



## *Pushing the Limits of Survival*

### Suggested Reading and Discussion Questions

This theme explores the fundamental urge to survive and how it has manifested in society in the past and today. Issues to consider in group discussions include the ways in which we strive for the survival of the planet, of our families, and as individuals.

#### *Hatchet*

**Gary Paulsen, Fiction-Young Adult.** Thirteen-year-old Brian Robeson, haunted by his secret knowledge of his mother's infidelity, is traveling by single-engine plane to visit his father for the first time since the divorce. When the plane crashes killing the pilot...He is alone in the Canadian wilderness with nothing but his clothing, a tattered windbreaker, and the hatchet his mother had given him as a present....At first consumed by despair and self-pity, Brian slowly learns survival skills—how to make a shelter for himself, how to hunt and fish and forage for food, how to make a fire—and even finds the courage to start over from scratch when a tornado ravages his campsite. When Brian is finally rescued after fifty-four days in the wild, he emerges from his ordeal with new patience and maturity, and a greater understanding of himself and his parents. *Amazon.com*

- *Hatchet* is a coming-of-age story—in the extreme. Once rescued and returned to civilization, how has Brian's survival experience changed him? In what way is he a different boy than the one who stepped on the plane at the beginning of the story?
- What inner traits does Brian develop to survive in the wilderness? To which of those qualities do you most attribute his survival? Do other creatures (besides humans) have the ability to develop new skills or traits to survive?
- How does Brian's relationship to nature change during this novel? What lessons does he learn about the natural world? How did he use experimentation to learn about the world around him? Is that a good way to learn new things?

