***Chapter 3***

***Summary and Analysis***

***Summary:***

Despite his fear of dying, Brian takes the controls and tries to guide the plane down. After a while, he sees an L-shaped lake up ahead and guides the plane to it, reasoning that landing in water may make his landing easier. The plane hits trees as he's descending and crashes into the lake. Water destroys the front windshield and the side windows and blasts him back in his seat. Screaming in pain and fear, he pulls his seatbelt off and scrambles out the broken front window. He swims upward and surfaces, trying not to swallow water, until he reaches the shore. Then he passes out. Brian frantically studies the ground to find a suitable place to crash the plane. Brian sees an L-shaped lake and decides to try to crash the plane there. Brian moves the nose of the plane up and down, trying to keep the lake in focus. It is a struggle, but Brian manages to crash the plane in the center of the long arm of the lake. Brian frees himself from the seat belt and swims out of the broken windshield and makes it to the side of the lake before he passes out. Seeing only trees rather than lakes directly in front of him, Brian becomes convinced he will not survive the plane's descent. Finally he spots an L-shaped lake, uncertain whether he has enough speed to reach it. At that instant the plane hits the trees, shooting through them and landing on the lake. Water rushes over Brian, who screams and vomits during the descent, but he succeeds in unbuckling his seatbelt and swimming up to the surface. When he finally reaches the shore, Brian passes out from pain and exhaustion.

***Analysis:***

This chapter blends believable heroic action—as Brian takes the controls, starts guiding the plane, and makes it out of the plane alive—with equally realistic failure. Brian fails to land the plane safely, and when he crashes, he is overwhelmed and almost drowns. Finally, the chapter ends with a classic cliffhanger: the hero passed out alone in the wilderness. These details make Brian's story credible, suspenseful, and frightening.

This chapter is also thematically and symbolically important. When Brian takes the controls of the plane, he is trying to take control of his life. His crash, unconsciousness, and eventual recovery are a symbolic form of death and rebirth. After he survives what could have been a watery grave and manages to get to shore, he is reborn into a new situation that will test his mettle. The transformation is painful and traumatic, as his screams of pain and fear demonstrate. Like a snake shedding its skin, Brian will repeatedly have to leave behind parts of his former identity in order to survive.

***Analysis (Ch1-3):***

The opening chapters of this novel introduce several elements of content, style, and theme that persist throughout the story. Paulsen's heavy use of foreshadowing, as well as his emphasis on certain significant words and phrases, give the reader a sense of suspense and inform him of Brian's perspective.

A prevalent technique in Hatchet, foreshadowing appears from the first chapters of the book, when Paulsen gives the reader hints and warnings of the events to come. The pilot's pains in his shoulder, arm, and stomach seem insignificant at the start of the book, but they later grow more serious when it becomes clear they signal an imminent heart attack. In addition, Brian's brief turn at the wheel of the plane foreshadows his subsequent need to operate the plane himself following the pilot's death. The pilot's following comment to Brian also foreshadows this circumstance; he says, "All of flying is easy. Just takes learning. Like everything else. Like everything else." This remark not only foreshadows Brian's later flying adventure, but also has relevance to his subsequent struggle for survival alone in the woods. There he learns he must be patient, observant, and astute; he must learn from his mistakes and use his knowledge to improve his situation. Lastly, the pilot briefly mentions the presence of the survival pack in the plane. The reader may find the presence of the survival park insignificant at that point in the plot, but later learns that it contains a transmitter that eventual leads to Brian's rescue.

These first chapters also introduce stylistic trends in the book. The narrative shifts back and forth between past and present, between the events on the plane ride and Brian's thoughts on the past. Through these shifts the reader gains an intimate knowledge of Brian's thoughts and feelings, and experiences the plane ride as he would. In addition, Paulsen isolates certain significant words in order to convey to the reader their import to Brian's consciousness. He often begins paragraphs with sentences containing only one word or a few words, and at times his paragraphs contain only one word. For example, Paulsen writes of Brian's thoughts: "The words. Always the words. Divorce. The Secret. Fights. Split." Paulsen also repeats these select words and phrases to sustain an element of suspense and rhythm during Brian's adventures. During Brian's negotiation of the plane's descent, Paulsen employs this type of repetition particularly often, with phrases such as, "Easy say, hard do" and "Gonna die." It realistically reflects the tendency toward a frantic and urgent thought process in a time of emergency.

Lastly, Paulsen introduces the theme of survival early on in the novel. Brian's solitary adventure in the Canadian north woods provides the central struggle for survival in the book. However, his struggle to survive begins even before his time in the wilderness, with his effort to land the plane and emerge alive. He must demonstrate clear-headedness, bravery, and perseverance during the descent of the plane, qualities that only become more essential as the story unfolds.

Critical Study(Ch 1-3):

The book begins with thirteen-year-old [Brian](https://www.gradesaver.com/hatchet/study-guide/character-list#brian) Robeson flying as a passenger in a small bush plane from Hampton, New York. He is on his way to spend the summer with his father in the Canadian wilderness—his parents recently got divorced, something that has taken a toll on Brian. While in the plane, he thinks a lot about the divorce and about a particular secret that he calls The Secret. He believes it is this secret that caused the divorce.

As he gets upset thinking about it, Brian tries to distract himself by looking around the plane. The pilot asks whether he has ever flown in the copilot's seat before. When Brian sys no, he explains that flying is not as hard as it seems, and offers to let him take the controls for a minute. Nervous, Brian tries, and realizes that he is able to steer the plane easily. It distracts him for a while, but when the pilot takes the controls back he starts thinking about the divorce and The Secret again.

The court had determined that Brian would spend the summers with his father, and the school year with his mother in New York. His father is working in the oil fields of Canada, and Brian is flying up on the plane along with some equipment that his father would need for his work. His mother drove him from the city to catch the plane, and gave him a gift to use that summer: a hatchet.

As he is lost in his thoughts, he realizes that the pilot is in distress. The pilot has begun to have a heart attack, clutching his chest and jerking around. Brian recognizes it, but can do nothing, because within moments the pilot is slumped over with his eyes rolled back in his head. Brian knows he is either dead or in some state close to a coma—either way, Brian Robeson is alone in a plane high in the air.

For a while he does nothing, shocked, and then realizes that he has to fly the plane somehow. He plays with the controls a bit and gets the hang of it, but he has no idea where he is or where he is going. Carefully he pulls the headset from the pilot's head, even though it scares him. He tries to call out for help over the microphone and gets a response, but the signal fades out and Brian cannot provide his location or flight number. He realizes he has two options: let the plane keep going and run out of fuel, or try to bring the plane down now. He has no idea how far he has diverted from their original course.

He keeps going, holding the plane at its altitude and making periodic calls on the radio. He decides to take it down and try to find a lake to crash-land at the edge of. He is preparing himself for this when suddenly the plane's engine sputters and dies and it begins to go down. Brian starts panicking, realizing he is going to die. As the plane keeps going down he spots an L-shaped lake and tries to steer the plane towards it. The world speeds up as he gets closer and closer to the ground and he crashes, the wings of the plane breaking off as it falls through the trees. It sinks down into the lake and Brian swims out of it, desperately trying to make it up to the surface.

*Hatchet*wastes no time in throwing readers right into the heart of the action. The first chapter begins with Brian flying in the plane, rather than building up to the incident that will pave the way for the rest of the story. At the surface level, this draws readers in immediately and keeps them hooked from the first sentence. But it also serves a deeper purpose. By neglecting to show readers any piece of Brian's life before the plane crash—we can only rely on his stories and thoughts for this information—Paulsen shows what is really important to this story. It does not matter what Bryan did before: what matters is what is happening to him right now.

Along these lines, the first few chapters of the novel tell us much more about Brian's family life than they do about Brian *himself.*Readers learn about his parents and their divorce, about his feelings on the various court sessions and disputes he has had to be a part of, but not yet about what makes him tick as a person. This extreme focus on his family circumstances shows what matters to Brian when he is in the real world; however, once he is in the forest, he has to abandon this focus on extraneous matters and concentrate only instead on *himself*and his survival.

[Gary Paulsen](https://www.gradesaver.com/author/gary-paulsen) writes many coming-of-age novels, and this is certainly one of them. The disappearance of the authority figure—the adult pilot—is the first indicator of this theme. Without the pilot, and without either of his parents, Brian will have to grow up very quickly. He cannot be a child anymore, now that he has to make important decisions that may save his life. In the process of making these decisions, Brian will reach a level of maturity that he had not before.

Based on the first three chapters, Brian is up to the challenge. It would have been easy for him to panic and lose control after the pilot's death, but instead he calms himself down enough to think rationally and come up with the best way for him to have a shot at survival. His quick thinking—flying the plane, using the radio, steering the crashing plane towards the lake—has served him well, and this resourcefulness will continue to be important over the course of the story.

These chapters introduce us to Brian, but also to another important element of this story: the hatchet. Brian's mother giving him the hatchet to use for the summer foreshadows the events to come, when a hatchet will be the most useful tool he could possibly have. With his hatchet in hand, Brian will face the reality of having to fend for himself, but still with this one essential tool from his former life at his side. The hatchet is so important that it gave this book its title; so, keep an eye out for its use as a symbol throughout the novel.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part***

***Summary Part 1:***

[Brian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-robeson) is overcome with fear that he is going to die. The plane glides quickly downward, and Brian is suddenly unable to see any lakes on the ground below. Finally, he catches a glimpse of one and steers the plane toward an L-shaped lake nearby. It seems for several moments that the plane will not reach the lake before hitting the ground, and Brian looks out the window, seeing the landscape frozen around him.

***Analysis Part 1:***

In this moment, Brian surrenders completely to the knowledge that he is at the mercy of circumstance, giving up on independent action to save himself. However, the natural world intervenes in the form of a lake to give him fresh hope, foreshadowing the connection that Brian will come to experience with the wilderness as a whole.

***Summary Part 2:***

All at once, the plane reaches the tree line, and [Brian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-robeson) is again sure that he will die. Just in time, he sees the lake again and steers the plane upward. It hits the trees, which tear its wings off, and the crash throws Brian forward. Then, just before it hits the ground, the plane rolls through the air and hits the surface of the lake. Brian screams as the windows break and water floods the plane.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Steering the plane upward so that it reaches the lake turns out to be a crucial act of control that allows Brian to survive the crash. However, the natural world of trees and lake water quickly overwhelms him, depicting the balance between Brian’s actions and the forces of nature that will develop over the course of the book.

***Summary Part 3:***

Underwater and terrified, [Brian](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/hatchet/characters/brian-robeson) unbuckles his seatbelt and tears his jacket away from the plane. Free in the water, he swims toward the surface, certain that he will not make it in time. At the last moment, he reaches the surface and swims toward the shore, screaming and barely aware of his surroundings. He makes it to the grassy shore and faints in pain and exhaustion.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Again, Brian uses his will to survive to overcome the dangers of the natural world, but only to a point. He is alive, but he will not truly thrive until he learns to work with nature rather than against it.