

from **Woodsong**
Memoir by Gary Paulsen

Does nature demand **RESPECT?**

COMMON CORE

RI 4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text.

RI 6 Determine an author's purpose and explain how it is conveyed in the text.

RI 10 Read and comprehend literary nonfiction.

Nature can be a powerful force. It might be a thunderstorm rumbling in the night, a wave crashing onto the beach, or a lion's mighty roar. In *Woodsong*, Gary Paulsen shares a lesson he learned about respect for nature.

QUICKWRITE Think about your most memorable or intense encounter with nature. Describe this experience in a journal entry. What did you learn from the experience?



Meet the Author

● TEXT ANALYSIS: NARRATIVE NONFICTION

Woodsong is a type of narrative nonfiction called a **memoir**, in which the writer tells true life stories. Writers of narrative nonfiction use many of the same literary elements that are found in fiction, such as

- a **conflict**, or struggle between opposing forces
- **suspense**, or the anxious curiosity you feel about what happens next
- **imagery**, or words and phrases that appeal to your senses

As you read, notice how the writer explains the conflict, builds suspense, and creates vivid scenes with imagery.

● READING SKILL: IDENTIFY AUTHOR'S PURPOSE

A writer's main reason for writing is called the **author's purpose**. For example, a writer might write to

- explain or provide information about a topic or event
- share thoughts or feelings about an issue or event
- persuade people to think or act in a certain way
- entertain the reader with a moving story

As you read, use a chart to record clues about Paulsen's main purpose for writing this memoir.

Author's Purpose			
Explain/Inform	Share Thoughts	Persuade	Entertain
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

▲ VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

For each numbered word or phrase, choose the word from the list that is closest in meaning.

WORD LIST	coherent	hibernation	scavenge
	eject	novelty	truce

- | | | |
|--------------|-------------------|-------------|
| 1. throw out | 3. find leftovers | 5. sensible |
| 2. agreement | 4. new thing | 6. sleep |

Gary Paulsen

born 1939

Into the Woods

For Gary Paulsen, the woods were often an escape from an unhappy home in a small Minnesota town. According to Paulsen, "all the hassles of life were very quickly forgotten" in the woods. His wilderness adventures and love of nature appear in much of his work.

Another Escape

Paulsen discovered the joy of reading during his teenage years. One very cold night, he ducked into a public library to warm up. The librarian offered him a library card and recommended a book. Paulsen discovered that books, like the woods, provided a way for him to get away from it all, explore new worlds, and learn about himself.

Back to Nature

In his book *Woodsong*, Paulsen describes his life in the woods of northern Minnesota. In this region, people are scarce, but wild animals are plentiful. It is home to timber wolves, white-tailed deer, beavers, and black bears. Paulsen lived there with his wife and son in a cabin with no plumbing or electricity. During this time, Paulsen raised dogs and trained for the Iditarod, the famous trans-Alaska dogsled race.



Author
Online



Go to thinkcentral.com.
KEYWORD: HML6-115



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

Woodsong



Gary Paulsen

Analyze Visuals ►

Examine the painting closely. What do you see?

scavenge (skāv'ənj) v.
to search for discarded scraps

A NARRATIVE NONFICTION

Reread lines 1–14. What imagery does Paulsen use to depict life at the edge of the wilderness?

We have bear trouble. Because we feed processed meat to the dogs, there is always the smell of meat over the kennel. In the summer it can be a bit high¹ because the dogs like to “save” their food sometimes for a day or two or four—burying it to dig up later. We live on the edge of wilderness, and consequently the meat smell brings any number of visitors from the woods.

Skunks abound, and foxes and coyotes and wolves and weasels—all predators. We once had an eagle live over the kennel for more than a week, **scavenging** from the dogs, and a crazy group of ravens has pretty
10 much taken over the puppy pen. Ravens are protected by the state, and they seem to know it. When I walk toward the puppy pen with the buckets of meat, it's a toss-up to see who gets it—the pups or the birds. They have actually pecked the puppies away from the food pans until they have gone through and taken what they want. **A**

1. **it can be a bit high:** the smell can be rather strong.





Golden Autumn (1901), Stanislav Joukovski. Oil on canvas, 87.5 cm × 107.5 cm. Museum of Art, Serpukhov, Russia. © Bridgeman Art Library.

◀ Analyze Visuals

What **details** in the painting suggest that the house is in the wilderness?

Spring, when the bears come, is the worst. They have been in **hibernation** through the winter, and they are hungry beyond caution. The meat smell draws them like flies, and we frequently have two or three around the kennel at the same time. Typically they do not bother us much—although my wife had a bear chase her from the garden to the house one morning—but they
20 do bother the dogs.

hibernation
(hī'bər-nā'shən) *n.* the state of being inactive through the winter

They are so big and strong that the dogs fear them, and the bears trade on this fear to get their food. It's common to see them scare a dog into his house and take his food. Twice we have had dogs killed by rough bear swats that broke their necks—and the bears took their food.

We have evolved an uneasy peace with them, but there is the problem of familiarity. The first time you see a bear in the kennel it is a **novelty**, but when the same ones are there day after day, you wind up naming some of them (old Notch-Ear, Billy-Jo, etc.). There gets to be a too-relaxed attitude. We started to treat them like pets.

novelty (nŏv'əl-tē) *n.* something new and unusual

30 A major mistake. **B**

There was a large male around the kennel for a week or so. He had a white streak across his head, which I guessed was a wound scar from some hunter—bear hunting is allowed here. He wasn't all that bad, so we didn't mind him. He would frighten the dogs and take their hidden stashes now and then, but he didn't harm them, and we became accustomed to him hanging around. We called him Scarhead, and now and again we would joke about him as if he were one of the yard animals.

B NARRATIVE NONFICTION

Reread lines 15–30. At what point are you excited or anxious about what happens next? Note the details that create suspense.

At this time we had three cats, forty-two dogs, fifteen or twenty chickens, eight ducks, nineteen large white geese, a few banty hens . . .
40 ten fryers which we'd raised from chicks and couldn't (as my wife put it) "snuff and eat," and six woods-wise goats.

The bears, strangely, didn't bother any of the yard animals. There must have been a rule, or some order to the way they lived, because they would hit the kennel and steal from the dogs but leave the chickens and goats and other yard stock completely alone—although you would have had a hard time convincing the goats of this fact. The goats spent a great deal of time with their back hair up, whuffing and blowing snot at the bears—and at the dogs, who would *gladly* have eaten them. The goats never really believed in the **truce**. **C**

50 **T**here is not a dump or landfill to take our trash to, and so we separate it—organic, inorganic²—and deal with it ourselves. We burn the paper in a screened enclosure, and it is fairly efficient; but it's impossible to get all the food particles off wrapping paper, so when it's burned, the food particles burn with it.

And give off a burnt food smell.

And nothing draws bears like burning food. It must be that they have learned to understand human dumps—where they spend a great deal of time foraging. And they learn amazingly fast. In Alaska, for instance, the bears already know that the sound of a moose hunter's gun means there
60 will be a fresh gut pile when the hunter cleans the moose. They come at a run when they hear the shot. It's often a close race to see if the hunter will get to the moose before the bears take it away. . . . **D**

Because we're on the south edge of the wilderness area, we try to wait until there is a northerly breeze before we burn, so the food smell will carry south, but it doesn't always help. Sometimes bears, wolves, and other predators are already south, working the sheep farms down where it is more settled—they take a terrible toll³ of sheep—and we catch them on the way back through.

That's what happened one July morning. **E**

70 Scarhead had been gone for two or three days, and the breeze was right, so I went to burn the trash. I fired it off and went back into the house for a moment—not more than two minutes. When I came back out, Scarhead was in the burn area. His tracks (directly through the tomatoes in the garden) showed he'd come from the south.

truce (trōōs) *n.* an agreement to end an argument or fight

C NARRATIVE NONFICTION

Reread lines 42–49. What conflicts exist between the animals?

D AUTHOR'S PURPOSE

Reread lines 56–62. Why do you think Paulsen wants you to know these facts about bears?

E NARRATIVE NONFICTION

Look back at lines 30, 55, and 69. How does Paulsen build suspense by using single sentence paragraphs? Why is this an effective technique?

2. **organic, inorganic:** *Organic* refers to plant or animal material that breaks down naturally. *Inorganic* refers to man-made material that will not break down naturally.

3. **take a terrible toll:** destroy a large number.

He was having a grand time. The fire didn't bother him. He was trying to reach a paw in around the edges of flame to get at whatever smelled so good. He had torn things apart quite a bit—ripped one side off the burn enclosure—and I was having a bad day, and it made me mad.

I was standing across the burning fire from him, and without
80 thinking—because I was so used to him—I picked up a stick, threw it at him, and yelled, “Get out of here.” ♦

I have made many mistakes in my life, and will probably make many more, but I hope never to throw a stick at a bear again.

In one rolling motion—the muscles seemed to move within the skin so fast that I couldn't take half a breath—he turned and came for me.



COMMON CORE L5

Language Coach

Multiple-Meaning

Words *Bit* is an example of a multiple-meaning word, or a word with more than one meaning. In line 77, *bit* means “a small amount.” The word *bit* is also the past tense of the word *bite* and can mean “cut off with teeth.” Reread lines 75–78 and identify at least two more multiple-meaning words.

GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT

Read the sentence beginning “I was standing . . .” on line 79. Notice the writer uses correct pronoun-antecedent agreement. The singular pronoun *it* agrees with the noun *stick*.

Analyze Visuals

What words would you use to describe the bear in this work of art?

Close. I could smell his breath and see the red around the sides of his eyes. Close on me he stopped and raised on his back legs and hung over me, his forelegs and paws hanging down, weaving back and forth gently as he took his time and decided whether or not to tear my head off. **F**

- 90 I could not move, would not have time to react. I knew I had nothing to say about it. One blow would break my neck. Whether I lived or died depended on him, on his thinking, on his ideas about me—whether I was worth the bother or not.

I did not think then.

Looking back on it, I don't remember having one coherent thought when it was happening. All I knew was terrible menace. His eyes looked very small as he studied me. He looked down on me for what seemed hours. I did not move, did not breathe, did not think or do anything.

And he lowered.


- 100 Perhaps I was not worth the trouble. He lowered slowly and turned back to the trash, and I walked backward halfway to the house and then ran—anger growing now—and took the rifle from the gun rack by the door and came back out.

He was still there, rummaging through the trash. I worked the bolt and fed a cartridge in and aimed at the place where you kill bears and began to squeeze. In raw anger, I began to take up the four pounds of pull necessary to send death into him.

And stopped.

Kill him for what?

- 110 That thought crept in.
Kill him for what?

For not killing me? For letting me know it is wrong to throw sticks at four-hundred-pound bears? For not hurting me, for not killing me, I should kill him? I lowered the rifle and ejected the shell and put the gun away. I hope Scarhead is still alive. For what he taught me, I hope he lives long and is very happy, because I learned then—looking up at him while he made up his mind whether or not to end me—that when it is all boiled down, I am nothing more and nothing less than any other animal in the woods.  **G**

**F NARRATIVE
NONFICTION**

Reread lines 84–89.

What imagery helps you understand what it's like to be in Paulsen's shoes?

coherent (kō-hîr'ənt) *adj.*
clear; logical

eject (ĭ-jěkt') *v.* to throw out from inside

**G AUTHOR'S
PURPOSE**

What does Paulsen now think about his place in nature? Identify the line that tells you this.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE Gary Paulsen's love of nature is not limited to the wilderness. In this article, based on an interview with Caroline Scott, Paulsen describes a typical day on his sailboat, on which he lives alone most of the year.

Section 4

C4

A Life in the Day of Gary Paulsen

At 5:30 A.M. I have a bowl of oatmeal, then I go to work. First up, I stow all the gear away. Then I take the covers off the sails and fire the engine up to get out of the harbor. I hate the motor—once it's off, there's silence. I have a steering vane so I can go below and cook or sit and write. Sailing is an inherently beautiful thing. To me it's like dancing with the wind and the water; it's like running with wolves—a perfect meeting of man and nature. . . .

On the boat there is nothing, and I know I work better that way. I think that the writer in the city, with the traffic and the parties and the theater, is at a disadvantage, because the distractions are so enormous. I work in the city when I have to, but I find it really hard. I don't need much. The way I live is nobody's idea of luxury, but that's the way I like it. I use a battery to charge my laptop and I just head out to sea. Sometimes I go 150 miles out and 150 miles back; sometimes I head out and keep right on going. . . .

I write all morning, then I have a two-hour break to answer mail. I get around 400 letters a day from children and I have a secretary in New York who helps me answer them all. I owe a great deal to dogs and

a great deal to children, and I try to help both of those species. A lot of what I write is fiction based on my life. . . . I spent my whole childhood running away. A lot of kids know this through my books, so I look for mail from kids in the same situation. It helps them to know you care. I'll try and get in touch with their school to let them know this child is in trouble. I'm aware I might be the only person they've told. I got a letter once from a girl who said, "My only friends in the world are your books." . . .

I don't get lonely. There was a time when I [wished I had] somebody who I could turn to and say, "Look at that!" I'd be leaning over the bow strip to touch the dolphins swimming alongside the boat. One time, three of them somersaulted in the air and crashed into the water, which was golden with the sinking sun. It was the most beautiful thing, and I felt so happy I just wanted to tell someone. But I realized that I'm telling it through my writing the whole time. . . .

I used to think I should be fulfilled by awards or by earning a million dollars, but with age has come some kind of self-knowledge. My rewards are less tangible: they're the killer whales who reared up out of the water to look at me. Or a 15-knot wind across my beam. Those are my moments of pure joy.

Comprehension

1. **Recall** What smell draws the bears to Paulsen's cabin?
2. **Clarify** Why does Scarhead show up the day Paulsen burns the trash even though the wind is blowing away from the wilderness?
3. **Summarize** What happens when Paulsen confronts Scarhead?



RI 4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text. **RI 6** Determine an author's purpose and explain how it is conveyed in the text. **RI 10** Read and comprehend literary nonfiction.

Text Analysis

4. **Make Inferences** Reread lines 42–49. Why don't the bears bother the yard animals?
5. **Analyze Author's Purpose** Review the clues you recorded in your chart as you read *Woodsong*. What is Paulsen's main purpose for sharing his experience? Support your answer with examples from the memoir.
6. **Examine Narrative Nonfiction** Although *Woodsong* is a memoir, you probably noticed literary language and devices that you commonly find in short stories. Record examples of imagery from *Woodsong* and note the senses to which these images appeal. What is memorable about Paulsen's use of imagery? Support your answer with details from the chart.

Imagery	Senses
"... there is always the smell of meat over the kennel."	smell, sight

7. **Synthesize Ideas Across Texts** Consider Paulsen's descriptions of nature in *Woodsong* and in the newspaper article on page 122. Based on the details in these texts, how would you define Paulsen's attitude toward nature? Support your response with specific examples from both selections.

Extension and Challenge

8. **Creative Project: Art** Sketch the area where Paulsen lives, using details found in the memoir.
9. **Inquiry and Research** Paulsen explains that bears are very hungry in the spring after hibernating through the winter. Research to find out more about the hibernation process. In two or three paragraphs, explain why a bear hibernates, how it prepares for hibernation, and what happens to its body.

Does Nature Demand RESPECT?

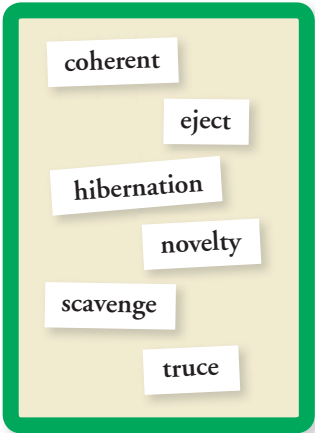
Review your journal entry on your encounter with nature. Did you gain respect for nature after your experience? Explain.

Vocabulary in Context

VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Choose the letter of the word or phrase that best completes each sentence below.

- 1. A **coherent** message (a) is very long, (b) makes sense, (c) is a surprise.
- 2. A bear might **scavenge** in (a) garbage, (b) streams, (c) caves.
- 3. **Hibernation** involves (a) growling, (b) eating, (c) resting.
- 4. Enemies who call a **truce** (a) go to war, (b) stop fighting, (c) sink a ship.
- 5. After I **eject** the CD-ROM, I (a) put it away, (b) play it, (c) buy it.
- 6. A bear would be a **novelty** in (a) a zoo, (b) the wilderness, (c) a house.



ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING

- analyze • affect • evidence • impact • provide

With a partner, **analyze** the imagery Paulsen uses to describe the animals in *Woodsong*. How do his descriptions **affect** the way you imagine the animals? Which animals seem more lifelike or dangerous because of Paulsen’s descriptions? Use at least two Academic Vocabulary words in your response.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: PREFIXES AND THE LATIN ROOT *ject*

A **prefix** is a word part that appears at the beginning of a base word to form a new word. For example, consider the word *uneasy* (un + easy) in line 25 of *Woodsong*. *Un-* is a prefix that means “not,” so *uneasy* means “not easy.”

Prefixes may also be added to **roots**, which are word parts that can’t stand alone. The vocabulary word *eject* contains the Latin root *ject*, which means “to throw.” This root is combined with various prefixes to form English words. To understand the meaning of words containing *ject*, use your knowledge of the root’s meaning and the meanings of the prefixes used with it.

PRACTICE Use the information in the chart and the meaning of the root *ject* to write a definition for each boldfaced word.

- 1. The emperor **subjected** his people to a harsh government.
- 2. Dad keeps his antique movie **projector** in the basement.
- 3. This **injection** will protect you from the illness.
- 4. The actor **rejected** the role offered to him.

Prefix	Meaning
e-, ex-	from; out of
in-	in; into
pro-	forward; in front of
re-	back; again
sub-	under; down

COMMON CORE

L.4b Use Latin affixes and roots as clues to the meaning of a word.

Interactive Vocabulary

THINK central

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KEYWORD: HML6-124

Language

◆ GRAMMAR IN CONTEXT: Maintain Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement

A **pronoun** is a word that is used in place of a noun or another pronoun. The word that the pronoun refers to is its **antecedent**. For example, notice how the pronoun *his* refers to the antecedent *Gary* in the following sentence: *Gary walked out of his house.*

Pronouns should always **agree in number** with their antecedents. Be careful when using antecedents that are indefinite pronouns, such as *anyone*, *nobody*, *no one*, and *somebody*. These indefinite pronouns should always be paired with singular pronouns. In the revised sentence, notice how the singular pronoun (in yellow) and the singular antecedent (in green) agree in number.

Original: Somebody threw a stick, and they yelled, “Get out of here.”

Revised: Somebody threw a stick, and he yelled, “Get out of here.”

PRACTICE Correct the following pronoun-antecedent errors.

1. Anyone in this situation would have turned to face their enemy.
2. For what seemed like an hour, nobody moved from their spot.
3. Someone had to be reasonable. They would need to walk away.
4. No one wanted their life cut short that day.

For more help with pronouns, see page R52 in the *Grammar Handbook*.

READING-WRITING CONNECTION



Broaden your understanding of *Woodsong* by responding to this prompt. Then use the **revising tip** to improve your writing.

WRITING PROMPT

Short Constructed Response: Author's Purpose

Paulsen says that the bear gave him more respect for nature and taught him that he is just another animal in the woods. In **one paragraph**, explain how this lesson might change the way Paulsen will interact with nature in the future.

REVISING TIP

Review your response. Do all pronouns agree with their antecedents in your paragraph? If not, revise your writing.



L 1c Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in pronoun number and person. **W 2** Write informative/explanatory texts to convey ideas.

