

# **The Sign of the Beaver Study Guide**

**The Sign of the Beaver by Elizabeth George Speare**

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## Overview

The Sign of the Beaver is an excellent introduction to life among pioneers and Native Americans in the eighteenth-century American colonies. Full of precise detail concerning the tasks and objects that filled everyday life, the novel also contains a good deal of adventure and suspense. Most notable is Speare's insightful and sensitive portrayal of the relations among white settlers and Native Americans. Intertwined with the exciting plot is a strong but not didactic commentary on the tragedy that ensued when settlers forced the Native Americans from their lands.

## About the Author

Elizabeth George Speare was born on November 21, 1908, in Melrose, Massachusetts. She began composing stories as a child during lonely summers in the countryside. After completing her undergraduate work at Smith College, she earned her master's degree in English from Boston University and then taught English in Massachusetts high schools.

In 1936 she married Alden Speare. The couple had one daughter and one son.

In order to care for her children, Speare retired from teaching, but when her son and daughter entered high school, she began writing seriously.

Her first novel, *Calico Captive*, was based on the memoirs of a settler who was captured by Native Americans in colonial times. Her second novel, *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, also set in colonial America, won the Newbery Medal in 1960. Two years later Speare won that prestigious prize a second time for *The Bronze Bow*, a story of ancient Jerusalem. *The Sign of the Beaver* was a 1984 Newbery Honor Book and in 1984 won the first Scott O'Dell Award for historical fiction.



# Plot Summary

The year is 1768, and the story takes place in what will eventually become the state of Maine. It tells the story of a twelve-year-old boy who is left alone in the wilderness while his father leaves to bring back the rest of his family. He must use skills he learns from the Indians who live nearby in order to survive. When he meets a young Indian boy about his own age, they grow together into manhood. In the process, both the parallels and differences between the two cultures are examined.

Twelve-year-old Matt Hallowell finds himself alone in the new Main territory in 1768 as his father leaves the cabin they have just built together to get his mother, sister and a new baby. The territory has recently been opened to settlers after a truce is reached with the regional Indian tribes, and while the Indians still have a presence there, they are not supposed to be outwardly unfriendly. Matt is told to notch a stick each day, and after seven notches to start a new stick. When he reaches seven sticks, he can begin to look for his family's arrival from Massachusetts.

Matt's first mishap occurs when a trapper arrives and asks to share a meal with Matt. Matt agrees, thinking it would be unfriendly to turn him down, and invites him in for a meal and to spend a night in the cabin. The next morning when he awakes, though, he finds the trapper gone along with Matt's only rifle. He now has no protection and no way to hunt game for food.

Some time later, a bear gets into Matt's cabin and ruins all the food he has, leaving Matt with almost nothing. Remembering a tree where there is a hive of bees, Matt climbs the tree to try to get some honey to go along with the fish he catches to survive. He realizes his mistake too late as the bees swarm and chase him into a pond. Stung and with a twisted ankle, Matt has difficulty in getting out of the pond until an Indian rescues him. It turns out to be Saknis, chief of the beaver people, along with his grandson, an Indian boy about Matt's age named Attean. They bring Matt back to health and also provide food for him.

When Saknis realizes that Matt can read, he makes a deal with him. Matt is to teach Attean to read, and Attean will provide Matt with food and possibly some hunting and fishing skills. The Indian boy is not excited about this exchange, but he cannot go against his grandfather's wishes. Thus, Matt begins to teach Attean to read, and in the process, he reads much of *Robinson Crusoe* to the boy.

Matt and the Indian boy eventually become friends and go from boyhood to manhood together. However, the Indian tribe feels threatened by the onslaught of whites invading their hunting territory, and eventually they pack their belongings and move far away towards where the sun sets. Matt, however, is worried that his family may never come back to the cabin, and realizing this, the Indians invite him to go with them and become Attean's white brother. After a great deal of thought, Matt decides he must remain loyal to his father. He finally declines their offer, knowing that he may spend the long winter alone.

Matt's family finally arrives just before Christmas, almost four months late. They are surprised to find that Matt has become a man and has overcome many odds with the help of the Indians. Matt has grown into a man along with his friend, Attean, but with their manhood they have both had to take different paths.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

The year is 1768, and the story takes place in what will eventually become the state of Maine. It tells the story of a twelve-year-old boy who is left alone in the wilderness while his father leaves to bring back the rest of his family. He must use skills he learns from the Indians who live nearby in order to survive. When he meets a young Indian boy about his own age, they grow together into manhood. In the process, both the parallels and differences between the two cultures are examined.

The story begins with Matt, a twelve-year-old boy, watching his father leave the log cabin the two of them have just built in the new Maine territory in 1769. As his father walks away into the surrounding forest, Matt looks at the one-room cedar log cabin that is now his home. The cabin consists of rough shelving built against the walls, a fireplace with a log and mud chimney, two chairs and a sturdy table. There are no windows yet, but they plan to cut them into the walls and cover them with oiled paper.

Matt and his father have also planted corn and pumpkins, and Matt feels the cabin is at least good enough for his mother. He feels pride that he has helped to build every inch of it, from cutting the trees and shaping them into logs which now form the walls, to covering the roof with pine boughs.

The cabin is very quiet, and Matt knows his father will be back in approximately seven weeks. In the meantime, he feels that he will be very lonely by himself in the wilderness. His father is returning to Quincy, Massachusetts to bring back his mother, sister and a new baby that neither he nor his father has seen yet. To keep track of the weeks, his father told him to cut a notch on a stick for each day. When he has seven notches, he should begin carving a new stick. When he has seven sticks carved, he can begin to watch for them.

Matt also recalls how his family spent nights by lamplight looking at maps that showed the territory that was to be their new home in the wilderness. Constructing the cabin from rough materials they created from the natural woodlands caused him to go to sleep many nights very sore, but he looked at the work proudly and felt he had done his part to help begin their new life. He purposefully remembers things his father told him before he left, such as to be careful with fire since the wood chimney is not as safe as a stone one. The young boy shows his maturity by remembering everything his father has told him: not to waste bullets or powder, to be careful with the fireplace, to keep track of time on a stick and to faithfully wind the watch.

As Matt looks around the cabin, he gazes at the big silver watch his father presented to him just before he left and picks up the rifle left for him to get food and protect himself. To pass the first day, Matt takes the gun into the forest and shoots at a red squirrel, but





he misses. He is disappointed, but he realizes it will take him some time to get used to the new gun.

## Chapter 1 Analysis

The first chapter introduces two of the main characters, Matt and his father. The time is established as 1869, and the place is the territory of Maine prior to its becoming a state. The mood is set as a wilderness survival experience with "Man against nature" as the chief initial conflict. The plot reflects this, as Matt is left to survive on his own with just the teachings of his father and the examples he was taught as he and his father began the adventure. The chapter ends with Matt thinking about carving the stick and knowing it will be August before his family returns. He realizes that another birthday will pass before they return to the log cabin.



## Chapter 2

### Chapter 2 Summary

The next day Matt gets over some of his fear of loneliness and begins to get into a routine of very hard work with a great deal of responsibility. The chores his father gave him are many, including fixing cracks in the cabin with mud, watering the corn and pumpkins, clearing more of the forest and cutting the logs into firewood. In addition, he will need to find much of his food in the woods and do all his own cooking and cleaning.

Even though Matt begins to enjoy his life alone, as no one is there to tell him what to do, when to do it or how to do it, he also realizes that it is very difficult to get everything done he has to do on a daily basis. He remembers happy times with his father, like the time they met an Indian and his father greeted him like a deacon in his hometown. He also remembers his father telling him that the Indians are no longer to be feared, as they have begun to be peaceful in this area since the last treaty. All this said, however, he still can not get over the slight feeling that something is watching him from the shadows of the forest.

Even though Matt begins to enjoy the quiet times in the forest, loneliness begins, and he does at times wish he had someone to talk to. That may explain why he is not as prepared as he should be when someone unexpected arrives at the cabin.

### Chapter 2 Analysis

This chapter begins by establishing Matt's ability to overcome his loneliness and shows his determination to get the work done that is needed. He is able to keep up with the work, but he is not unlike other boys who lose themselves in thought once in a while. He also gives in to short-term frustrations, such as yelling at the crows that constantly pester him in the cornfields.

At first, Matt fears noises such as the loon in the forest, but it soon becomes a soothing sound to him, transcending from fear to security. However, he still exhibits the fear that someone may be watching him from the forest shadows. There is also a new plot introduced, as readers get a hint in the last line of the chapter that Matt is not as prepared as he should be when someone unexpectedly arrives.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

One day, Matt is relaxing on the rock in front of the cabin door. He has shot a rabbit, and it is cooking over the fire when a figure appears from out of the darkness of the woods. He realizes it is a man walking slowly towards him, who shouts "Howdy!" as he approaches. Matt lets his guard down since the man appears friendly, and the man asks if he can share in the dinner boiling in the cabin. Matt, feeling he must be polite, agrees.

As Matt prepares dinner, the stranger, named Ben, admires the gun hanging over the door. After they finish the stew and some bread and molasses, Ben states that he is avoiding the river town because there has been some trouble involving him there. He says he aims to hunt beaver and possibly live with the Indians up north. It turns out he grew up with the Indians and learned to hunt and trap as they did. Now he mourns the fact that most of the Indians are gone, and those who have stayed are poor and too stubborn to realize that they don't own the land anymore. He brags a great deal of his past and finally falls asleep on the floor as Matt cleans up from the meal and readies himself for bed.

At first, when Matt gets into bed he cannot sleep. He has a slight fear in the back of his mind about Ben. He worries what will happen to his flour and molasses if Ben won't leave and Matt is forced to continue to feed him. Matt stays awake a long time, but finally he goes to sleep. The next morning, he awakes to realize that Ben has left. Matt feels relief but also some shame in the possibility that the man left because he felt he was unwelcome.

As Matt begins to make breakfast, he suddenly notices that the gun is gone. He searches in vain and finally realizes what has happened. His initial thoughts are of rage that he was so easily fooled. However, they soon turn to fear as he begins to understand that he has no protection and also no way to shoot game to eat. Looking at his notched sticks, he knows that it will be more than a month before his father returns. Matt will certainly eat a lot of fish!

## Chapter 3 Analysis

Matt's personality continues to be developed as readers see signs of his immaturity and recklessness. The cabin and its surroundings continue to be developed as a setting and almost take on their own personality. The plot develops as well, as Ben steals Matt's gun. This becomes the first real obstacle in the way of Matt's survival. Matt is shown at first to direct his rage at himself for being stupid, and then he begins to give in to other fears as he realizes that he has no protection and no method of getting game for food.

As the dividing line between carelessness and fear diminishes, Matt's character becomes more complex and also more mature. The chapter ends with the assumption that a new situation will be introduced and that a new level of the plot will be created.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

Matt's trips into the forest continue even though he cannot shoot any game. He thinks the animals all know this, and they seem unafraid as they play very near to him. His spirits pick up since the July weather is warm, and most of the flies and mosquitoes have disappeared. He is thankful that he can still catch an abundance of fish.

One day on Matt's return to the cabin with a nice catch of fish, he notices that the front door is open. As he gets nearer, he sees that the cabin is a shambles. Food is strewn all over, and the flour has spilled out, as has the molasses. His food is all ruined, and the tools have been scattered all over the cabin floor. At first Matt fears that Ben has returned to rob him, but he soon decides that Ben would not waste so much food for any reason. At that point he realizes that it must have been a bear. It is too late to do anything about it, but he tries in vain to salvage some of the food. He cannot, so he uses the last grains of salt on the trout as he roasts them. Then he knows that his own failure to bolt the cabin door not only cost him his food, but he no longer has any salt for the fish.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

Matt's spirits rise with the warming of the weather, but the enjoyment is short-lived as his carelessness once again costs him dearly. This time he loses what little food he has. Matt continues to be portrayed as a boy who meets adversity with some courage, and his ability to look at the bright side of situations after short bursts of temper strengthens his character.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

Several days go by with Matt eating only unseasoned fish. Soon he remembers a tree where there was a swarm of bees near what he and his father named Loon Pond. His father told him there were no bees in America until the colonists brought them here from England, and as a result, they must be domesticated bees. Where there are bees, he figures there must be honey. Matt is awfully tired of eating fish and nothing else, and he craves something sweet. He decides to climb the tree and get a small amount of honey that he assumes the bees won't miss.

Climbing up to the level of the hive, Matt tries to reach in for the honeycomb that he can barely see inside. As he does this, a piece of the hive breaks away, and the bees come out in a swarm and begin to sting him all over. Somehow Matt gets down from the tree, and with the whole swarm of bees attacking him with painful stings, he dives into the pond and ducks under the icy water.

In a panic, Matt gets tangled up in branches in the pond. In the process, he hurts his ankle, and he cannot get free. Almost unconscious, Matt finds himself being lifted out of the water and carried to dry land. He soon discovers that his rescuers are two Indians, an old man and a boy. The old man indicates that Matt is to lie still while he painfully removes the stingers of the bees from Matt's swollen body. Matt is then carried to his cabin and put into his own bed and left alone. A short time later, the old man returns and gives him some medicine that tastes very bitter to Matt. Then Matt sleeps.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

Once again, Matt's carelessness gets him into trouble. Always when things seem to be getting a little better for the boy, a tragedy occurs which he causes himself, or which he could control by being more cautious. However, this chapter does not end quite so happily, as Matt has a severe reaction to the multiple bee stings he receives while in the tree and escaping into the pond. New additions to the story include the characters of two Indians who appear to be friendly and caring. There is a sense that the Indians will become a major part of Matt's life.



# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

The next day, the old Indian returns to check on Matt and finds him recovering from the stings. They exchange names, and Matt finds the Indian is Saknis, family of beaver. Matt explains that his father has gone for the rest of his family and will return soon. The Indian explains that they have been watching him and that they thought him foolish to climb the bee tree. Matt discovers that his ankle has been injured. When the old Indian examines it, he tells Matt that it isn't broken and will soon heal. After he leaves, Matt discovers the Indian has left him a wonderful tasting stew and some cornbread.

The next day, Saknis returns with a boy about Matt's age. He announces that the boy is his grandson and that his name is Attean. Matt feels the boy is not happy to be in the cabin with a white boy and his possessions. Saknis presents Matt with a rough wooden crutch, and Matt tries to walk with it, having very little luck. However, after the Indians leave, he learns to balance on it and finds that he can even do most of his chores by using it to help him walk.

During the flight into the pond, Matt lost the boot that was on the foot of the ankle that was injured, and he soon wears through his only pair of socks. After the Indians notice this, they return three days later with a pair of moccasins made of tough moosehide. They fit and feel fine, and Matt is very grateful. He wants to give the old Indian something in return, but he can't think of anything. Then he spies the only book he has brought with him to the wilderness, *Robinson Crusoe*. He gives Saknis the book, but when the Indian stares at it upside down, Matt realizes the old Indian cannot read.

Matt is surprised, however, when Saknis shows a huge smile and asks Matt if he can read the white man's sign. When Matt admits that he can read, Saknis tells him that they will make a truce. Attean will teach Matt how to hunt, and Matt will teach Attean how to read.

While Attean voices his anger at the plan, Saknis is unwavering. He explains that the white man came to the Indian lands and made a treaty, not with peace pipe, but with signs on paper that the Indians could not read. After they put their sign on the paper to show that they are the white man's friends, they were told that they no longer own the land and could no longer hunt here. Saknis says that Attean will learn to read and will not give away Indian lands. The next day the lessons are to begin.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

Chapter six is unique in that it does not contain any tragedy. The Indians Matt meets appear to represent most of the Indians in the region and turn out to be friendly. Matt is nursed to health, which shows the Indians' compassion toward even those who they believe have wronged them, and the Indian ways of survival begin to appear in the use



of the crutch, the moccasins and their hunting knowledge. The only dark side of this chapter is in the actions of the grandson, Attean. He appears unhappy to have to go to the white boy's cabin with his grandfather, and he appears unhappy to have to hunt for the white boy. He is especially unhappy that he will be taught to read. Readers get a sense of uneasiness about the pending relationship between the two boys. However, the Indian shows that the white man cannot be trusted through the way the treaty was enacted. The Indians appear to have been purposefully misled for the advantage of the white man.





# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

Matt wakes the next morning with slight foreboding about the task of teaching Attean to read. He decides that Attean might not even show up for his first lesson, and if he does, he probably will not get very far into the alphabet before he quits the lessons altogether. Just in case, Matt lays out a plan to begin to teach the alphabet to the Indian boy. He decides he will find something to represent each letter, and he begins to look around the room for things to use for the first letters of the alphabet.

Attean does arrive, swinging a large rabbit for Matt to use for food. While Matt thanks him, Attean does not seem friendly or even responsive to him. The lessons begin. They do not last long, however. Matt begins the lesson by showing Attean that the letter "A" represents the word "arm." When asked to pick out the letter "A" in the book, Attean gets impatient and says that the white man is foolish to write the word "arm" all over the book. Matt explains that there are many words with the letter "A" and that there are many more letters. Attean seems astonished and asks how long it will take him to learn to read. "One moon?" he asks. No, Matt replies, maybe a year. With that, the Indian boy slams down the book and rushes out of the cabin. Matt hopes to himself that the boy is gone for good.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

The old Indian's word proves to be truthful. Like it or not, Attean shows up at the cabin the next day with a rabbit for Attean, and ready, though unhappily, for his first lesson. The Indian boy's character is introduced at this point. He evidently wants little to do with the white man's ways, and he ridicules them when given the chance. At this point in the story, because it generally takes place in Matt's world, Matt is shown to be the leader of the two boys. The reader probably feels as Matt must toward the Indian boy: distrustful and cautious.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Surprisingly, Attean returns the next day for another lesson. Matt tries several angles to get the boy's interest, but Attean seems uninterested in anything to do with words. Matt reads the part of *Robinson Crusoe* where Crusoe is tossed from a lifeboat into the rough sea. Though Attean seems uninterested, he does ask if Robinson gets out. When told that Crusoe is the only one who survives, the boy seems satisfied, but he leaves the cabin abruptly. The lessons are over once again.

The next day, Matt is better prepared, and he reads some of the more exciting passages of the book. Attean still seems uninterested. When Robinson Crusoe is excited about seeing some of his ship left in the ocean and plans on returning to it to get some useful items, Attean says that the white man is stupid. He tells Matt that the Indians could get along without anything from the ship, as they can make anything they need themselves. Matt turns to explaining the letter "B," but Attean is bored and leaves.

Afterwards, Matt thinks about the items Robinson Crusoe salvaged from the ship. He realizes that Robinson lived much better with just the items he brought ashore than Matt and his father have after their long trip to Maine territory.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

Matt gets into the teaching more while at the same time Attean becomes more adamant that he is wasting his time. The two characters continue to reflect the conflicting personalities introduced in the previous chapter, and some interest is created in whether or not Matt can teach the Indian boy to read. The differences between the two races, their philosophies and their means of survival are more noticeably introduced in this chapter.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

A few days later, Matt asks Attean to show him how the rabbit was killed without a gun or even a hole in its body. Willingly, Attean takes Matt into the forest, and using roots for a snare, he shows Matt how to set it by using two saplings a few feet apart with fish as bait. Matt makes some snares for himself and sets them. A few days later, he catches a partridge. Attean shows some small approval, but he still continues to bring Matt some food item each day for his lesson.

The Indian boy begins to learn the alphabet and even to spell some simple words in spite of himself. He still feels that reading and writing are the white man's tools and that they are unnecessary. The lessons continue with the one highlight generally being the continued reading of *Robinson Crusoe*. During one reading, when Crusoe saves a savage's life and the savage kneels down to kiss the earth and Crusoe's feet, Attean becomes very indignant and says that would never happen. No one should be a slave to a white man! With that, he again storms out of the cabin.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

While the plot mostly follows Attean's efforts to learn, Matt finally becomes the student as he tries to learn the Indian hunting ways by making and setting a snare for wild game. At almost the same time, Attean begins to learn from some of the lessons Matt is teaching him. This represents the struggle that continues today of the sharing of knowledge between two races or civilizations. Both boys have given in to the other somewhat, and that benefits both.

The question is also raised whether any man should be another's slave. Matt has unknowingly been brought up to accept the servitude of the savage to Crusoe. On the other hand, Attean, who has probably experienced the expected servitude of native peoples in a first-hand manner, is adamant that no man should kneel to another. The chapter ends with Matt possibly learning something from the Indian boy about life that he had never questioned to this point.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

Lessons continue, and Matt is able to convince Attean that Crusoe and Friday (the name he gave to the savage he rescued) have become companions without a master/slave relationship. Then, once again surprising Matt, the Indian boy asks if Matt would like to go fishing. Matt is delighted and says yes. However, upon arriving at the stream, instead of using a pole and line, Attean cuts a stick and sharpens one end, wades into the water and calmly spears a fish. The first fish is too small to keep, and the Indian boy talks quietly to it before releasing it back into the stream. The next fish is deemed acceptable, and Attean brings it to the bank and asks Matt to try spearing.

Matt knows that he will look foolish, but he tries anyway. He does look foolish as he falls completely into the stream on his second try at spearing what he thinks is probably a fish. As a result of his embarrassment, Matt decides to show Attean that he can catch fish his own way, and he promptly digs a worm and puts it onto his hook. Luckily, Matt soon hooks a large fish, but in trying to bring it to him, it breaks his line and is gone along with Matt's only hook. Even more embarrassed, Matt watches as Attean quickly carves a new hook from a maple sapling, deftly ties it onto Matt's line, and tells him to attach two worms to cover the hook and to continue fishing. Matt does, and he quickly catches a large fish. He points out to Attean that it has swallowed the hook. Attean agrees and slits open the fish to find a broken hook. He doesn't seem to care at all that he has lost the hook. "Easy make new hook," he says. "Make many hooks." Then he shows Matt how to carve them out of wood.

Matt admits to himself that at least here in the woods, Attean's skills are more valuable than he had at first thought. He is even more impressed as Attean quickly starts a fire with a small rock from his pouch and instructs Matt to ready the fish for cooking.

Eating the tasty fish, the two boys at last create some semblance of friendship. When Matt asks Attean what he said to the fish he threw back, he tells Matt that he asked the fish not to tell the others. Matt is surprised when Attean tells him that the fish know and understand more than he thinks. Then, Attean smiles for the first time.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

Chapter ten begins with Matt telling a small lie, that Crusoe and Friday are equal friends in the book they are reading, but this lie makes it easier for Attean to believe the story. Then, the two boys take another trip together, this time to fish. Attean is shown to be far superior outside of the cabin. He not only catches a fish his own way, but he shows Matt a better way to catch a fish Matt's way. The friendship between the two boys begins to show slightly as they enjoy eating the fish together. A parallel exists between the book, *Robinson Crusoe*, and the lives of the two boys. Matt understands that Friday, the man

Crusoe saves, probably knows much more about the island that they are marooned on than Crusoe does. Matt realizes that he thinks of himself as superior to the Indian boy because he has an education and Atean obviously does not. However, Matt begins to learn that the skills of the Indians are valuable in this remote wilderness, often serving them more so than his formal education.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

One day, Matt finally has seven notches on his stick, meaning it is mid-August. His father should be returning soon with the rest of his family. When Attean arrives at the cabin, he is accompanied by a strange-looking dog. It is a sorry-looking old hound with coarse brown hair, a mangy tail and a pointed nose that is misshapen. It looks as if it has survived many battles, and when he sees Matt the hair on his back stands straight up and he lets out a mean growl. Attean says that the dog has no name except *Aremus*, the Indian name for dog. Attean says somewhat proudly that the dog will fight almost anything, and Matt thinks that by the look of the dog, he has lost many battles. While Attean calls the dog worthless, Matt can see that Attean is somewhat proud of him.

That day Matt and Attean go into a part of the forest that Matt has never seen. There they find a beaver dam that Attean says is populated by a family of beavers. Matt is scared when a beaver slaps its tail on the water and dives under. Matt thinks it is the sound of a rifle. Attean laughs at him but then points out a crude sign that looks somewhat like a beaver carved on a tree. He tells Matt that the sign means the dam and the beavers in it belong to the "people of the beaver" and that no one else is to hunt here. Matt finds that strange, but he makes a mental note to tell his father of this.

Soon, the boys are ready to go back to the cabin. Attean tells Matt to lead and to find their way home. Thinking it is a trick because he doesn't know the right way, he gets mad at Attean. Attean goes ahead and shows Matt that he has left signs all along the trail as they went through the forest, such as a bent twig, small stones piled a certain way and a tuft of grass left low in a tree. Attean says that Matt must do the same, since he cannot afford to get lost in the forest.

All of a sudden, Matt remembers Robinson Crusoe and Friday leaving their cabin. The brown-skinned renegade always leads the way and seems to know more about the island than Crusoe. Matt realizes that he and Attean are similar to Crusoe and Friday, and that he himself is a somewhat skinny version of Robinson Crusoe.

On the way back to the cabin, Attean cuts two small globules of sap from a pine tree, sticks one in his mouth and begins to chew. Then, he gives Matt the other and instructs him to do the same. At first the taste is horrible and the texture is crunchy, but it soon turns into a rather nice taste of pine with a feel much like gum. Matt knows that Attean has once again proven himself to be superior in the ways of the woods.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

The boys continue to become companions, though neither likes the other too much. The slashes in the sticks tell Matt it is time for his father and family to return, and the reader knows it is mid-August.

Matt gets more instruction from Attean about the secrets of life in the forest and loses some of his mistrust of Attean, while Attean's character is developed more fully and he is shown to have some compassion for a mongrel dog that often accompanies him.

The dog allows the author to show that Attean has some compassion, and the reader understands that the Indian boy is hesitant to show his love for the dog. This is much like the boy's attitude towards other people and things he comes into contact with.

More parallels are established between the book *Robinson Crusoe* and the two boys. Friday takes the lead when he and Crusoe leave their cabin, and Attean takes the lead when they leave Matt's. However, the more intelligent ones are in fact supposed to be Crusoe and Matt.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

Matt continues to admire the bow that Attean often carries over his shoulder on their trips into the forest. Matt remembers shooting a bow and arrow during his earlier childhood, and he decides to make one for himself so that he can get more meat to go with his fish. Practicing with the crude bow and arrows, he cannot make the arrows fly straight or true. Watching his failing efforts, Attean finally shows him how to make a proper bow from the proper wood and how to make a bowstring for it. He also shows Matt where to get the right wood to make arrows.

Matt practices with his bow daily, and he finally gets so that he can often hit the target he has made for himself. He promises himself that the squirrels that seem to mock him will think better of it.

## Chapter 12 Analysis

Chapter twelve continues to show Attean's intelligence and skills. Matt continues to learn from him, and their meager friendship grows slightly, as it has since their first meeting. However, a distrust of each other remains.





# Chapter 13

## Chapter 13 Summary

One day during a hike, Matt and Attean come upon a fox caught in a metal trap. Matt wants to either kill it or set it free, but Attean shows Matt a sign carved crudely on a tree that marks this area as that of the turtle people. Matt and Attean are not allowed to do anything. Attean shows Matt that the trap has been skillfully hidden and that most likely an Indian set the trap for a white man who is looking for fox pelts. Matt continues to be upset that the fox must suffer and that a white man would trespass onto an Indian clan's private hunting area.

During Matt's days with Attean, Matt continues to somewhat resent Attean's skills in the forest. At night, he even dreams that he himself is the hero and that he saves Attean from some horrible fate. He also knows that the Indian boy would probably not return each day were it not for his grandfather's instructions. He even thinks that the grandfather might be very unhappy if he knew that Attean had become the teacher. As Matt thinks about it, though, he realizes that each boy is learning from the other. They are even learning language skills, as each tries to use more of the other's words.

## Chapter 13 Analysis

Time continues to pass, and the two boys continue to profit from the things they learn from each other. Matt finally begins to realize that, though he often dislikes Attean, the two of them are helping each other learn things they could not learn on their own.

This realization sums up one of the main themes of the story, that both have knowledge the other can use but not without conflict. This idea is paralleled by the conflict of the two cultures at the time. One represents knowledge and skill of the wilderness. The other represents modernization and material gains. This world's imposition on the other is necessitated by its need to expand.



# Chapter 14

## Chapter 14 Summary

Matt finally completes his abridged version of *Robinson Crusoe* with Attean. Both boys are sad to see it end, and Attean admits that he has been relaying each day's lesson to the people in his camp around the fire each night. Matt realizes that he has only one other book, the Bible. All of sudden he remembers that many of the stories in the Bible have a lot of action and are very interesting.

At the next lesson, Matt relays a Bible story to Attean, that of Noah and the ark. Afterwards, Attean says that his people have a very old story that is much like that of Noah. He tells Matt the story as well as he can using the white man's words, and Matt is amazed that they parallel each other so closely. Matt wonders if the Indians have other stories like that and how they could know of the flood when they live so far away here in the forest.

## Chapter 14 Analysis

More parallels between the two boys and their cultures are established. After the boys finish reading *Robinson Crusoe*, Matt reads the story of Noah and the ark. Attean excitedly tells Matt that the Indians have a story much like that, and he begins to tell their story in Matt's language. This leaves Matt wondering how the Indians could have a story so much like his when they live so far away from the flood. Matt here puts his culture before the Indian culture. He wonders how the Indians could know about the flood told of in the Bible, not how the Bible story could relate the same flood as the Indians' story.



# Chapter 15

## Chapter 15 Summary

This is to be the day of the boys' greatest adventure. Matt finally shoots a rabbit with his bow and arrow. Very proud of himself, he swings it by its ears as they walk towards the beaver dam. As they walk further, they are startled by a playful bear cub that pokes its head through the bushes. The boys immediately stop, but the mother bear appears and begins to charge them, only a couple of bounds away. Hardly thinking and very scared, Matt throws the rabbit at the large female bear and strikes it squarely on its nose. Hesitating for only a second, the bear quickly charges towards them, but the second gives Attean time to string an arrow onto his bow and shoot the bear squarely between the eyes. Attean quickly follows his initial attack with another arrow to the heart. The bear drops, and Attean immediately sinks his knife into the bear to make the final kill.

Knees shaking noticeably, Matt watches as Attean stands over the bear and quietly talks to it. Then Matt asks Attean what he said to the bear. The Indian boy solemnly tells Matt that he told it that he was sorry he had to kill it. They did not come here to hunt. He explains to Matt that Indians do not kill female bears who have cubs. Matt indicates that he is really glad that Attean did kill it, and Attean returns the compliment, saying that Matt moved quickly, like an Indian.

The boys leave the bear where it is, for Attean tells Matt that the work now is squaw's work. They will be the ones who cut up the bear and take it back to their camp, where all of it will be used in some manner. Matt regrets that he will get none of it, not even a piece to show his father, but he consoles himself with the thought that he has been complimented by Attean and that he moved quick like an Indian.

## Chapter 15 Analysis

Matt finally gets some recognition by saving their lives when a bear begins to attack them. Attean compliments him by saying he moved quickly, like an Indian. This statement builds on the fact that, while the Indian is looked at as inferior because of his lack of education and what whites would call class, he is far superior in the basic means of survival in his own world. Roles continue to switch as Matt is less and less the teacher, and Matt is now the one who feels pride in being complimented by the Indian boy.



# Chapter 16

## Chapter 16 Summary

Later the same day when Matt is by himself, he becomes very lonely. His excitement gone, he begins to wonder what is taking his father so long. He imagines the possibility of a bear getting him. How would his mother ever find him? All of a sudden, a stranger walks out of the woods. It is not a stranger, but Attean dressed in what Matt believes is blue and white war paint. Attean tells Matt that it is not war paint, but paint for a celebration of feasting on the bear. Attean's grandfather has asked Attean to invite Matt. Matt is thrilled and says that he would love some of the bear meat. As they leave, Attean makes one of his infrequent jokes and tells Matt not to forget to bar the door properly.

After walking for more than an hour, the boys come to a small river. Tied next to the bank is a birch bark canoe, and Attean motions for Matt to get in. Gently pushing off, Attean quickly and silently rows them to the other side, where they get out and walk a short distance to a large fence made of log poles. Matt's doubt about entering lasts only seconds, and they are soon inside a village where there are numerous cabins and wigwams. A smoky fire burns under pots filled with fragrant meat and herbs, and the area is surrounded by Indians in all types of garments from basic Indian clothing to white man's coats and brightly colored dresses on the women. In the darkness and light of the fire and flickering birch torches, Matt is aware that these people have put on their finest for the feast.

Soon one man rises and walks slowly towards Matt. It turns out to be Saknis, and he is dressed like a king in a long red coat decorated with many beads. He also wears metal armbands and has some feathers in a headband. He welcomes the white boy, and all the Indians echo his welcome. Matt replies with, "Kweh!" the native greeting. Soon the Indians begin to laugh and talk, and more women and children appear. This all makes Matt feel relieved if not a little overwhelmed. Attean sits him down, and an Indian lady brings him a drink that is sweet and very satisfying.

Shortly thereafter, Attean's grandfather continues the ceremony by puffing on a long pipe before handing it to Attean, who stands in front of the whole group rather ceremoniously. He puffs quickly on the pipe, passes it back to his grandfather and begins a story that Matt realizes is the telling of their early morning adventure. Towards the end, he jumps, throws something imaginary and points towards Matt. At this point, the Indians begin to laugh and mimic Attean, all in great spirits.

At the end of the story, which Attean tells very effectively, the Indians form a line and begin dancing. Attean says that they will dance now and then feast, and he commands Matt to dance with them. After a time Matt is exhausted. His feet hurt, and he is out of breath. The dance finally ends, and the feasting begins. Matt finds the bear stew wonderful, but he is amazed that Attean does not eat. Attean explains that he killed the bear. It is his, so he does not eat it.



Later, the revelers are almost too tired to stay awake. They tell more stories and jokes, and laughter continues. Realizing that his guest is tired, Attean takes him to a wigwam that is warm and cozy and motions for him to take the bed. Matt does, and he sleeps. He realizes, though, that the dancing and stories last all night.

## Chapter 16 Analysis

The highlight of the chapter is the introduction of the Indian village and the ceremony that includes dancing, stories and much joking among the native people. The first description of the village in which Attean lives is different from what Matt had imagined. Indians are clothed in various garb, which includes Englishmen's formal wear as well as the traditional brightly colored blankets of the Indian people. The similarity between Matt's people and Attean's becomes more evident as Matt remembers celebrations back in his hometown. Matt feels this is a great deal like what he was used to in Massachusetts. Both Saknis and Attean are given more status as Matt realizes that Saknis is indeed the leader of this group.



# Chapter 17

## Chapter 17 Summary

Waking the next morning, Matt looks around inside of the hut where he spent the night. It is disorganized, with pots, pans and other items hung about carelessly. The smoke from the small fire during the night chokes him, and he goes outside into the bright sunlight. Attean arrives with some cold cornbread, and the boys make their way through the village toward the canoe at the river. Matt wants to linger, taking in all the reality that the previous night had hidden. The village consists mostly of poorly built huts. Fish hang on lines throughout the camp, and fish bones, seashells and animal bones are discarded everywhere. The glamorous dress of the night before has given way to drab dress on all those who wear any clothing at all. The men, he learns, have gone to hunt deer.

Attean seems to be in a dark mood, and Matt asks him if it is because he is not with the men on the hunt. Matt learns that since Attean does not own a gun, he cannot participate. Matt also notes that the Indians have no money with which to buy anything. Their wampum used to be good to buy things, but no more. Continuing their discussion, Matt learns that Attean's grandmother did not want Matt to come to the feast because she hates all white people. She finally agreed that he could attend but said that he could not sleep in her house. This causes Matt to realize even more the shame and discomfort these people feel at having their land and their lives in general disrupted by the white man's taking more and more of their lands.

Attean then explains to Matt that, while his mother was looking for bark to make baskets, some white men shot her. When his father went on the trail to find the murderers, he never returned. He finds out that some time ago white men were paid for Indian scalps, and he realizes that it is the truth. He remembers the governor offering a bounty for them.

Walking back with Attean, Matt realizes the deep differences there are between the two boys, their families and their cultures. There has been much hatred. Will it ever end? This makes him remember his mother, and he wonders if it is right for his father to be bringing her here. He is not certain the land is safe.

Walking on down the path towards Matt's cabin, the boys soon come to a place where two trails meet. Matt realizes that he could find the village again if he wanted to, but the dark look in Attean's eyes tells him he must not go there again unless invited.

## Chapter 17 Analysis

The exciting time of the feast is gone and with it the apparent glamour of the village and its inhabitants. Matt awakes to daylight that signifies not only the beginning of a new day, but also the harsh reality of the true Indian village with its squalor and lack of

cleanliness. In addition, the facts leading to his invitation to visit are made clear to him, particularly Attean's grandmother's hatred of all white men. This causes Matt's mood to parallel that of the environment of the camp he has just left. The true plight of the native people at the mercy of the whites who have more weaponry and technology is clear to both boys. Finding his way back to his cabin and recognizing the place where two roads meet is not accidental. The road symbolically dissects the lives of Matt and the Indian boy. Are their two paths combining into one, or are they diverging, never again to meet?



# Chapter 18

## Chapter 18 Summary

Days go by, and Matt realizes by the number of sticks he has carved that August has come and gone and that September must also be over. Signs of fall are everywhere. His mood darkens as the shadows lengthen, and Attean's mood remains dark as well. Attean often does not come to see Matt for days. Matt begins to travel farther and farther into the forest alone, secure in the ways of Indian trail blazing that Attean has taught him, until once again he goes so far as to be in the land of the turtle.

Matt suddenly hears the pitiful whine of a dog. He finds a dog in a trap and realizes that it is Attean's dog. He knows that he cannot leave it as he left the trapped fox, no matter who has rights to the area. Try as he might, though, he cannot free the dog because it continues to lash out at him. The only way to save the dog is to return to the Indian village and find Attean. The trip takes a long time, even running. Using what the Indian boy taught him of trails, Matt finds his way to the river. Matt swims across and is met by a pack of the Indians' dogs. Some of the girls from the village arrive and quiet the dogs. He tells them that he needs to find Attean, but they indicate he is not at the village.

Finding that Saknis is also gone, Matt demands to see Attean's grandmother. Upon being taken to her cabin, he is met by a proud old woman to whom he explains that he has found Attean's dog, but he cannot get the dog out of a trap. A handsome girl dressed in blue comes outside and explains that the lady cannot speak English. She says that she is Marie, Attean's sister, and will tell her grandmother what has happened. Finally the old lady agrees and decides to let Marie accompany Matt back to get the dog. In the meantime, however, she notices the cut Matt received from the trap while trying to free the dog, and she insists that he let her clean and mend the wound.

On the trail, Matt and Marie talk briefly, and Matt explains that he has a sister somewhat younger than Marie. Marie tells him that her name is Christian and that she was baptized by a father. Upon reaching the trapped dog, Marie holds him in a blanket while Matt releases the trap. The dog bounds off on three legs. Halfway to the village, they meet Attean, who has come looking for them. He calls the dog worthless, but Matt can see the pleasure in both the Indian's eyes and those of the mongrel dog.

## Chapter 18 Analysis

Matt's mood becomes dark like the lengthening shadows of fall. Attean's mood is the same, and the boys often don't see each other for days. The worrisome feeling that there might be something wrong with his father is forgotten when Matt finds Attean's dog in a trap placed near the turtle people's boundary. It is a steel trap, like the one that the fox was trapped in. The similarity is not lost, as the reader understands that this is not an Indian way.





A new character is introduced in Marie, who turns out to be Attean's sister. When Matt tells her that Attean has never mentioned her, she tells Matt that Attean doesn't care for anything but hunting and fishing. She indicates that he doesn't find anything else worthwhile.

Attean's grandmother relaxes her hatred of white people as she allows Marie to return with Matt to get the dog and also bandages Matt's cut from the steel trap. She is impressed that Matt would go to so much effort to save an Indian dog. Maybe, also, she wants to defeat the white man's trap.



# Chapter 19

## Chapter 19 Summary

Two days later, Attean arrives at Matt's cabin and announces that his grandmother wishes for Matt to return to the village. On his arrival at the village, Matt feels more at ease. He is met by Attean's grandmother, Saknis, and Attean's sister, Marie. After a bowl of fish and corn stew, Matt is led around the village, where he watches the Indian women at work. He learns how to dry berries, how to make baskets and other skills he feels he can put to use.

Then, Matt and Attean get involved in a gambling game the boys are playing. It involves the use of sticks as trade. When the other players win all of one boy's sticks, the loser is expected to give up something of value. As luck would have it, Matt finally loses and must give up his only shirt, which he reluctantly does. After a different very rough game of hitting a ball (and each other) with leather sticks, the boys go as a group to swim in the river and engage in horseplay. It is much like Matt remembers the ocean when he was younger, and he finds it enjoyable and exciting. Matt feels he has been accepted. Before going home, he goes to the cabin of Attean's grandmother to say goodbye. She asks Attean where Matt's shirt is, and Attean leaves and quickly returns with Matt's shirt, telling Matt that taking it was a joke.

The boys go to the river to get into the canoe, followed by the dog. As the craft leaves the bank, the dog jumps in with them and settles down near Matt. Attean notes that the dog remembers him. Matt wonders if a dog actually can remember, and he gently touches the dog. With this gesture, the dog begins to softly wag its tale.

As Matt begins his lonely walk back to his cabin, he feels that he has been accepted at least somewhat by the Indians. While he is tired and hurt from the rough games, he feels an inner satisfaction that the dog has accepted him, that the Indian boys have accepted him and that he has not embarrassed Attean.

## Chapter 19 Analysis

The change in the feeling of the Indians towards Matt is reflected by Attean's grandmother's invitation to return to the village. Her acceptance of him is due to Matt's courage and caring for a poor dog that belongs to an Indian. Matt is becoming more accepted by the people of the Indian village. Attean's dog's acceptance of Matt also reflects this. It is possible that Attean's grandmother, and other Indians, are undergoing a change of attitude towards Matt, and, quite possibly whites in general. Certainly Matt's acceptance is leading towards this in a small way.

Matt's gambling somewhat parallels the gamble that Attean took in bringing the white boy into the village as his friend, when white people are generally despised by these people. It may also reflect his father's distaste for gambling of any type. In the end, Matt

loses his bet, but Attean wins as Matt is accepted by the Indian boys. At the end of the chapter, the question of Matt's father and the rest of his family's whereabouts remains.



# Chapter 20

## Chapter 20 Summary

A week passes before Attean returns to Matt's cabin. In the meantime, Matt does his chores early in the morning so that, if Attean invites him back to his camp, he will be ready to go. When Attean does come, he has surprising news. The time of the hunt is nearing, and many of those in his village will leave to follow the caribou and moose. However, Attean says that he will not go with them, as it is time for him to find his *manitou*, or spirit. To accomplish this, he will go by himself deep into the forest, build a wigwam, go without food for many days and wait for a sign to come to him. It may be in the form of a dream, a vision, or a sound, but he says he will know it when it happens. Then he will have found his *manitou* and will obtain a new name and be treated as a man.

Attean leaves Matt, and Matt wonders what it will be like for Attean. It is now almost winter, and the nights are beginning to get very cold. Being alone without food for many days must be a very scary experience. If Attean does not find his spirit, he must return to his village a failure. Attean promises to return to the cabin and his friend if he completes his task successfully.

## Chapter 20 Analysis

A new plot is introduced, as Attean must prove himself to be a man. For the first time in the novel, Attean shows fear at being in the forest alone. It is not the survival he fears, but the possibility of failure to find his *manitou*, or spirit. Matt senses this and becomes concerned for his friend's safety and honor. It is the first time in the story that the boys are referred to as "friends." As the winter approaches, the cold nights begin, and there is still no mention of Matt's family.



# Chapter 21

## Chapter 21 Summary

Many days later, Attean returns, but he is not alone. His grandfather solemnly walks toward the cabin with him. Matt realizes immediately that Attean has been successful in his search for his spirit. He walks taller and with more dignity. His head has been shaved except for a topknot, and he is carrying a new rifle.

Matt cannot hide his excitement that his friend's ordeal is over, and he shouts his congratulations. Attean says little, but he does show his pleasure. Then, Saknis speaks gravely. He tells Matt that winter and snow are fast approaching and that the tribe will be going north on the caribou and moose hunt. He says that it is not safe for a white boy to stay here during the winter alone and that he wishes Matt to travel north with the tribe as Attean's white brother.

Matt is at first furious, and he says that his father may arrive any day. Saknis says that he may not. Matt has not allowed himself to even think that his father may not return, but as the thought sinks in, he sees that the trip with the Indians might be a way out of his fear. However, after thinking about his father, he politely declines the offer. Almost in tears as the two Indians walk away, he furiously begins to chop wood, hoping that he has made the right decision. Then Matt realizes that Attean had not even offered to say goodbye or shake his hand, as his grandfather had done. Is Attean unhappy with him? Has Matt possibly embarrassed him by refusing to become his white brother?

## Chapter 21 Analysis

While Attean is still the same person, a new side of him is introduced. He is now a man and a hunter, and he is no longer a carefree boy who can spend days wandering in the forest at his will. The offer to take Matt with the tribe on the very important winter hunt is a great step forward in uniting the boys towards one culture. Matt's decision to decline the offer and to wait for his father and family shows not only his resolution to be faithful to his father, but his ultimate denial to take the next step in transitioning towards the Indians' way of life. Again, as winter nears, the plight of Matt's father and family is less and less certain.



# Chapter 22

## Chapter 22 Summary

After Matt watches for Attean's return for several days, the Indian boy finally does return with his dog. Matt is very relieved and welcomes his friend openly. Attean asks if Matt might have changed his mind, but Matt says that he has not. He must remain faithful to his father. Attean says that both he and his grandfather understand, and they honor him for his decision. Attean presents Matt with two gifts, one from his grandfather, which is a beautiful new pair of snowshoes, and one from Attean's grandmother, a basket of maple sugar, which is very precious to the Indians. Matt thanks Attean and tells him to tell his grandmother that he will help them gather sap for more sugar in the spring.

Attean is thoughtful and tells Matt that they will not return at all. His grandfather knows that they are a hunting tribe, and with all the white men coming and clearing the forest, they must move to better hunting grounds. They will go far away toward where the sun goes down and never return.

Suddenly Matt wonders if the land he is on is part of the reason the tribe must leave, and he asks if Attean's grandfather ever owned the land that his father purchased for the cabin. Attean responds, "How can man own land? ... Land for all people to live on." Matt has trouble understanding this, but as he thinks about it, he realizes that Attean may be the one with the correct philosophy. Attean has one last present for Matt, his dog. He says that the dog is not good on a hunt and that he likes Matt. He will stay with Attean's *medabe*, or white brother.

Matt knows what the dog means to Attean and decides that he must return the favor with a gift. What can he give Attean, though? The boy could make no use of the book they read together. Then, Matt remembers his father's watch. He gets it and solemnly gives it to Attean with instructions on how to wind it. Attean is very impressed, and the boys shake hands goodbye for the last time. Attean walks away, and the dog stays behind looking after him.

## Chapter 22 Analysis

There are two significant events in Chapter 22. First, Attean refers to Matt as *medabe*, or white brother. This shows how deep the boys' friendship has grown. The other significant event is that Matt has won Attean and his grandfather's respect and admiration by staying true to his own father, as Attean says he would do. As the tribe leaves for new hunting opportunities far away, Matt begins to realize that Indians' decision to leave may not be a safe one. Sagnis believes that they can go where there are no white men, but white men are heading west also. The two boys set off on their separate journeys, though, parting ways in their relationship and in their cultures.



# Chapter 23

## Chapter 23 Summary

Matt continues his life much as he began it at the beginning of the story. He continues to have to fill cracks in the log cabin with mud, and he now takes the kernels off the cob instead of watering and weeding it. He has found berries and nuts that he thought of before only as squirrels' food. The biggest difference is the cold. He is constantly trying to stay warm, and he begins to use skills he observed among the Indians to make clothes, create warm insulation in his moccasins and even make a fur hat.

Doing all this work generally left for women, Matt's thoughts often turn to his mother, and he can almost see and hear her moving cheerfully about the cabin. He begins to make presents for the family he is sure will arrive at any time. For his mother, he carves plates and bowls from wood. For the baby, he makes a cradle, and for his sister, Sarah, he makes a cornhusk doll. He is somewhat amazed at how much he anticipates being reunited with his sister. He thinks of Attean's sister and wishes they could all get to know one another.

## Chapter 23 Analysis

Matt's cycle of work continues, varied only by the coldness of the weather. His use of the skills he learned from the Indian people is necessary for his survival, and he fashions clothing, furniture and tools. He makes use of food sources he would have not known about before his association with the Indians.

With Matt's isolation, his thoughts turn more toward his family, and he imagines them arriving at the cabin any day. He wishes there could be an association between the Indian people and his own family.



# Chapter 24

## Chapter 24 Summary

It is almost Christmas. The thought of the holiday and Matt's mother's plum pudding is both happy and sad, since Matt knows that this Christmas Day will be just like all the other days. He has his memories, though. The first heavy snowfall makes it difficult for Matt to even open the cabin door, but he finally fashions a shovel of sorts from a piece of firewood and pries the door open so he can go out into the bright sunshine and deep snow. Trying on his snowshoes, he is at first clumsy. However, with a little practice, he is able to maneuver on top of the snow, and he realizes that he is very happy for the first time in a long while. He no longer fears the winter. Returning to the cozy cabin, Matt curls up by the fire and he reads *Robinson Crusoe*.

## Chapter 24 Analysis

For the first time, winter becomes a positive occurrence in Matt's life. While the symbolic safety of the cabin becomes a prison-like structure when the snow keeps the one door from opening, his freedom is obtained. Matt finds happiness in his ability to freely move in the heavy snow.





# Chapter 25

## Chapter 25 Summary

Matt is bringing wood into the cabin a few days later when the dog begins to look towards the creek and bark furiously. Looking towards the area the dog is pointing at, Matt sees a figure pulling a sled. It turns out to be his father. Then, the small figure of his sister darts out behind him. At the same time, Matt sees his mother trying to get out of the sled. A tearful reunion is held, and his father says that his mother is responsible for pushing them to get here before Christmas. A typhus fever attacked the whole family and held them up for months until they were all well enough to travel. His mother is still very frail, and Matt learns that the baby lived only five days.

Matt's father realizes that everywhere he looks are signs of the Indian friends Matt made. He tells Matt that he is very proud of him and that Matt has done a grown man's job. The little family bustles about unloading and admiring all the wonderful things they brought which make the cabin a real home. Matt's special gifts are new boots, a warm woolen jacket and breeches. His father has a new rifle, but his mother has also brought Matt's old one. Matt thinks of Robinson Crusoe and feels that no one could be as rich as himself at this moment. It causes him to feel very proud that he has been faithful and waited for his family.

Matt's sister has grown up significantly. She tells him that the dog is the ugliest she has ever seen and that it won't come near any of them. Matt responds that they will come to like the dog.

As the family settles in, Matt's mother is amazed at how much taller Matt has grown, how thin he has become and how brown he is. He is almost like an Indian, she declares, and Matt thinks she does not know how close he came to becoming one. She also tells Matt that they will soon have neighbors. At least one family will be moving there, and probably others will follow soon. Before long, there will be a town here, where the Indians were once free to hunt and travel as they wished.

Matt goes outside into the snow and looks back at the little cabin, so brightly lit. Tonight he will not have to eat alone. He remembers his other friends and realizes they were probably right to leave. Their hunting here will soon be gone forever.

## Chapter 25 Analysis

The story ends on a happy note when Matt's father, mother and sister finally arrive. The cabin becomes the center of the family's safety and happiness, and Matt is given the ultimate compliment by his father that he has done a man's job and that his father is proud of him. Very significantly, the parallel between Matt and Attean is completed as both have grown from boys to men together. However, the division in the road is ultimately dividing the two cultures, not converging them. The author has defined the

plight of the Indian people as it will be throughout the United States and given readers a glimpse of the white man's struggles as well.



# Characters

## Matt Hallowell

Matt is a twelve-year-old boy when the story opens. He is of strong character for his age and works hard to help make his father's dream come true. He is portrayed as a responsible boy who overcomes some obstacles on his own by relying on his life's experiences of twelve years. He is immature as the novel begins, but he becomes a man as he experiences life in the wilderness with the help of his new Indian friends. He is eventually faced with the decision of whether to go with the Indians who feel forced to leave the area or wait for his father and the rest of his family, who are months late getting to him and who may not return at all.

## Matt's Father

Matt's father appears to be a very hard working but quiet man of great abilities. He is stern but very understanding, and he is a great role model for Matt. His dream is to be one of the first to settle in the newly created Maine territory, and he takes his son there to begin building a cabin around which he hopes to provide his family with a new life.

## Ben

A short, heavysset man with blue eyes and weathered skin, Ben has a full beard almost covering his eyes with reddish whiskers. He wears a tattered old blue army coat and heavy boots. He has had some trouble with the law in the river town, and he is going west to live with the Indians and trap animals for fur. He proves to be a thief and quite possibly the one who is using "bad" Indians to trap animals with steel traps.

## Saknis

An old Indian who is dressed somewhat like Matt's father, Saknis wears a coat of a rough brown material and pants that have fringes down the sides. His face is smooth, and his head is bald except for a topknot of black hair. He stands very erect and is tall and proud. His name is Saknis, family of beaver. Saknis is the chief of the tribe that has its village not too far from Matt's cabin. He is a wise leader who dislikes the invasion of whites onto his people's hunting grounds, but he realizes that he cannot change the way things are going and that he must lead his people as best he can to make the most of the situation.



## Attean

Grandson of Saknis, Attean is an Indian boy about Matt's age. He has dark expressionless eyes and black hair that hangs to his shoulders. He is clothed only in a breechcloth that hangs from a string around his waist.

Attean does not like what the migration of whites into his area is doing to the people and the hunting and fishing. He realizes it is changing the ways he has been taught up to now, and he resents Matt, who represents the white people in general. He is a very proud boy who shows little emotion and is trying to gain the respect of his elders so that he can become a man and accompany them on their long winter hunting trips to the north. Attean is greatly skilled in the ways of living in the wilderness, and his grandfather forces him to take reading lessons from Matt and to teach Matt his ways of survival.

## Aremus

Attean's dog has no name, but Aremus means dog in his language. At first, the dog does not like Matt and noticeably watches him all the time. The dog once got into a disagreement with a porcupine, and many of the quills that went into his face were never completely pulled out, making him a very ugly and yet laughable animal.

In general, the dog is misshapen and ugly, and Matt thinks it not much of a dog. While Attean curses him as a dumb, useless dog, though, Attean is proud of him and says he will fight anything. The dog has an understanding of people much as Saknis, and he dislikes white people.

## Sarah

Matt's sister is Sarah. Matt remembers her as a very little girl who is always following him around and generally getting in his way. Upon her arrival at the cabin, she has grown up and become a responsible girl.

## Matt's Mother

While playing a very small role in the book, Matt's mother has been a wonderful mother to Matt, and he always remembers her very fondly. On her arrival at the cabin, she is a typical mother, concerned about the difficulties her son has faced. She has had typhoid fever and become very frail.

## Squaws

The Indian women are called squaws. They are portrayed as being lower in status than the men. Their work consists of duties the men will not perform.



# Objects/Places

## The Forest

The forest plays a very important role in the novel. It has many facets including happiness, fear, bravery, cold, warm, brightness and darkness. It is located in the new Maine territory and has for generations been the home of native Indians who have lived there, hunted, fished and used it as an integral part of their existence. In 1768, the forest is teeming with wild game, fish, birds and the environment necessary to sustain crops like corn and pumpkins. It provides all the necessities for the people living there to survive. However, as the two boys change, so does the forest and its inhabitants.

## The Cabin

The novel is centered around the one-room cabin that has just been completed by Matt and his father. It is made of spruce logs that have been squared and notched and turned into the walls. The roof is constructed of cedar splints and covered with pine boughs. There is one door held shut by a log that is held tight against the door when closed. There is no window as yet.

Inside the cabin, there are hand-hewn planks attached to the wall for shelves and a small fireplace with a log and mud chimney. Furniture consists of a sturdy table and two chairs that were made by Matt and his father. At various times, the cabin becomes either a refuge or also almost prison-like.

## The Gun

The rifle which Matt's father leaves him had been his father's. Its place is hanging above the door, always kept clean and ready for any emergency. Matt's life is to center around the gun, as it is both protection and his only method of getting meat for food. When the gun is stolen, Matt is left with a much more difficult life. The gun somewhat represents the decline of the Indian people in that it is the chief tool used by whites to gain superiority over the Indians.

## The Big Silver Watch

Another gift of Matt's father when Matt is left to fend for himself, the watch has been his father's for years. It keeps perfect time, and it is left with Matt as a symbol that his father will return. Matt faithfully winds it and keeps it clean until he gives it to his Indian friend upon his departure from the forest.



## The Bee Tree

The tree that Matt remembers seeing with his father is full of bees, and Matt assumes it has a hive with a honeycomb inside. This tree is responsible for Matt's meeting with the Indians as they save him from the poison of the bee stings after Matt tries to get some of the honey for himself.

*Robinson Crusoe*

Matt uses the book *Robinson Crusoe* to help interest Attean in his reading lessons. Matt generally reads it to the Indian boy, but he learns to leave out some parts that Attean finds boring or unacceptable to his lifestyle. Matt sees in the characters and some situations a parallel to his situations and his relationship with Attean.

## The Snares

Matt's first lesson in obtaining game without the rifle occurs when Attean shows him how to make and bait a snare. With roots and branches they find in the forest, they are able catch small animals and birds using fish for bait.

## The Steel Trap

A fox is found in a steel trap. Attean says that the way it was baited and hidden are signs of Indian work, but that Indians do not use steel traps to capture game. It must therefore be the work of a white man who has paid an Indian with furs to set it for him. These traps represent evil and suffering.

## The Beaver Dam

The boys find a dam that has recently been built by beavers to house their young family. However, it is being left alone until the young beaver grow and have more valuable fur. Therefore, it cannot be touched by Attean and the "beaver people."

## Signs

Signs referred to in this book are manmade or arranged items in the forest often used to mark a trail. These could be a broken tree limb, a pile of rocks or possibly a piece of turf left in a low branch of a bush. Here, they symbolize Matt's freedom to move about the forest without getting lost. Attean tells Matt not to use the white man's signs of slashing marks in trees, as that shows other people where you have been.



## The Bow

Matt's decision to make a bow turns into an unsuccessful project. The bow he makes turns out to be inaccurate and worthless. Attean eventually helps him make a better one, and eventually Attean presents him with a beautiful, durable bow that the Indians have made. The bow is another tool Matt uses for survival, and it replaces the gun he lost.

## Chaw

Another symbol of Attean's skills is a chaw, which is pine sap chewed until the bitterness leaves and the sap turns into a sort of gum which has a pleasant flavor of pine.

## The Bible

The Bible is used in this story to relate stories of interest to children. Upon hearing of Noah and the ark, Attean tells Matt the Indian version of the story. Matt wonders how these people, so far from the flood, could have heard this story and translated it into their own words.

## The Bear

Matt and Attean come upon a mother bear with a cub. Their adventure with the bear is the beginning of Matt's acceptance by Attean as an equal, and it is responsible for Matt's first visit to the Indian village.

## The Indian Village

The village where Attean and his people live is far away from Matt's cabin and across a river. When Matt first arrives, it is the scene of a feast in honor of the killed bear. While it is dark when Matt arrives, it is a place of a festival-type atmosphere and appears to be a very happy place. The men and women are dressed in their best clothes, and there is much singing, dancing, feasting and general happiness there. However, the next morning after the feast, Matt wakes up to the real squalor of the village. It is full of trash in the form of old seashells, dry bones and general filth. The cabins and wigwams that looked to be quaint and festive the night before appear dirty, rundown and almost unlivable to Matt in the harsh light of day.

## The Wigwam

The place Matt is given to sleep after the feast is a little wigwam with a small, cozy fire. He is given a comfortable bed and falls asleep immediately in pleasant surroundings.



However, as with the village itself, when daylight comes he realizes it is dirty and messy. Smoke from the fire has filled it and drives him outside into the open air and sunshine.

## The Trail

Many trails are utilized by the characters in the story, but one is especially important. It is described as a trail that divides itself in two, one path leading one way, the other the other way. This trail could either symbolize the coming together of Matt and Attean and the white and Indian peoples in general, or it could symbolize their parting, depending upon which direction one travels.

## Notched Sticks

Matt is directed by his father to keep time by notching a stick each day and starting a new one after seven days, or one week. When he has seven notched sticks, it will be time for Matt to look for his father's return. Many, many sticks are notched before the end of the story.

## Matt's Shirt

Matt has only one shirt. During a gambling game with the Indian boys in their camp, he is forced to give it up as a gambling loss. This loss of his shirt symbolizes his father's disdain for gambling of any type.

## Manitou

"Manitou" is the word for a person's spirit in Attean's language. It is the symbol that every Indian boy strives for, as it means he has found his own personal spirit and can now become a man. It is the point at which Attean becomes a man, much as Matt's decision to stay at the cabin to wait for his family is Matt's final turning point towards becoming a man.

## The Snowshoes

Attean's grandfather presents Matt with a pair of snowshoes as a present when they say goodbye. These eventually come to symbolize Matt's freedom from the snowy forest, as he is able to move around to do his chores at will.

## The River

The river that must be crossed to get to the Indian village is large enough to use a canoe to cross. On one level, it symbolizes the barrier between Matt and the Indians,



and even the barrier between the white man's life and that of the native. The character of life on each of its opposite banks differs significantly.

# Setting

The story takes place in the late 1760s.

The northeast coast of America has already been settled by Europeans, and the colonists are gradually cutting down forests, establishing farms, and pushing the Native Americans into Canada.

Twelve-year-old Matt Hallowell is alone in the woods of Maine. He and his father have cleared some land and built a log cabin, while his mother and sister have remained in Quincy, Massachusetts. As the novel opens, it is summer and Matt's father has gone to fetch the rest of the family, leaving Matt to look after their new home for several weeks.



## Social Sensitivity

Speare handles difficult cultural conflicts with sensitivity and tact. The story is told primarily from the perspective of Matt, a young white settler and a sympathetic character. As Matt begins to understand and appreciate Attean's culture, he realizes the enormity of the problems that the settlers are causing for Native Americans. The Native Americans do not have concepts of land ownership as the settlers do, but they have definitely marked hunting territories.

Because the Native American ways of staking out territory differ from the settlers' ways, the settlers simply ignore them. As the settlers take over their hunting grounds, the Native Americans must move further west, as Attean's people do at the end of the novel. Matt knows that he and his family are part of the influx of settlers responsible for driving away the Native Americans, but he does not know what to do about it other than try to explain his friendship with Attean to his family, who are startled that he has befriended a Native American. Speare offers no easy solutions for the complex problems she presents in *The Sign of the Beaver*, but she does suggest that solutions are possible only if people of different cultures or backgrounds first make an effort to understand one another.

## Literary Qualities

The Sign of the Beaver is in many ways a retelling of Daniel Defoe's early eighteenth-century novel Robinson Crusoe, the novel Matt chooses for Attean's ill-fated reading lessons. Like Crusoe, Matt is stranded in a wilderness. But for the most part, Speare switches the roles of the white man and his Native American companion: "[Matt] remembered Robinson Crusoe and his man Friday. He and Attean had sure enough turned that story right round about." In Defoe's novel, Crusoe rescues Friday, and Friday becomes the white man's faithful servant; in Speare's novel, Matt realizes that it is always Attean who is "leading the way, knowing just what to do and doing it quickly and skillfully," while Matt, "a puny sort of Robinson Crusoe, tagged along behind, grateful for the smallest sign that he could do anything right." Defoe depicts most of the Native Americans that Crusoe encounters as ruthless cannibalistic savages. Speare, on the other hand, depicts the Native Americans as having great regard for the sanctity of life.

Attean's people take only what they need from nature, find a use for every part of the animals they hunt, and solemnly apologize to the animals' spirits.

The Sign of the Beaver is told by a third-person limited omniscient narrator who relates Matt's thoughts and feelings. Nothing is wasted in the carefully crafted narrative. Speare unobtrusively weaves details about life in eighteenth-century America into the plot, selecting those details that provide insight into either Native American or white culture. For example, the settlers make conspicuous blazes on trees with knives, while the Native Americans create subtle signs by perhaps pushing two stones together or breaking a twig.



# Themes

## Cultural Conflict

The constant conflict caused by the modern white man's trespass on what the Indians feel is their land and the Indians' fierce protection of it creates one of the central themes of the novel. In 1767, the territory that will eventually become the state of Maine is opened to white homesteaders. This occurs only after a truce with the Indians who are native to that region. Unknown to most whites wanting to settle there, the natives feel they have been tricked. The treaty they sign is, for them, a statement that they have become friends of the white man. However, they soon learn that the treaty they signed is a document that transfers their lands and their rights to and fish to the whites. The entire theory that a man may own land is not understood by the Indians, who feel the land is like the air, open to all men, animals and birds alike.

There is a twofold mystery to the Indians. First, how can it be that the white man now says he owns these lands that the Indians have called home for so many generations? Second, how can they not be allowed to use it in the manner they are accustomed to?

In this story, the white man is only moving to occupy what he sees as a new opportunity. The opening of new territory offers a new lifestyle that will make life more comfortable and profitable. The Indians, however, see it as an infringement upon the lifestyle that they have become accustomed to. Intelligently in this story, the Indians realize that even if they fight the white man for the use of the wilderness, it will not continue to sustain the game, fish and birds upon which the hunting lifestyle is dependent. They must move onto new land they assume will be safe from this trespass.

## Family Loyalty

Matt's most important test in the novel comes when he must make a decision whether to leave the cabin and, quite possibly, his association with white people in general, or to take a chance waiting for his father and family who might never come. His strongest relationship turns out to be to his father and family, and he turns down Saknis' offer to travel with the natives and become a *medabe*, or white brother to Attean.

Matt's inner conflict parallels that of the Indian people and that of the whites. Saknis must decide whether to remain attached to the wilderness that has housed his people for years or to give it up and search for a place that is more hospitable to his peoples' hunting tradition. In turn, the white people who desire to settle in this untamed wilderness must give up the life they are already comfortable with.

This family loyalty is reflected by the Indian boy, Attean. He finally admits that he agrees with the decision Matt has made to stay and wait for his family. Attean says that he would make the same decision if his father and mother were still alive.



## Personal Achievement

Two different kinds of personal achievement are evident. On one hand, Matt is destined to learn the traditional ways of the Indians in order to survive and is eager to do so. On the other hand, Attean sees no reason to learn to read, or to learn any of the other skills he sees as belonging to the white man and his culture. His life is centered on hunting and living in the old ways of his grandfather. However, in his maturity, his grandfather sees the necessity of learning new ways if the group is to survive. As a result, he instills this into the mind of Attean, if only slightly. Therefore, Matt's personal achievement is one of survival, and, to some degree, the happiness he accomplishes in knowing in his heart that he has done as his father wishes. Attean achieves his own goal when he finds his spirit and can become a man and thus a hunter.



## Themes/Characters

The Sign of the Beaver relates how Matt Hallowell matures from a child to an adult in the course of several weeks that he lives alone in the wilderness of Maine. Early in the novel, Matt supplies a vagrant trapper named Ben with food and lodgings only to have his gun stolen by the blustery old trapper. Soon after, a bear raids the Hallowell cabin, leaving Matt with almost no food to sustain him while he waits for his family to return.

Deprived of his provisions, Matt must rely on his own resources to survive. An early attempt to fend for himself fails miserably when he tries to retrieve honey from a beehive and ends up with multiple bee stings and a sprained ankle. Two Native Americans—Saknis and his thirteen-year-old grandson Attean—rescue the injured Matt, and Matt agrees to teach Attean to read English in exchange for their help.

Attean plays a vital role not only in Matt's survival but also in his maturation, though the reading lessons that Matt devises, first using a copy of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and then the Bible, fail. *Robinson Crusoe* proves to be a particularly disastrous choice when Attean becomes offended by the assumptions of white supremacy that underlie the portrayal of Crusoe's relationship with Friday, a Native American from South America who becomes Crusoe's faithful servant. Matt is shocked to realize that a novel that he has always regarded as a harmless adventure story contains such assumptions. The failure of the reading lessons—which Saknis hopes will enable Attean to understand treaties drawn up by settlers and thus check the white encroachment on his people's hunting grounds—reflects the historical reality that most attempts at fair negotiations between the whites and the Native Americans eventually failed.

The friendship between Attean and Matt develops slowly and is an idealized version of relationships between Native Americans and settlers. Neither of the boys understands the culture of the other whatsoever when they first meet.

Attean is generally aloof and mistrustful, an attitude that Matt understands when Attean tells him that white men killed his mother in order to make money from selling her scalp. Attean's father has never returned from his mission to avenge her death. When Attean tells Matt about his mother's scalping, Matt argues that the Native Americans treat the settlers similarly, but is at a loss when Attean points out that the whites are destroying Native American hunting grounds.

Matt makes a tremendous effort to impress Attean, who scorns the white boy's ineptitude in the wilderness. But Matt gradually learns much more about the wilderness from Attean than Attean learns from Matt about reading. Matt begins to earn Attean's respect when Matt helps to kill a bear that attacks the boys. Attean acknowledges Matt's progress when he leaves Matt to find his way back to the Hallowell cabin from the Native American village on his own, a compliment that is not lost on Matt.

Attean pays Matt an even greater compliment later by inviting him to accompany the men of his village on a hunt and calling him his "white brother," but it is at this point that



Matt decides that he must remain loyal to his own heritage. Matt declines the invitation, choosing to stay at his cabin in case his family, several weeks late already, arrives.

The novel shows that it can be very difficult to understand another culture and that tragic consequences can ensue if that difficulty is not overcome. Matt's mistaken assumption that the paint Attean dons for the bear feast is war paint points out how easy it is to misinterpret the intentions of a culture that one is not familiar with. The murder of Attean's mother and the fate of his fellow villagers—who are all eventually forced to move further west because of white encroachment on their hunting grounds—suggests the tragedy that can result from ignorance about other cultures.





# Style

## Points of View

The entire story is told from the third person point of view. Generally utilizing the point of view of Matt, it follows his moods and timelines. The reader feels the uncertainties that Matt feels, at the same time that he is feeling them. When he is unhappy with himself for losing the rifle, the reader sympathizes with him. His fear is also felt as when he realizes he must go without protection and game. Likewise, his happiness is very apparent when he is complimented by Attean upon catching game and fish.

While readers don't see events from Attean's point of view, Matt's thoughts make the struggle Attean is feeling clear. The reader is led to understand the concern a young boy has when there is a struggle between two loved and respected elders, Attean's grandmother and grandfather.

## Setting

While the entire story takes place in the same wilderness forest, there are two distinctive areas. The first introduced is the cabin and the relative familiarity of the forest in its immediate vicinity. For the most part, the environment here is light and friendly. Matt is comfortable moving about here, and the game, fish and birds he encounters are unthreatening to him. Streams are small, and animals he comes in contact with are portrayed as fun-loving. The cabin represents man's intrusion into the wilderness and introduction of crops. Small animals make fun of Matt when he no longer has a rifle and is not a threat to them. The animals live in harmony here.

The other setting, the Indian village, is some distance away. At first it is even a threat to get there, as Matt knows he can easily lose his way and become hopelessly lost. It is generally skillfully pictured as a dark place, not especially unfriendly or evil, but more unsafe and unknown. Matt never knows what to expect when he arrives there. To get there he must cross a river, much larger than the streams around his cabin. The village is portrayed as generally a dirty and unpleasant place in which to live. However, to the Indians who know nothing different, it is home and is acceptable.

## Language and Meaning

The language is written to be easily understood by young students. There are no difficult words, and those in the Indian tongue are fully addressed and defined. These words, which generally are spoken by Saknis or Attean, are often used multiple times so that the reader can grasp their meaning easily by the end of the book. There are not so many of these that the train of thought is interrupted.



The language of the white settlers is written in modern day English, no doubt very different from actual spoken language of the late 1700s. The only dialect other than that of the Indians is that of Ben, who uses words such as "mebbe" for maybe, "baccy" for tobacco and "bout" for about. In keeping with his character, Ben also uses incorrect English in his speech, saying things like "What wasn't killed off in the war got took with..."

The other transgression from accepted English is that used by Saknis and Attean. Their English is spoken in a broken tongue as a second language.

## Structure

The entire novel is told in chronological order with but three real flashbacks. There are twenty-five chapters, each numerically identified. Most chapters contain a complete story within themselves.

The chapters are not structured to a specific time frame nor length relating to passage of time, but rather they follow significant events. Chapters rarely depict more than one event, making the story somewhat episodic and easy to follow.



## Quotes

"But Indians take great stock in politeness. Should you meet one, speak to him just the same as to the minister back home." Chapter 2, p. 9

"'More folks comin' all the time,' the man said. 'Time was you could tramp for a month and never see a chimney. Now the town is spreading out from the river every which way.'" Chapter 3, p. 13

"'Attean learn,' he said. 'White man come more and more to Indian land. White man not make treaty with pipe. White man make signs on paper, signs Indian not know. Indian put mark on paper to show him friend of white man. Then white man take land.'" Chapter 6, p. 31

"'Not kneel down,' Attean repeated fiercely. 'Not be slave. Better die.'" Chapter 9, p. 43

"One time many moose and beaver. Plenty for all Indians and for white man too. But white man not hunt to eat, only for skin." Chapter 13, p. 65

"'I tell bear I do not want to kill,' Attean answered. 'Indian not kill she-bear with cub. I tell bear we did not come here to hunt.'" Chapter 15, p. 75

"'My grandmother hate all white men,' Attean said." Chapter 17, p. 87

"My people hunters. My grandfather say many white men come soon. Cut down trees. Make house. Plant corn. Where my people hunt?" Chapter 22, p. 116

"'I not understand,' Attean scowled. 'How can man own land? Land same as air. Land for all people to live on. For beaver and deer. Does deer own land?'" Chapter 22, p. 117

"'You've done a grown man's job, son,' he said. 'I'm might proud of you.'" Chapter 24 p. 133



## Topics for Discussion

1. Children in colonial America had to grow up much more quickly than children do today. Matt and Attean become adults by the age of thirteen. Why was this possible?
2. How would you like to have lived in colonial America instead of the present time? What would you have missed or enjoyed?
3. Why is Matt so concerned about earning Attean's respect? How does he finally succeed in doing so?
4. Attean goes off by himself to find his *manitou* or guardian spirit, so he can become a man. Does anything similar happen to Matt?
5. After Matt offers Ben hospitality, Ben steals his gun. Should Matt have refused to let Ben in? What might have happened then? What could Matt have said or done to ease the situation?
6. What do you think will happen to Attean and his people after they move further west? What do you think life will be like for Matt and his family after Maine becomes more populated?
7. Why does Matt have to skip parts of Robinson Crusoe when he tries to teach Attean to read? Would the lessons have gone better if he had started with the Bible instead of Robinson Crusoe?
8. Throughout the story Attean is seen from Matt's point of view. How do you think Matt appears to Attean?
9. Much of Native American culture was eventually destroyed by the development of white settlers. How much blame should be placed on settlers such as Matt and his family for this tragedy?



## Essay Topics

Discuss the conflict between Matt and Attean.

In what ways are Matt and Attean the same?

Discuss the conflict between Attean's grandfather and his grandmother.

What is the significance of the trail that divides when traveled one direction and comes together when traveled the other direction?

Discuss the reasons the Indians left their village for a new home.

Trace the parallel between Matt's survival and that of the Indian tribe that befriends him.

Show the significance of the characters in *Robinson Crusoe*.

Explain how the demise of the forest affects the Indians.



# Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Many Native American communities identified themselves with totem animals such as the beaver or the turtle.

What was the significance of these animals?

2. Research and report on the initiation ceremonies of Native Americans, in which a child passed to adulthood.

3. How were log cabins like that of Matt's family built? What tools were used?

4. What chores were young people in colonial America expected to perform?

How might they spend a normal day?

5. How were holidays celebrated in the families of pioneers?

6. How was work divided between men and women among the pioneers? Among the Native Americans?

7. What impressions did the colonists have of the Native Americans? How did Native Americans regard the white men?

8. Write a sequel to the story in which Matt and Attean meet again many years later. How have they changed? Can they still be friends?

## Further Study

Fuller, Muriel, ed. *More Junior Authors*.

New York: H. W. Wilson, 1983. Contains a brief autobiographical sketch by Speare.

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