

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Transall Saga by Gary Paulsen

Book Information

Gary Paulsen, The Transall Saga
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While backpacking in the desert, Mark falls into a tube of blue light and is transported into a more primitive world, where he must use his knowledge and skills to survive.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books

Topics: Adventure, Survival; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8; Recommended Reading, Children's Literature Choice; Recommended Reading, YALSA Quick Picks for Reluctant YA; Science Fiction, Time Travel

Main Characters

Barow Meehan's inquisitive younger brother; he gives Mark the bottom of a Coca-Cola bottle, which makes Mark realize he is still on Earth

Dagon the leader of the Tsook tribe who captures Mark and Leeta; he is also Meehan's father and makes Mark an equal when Mark saves the Tsook village from the Rawhaz cannibals

Francle a member of the outlaw camp near Listra who is known for stealing animals; he helps to attack the Merkon's stronghold and to warn Mark of Mordo's plan to seek revenge

Leeta the primitive girl who forms a friendship with Mark after he saves her from the Howling Thing

Mark Harrison (Kakon) the adolescent boy who falls through a light tube into the future while he is out hiking; he is a survivalist and a humanitarian

Meehan the proud daughter of Dagon, who falls in love with Mark

Mordo the vengeful son of the Merkon; he is tricked into a mud trap by Mark when he tracks Mark down and tries to kill him

Pet the last of the keepers responsible for passing the history of Transall down from one generation to the next; the people of Trisad consider him insane, and his great age makes it difficult for Mark to get much information from him

Roan the outlaw who helps Mark get into the Merkon's stronghold so that Mark can confront the Merkon and Roan can plunder the Merkon's treasure

Sarbo the proud and loyal Tsook warrior who goes with Mark to Trisad

Short Man an unsavory acquaintance of Sarbo who houses Mark and Sarbo when they come to Trisad; he is also Yonk's master

the Merkon a manipulative and power-hungry criminal who escaped to Transall from roughly the same time period as Mark; he has become a powerful ruler in Transall

Tukha Leeta's brother, who is killed in a raid after he makes sure that Mark stays in a safe place while the raid is taking place

Willie the monkey-bear who befriends Mark when Mark first comes to Transall

Yonk the talkative slave of the Short Man; he escapes with Mark after warning that Mark is wanted

Vocabulary

barren lacking vegetation

lean-to a simple shelter with a sloped roof

options choices

refuge a safe place

shaman a spiritual leader who uses magic to heal

unruly out of control, wild

Synopsis

While hiking and camping in the desert, thirteen-year-old Mark Harrison investigates and photographs a strange fireball and light tube. While studying the light tube, he is bitten by a rattlesnake and falls through the strange blue tube. Mark awakens in the jungle of a hostile new world and spends many weeks learning to survive. When he finds an arrow, he knows there are other people

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somewhere in his new environment.

While searching for the arrow makers, Mark saves someone from a vicious dog-like creature. The person runs away, but a few days later, Mark finds a group of girls while he is scouting the area. He recognizes the one he saved, so he follows them. He finally manages to speak with the girl, whose name is Leeta, but then her leader clubs him. When Mark awakens, he finds he is free to wander Leeta's primitive village and realizes that Leeta has explained to the villagers that he saved her life.

During his stay Mark makes friends with Leeta, but he decides to leave when he sees the tribesmen burn another village. As Mark departs, he realizes his own village is being attacked by a group of warriors. He tries to help Leeta and is enslaved, along with most of the village, by the Tsook people. When Leeta is injured he protects her from the Tsook.

When they arrive at the Tsook village, Dagon, the leader of the village, claims Mark as a slave. Mark tries to run away, but he is shot with an arrow and is fitted with a steel band around his ankle attached by a chain to a heavy iron bar to prevent future attempts to escape. While he is healing he gets to know Dagon's daughter, Mekaan.

When Dagon and the other warriors leave the village, Mark escapes again. He has just broken off the iron bar when he sees the Rawhaz, a cannibalistic tribe, heading toward the village. Mark's affection for Leeta forces him to warn the villagers. While Mark is searching for the Tsook warriors to warn them, the Rawhaz attack and injure him. Just as the Rawhaz descend on him to kill him, Dagon and his men arrive and save Mark. The men return to the village, but he is too hurt to travel with them.

The next morning, Mark discovers he has been freed from slavery as a reward for his bravery. He is given his own home, and a feast is planned in his honor. Now treated as an equal, Mark forms friendships with Mekaan and Sarbo, the second in command of all the village. The ruler of the Tsook

tribe, a man called the Merkon, attends Mark's feast.

Throughout his time in Transall, as the Tsook call their world, Mark has been quietly searching for the blue light tube, hoping that will help him return home. The Merkon tells Mark that a shaman in the city of Trisad may be able to help him. He offers to take Mark there after the feast.

At the feast Mark is given many gifts, but when Mekaan's brother gives Mark the bottom of a Coca-Cola bottle, Mark finally realizes that he has traveled into the Earth's future. He is more determined than ever to find the blue light, and Sarbo insists on going with him when the Merkon takes him to Trisad.

On the way to Trisad, the Merkon disappears when the travelers are ambushed. Sarbo and Mark continue to Trisad. There they meet a trader whose slave, Yonk, comes to warn them that Mark is a wanted man. Yonk also takes them to an ancient man who tells Mark about the disease that destroyed Mark's civilization. Mark and Sarbo leave to find the Merkon in hopes of discovering information that will lead to the location of the blue light, and they take Yonk with them. As they are crossing the desert to find the Merkon, a desert tribe captures the three. Sarbo is badly injured, and after they all escape, Sarbo and Yonk go home.

Now alone, Mark continues his search. He is stopped by an outlaw named Roan. Roan reveals that the Merkon is not an ally, but rather it is he who wants Mark captured. Roan takes Mark to his camp, where Mark, Roan, and Roan's fellow outlaws discuss a plan to attack the Merkon's stronghold. Mark realizes such an attack will probably fail, so he suggests a more cunning plan that will allow them to enter the stronghold unimpeded. The outlaws want to rob the Merkon, so Mark suggests they pretend to turn Mark in to him. Once inside the stronghold, the outlaws plunder the treasure while Mark confronts the Merkon. The Merkon explains to Mark that he also traveled through the blue light, a time warp that appears sporadically. He also explains that the present civilization in Transall slowly developed after

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an Ebola-like virus and a nuclear war decimated the population and the landscape. An escaped convict from Earth's past, the Merkon sees Mark as a threat to his power. Mark fights him and severely wounds him.

After the confrontation, Mark travels back to Dagon's village. He realizes that he cannot hope to find the blue light and return to his past, so he decides to marry Mekaan. His plans are interrupted, though, when the Merkon's son, Mordo, and his army come to avenge the Merkon. Mark leads the army into the jungle where he first lived in Transall. He kills Mordo and most of his men, but he forgets about Mordo's scouts. Just as the scouts are about to kill him, the blue light resurfaces and Mark falls through to his own time.

Twenty years later, Mark is seen struggling to find a cure for the terrible virus before it destroys the Earth's population.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

After Sarbo tells Mark why the Samatins resent the Merkon, Mark says, "Sounds like bigotry is still alive and well on this planet." What does he mean?

Throughout his time in Transall, Mark is disturbed by the attitude of the Tsook regarding other people. He dislikes the slavery system and the concept that there are "nonpersons." When Sarbo says that the Samatins are not to be considered part of the Tsook people and, therefore, do not have the same rights as the Tsook, Mark is annoyed. He feels that Sarbo's explanation of why there is conflict between the Merkon and the Samatins is only another example of the racism he has repeatedly witnessed in Transall. He is also frustrated that racism seems to be one of the few cultural traits that survived the meltdown of his civilization.

Literary Analysis

What are some of the themes the author communicates in this story?

The author uses Mark to illustrate several themes. When Mark first comes to Transall, the author shows that it is important to be able to adapt to new situations by showing how Mark applies his general knowledge of wilderness survival to the strange environment in Transall. When Mark encounters the Tsook, the author uses Mark's horror at the Tsook's social system to show that racism and bigotry are wrong, but the author also shows that Mark can find good in this society. The author also uses the Merkon to illustrate the results of abuse of power. Finally, Mark repeatedly models self-sacrificing behavior, which shows the importance of protecting others even if it means putting oneself at risk.

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Inferential Comprehension

Leeta tells Mark that a shaman claimed "what came from the light would have the power to destroy our world." How does the shaman's prophecy come true?

Both the Merkon and Mark travel through the blue light tube to Transall and both have the power to destroy Transall by taking advantage of their superior knowledge. Although the Merkon managed to unite the Tsook people, his need for power and desire to control the people is already causing dissension when Mark attacks him. The Samatins resent the Merkon's policies, and the possibility for war is evident. There are also the outlaw bands composed of people branded by the Merkon, who operate outside the Merkon's rules. Even Sarbo and Dagon's village do not seem particularly loyal to the Merkon and possess the potential to join a war against him and his children if the stakes are high enough, as shown by their willingness to attack Mordo when he comes to the village looking for Mark. All these factors show that the possibility of a massive war is on the horizon when Mark overthrows the Merkon. The other way that the shaman's prophecy has the potential to come true is that if Mark successfully finds a cure for the virus, Transall, as Leeta knows it, will probably never exist. Since the virus was the catalyst for the destruction of modern civilization, the destruction of the virus will prevent the breakdown of society described in this story.

Constructing Meaning

When Mark first comes through the light tunnel, he says he feels "like Alice in Wonderland." What does he mean by this?

In part, Mark is inspired to say this because he has just fallen through a tunnel into a strange and confusing land. Like Alice, he is unsure what he should do or how he should act. He also feels lonely and homesick and has no clue how to return home.

many unique locations in this story that require a great deal of imagination to envision. Have each of the students choose one of these settings and create an interpretation of the author's description. Encourage the use of a wide variety of media for the project, such as pen and ink, pencil, water color, oil paint, etc. Display completed illustrations around the classroom.

Comparing and Contrasting Have the students read excerpts describing the world of the future from H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* and then prompt a classroom discussion about the similarities and differences between Gary Paulsen's and Wells's ideas of the future.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning When Mark first encounters Leeta's people, he does not understand their language. Have the students examine the passages in which the people are speaking to Mark and try to assign meaning to what the people are saying by creating a rough translation of their words.

Describing Actions or Events Many explorers record their adventures to strange lands in a log. Have the students choose a character from the story and have them create a log of their chosen character's adventures in Transall. While students should focus on the events of the book, they may choose to invent some of the information.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The narrator describes