

Canyons Study Guide

Canyons by Gary Paulsen

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Plot Summary

Canyons is a novel by award winning writer Gary Paulsen. In this novel, Brennan Cole is a hardworking fifteen year old who tries to avoid the many men who come in and out of his mother's life. However, this is not always possible and Brennan finds himself forced to go on a camping trip with his mother, her new boyfriend, and a church youth group. This trip will change Brennan's life when he finds the skull of what turns out to have been a fourteen year old Indian warrior. Canyons is a novel of self discovery and inspiration, a novel that will entertain readers of all ages.

Brennan Cole spends as much of his time as possible outside of the house. When Brennan is not at school, he is running. This summer, Brennan has gotten a job mowing lawns to help pay for his school clothes in the fall. Brennan enjoys the physical work and likes the many excuses to separate himself from his mother and her many attempts at romance. However, Brennan discovers this is not always possible. One day he comes home from work to find his mother with yet another man in the kitchen. This man is a churchgoer who runs a youth group through the church. Much to Brennan's frustration, he finds himself talked into going on a camping trip with his mother, her new boyfriend, and his youth group.

The youth group is filled with young boys who are constantly on the go, talking, yelling, and fighting the whole way to the canyon where they are to camp. Brennan does his best to keep the boys from hurting one another on the hike into the canyon, but by the time they have set up their campsite, Brennan is tired of the noise. Brennan lays his sleeping bag some distance from the others just to have a few minutes of peace and quiet. During the night, however, Brennan can feel something pressing into his back. Brennan digs in the earth beneath him and unearths a human skull. Although there appears to be a bullet hole in the skull, Brennan believes it is too old to be a recent crime.

Brennan hides the skull in his backpack and takes it home with him. At home, Brennan examines the skull closer, measuring it and comparing it to his own head, leaving him convinced the skull belonged to someone his own age. Brennan begins to have dreams, intense dreams of running from someone or something. Brennan decides to turn to an old teacher for help with the skull. This teacher, Mr. Homesley, once inspired Brennan to do better at school and has become something of a friend. When Brennan tells Mr. Homesley about the skull, Mr. Homesley sets up a meeting for Brennan with a coroner friend of his.

The coroner looks at the skull and determines it is more than a hundred years old and was the body of a young boy, more than likely an Indian. The coroner also determines that the boy was killed by a rifle held inches from the boy's skull. Mr. Homesley then contacts a friend of his with the Western Historical Archives to get information on violent deaths in that area between 1855 and 1885. When the information arrives, Brennan stays up all night going through it. When Brennan reads about a young Indian warrior

killed in the canyons near El Paso, Brennan instinctively knows he has found the owner of the skull.

Brennan returns home only to discover his mother has found the skull. Brennan takes the skull and sneaks out of the house. Brennan returns to the canyon on foot during the night only to find his mother and the police waiting for him when he arrives. Brennan manages to slip past them and make his way into the canyon, instinctively taking the skull to a medicine place just beyond where the young Indian warrior died, returning him to a place of sanctuary the warrior had sought in life as well as death.



Chapters 1-4

Chapters 1-4 Summary

Gary Paulsen is a Newberry Award winner who has written many books for young readers. In this book, Paulsen explores the spiritual connection between two boys born a hundred years apart.

In chapter 1, Coyote Runs learns he is to join a raiding party, an event that marks Coyote Run's first step into manhood.

In chapter 2, Brennan Cole likes to run. Running keeps Brennan out of the house where his mother is often entertaining someone new. Brennan never knew his father and has seen his father hurt over and over by the men in her life. Even now, as Brennan runs toward the house, he can see that she has someone new with her. His name is Bill Halverson and he will change Brennan's life forever.

In chapter 3, Coyote Runs follows the other Indian warriors as they make their way to El Paso. Coyote Runs does not have a gun, he will only be allowed to watch the horses while the others participate in the raid, but at the end he will be a man.

In chapter 4, Brennan works for a man named Stoney mowing lawns. Brennan works hard so that he can help pay for his own clothes and things. Work is hard, but Stoney never wants to talk, leaving Brennan alone with his own thoughts. Unfortunately, Brennan cannot say the same about his mother. When Brennan goes home, his mother announces they will be going on a camping trip with Bill.

Chapters 1-4 Analysis

These early chapters introduce the two main characters. The first chapter takes place in the past and is narrated by Coyote Runs, a young Indian who has just been invited to participate in his first raiding party, and an event that will make Coyote Runs a man in the eyes of his tribe. At fourteen, Coyote Runs has been anxious for this opportunity and its arrival makes him very happy. At the same time, the reader meets Brennan Cole. Brennan Cole is a modern teenager who is more responsible than the average teenager, a young man who has never known his father and is tired of the men who come in and out of his mother's life, leaving nothing but sadness in their wake. These two boys are as similar as they are different, two young men who are both in a hurry to grow up and be respected as men.

Brennan is invited to go camping with his mother's latest boyfriend; an event that he tells the reader will change his life. This introduces suspense into the plot, but the reader has no idea what might happen on this trip to change Brennan's life. The reader also does not know at this point how the two boys' story will meet, but anticipates their stories coming together at some point as the plot continues to develop.



Chapters 5-8

Chapters 5-8 Summary

In chapter 5, Coyote Runs thinks of the white school he was forced to attend for a time in Alamogordo as they pass the city. Coyote Runs attended the school with his friend, Magpie, who is also on this raid.

In chapter 6, Brennan is annoyed as he finds himself riding in a van with a group of younger kids who seem intent on hurting one another. Brennan cannot figure out why he agreed to this. Bill is nice enough, but the kids were about to drive him insane. They stop at a canyon about sixty miles outside of El Paso and hike into its depths to a place Bill knows. When they arrive, Brennan is so tired of the kids he is ready to explode.

In chapter 7, Coyote Runs' group comes across a group of eight soldiers. They moved passed in silence, successfully passing the group without alerting them to their presence. The group moves during the night and rests in the day. On this particular morning, they rest in a low gully surrounded by mesquite.

In chapter 8, darkness settles over the campers. To get the kids to quiet down, Brennan suggests they tell stories around the campfire. Bill tells the kids about the Apache Indians who once lived and fought in these canyons, especially another canyon nearby called Dog Canyon. As the kids begin to settle down, Brennan goes to his sleeping bag where he laid it a few feet away under a rock.

Chapters 5-8 Analysis

Coyote Runs continues on his raiding party, telling the reader about his past experiences with the white man. Coyote Runs was once forced to live at a school designed to make Indians give up their traditions and embrace the white man's beliefs and traditions. Coyote Runs did not understand a great deal of this world, including why they named their mountains as they did, but he enjoyed the music he was allowed to listen to. Many things about the white man confuses Coyote Runs whose life and traditions revolve more around nature and spirituality than the white man's world. This shows the reader what kind of a person Coyote Runs is, an innocent young man who is only trying to survive according to his own traditions and beliefs.

Brennan finds himself talked into the camping trip, a fact that reveals his respect and love for his mother. Clearly Brennan wants his mother to be happy, which is why he agreed to the trip. However, the children on the trip annoy Brennan and make his enjoyment of the trip impossible, but Brennan does not reveal this annoyance to his mother, again showing the reader Brennan's basically kind personality. Later, Bill's stories about the fights between the Apache and the white soldiers in these canyons where Brennan is camping with Bill and his youth group seems to give the reader some kind of connection between Brennan and Coyote Runs.



Chapters 9-10

Chapters 9-10 Summary

In chapter 9, time for the raid has arrived. Coyote Runs is left with the extra horses and told to follow the raiding party as they return from stealing horses meant for the white soldiers. Coyote Runs becomes confused in the chaos after the raid, nearly driving the horses the wrong direction, but quickly recognizing his mistake and chasing after the raiding party. In time, Coyote Runs catches up with Magpie. Coyote Runs believes he can escape their bullets because one of the Mexican ranchers fired right at him and missed. Coyote Runs and Magpie catch up with the rest of the raiding party and continue toward home on fresh horses. Coyote Runs rides a beautiful white horse he hopes to make his own when they reach the village.

The following day, the raiding party is attacked by a group of white soldiers. Three follow behind Coyote Runs and Magpie while the others chase the rest of the party. When Coyote Runs sees Magpie shot down, he begins to fear for his own life. Coyote Runs heads for a nearby canyon, hoping to reach his secret medicine place. However, Coyote Runs is shot in the ankle and his horse injured. Coyote Runs goes into the canyon on foot, but his injury makes his movements slow. Coyote Runs tries to hide behind a rock at the back of the canyon, but his blood shows the soldiers where he is. One soldier approaches Coyote Runs and presses his rifle against his head, killing Coyote Runs as he jokes with his companions.

In chapter 10, Brennan is trying to sleep, but something is pressing into his back. Brennan digs in the dirt and uncovers a skull. Brennan studies the skull, curious about the person it once was. Brennan recognizes the bullet hole in the skull, but believes the skull is too old to be a recent crime. Brennan hears a voice in his head that is not his own and an increase in the odd sensation he has felt all night. Although he knows it is wrong, Brennan hides the skull in his backpack.

Chapters 9-10 Analysis

Coyote Runs is successful in his first role in his first raiding party. In fact, Coyote Runs is shot at by the Mexican ranchers from whom his party has stolen horses but survives unharmed, leaving him convinced he cannot be killed. This leads to a false sense of immortality that leads to a shocking revelation not long after when Coyote Runs is chased by white soldiers and shot. Coyote Runs' death is a sad example of the treatment of Indians during this time period, showing the disregard of the soldiers for the humanity of even a teenaged Indian.

As soon as the reader learns about Coyote Runs' death, Brennan finds a skull. The reader knows immediately that the skull is Coyote Runs and that this is the connection

between these two young men. Now the reader wonders how deep this connection will go and what Brennan will do with the skull he has found.



Chapters 11-14

Chapters 11-14 Summary

In chapter 11, Brennan finds himself obsessed with the skull. Brennan has also begun to have strange dreams and the phrase, Take me, spirit, keeps running through his mind. Brennan measured the skull, convinced it belonged to someone young, and realizes the skull is about the same size as his own. Brennan wonders if the skull belonged to someone his own age.

In chapter 12, Brennan wants to learn more about the skull, so he decides to ask the advice of his teacher, Mr. Homesley.

In chapter 13, Brennan recalls how Mr. Homesley approached Brennan after school and talked to him about beetles, convincing Brennan to search for a beetle in the grass with him. After this, Mr. Homesley had Brennan bring him a beetle everyday so they could discuss it; this led to a close friendship that expanded into several visits to Mr. Homesley's house.

In chapter 14, Brennan arrives at Mr. Homesley's home and tells him about the skull. At first, Mr. Homesley tells Brennan he should have called the police, but then Mr. Homesley agrees to help Brennan by setting up a meeting with a friend of his who is a coroner.

Chapters 11-14 Analysis

Brennan returns home from the camping trip and finds himself obsessed with the skull. Brennan has many dreams that are not of experiences he has ever had, making Brennan wonder if perhaps there is some kind of connection between him and the skull. In fact, Brennan has come to believe the skull belongs to a young male, something he could not possibly know on his own, but which the reader knows is correct. This suggests to the reader a clear connection between Brennan and Coyote Runs through the skull and perhaps something a little more spiritual that neither Brennan nor the reader fully understand at this point.



Chapters 15-20

Chapters 15-20 Summary

In chapter 15, Brennan meets Mr. Homesley at the morgue where he is introduced to Dr. Tibbets. Tibbets examines the skull in detail and then tells Brennan and Mr. Homesley about it. Tibbets believes the skull was shot at very close range by a large bore rifle, a shot that was most likely murder by the angle of the bullet. Tibbets also suggests the skull is that of a fourteen year old boy.

In chapter 16, Tibbets suggests that the skull belonged to an Indian killed by a white soldier. Tibbets suggest they contact the Apache reservation in Alamogordo or the Western Historical Archives. Mr. Homesley says he has a friend at the Western Historical Archives and agrees to contact him immediately on Brennan's behalf.

In chapter 17, Brennan waits a week before he finally gets the call from Mr. Homesley informing him that the information from the Western Historical Archives has arrived. Brennan rushes right over and digs right into the material.

In chapter 18, Brennan reads many reports about Indian activity around the canyons.

In chapter 19, Brennan reads about a patrol in October of 1864 that came across a raiding party on their way back to Fort Bliss. This report includes mention of a teenage boy who ran into a canyon and was killed after a brief firefight.

In chapter 20, Brennan finds a letter from a Quaker school asking for information in the death of Coyote Runs on behalf of his mother. However, the commander of Fort Bliss is unable to give information as to the location of Coyote Runs' body. By the time Mr. Homesley wakes, Brennan has read everything about this attack and is convinced Coyote Runs is the skull Brennan has found.

Chapters 15-20 Analysis

Brennan learns that he was right in his assumption that the skull belongs to a young boy. Brennan also learns that the skull was murdered at close contact with a large rifle, a shot that was clearly murder. When Brennan gets information from the Western Historical Archives in Denver, he reads of many tragic deaths and fights between the soldiers and Indians. Among these Brennan reads about the death of Coyote Runs and his mother's desperation in finding his body to offer him a proper burial. This latter information suggests to the reader that the reason Brennan has been having strange dreams is because Coyote Runs wants a proper burial. However, the reader is not clear on how Brennan might go about doing this for Coyote Runs.



Chapters 21-24

Chapters 21-24 Summary

In chapter 21, Brennan returns home and discovers that his mother has found the skull in his bedroom closet. Brennan's mother tells him she has called the police and reported the skull and that his taking it from the canyon is a federal crime. Brennan grabs the skull as the police pull up out front and runs.

In chapter 22, Brennan runs toward the canyon where he found the skull. Brennan stopped on the way out of town and got water and granola bars, but they quickly run out. Brennan wants to stop for the night, but a voice in his head tells him to keep going. In fact, the voice tells Brennan how he can walk in the darkness and avoid the danger of snakes using a stick. The voice also tells Brennan how to find water in a yucca plant. By morning, Brennan finds himself outside the mouth of the canyon. Not only this, but Brennan discovers his mother, Bill, Mr. Homesley, and the police there waiting for him.

In chapter 23, Brennan lets the police know he is there. However, when they refuse to allow him to return the skull to the canyon, Brennan runs past them. Brennan hurts his ankle while climbing over some rocks, but he refuses to stop even as he hears the rescue team coming up fast behind him.

In chapter 24, Brennan passes the place where he found the skull and knows he must continue on. Brennan runs deep into the back of the canyon and sees a ledge high on the canyon wall. Brennan approaches it and begins to climb, using ancient handholds. The rescue workers pass under Brennan, searching further up the canyon and giving him the time he needs to reach the ledge. Inside Brennan discovers the medicine place Coyote Runs was rushing toward when he was killed. Brennan leaves Coyote Runs' skull on a flat rock.

Chapters 21-24 Analysis

Brennan's mother has found the skull and called the police, taking the power of choice out of Brennan's hands. Brennan runs away and takes the skull back to the canyon. Brennan's connection with Coyote Runs is stronger now and Coyote Runs tells Brennan exactly what to do. This is a connection that has been growing from the moment Brennan found the skull and it has brought Brennan to a place he is not fully prepared to face.

Brennan arrives at the canyon and finds his mother waiting with the authorities. However, when Brennan's mother sees her son's determination, she encourages him to go. Brennan finds himself chased through the canyon, much like Coyote Runs' experience, complete with an injured ankle. Brennan's experience is so much like Coyote Runs' that the reader wonders if Brennan will make it, or be stopped like Coyote

Runs. However, Brennan finally makes it to the medicine place that Coyote Runs so desperately wanted to reach, bringing Coyote Runs experience full circle.

Characters

Brennan Cole

Brennan Cole is a fifteen year old boy. Brennan likes to run. Brennan's home life is difficult. Brennan's mother is a single mother and she works most of the time, leaving Brennan home alone. When his mother is not working, she brings men home with whom she hopes to have a relationship, but they often end up breaking her heart and leaving her alone. It is this situation Brennan tries to avoid. Brennan does not like the way his mother seems desperate to have a man in her life and how she becomes depressed when a man leaves her.

Brennan is a responsible, strong young man who works hard. Brennan is dependable and intelligent. When Brennan finds a skull in a canyon outside of El Paso, he knows he should tell the police. However, Brennan instinctively knows the skull is too old to be a recent crime. Brennan takes the skull and feels a connection to it, immediately having dreams that could not possibly come from his life experiences. This causes Brennan to become obsessed with the skull and to do everything he can to be sure the skull is taken to the place where he instinctively knows it will find peace.

Coyote Runs

Coyote Runs is a fourteen year old Apache Indian. Coyote Runs has been invited to participate in his first raiding party. Coyote Runs is excited because he knows that this will officially make him a man in the eyes of his people. Coyote Runs does well on the raid. However, when the raid reaches its conclusion, the party runs into a soldier patrol and are chased through the canyons near El Paso. Coyote Runs tries to make it to a secret medicine place that he knows where he knows the soldiers will not be able to find him. However, Coyote Runs is shot in the ankle and cannot make it to the medicine place, so he hides. Coyote Runs' blood gives away his hiding place and he is killed.

When Brennan finds a skull in the same place the reader knows Coyote Runs died, it is clear that the skull is Coyote Runs. Coyote Runs wants to be returned to the medicine place so that his spirit might rest in the afterworld. Coyote Runs' spirit guides Brennan to take him to the medicine place where he is free to join the spirits of his ancestors.

Mr. Homesley

Mr. Homesley is a biology teacher at Brennan's school. Aware that Brennan is intelligent despite his bad grades, Mr. Homesley befriends Brennan and guides him into directing more of his energy into his studies. This causes a strong bond between the two. When Brennan finds the skull, he turns to Mr. Homesley to help him learn more about it. Mr. Homesley takes Brennan to meet one of his Vietnam buddies and this buddy helps Brennan learn the facts about the skull's death. Mr. Homesley then calls a friend at the



Western Historical Archives to get information on violence in and around the canyons in the years in which the skull more than likely met its demise. With this help, Brennan is able to figure out where he should take the skull.

Bill Halverson

Bill Halverson is the boyfriend of Brennan's mother. Bill is a churchgoer and he runs a youth group through his church. Shortly after meeting Brennan's mother, Bill invites Brennan and his mother on a camping trip with the youth group. This trip is in the canyons outside El Paso where Brennan finds Coyote Runs' skull.

Tibbets

Tibbets is Mr. Homesley's Vietnam buddy and a pathologist in El Paso. Tibbets is able to tell Brennan that the skull is that of a boy around the age of fourteen, that it is more than likely an Apache boy, and that the skull died of a close range gunshot wound, but not a suicide. It is because of this information from Tibbets that Brennan is able to narrow his search and find information on the death of Coyote Runs.

Magpie

Magpie is Coyote Runs' friend. Magpie is a few years older than Coyote Runs, therefore he has gone on raiding parties before Coyote Runs. It is Magpie who tells Coyote Runs of his chance to go on a raid. It is also Magpie who rides at the back of the pack with Coyote Runs. When the soldiers attack, Coyote Runs' rides behind Magpie and sees him shot by one of the soldiers. It is this event that convinces Coyote Runs he can die and that his life is in danger.

Brennan's Mother

Brennan's mother is a single woman who has raised her child alone most of his life. Brennan's mother is desperate to share her life with a man, but all her relationships have ended in heartbreak. Brennan avoids his mother and his home because he does not like to watch her wallow in her depression. However, it is Brennan's mother who introduces him to the man that will change his life. Brennan's life changes when Bill takes him, his mother, and a youth group camping in the same canyon where Coyote Runs died over a hundred years before.

Stoney Romero

Stoney Romero is Brennan's boss. Stoney is a quiet man who works hard and is determined to keep his clients happy. However, Stoney does not see the point in mowing lawns day in and day out when they only grow back. Stoney wants to see a



reason in life, but cannot find it in lawn care. Stoney is the only person in town who was willing to hire someone as young as Brennan and he has been a good, but cheap, boss to Brennan.

Bluebellies

Bluebellies is what the Apache call the soldiers because of the uniforms they wear. The raiding party dislikes the soldiers because of their previous attack on other Apache villages and the danger they pose for the Apache. In fact, the raiding party with which Coyote Runs participates is targeting a Mexican ranch where there are horses being raised for the soldiers. The Apache find it humorous to steal these horses from the soldiers. Unfortunately, on their way back to their village the Apache run into a small patrol of soldiers. Coyote Runs and his friend Magpie are gunned down by the patrol.

Youth Group

Bill is a youth group leader. When Bill invites Brennan and his mother to go camping, it is a trip that is arranged with the youth group. The youth group consists of a group of pre-teen boys who are rowdy and violent. Brennan finds himself forced to keep the kids entertained so that they will not injure one another during the trip. Brennan is annoyed by these kids and feels that Bill is too lenient with them. It is because of these kids that Brennan decides to sleep a distance from the campfire, leading him to find the skull of Coyote Runs.



Objects/Places

Skull

Brennan finds a skull while camping in a canyon about sixty miles outside of El Paso.

Sweatshirt

Brennan covers the skull in his sweatshirt and hides it, first in his backpack and later in his closet.

Measuring Tape

Brennan uses a measuring tape to figure out that the skull he found is about the same size of his own skull.

Beetles

Mr. Homesley convinces Brennan to be a better student by sharing with him his knowledge of beetles.

Stick

Brennan uses a stick to keep the snakes away from him as he runs in the night to take the skull back to the canyon.

Yucca

Brennan gets water in the desert from the yucca plant, something he learns through his spiritual connection with Coyote Runs.

Lawns

Brennan cuts lawns for a living.

Boxes of Reports

Mr. Homesley contacts a friend with the Western Historical Archives and has him send multiple boxes with incident reports from the military around the canyons in the years 1855-1885. In these boxes, Brennan finds the report of Coyote Runs' death in 1862.



Music Room

Mr. Homesley and his wife have a special music room in the basement of their home where they listen to classical music together.

Morgue

Brennan meets Tibbets at the morgue and learns about the age and cause of death of the skull.

Canyon

There are a set of canyons sixty miles outside of El Paso where the Apache once participated in many fights against the soldiers. Coyote Runs dies in this canyon and Brennan later finds his skull here.

Alamogordo

Alamogordo is a city north of El Paso. Coyote Runs passes by Alamogordo during the raiding party and is reminded of the Quaker school he was forced to attend there.

El Paso, Texas

Brennan lives in El Paso, Texas.



Themes

Coming of Age

The novel begins with Coyote Runs celebrating his coming of age. Coyote Runs is an Apache teenager who has just learned he will be going on a raiding party. This means that if Coyote Runs does well, he will be considered a man by the people of his village. Coyote Runs has believed for a long time that he was ready to prove his maturity and this raiding party will give him the opportunity to do so. However, Coyote Runs dies before his people can tell him he is a man, leaving his spirit in a kind of limbo as he waits to return to his people and become one with them once more.

At the same time, Brennan Cole is growing up in modern El Paso. Brennan has no father to guide him and to tell him when he is a man. However, Brennan is a responsible young man who already has a job and who is helping to pay his own way in the world. When Brennan finds the skull in a canyon, he feels a spiritual connection to Coyote Runs and it helps him to move beyond the restraints of childhood and of his culture to give Coyote Runs' spirit the release it needed.

Cultural Traditions

Coyote Runs is an Apache Indian who has finally reached the age at which he might be considered a man. It is important within the Apache culture for a young man to be given the opportunity to prove himself and to be told he is a man. Coyote Runs was given the opportunity to embrace the Christian traditions of the white man, but he returned to his people to continue growing in their traditions. The Indian ways is the only culture Coyote Runs understands and the only one he wishes to embrace.

Brennan, on the other hand, has very little culture in his life. Brennan's mother is alone and she works a lot, leaving Brennan on his own. Brennan has no structure, no example to follow. This leaves Brennan with no reason to live his life in any particular way. However, Brennan chooses to follow the rules of society, to be a strong, independent young man with a sense of responsible.

Brennan finds Coyote Runs' skull in a canyon and he finds himself filled with dreams of events that never took place in his own life. Brennan finds himself obsessed with the skull and realizes he must do all he can to put Coyote Runs to rest. This helps Brennan connect with the traditions of the Apache people and to find more guidance in his life than he has had in the past. This culture has a strong impact on Brennan and helps him find purpose in his life, making cultural traditions a theme of the novel.



Family

Neither Coyote Runs nor Brennan has a father. Brennan finds this situation difficult because it forces him to watch his mother struggle in her many attempts to find a meaningful relationship. Coyote Runs is impacted by his lack of a father because he does not have a man in his life to decide when he is ready to prove that he is ready to be a man. These situations make life difficult for these two young men.

Brennan does not want his mother to find a replacement father for him, he is happy without a father. Coyote Runs turns to his good friend Magpie and other men in the tribe as father figures. These boys have both found family and people to look up to in other places. Brennan has Mr. Homesley, his biology teacher, and Coyote Runs has both Magpie and Sancta, the raid leader, to guide him. However, in the end both rely on family to find happiness. Coyote Runs looks to his entire Apache ancestry for guidance, requesting that he be allowed to return to the medicine place so that his spirit can be with his people. Brennan discovers the strength and love that he has in his mother, who supports his attempts to return Coyote Runs to his people. For these reasons, family is a strong theme in this novel.

Style

Point of View

The novel is told in the third person omniscient point of view. There are two narrating characters in this novel. The novel begins with a chapter written in the point of view of Coyote Runs, a young Apache Indian boy who has just learned he will be allowed to participate in his first raiding party. The chapters then alternate for a time between chapters written in Coyote Runs' voice with chapters written in the point of view of Brennan Cole, a modern day boy who will find the skull of Coyote Runs.

The point of view of this novel allows the reader to see events through the eyes of the two main characters, Coyote Runs and Brennan Cole. Coyote Runs dies early in the novel, but his presence continues throughout the novel, impacting the experiences of Brennan Cole. For this reason, the author has told Coyote Runs' story in his own voice and then continued the novel through the eyes of Brennan Cole as he becomes spiritually connected to Coyote Runs. In this way the author shows how these two boys, who are separated by over a hundred years and culture, are more alike than either could have ever understood.

Setting

The novel is set in El Paso, Texas and the surrounding area. Brennan lives in El Paso while Coyote Runs lives in a village some distance north of the city. Coyote Runs travels to El Paso to take part in a raiding party that plans to steal horses from some Mexican cowboys working near El Paso. It is in El Paso that Fort Bliss exists, an army base where the soldiers who gun down Coyote Runs and his people are from and the same army base Brennan passes on his night run to the canyon where Coyote Runs died. Both boys will travel the same area in the moments leading up to their flight from danger in the canyon, more than a hundred years apart.

The setting of this novel is important because it is an area in which the Apache Indians were known to have had skirmishes with the soldiers from Fort Bliss. There is a great deal of history in the area around El Paso that is touched upon in this novel. The author has taken a real setting and real history and written a fictional account of two boys' lives that are drawn from that history. If the novel were set in a different locale, the history would be different and therefore the story would be different. For this reason, the setting of this novel is vital to the overall plot.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is simple. The novel is written for young readers; therefore the writer uses grammar and language that is easy for the youngest readers to comprehend. Although one of the main characters is an Apache Indian, there is little in

the way of foreign words in the novel; therefore the reader will not become confused by strange words.

The language of the novel fits the main characters. The main characters are teenagers and therefore their language is simpler than the language of an adult or a person with an advanced education. The language is simple, but not so simple that it talks down to the reader. There is some slang, but most of the language is clear cut, easy to understand even for adult readers who do not think in the slang of adolescence any longer.

Structure

The novel is divided into twenty-four chapters. Each chapter varies in length, but most chapters are only a few pages long. The first nine chapters alternate between the past and the present, with Coyote Runs narrating the odd chapters while the even chapters are in Brennan's voice. The chapters after chapter nine are all in Brennan's point of view because Coyote Runs dies in chapter nine. It is in chapter ten that Brennan finds the skull that will connect the two main characters together for the remaining chapters.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows Brennan as he finds the skull, attempts to learn its identity, and returns it to the medicine place. The first subplot follows Coyote Runs' last few days of life and his desire to get to the medicine place. Another subplot deals with the love life of Brennan's mother and the impact of that on his life. Another subplot covers the relationship between Brennan and his biology teacher, Mr. Homesley. All the plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"Soon he would be a man." Chapter 1, pg. 3

"He ran to be with himself." Chapter 2, pg. 9

"Six whole days, Coyote Runs repeated. Six days to be a man." Chapter 3, pg. 18

"Oh great, Brennan thought, another relationship." Chapter 4, pg. 27

"Something was there, some strange thing that bothered him." Chapter 8, pg. 54

"Magpie was a body." Chapter 9, pg. 71

"It was one thing to say he had to learn about the skull, and quite another thing to do it." Chapter 12, pg. 97

"Victim, Brennan thought. Victim. He felt suddenly sick, weak. Imagine how it must have been, he thought. To have somebody hold the barrel of a gun to your head and pull the trigger." Chapter 15, pg. 120

"Brennan knew nothing but the papers, the papers and the world they showed." Chapter 17, pg. 132

"Names. He knew the names of the men. All Irish. Probably big men, soldiers, blue uniforms, hot, stinking of sweat, chasing him, chasing me into the canyon up beneath the rock..." Chapter 19, pg. 143

"The darkness seemed complete, thick, black, close around him, and he took it as a friend. There was a time when he was afraid of darkness and it surprised him faintly that he had changed." Chapter 22, pg. 159

"He sighed, tears on his cheeks, missing something he did not understand, feeling that he had lost a friend somehow, and turned to meet the rescue men." Chapter 24, pg. 184



Topics for Discussion

Who is Coyote Runs? Why does the novel begin with his story? Why are his chapters told in bold print? What does this print say to the reader before the first sentence is read? Why is Coyote Runs excited to go on a raiding party with the men of his tribe? How does Coyote Runs think his mother will react to this news? Why does Coyote Runs worry about his mother?

Who is Brennan Cole? Why does he work cutting lawns? What does Brennan plan to do with the money? Why does Brennan run? How does running make Brennan feel? How does Brennan feel about his mother? What might improve Brennan's relationship with his mother? Explain.

Compare and contrast Brennan Cole and Coyote Runs. How are their lives similar? How are they different? Why did the author choose these two boys as his main characters? What will cause these two boys to connect in the plot of the novel? For what reason? What does Coyote Runs want from Brennan? What does Brennan get from Coyote Runs? How does it change his life?

Discuss Mr. Homesley. Why does the writer point out that Mr. Homesley was in Vietnam? What did Mr. Homesley do there? What did his experience do for Mr. Homesley? How did it change him? Was that change a good thing? How does Mr. Homesley know the pathologist? The man at the Western Historical Archives? How do these relationships help Mr. Homesley?

Discuss Brennan's mother. Why is she always looking for a man to share her life with? Would Brennan's mother look at relationships differently if not for Brennan? How does Brennan impact the relationships in his mother's life? Why does Brennan dislike the many new relationships in his mother's life? How does this situation impact Brennan's life?

Discuss the setting. How does the setting impact the story? What is significant about the setting? Are the stories of Apaches in the area true? How does the reader know this? How would the novel be different if it were set in a different place? Could the same story be told in a different locale? Explain.

Discuss culture. What is culture? How does a person recognize his own culture? How does culture impact the actions and behaviors of a particular person? Does culture separate Coyote Runs from Brennan? Explain. What is your culture? How does culture impact your thoughts and actions? Can you compare yourself to Coyote Runs? To Brennan?