

The Sign of the Beaver
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Readability level:
5th - 6th grade

Introducing *The Sign of the Beaver*

Spark:

What can an Indian boy and a white boy have in common? Two different people coming from two different life-styles. They are different in so many ways, but it does not take long for them to realize how much they share in common. Two strangers become like “brothers” in this warm, adventurous tale.

Summary

In the wilderness of Maine in 1768, twelve year old Matt Hallowell is left alone to guard the cabin and garden. Matt and his father worked long, full days to build their new home. Now, his father had returned to Massachusetts to fetch his wife, daughter, and new baby.

The father is to be gone only six or seven weeks, but for reasons unknown to Matt, his family is delayed. While he is alone, he encounters an uninvited house guest, Ben. Ben leaves with Matt’s rifle which his father had so proudly given to Matt upon his departure. Life in the woods without a rifle meant only fish to eat, and even more so, no means of protection.

One day, upon returning to his cabin after fishing, Matt finds that a bear has ransacked his cabin and among other things, eaten all the molasses. After several tasteless days of just fish to eat, Matt finds a bee tree. While trying to get some honey, he is attacked by a swarm of bees. Matt is severely stung several times and plunges into the water. He is rescued by an old Indian, who helps him get well. To show his gratefulness, Matt gives him his treasured book, *Robinson Crusoe*. The Indian makes a treaty with Matt for him to teach his grandson, Attean, how to read. And so begins the adventures of Matt and Attean. At first, Attean is cold towards Matt. Later, Attean tells him that his mother was needlessly killed by white men. Eventually, after many adventurous episodes, Matt is treated like a “brother” by Attean and his family.

Realizing the tardiness of his family’s return, Attean’s grandfather invites Matt to join their family as they make their journey further west, away from the encroaching white man. Matt struggles with the decision of whether to go with them, whom he had become like family, or to wait (perhaps in vain) for his family.

Matt decides he must stay and wait for his family. This act of true bravery and dedication wins the heart of Attean. Finally, delayed by sickness, his family arrives. Matt, of course, is delighted.

Vocabulary

Find the word in its context. Reread the sentences before and after the word. Do you understand the meaning of the word? Now, look up the word in the dictionary and write a clear, simple definition, and use it in a sentence.

1. temporary - (pg. 3)
2. salvage - (pg. 20)
3. incomprehensible - (pg. 46)
4. gravely - (pg. 56)
5. unhampered - (pg. 113)

Complete the sentences with the correct vocabulary word. OR Write your own sentences using the vocabulary words.

6. Matt and his father built a _____ chimney until they could build a safer one.
7. Matt thought about the _____ life of the Indians but knew he would miss his mother.
8. After seeing the bear's damage in the cabin, Matt began to _____ what remained.
9. Attean often spoke to the animals in words _____ to Matt.
10. Attean spoke _____ as he told what happened to his mother and father.

1. not permanent; lasting for only a time -
My aunt gave us her *temporary* address until she settled in the new city.
2. to save or restore -
The family could only *salvage* a few things after the hurricane.
3. that cannot be understood -
The lost boy's sobbing words were *incomprehensible*.
4. seriously and earnestly -
The police officer spoke *gravely* to the young man.
5. carefree -
On vacation, we enjoy our *unhampered* life.
6. temporary
7. unhampered
8. salvage
9. incomprehensible
10. gravely

Discussion Questions

Chapters 1-5

1. What two gifts did Matt's father leave with him before he left? Why do you think the father gave him these gifts? How do you think this made Matt feel?

Chapters 6-10

2. In Chapter 9, why do you think Attean reacted so strongly to the passage about Friday in *Robinson Crusoe*?

Chapters 11-15

3. In Chapter 15, Matt and Attean have the adventure of their lives. In your own words, retell the story about the bear.

Chapters 16-20

4. When Matt found Attean's dog caught in a trap, he had to walk and swim a very long way to reach Attean's village for help. Why do you think he went through all this trouble?

Chapters 21-25

5. What did Matt do in Chapter 22 that finally won the full respect of Attean? Why do you think this act was special to Attean? What gifts did Matt and Attean exchange?

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1. **Matt's father left him the family watch and his rifle.**

The father gave Matt the watch to help him keep track of the time. Also, because it would eventually belong to him. The father gave Matt the rifle because the old blunderbuss did not shoot well. The father knew Matt would need a dependable rifle.

The gifts probably made Matt feel very grown up, trustworthy, and special.

2. **Possible answer:**

Attean knew Friday was considered a savage, perhaps much like how the white man views Indians. He did not like Friday bowing down to Crusoe to be his slave.

3. **Possible answer:**

While hunting, Matt and Attean encounter a bear cub. The she bear lunged through the bushes towards Matt. Matt froze in his steps. Suddenly, without thinking, he threw the dead rabbit (which he held in his hand from the hunt) at the bear's face. At that moment, Attean shot his arrow between the bear's eyes. He sent another arrow into its shoulder, and then jumped on the bear and thrust his knife into the bear. Matt then followed by jumping at the bear and cut his knife into the bear.

4. **Matt knew how fond Attean was of his dog. Matt cared about Attean, therefore cared about his dog.**

5. **Matt finally won the full respect of Attean by deciding to remain at the cabin and wait faithfully for his father. This decision made Attean realize that Matt showed characteristics which were important to him, such as faithfulness, loyalty, and bravery. Staying was a much harder decision than going with Attean's family. Matt gave Attean his silver watch. Even though Matt knew Attean would continue to tell time by the sun, Matt wanted to give him something which was special to him. Attean gave Matt his dog. The dog was worthless to look at, but he held a very special place in Attean's heart.**

Decision Making



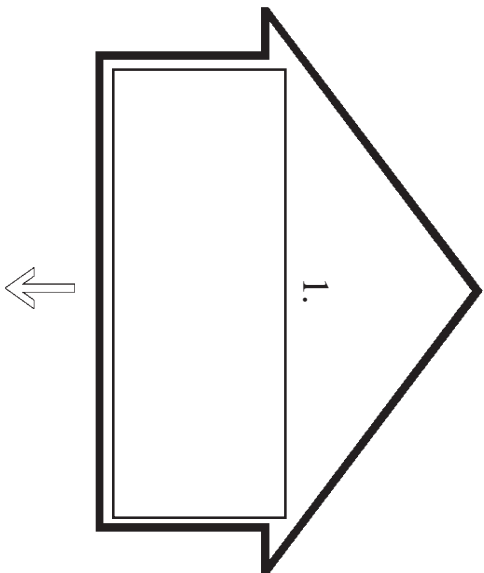
In Chapter 21, Attean's grandfather tells Matt that winter is coming and perhaps his father may not return. The grandfather has grown fond of Matt and cares about his safety, so he invites Matt to go with them. In the next few moments, Matt thinks about the reasons why he should go and why he should stay. The invitation sounds exciting, but he quickly makes his decision.

Answer the questions, and write the answers in the Decision Diagram on page 216 of your *Student Activity Book* or you may photocopy page 204 of this book.

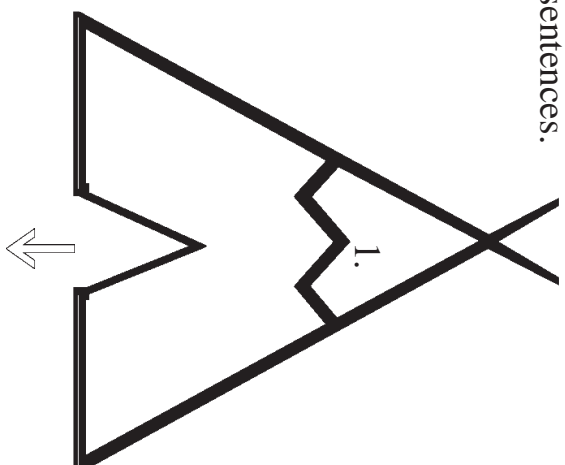
1. What are Matt's two choices?
**1. Matt will wait for his father.
Matt will go with Attean and his family.**
2. Although the thought of going with Attean sounded exciting, Matt decided to stay and wait for his father. Why?
2. He knew that his father trusted him to stay and take care of the cabin.
3. What did Matt think may happen if he waited for his father?
3. Something bad may have happened and his father might never come.
4. What did Matt think his life would be like if he went with Attean and his family?
4. He knew he would be safe and well taken care of. He knew he wouldn't be lonely.
5. What do you think would have happened if Matt had chosen to go with Attean and his father returned?
5. Matt's father would not know how to find Matt and be worried; and the cabin and garden may be ruined.
6. What was Matt's decision?
6. Matt decides to wait for his father.

Decision Diagram

Use page 216 of your *Student Activity Book*. OR You may photocopy this page. Using your answers from the previous exercise, write the answers accordingly. You do not need to use complete sentences.



Matt's Choices



2.



3.

4.



5.

Matt's Decision

6.

Cause and Effect

In a story, there is often a problem which is caused by something. This problem has certain results, or effects. For example, in Chapter 3, Matt realizes his rifle has been stolen. This is the problem. The result or effect is that he could no longer hunt for food and he had no protection. In the following chart, write the effect (or result) of each cause (or problem). You do not need to write in complete sentences.

Cause (problem)	Effect (result)
Ex: Chapter 3 the rifle is stolen	can't hunt for food, no protection
1. Chapter 4 Matt didn't shut the door properly	
2. Chapter 5 Matt wants something tasty to eat	
3. Chapter 6 Matt wants to show his appreciation to the Indian for saving his life	
4. Chapter 18 Matt counted his ten notched sticks	

1. The cabin is ransacked by a bear.
2. He climbs a tree, gets stung severely, and is rescued by an Indian.
3. Matt gives the Indian the book, *Robinson Crusoe*.
4. Matt began to worry because his father was so late and winter was approaching.

Gift Exchange

In Chapter 22, Matt and Attean say good-bye by exchanging gifts. It was a difficult moment for both boys. They knew the relationship they shared together had now come to an end. Complete the following questions, and then write the answers in the Gift Exchange Diagram on page 218 of your *Student Activity Book*. OR You may photocopy page 207 of this book.

1. Matt and Attean

1. What are the two boys' names?

2. The silver watch

2. What gift did Matt give?

3. His dog

3. What gift did Attean give?

4. Possible answer:

Even though Matt knew Attean would continue to tell time by the sun, Matt wanted to give him something which was special to him.

4. Why do you think Matt chose this gift to give?

5. Possible answer:

Although the dog was worthless to look at, he held a very special place in Attean's heart. Also, perhaps he thought the dog might be good company through the long winter if his father did not return.

5. Why do you think Attean chose this gift to give?

Gift Exchange Diagram

