



Crossbow

Dayle Campbell Gaetz

Reading level: 3.6
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Book Summary

Fourteen-year-old Matt has only one goal in life: to become a hermit. He has no use for school, but he loves the solitude of the forest. When he hikes up to the cabin he built for himself, he discovers a mysterious stranger named Forrest has moved in. At first Matt doesn't connect Forrest's appearance to the rash of local robberies. Forrest seems to be the perfect hermit, and he teaches Matt the skills he needs to achieve his goal, including how to hunt with a crossbow. But when Forrest tries to kill an endangered Roosevelt elk, Matt questions the ethics of his new friend. When Matt discovers a stolen rifle in his cabin, he finds himself trapped in a dangerous situation.

Author Biography

Dayle Campbell Gaetz is the author of many books for children, including these titles from Orca Book Publishers: *Mystery from History*, *Barkerville Gold*, *No Problem*, *Alberta Alibi* and *Spoiled Rotten*. Dayle lives in Campbell River, British Columbia.

Connecting to the Text

Language

Metaphors and similes connect ideas, giving us images that expand our understanding of situations and characters.

1. Read the following examples aloud to the large group, then write a few on the board. Ask students to identify the connections that are being made and discuss how they lend meaning to the text.

(ch. 1) *Bushes parted to let me pass and closed behind me like lacy green curtains.*

Massive tree trunks soared from the thick undergrowth like a thousand giant pillars.

(ch. 1) *I felt light and free, like an escaped prisoner.*

(ch. 1) *I carefully slid my backpack from one arm and then the other, lowering it to the thick carpet of brown fir needles.*

(ch. 2) *He picked up a long piece of wood and poked the fire, sending up a shower of sparks.*

Plot

Use the questions (numbered by chapter) in the following chart to assist students with their understanding of the text. Ask students to respond to the questions in two stages: first, as they finish reading each chapter (encourage students to guess, based on what they know “so far”); and second, after they have finished the novel. Hold a group discussion to compare the students’ findings. How did their understanding of the story change the farther into the book they got? Did early foreshadowing help them guess at some of the answers?

1. Invite students to choose one of the following to complete:
 - ◆ Rewrite three of these sentences, replacing the underlined words with your own. Try to use images that don’t necessarily correspond with the story.
 - ◆ Write three new sentences, using your own words and including simile or metaphor. Ideas to get the students started could include:
 - Walking in our neighborhood at night, the buildings looked like...
 - The books on the shelf stood straight, like...
 - The paint sets fell on the floor. They looked like...
 - The kids were all talking at once, like...
2. Ask students to keep a log of simile and metaphor as they read *Crossbow*. When all the students have finished reading the novel, discuss the examples. What images are being created with each? How do they expand our understanding of the situation or character?

Questions	After reading the chapter, what can you <i>guess</i> is the answer?	After reading the book, what do you now <i>know</i> is the answer?
1. Matt tries not to think about the “good old days, before the accident.” What is he referring to?		
2. Who is the stranger at Matt’s cabin?		
3. Why is Forrest at Matt’s cabin?		
4. Do you think Matt and Forrest will become friends? Can Forrest be trusted?		
5. Why didn’t Matt tell Amanda about building the cabin? Why does he avoid her?		
6. Will Matt learn to use the crossbow? What will happen then?		
7. Where is Forrest from? How long will he stay at Matt’s cabin?		
8. Why doesn’t Matt pay attention in class?		
9. Why does Matt often feel like “the invisible kid”?		
10. What is the “little question that had settled at the back of [Matt’s] mind”?		
11. What will happen to the Roosevelt elk?		
12. Why did Forrest become a hermit?		
13. What will happen because Matt uses Forrest’s “expert” answers for the report instead of Paul Edward’s?		
14. Was Forrest behind the stolen crossbows? What about the stolen rifle?		
15. Why did Matt lie about where he got his answers for the report?		

Character Development

The character of Matt changes significantly in *Crossbow*. In the early chapters his life's ambition is to be a hermit. By the end of the novel he feels differently. As a group, consider the following “before” and “after” quotations. You may wish to ask students to read these, or similar passages from the text, aloud:

Before

(ch. 5) *...it's a way of life. I like being alone, I like the wilderness and I don't much like people. Being a hermit is my calling.*

(ch. 6) *People were impossible to figure out. This was why I wanted to be a hermit.*

After

(ch. 16) Forrest: *“Hermits don't have friends”*

Matt: *“Then maybe I'm not a hermit!”*

In your group discussion, answer the following questions. Use examples from *Crossbow*.

- ◆ What happened that changed Matt's feelings about becoming a hermit?
- ◆ Will it be easier for Matt to make friends now? How do you know?
- ◆ Can Matt now cope with his feelings about his father and the “unforgivable mistake”?
- ◆ Can you think of experiences from your own life that helped you grow as a person, like Matt did?

Connecting to the Curriculum

Vocabulary

The following words/terms are used in *Crossbow* in the context of Matt's experiences in the woods. Invite students to write an imaginary diary entry, letter, descriptive paragraph or short story using these words. Ideas for themes could be:

- I got separated from the group while we were hiking and had to spend the night in the woods alone...
- Once, when we were walking in the forest, we came to a little abandoned cabin. Or at least, we thought it was abandoned...
- Clear-cutting is harmful to our forests...
- Who says the city isn't a wilderness...
- I knew something was near, I could just 'feel' it...
- What was that sound? Can you see that? Over there, glowing...
- We'd never seen that species before! Maybe it came from the undergrowth. We lifted the moss to see...

accident	collapsible	escaped	growl	onslaught	species
bundle	cougar	fierce	hermit	overhead	stomachache
camouflage	creature	foliage	homeless	Roosevelt elk	survival
cedar	crossbow	footprints	kindling	shelter	territory
clear-cut	destruction	forest	lair	silence	undergrowth
climate	endangered	glowing	livelihood	sixth sense	wilderness

Science and Geography

- Matt said he was honored to see the bull Roosevelt elk up close, and he was upset when he imagined killing it because it's an endangered species. Have students work in small groups to complete the following questions.
 - What parts of the world are elk indigenous to? What is their habitat like? What do they eat? How much do they weigh when full grown?
 - The Roosevelt elk are an endangered species. What factors contribute to the depletion of a species? Give factors for animals, birds and fish.
 - What happens when a bird, plant, animal or fish becomes extinct? How does this affect the food chain?
 - Choose one endangered species that is close to where you live. How do people contribute to the depletion of this species?
 - According to the World Conservation Union or the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, species at risk are classified as either "extinct," "extinct in the wild," "critically endangered," "vulnerable," "near threatened" or "least concern." Find species that fall into each of these categories.
 - Find a species that was once endangered but has since been "delisted," such as the bald eagle. What factors contributed to this species' increase in numbers?
- In Ms. Petrie's class, Matt, Amanda and Tyler study climate change. Read the following passage from *Crossbow* aloud; then, as a group, complete the following exercise.

(ch. 8) *Gases such as carbon dioxide create a greenhouse effect around the Earth. They hold heat inside our atmosphere just like the glass of a greenhouse does. And you're right, emissions from gasoline engines create that carbon dioxide.*

 - What human activities have contributed to climate change over the last fifty years?
 - Tyler said, "Think globally, act locally" (p. 53). Brainstorm a list of at least ten things that your class can do to make a positive difference in reducing greenhouse gasses. Write the ideas on the board or post them on a flipchart or poster board.

- ◆ As a class project, choose five of these actions your class can commit to for a week. During the week, encourage students to add to the posted list as new ideas occur to them. At the end of the week, debrief the experience. Was it difficult? What further changes can we commit to, to reduce global warming?

Option: Challenge another class or school to participate for a week as well. Design invitations for the challenge, using only recycled materials. Be sure your invitation includes ideas to get the other class or school started!

Connecting to the Students—Ideas for Exploration

1. Read the following passage aloud, in which Matt confronted Forrest about being the “thoughtful thief”:

(ch. 16) *“You broke into people’s houses and took their stuff!”*

“Look, it goes with the territory, Matt. I don’t think of it as stealing so much as borrowing.”

“So, you’re planning to give everything back?”

“Son, it’s a matter of survival. I take only what I need. Those people can afford to replace the stuff I take. Besides, I’m doing the world a favour. I live off the land, don’t drive a vehicle, don’t use electricity, don’t waste water. I’m emissions free! Look at this way, they’re buying carbon credits from me.”

Discuss this scene, asking students the following questions. Encourage students to think of scenarios at their local, classroom or family level, as well as in a larger context, such as their neighborhood, community or country.

- ◆ Is it ever okay to take something from people who can easily replace it?
- ◆ Is it ever okay to take something if you plan to one day give it back or replace it?
- ◆ Is it ever okay to take something from people if it’s a matter of survival?
- ◆ Forrest doesn’t drive a car, doesn’t use electricity and doesn’t waste water. Is he “doing the world a favor”? Does it make taking things from people okay?

Option: You may wish to ask students to also reflect on any rules your school may have regarding respecting other students’ property.

2. Matt said he “tried not to think about the good old days, before the accident” (ch. 1). He also said, “If my dad was still working at the mill, maybe he wouldn’t have started drinking, maybe none of the bad stuff would have happened” (ch. 4). Matt’s father caused a terrible accident, and Matt has trouble dealing with this.
3. Matt responds to his problems by endeavoring to be a “hermit.” Do you think Matt can successfully escape his problems this way? What could Matt do instead, to feel better? Write a journal entry, song, poem or letter, reflecting on Matt’s experience.
 - ◆ Matt’s mom said Matt’s father “made an unforgivable mistake, and now we’re all suffering for it. But you can’t keep it inside forever” (ch. 15). Have you ever had something that you felt you had to “keep inside forever”? Did keeping it inside help, or did reaching out help? Write a journal entry, song, poem or letter, reflecting on your experience.

4. Matt said “I thought homeless people only lived in cities,” and Matt’s mom said, “They can be anywhere...and they must get horribly cold at night” (ch. 10). As a group, discuss the following:
 - ◆ Homelessness is an issue facing many communities around the world. Do you think many people choose to be homeless, like Forrest does?
 - ◆ What are causes of homelessness? (housing shortage, poverty, etc.)
 - ◆ What items did Forrest steal “as a matter of survival”? What challenges might a homeless person in your community face? There are many organizations which provide care to homeless people. Research one in your community (or a community close to you). What services do they provide? How are they supported financially (for example, by donations or selling street newspapers)?

Option: As a class project, organize an awareness campaign or fundraiser to support a local organization that aids homeless people.
5. Matt knows how to survive in the forest. He knows how to build a small cabin, chop and store wood, build a fire pit, store and cook food, stay warm and dry and navigate through the forest, and recognize endangered species. Ask students to research something from this list that they would like to learn more about and give a presentation to the class.
6. Amanda wanted to run into her home when she saw the door was open, but Matt knew that wasn’t a good idea: “Are you nuts? What if someone’s in there? You can’t go barging in. You could get hurt. Come over to my place and call nine-one-one.” Ask students to brainstorm other situations where calling 9-1-1 would be the best option. Ask students to act out the situations in short skits, rehearsing what they might say when they need either fire services, the police or an ambulance. Why is it never a good idea to make a phony phone call to 9-1-1?

Web Resources

www.epa.gov/climatechange/kids?
www.fws.gov/endangered
www.doi.gov/kids