

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Haymeadow

by
Gary Paulsen

Book Information

Gary Paulsen, The Haymeadow
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195 Pages
Book Level: 5.4
Interest Level: UG

Fourteen-year-old John comes of age and gains self-reliance during the summer he spends up in the Wyoming mountains tending his father's herd of sheep.

Award: Spur Award/Finalist

Topics: Animals, Sheep; English in a Flash Recommended List, Library 3, Chapter 10, 90%; Family Life, Growing Up; Natural Environments, Mountains; Recommended Reading, YALSA Popular Paperbacks; U.S. States/Regions, Wyoming

Main Characters

Cynthia Barron John's deceased mother

Horace Cawley a thirty-five-year-old hired hand on the Barron ranch who takes John out to the haymeadow

John Barron the principal character of the story; a fourteen-year-old boy who matures tremendously while he tends sheep alone at a haymeadow for the summer

John's father, John Barron an honest, hardworking man of few words who mourns his wife's death and tries to raise his son the best he knows how

John's great-grandfather, John Barron the man whom John idolizes for having claimed a huge tract of land in Wyoming for himself at a young age; John finally finds out that his great-grandfather was an evil man

Tinckner (Tink) an old hand on the ranch who knew John's great-grandfather; Tink is diagnosed with terminal cancer but recovers with treatment

Vocabulary

carnage a massacre; a massive slaughter

farrier a person who shoes horses

fodder livestock feed

posse a group of people organized by a sheriff to help in law enforcement or search efforts

vertigo a dizzy sensation

Synopsis

John Barron has just turned fourteen and is irritated that nothing has changed for him. He lives on a large ranch settled long ago by his great-grandfather, John Barron, who, as legend has it, came West at the age of eighteen and single-handedly settled and defended his 960,000 acre claim against all other settlers. Young John resents the fact that the ranch, supposedly lost by the Barrons to bad debts, is now used for sheep rather than cattle and is owned by eastern corporations. He lives on the ranch with his widowed father and two ranch hands, Tinckner and Cawley. Change comes abruptly for John, however, when his father returns from town and announces Tinckner has cancer. His father plans to stay in town to support Tinckner, so John must now watch six thousand sheep up in the haymeadow in the mountains for the summer -- alone.

As John and Cawley prepare for the sheep drive up to the haymeadow, John expresses his insecurities to Cawley. Cawley reassures him, saying John's father did the same job at fifteen. John finds some strength in thinking about his great-grandfather, whom he idolizes. He convinces himself his great-grandfather would have had more time for him and would have cared more about him than his father, who rarely talks to him. Accompanying Cawley and John on the drive are four border collies and two horses. They arrive at the beautiful haymeadow without incident, and Cawley leaves the next morning.

John encounters one disaster after another. He battles a rattlesnake; he is nearly drowned and loses his gear in a flash flood; he confronts marauding coyotes; and he is nearly killed by a bear. After more than a month, John gradually learns to deal with injuries and death and learns the lesson that things

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are not in his control. He feels he has conquered loneliness.

When John sees his father coming with new supplies several weeks later, he realizes he has missed him. At the campfire that evening, John's father is the most talkative he has ever been. He shares the story of how he met John's mother and expresses some concern over John's worship of his great-grandfather. His father tells him the real story of the man. He reveals that he was a cold-blooded murderer. The next day when his father is set to leave, John says he wishes he could stay. His father feels the same, but says the ranch responsibilities call him home. He leaves, but shortly thereafter, turns around and joins his son for the rest of the summer so they can continue to get to know one another.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Why does John put so much emphasis on oiling the saddle, cleaning the rifle, and checking the dogs?

These are essentials for him if he is to carry out his responsibilities and survive up in the haymeadow. A saddle is expensive and made of leather. If it is not oiled, it will crack and become useless when exposed to the elements. It is an important tool of the rancher, as is the rifle. When John is without his rifle, the coyotes virtually have free reign. He needs it ready and clean if it is to be helpful to him. The dogs need to be in good health if they are to do a good job of controlling and protecting the sheep. They will ignore their pain in order to work, so John must see to it that they get their proper food and rest.

Literary Analysis

What statement about adolescents does Paulsen communicate through this book?

Paulsen indirectly makes many positive statements about teenagers. Through the character of John he shows a young man hungry for change, somewhat doubtful of his abilities, but willing to face his responsibilities and grow through the process. He shows a tender side of a youth who wants someone to admire, who wants a parent to care, and who can cope with the truth even though it may not be pleasant.

Inferential Comprehension

What does John realize about his father at the end of the story?

Because John's father comes back to spend the last weeks at the haymeadow with his son, John realizes he has been wrong about his father for many years. His father does care about him and has a lot of things to share with him and teach him. His father shares with him some beautiful new stories about his mother and his birth. He sees his father as vulnerable and loving. He also realizes that his father raised him the best he knew how after suffering a hard loss himself and struggling with the worry of a troubled family history.

Constructing Meaning

If you knew you had to spend three months alone somewhere without modern conveniences and electricity, what would you take along to pass the time when you did not need to work?

Answers will be as varied as the interests of the students. Responses might include books, journals, cards, models, puzzles, games, and art supplies. Encourage the students to be specific and tell why they chose a particular item.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Details Border collies are highly intelligent animals used to herd animals, but other breeds are trained for other purposes, such as

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flushing and retrieving of game, searching, or guiding. Have the students choose one of the purposes and learn how a dog is trained for that task. The students can research these techniques in books. If possible, the students should observe dogs at obedience school to see training in action. The students can then give a demonstration to their class showing the signals or commands used in training a dog.

Comparing and Contrasting The old man, John Barron, was a legend to young John, but he had heard only part of the story about him until his father told him the truth. Many of the legends of folk heroes are based on an actual person but are greatly exaggerated. Students should choose a legendary figure and compare and contrast the legend with the actual biographical history of that person. Students can chart the differences and similarities on a poster.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning The story contains many examples of figurative language, such as the tightly bunched herd of sheep looking like a gray carpet. Ask the students to review the story and choose two or three other figurative expressions and explain in what way each of the items being compared is similar.

Recognizing Plot The plot of *The Haymeadow* takes a number of twists and turns with alternately rising and falling action. Ask the students to make a plot diagram of the story. Starting at the beginning, plot the storyline labeling the incidents causing the rise and fall in tension. Also plot the climax and the resolution of the story.