### **Saving Food** (5 min)

“As Brian became comfortable in his surroundings he could plan ahead. What types of things could he do to prepare?”

*Build stronger shelter, save food, hunt larger game.*

“Why could it be important to save food?”

*To prepare if you become ill or injured. To take time away from the constant hunting and gathering.*

### **Physical and Mental Changes** (5 min)

“As Brian was going through his time in the wilderness he had many changes in his thinking and behavior that helped him to survive his ordeal. What were these changes?”

### **Survival Kit** (10 min)

Bring out the survival kit and show it to the students.

Talk about the survival kit that Brian found in the plane at the end of the book.

“How did finding the survival kit towards the end of the book change Brian’s situation?”

### **Conclusion** (5 min)

Review the basics of survival kit.

“What is the most useful new skill you learned?”

Remind them to tell someone where they are going anytime they are hiking or camping.

### **Class Tear-Down:**

- Make sure the students grab everything out of the woods–leave no trace!
- Replace the steel wool and anything else you might have used
- Return the pack away.