

Novel Resource #1

The Legend of Bass Reeves by Gary Paulsen

Published 2006

Random House

Gary Paulsen's website:

<http://www.randomhouse.com/features/garypaulsen/>

Gary Paulsen

c/o Children's Publicity

1540 Broadway

New York, NY 10036



Other books by Paulsen:

Alida's Song

The Beet Fields

The Boy Who Owned the School

The Brian Books:

 The River

 Brian's Winder

 Brian's Return

 Brian's Hunt

Canyons

The Car

Caught by the Sea: My Life on Boats

The Cookcamp

The Crossing

Dogsong-

 Newbery Honor Book

Father Water, Mother Woods

The Glass Café

Guts

Harris and Me

Hatchet

 -Newbery Honor Book

 -ALA Best of the Best Books for
 Young Adults

 -ALA Notable Children's Book

 -Notable Children's Book in the
 Field of Social Studies

The Haymeadow

 -Western Writers of America

Golden Spur Award

How Angel Peterson Got His Name

Elizabeth von Buchler

Bloomington High School South

evonbuch@mccsc.edu

The Island
Molly McGinty Has a Really Good Day
The Monument
My Life in Dog Years
Nightjohn-
 -ALA Best Book for Young
 Adults
 -ALA Notable Children's Book
 -IRA-CBC Children's Choice
The Night the White Deer Died
Puppies, Dogs, and Blue Northerners
The Quilt
The Rifle

Sarny: A Life Remembered
The Schernoff Discoveries-
 Yalsa Best Books for Young
Adults
Soldier's Heart
The Time Hackers
The Transall Saga
Tucket's Travels
The Voyage of the Frog
The White River Chronicles
The Winter Room-
 Newbery Honor Book

Background Information:

Gary Paulsen is known for writing books with characters who aren't perfect and often come from broken homes. Nature usually figures heavily into his books including *Dogsong* and *Hatchet*. In 1997, Paulsen was awarded the Margaret A. Edwards Award for his lifetime achievement in writing for young adults. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) honored him with an ALAN award in 1991.

Paulsen's "connection" to the book:

According to the Author's Note in the beginning of the book, Paulsen was interested in writing a book about Bass Reeves ever since he heard about him. There weren't many records about Reeves and many books relied on word of mouth stories. Paulsen incorporated the few details and facts he could and then wove his own interpretation of what Bass Reeves' life may have been like. As the subtitle says, "Being the True and Fictional Account of the Most Valiant Marshal in the West."

Annotation

Paulsen, Gary. *The Legend of Bass Reeves*. New York: Random House, 2006.

Gary Paulsen, best-selling young adult author and winner of three Newbery Honor Awards, presents a story of a figure from the days of the "wild west." Rather than focusing on famous men such as Wyatt Earp or Kit Carson, Paulsen created a book introducing his readers to an African-American man named Bass Reeves. Born a slave, Reeves became the most successful federal marshal in history. Because of lack of information and details, Paulsen largely created his own story of Reeves, while including the arrests and figures that were recorded. Through Paulsen's story of Reeves, we see a young boy who escapes from his master after a deadly night of card playing. The boy becomes a man as he hides and lives in the Indian Territory, completely fending for himself. It is because of the years spent in hiding that he finds success in his job as a United States marshal: he knows all of the "secret" hiding places. The book does a good job of creating a likable, humble character, but falters a bit in the end with various accounts of Reeves' successes catching outlaws. Oddly enough, the end is where many

Elizabeth von Buchler
Bloomington High School South
evonbuch@mccsc.edu

of the true details of Reeves' life are found. Perhaps Paulsen created a character much richer than the few facts about his law days.

Genres-

Adventure/Survival Fiction
Historical Fiction
Multicultural Fiction
Western Fiction

Point of View-

Third Person

Themes-

Bass Reeves
African-American History
Slavery
American West
The Law, Marshals

While the title is about “the legend,” through the book we see that Bass Reeves lived his life as a regular, average man rather than a legend. Although he became well known toward the end of his life, sadly his fame did not continue after his death. Other outlaws and criminals are romanticized and celebrated, but Bass Reeves, a man who helped bring law and order to a struggling land, remains largely forgotten.

Conflict-

Bass Reeves grows up as a slave. During an altercation with his mister he hits him and, fearing he has killed him, escapes into Indian Territory. Reeves faces both internal and external conflict. After he escapes his mister, he is alone for years. He struggles internally, trying to figure out what to do, how to get food, how to stay safe, etc. He has no one to talk to and tries to figure everything out by himself. Reeves faces much external struggle, from his interactions with the mister to fighting the wolves, and capturing outlaws and bringing them to justice (once he is a marshal).

Conflict Resolution-

Bass Reeves survives on his own in rugged and dangerous territory, eventually becoming a successful United States marshal. After years alone, he meets the Creek family and develops friendships and connections with them. His role as a runaway slave does not define him anymore. He gains success and recognition because of his accomplishments as a marshal.

Characters-

-Bass Reeves-Main character of the book. The book begins when he is ten and continues until his death at the age of 84. Bass is an African-American man who was born a slave and worked on a ranch until escaping at the age of eighteen.

Elizabeth von Buchler
Bloomington High School South
evonbuch@mccsc.edu

-Mammy-Bass' mom, an African-American woman, who was won in a poker game by the mister while pregnant with Bass. She was a slave for the mister and worked as a cook, maid, and caretaker at the ranch. Though she didn't appear to have any formal schooling (she never taught Bass any reading or writing or numbers), she did teach Bass how to behave among whites. She was the one who encouraged Bass to run away when he fought with the mister.

-Flowers-a fellow African-American slave who never speaks. He lives with Bass and Mammy in their small shack. He works around the ranch, taking care of the horses and doing whatever things he sees that need done.

-The mister-A white man who is the owner of Bass, his mom, and Flowers. He is a drunk who makes Bass do all the work on the ranch. Although he tried to court various women, he was rejected. These rejections made him drink even more.

-Betty-the young Indian girl Bass saves from the wolves. Her Indian name is "Two Shoes."

-The Creek Family: Peter, Paul, Martha, Mary, Luke, Betty-the Indian family who adopts Bass after he saves Betty's life. The Creek family knows that Bass is a runaway slave, but they shelter Bass as a thank you for him saving Betty's life. Bass stayed with the Creeks for approximately 22 years.

Setting-

1834-1910

American West including Oklahoma and Texas, and also the Indian Territory

Interest Level and Reading Level

Interest Level: Approximately grades 6-10.

Reading Level 5.8/ Lexile Score 950 (<http://www.perma-bound.com>)

Booktalk

Imagine growing up as a slave. Bass Reeves didn't have to imagine this: it was his life. In *The Legend of Bass Reeves*, author Gary Paulsen introduces us to Bass Reeves, a man who escaped slavery, lived with Indians, and became a successful United States marshal. This was a man who never learned to read or write and yet killed 3000 outlaws, never once being injured himself. You may think you know all about the west and westerns, but after reading this book, you will know about an important man in history who has unfortunately been forgotten.

Discussion Questions

Ch. 1

Pre-Reading

1. What comes to mind when you think of the Wild West?

Elizabeth von Buchler
Bloomington High School South
evonbuch@mccsc.edu

2. What outlaws or famous gunslingers can you name?

During Reading

3. Bass believes the coyote talked to him and said “things will change” (6). What do you think the coyote meant? What “things” could it have been referring to?
4. Bass has never known a day where he wasn’t a slave. On page 9, Bass lists just some of the rules he must follow. List at least five of the rules.
5. Which of these rules would be the most difficult for you? Why?

Post Reading

6. Look back at the title of this chapter. Do you think the title fits the chapter? Why or why not?

Ch. 2

Pre-Reading

1. Bass’ mom believes in omens and talks of reading the tea leaves to look at fortunes. Do you believe in omens and/or superstitions? Why or why not?
2. Why might some slaves have taken omens particularly seriously?

During Reading

3. Bass wasn’t allowed to have a gun to hunt. Instead, he used a Jesus stick. Why was the stick given this name?
4. Once after being out too long, Bass’ mom is worried about him. She says, “I thought you ran” (19). Bass asked her, “Where is that, freedom” (19)? How would you explain freedom to Bass? Is freedom a place? Could it be? Explain your thoughts.
5. Even though Bass is afraid of the Comanche, he also finds him appealing. Why? What could the Comanche represent, or symbolize for Bass?

Post Reading

6. Bass had to travel seven miles (one way) for food. He did this on foot. How far have you ever traveled or gone for food? This could be to a restaurant, grocery store, etc. How did you arrive at your destination?

Ch. 3

Pre-Reading

1. Think about movies and/or television shows that have Native Americans, or Indians. How are the Indians frequently portrayed? Can you think of any movies where Native Americans are portrayed in a respectful way? Explain.

During Reading

2. Why did Bass kill the pig?
3. Why was this not a smart thing to do? Give at least two reasons.
4. The mister said, “Garnett is going to hate himself for the rest of his life” (37). What does he mean by this?
5. Give four adjectives that describe the mister.
6. Why did the mister ride over to the Garnett’s homestead, wrap the bodies, and bury them? He didn’t have to do this. What do you think made him do it?

Post Reading

7. Do you think the mister trusts Bass? Why or why not?

Ch. 4

Pre-Reading

1. If you were Mammy, how would you explain to Bass about what happened to the Garnetts?

During Reading

2. Give two examples of “slave manners” that Mammy tells Bass about.
3. Bass has his first trip to a town where “he’d never seen so much of everything in his whole life” (43). Have you ever visited a place that surprised you, perhaps because of its size or what it had to offer?
4. Why might this town be especially captivating to Bass? Give two reasons.
5. The mister makes no secret of how much he despises Bass. What possible reason does the mister have for giving Bass candy?

Post Reading

6. Bass has mentioned the Indians throughout the story. Do you think Indians are going to be a constant theme in this book?

Ch. 5

Pre-Reading

1. When this chapter begins, we will find out Bass is almost 17. If you had to predict his future, what would you say will happen to Bass?

During Reading

2. Bass is basically running the entire ranch himself, but not getting paid for it. Is this fair? Why or why not? Think of the time period.
3. How would you feel if you were in charge of a ranch, but didn’t receive any of the rewards?
4. When the mister asks Bass to play poker, Mammy advises him to lose. Why would she want this?
5. On page 57 we find out more about Mr. Garnett. How was the mister’s prediction true?
6. On the top of page 60, we have some foreshadowing: “There would be days, and weeks, and even months when Bass wished he had done exactly that; had just let the mister win.” Why might Bass not have let the mister win?
7. As Bass was preparing to flee, Flowers talked and gave Bass advice. Until this point, Flowers had never said a word. Why do you think Flowers decided to talk?

Post Reading

8. When the chapter ends, Bass has fled and is on the run. Where do you think he will go?

Ch. 6

Pre-Reading

1. Do you feel Bass should have left with his Mammy? Why or why not?

During Reading

2. In this chapter, the focus is not on Bass Reeves, but on the history of the west. Do you like the break from Reeves or does this chapter seem awkward? Explain.
3. Did you know any of this information about the Indian Territory already?

Post Reading

4. Now that you know about the Indian Territory, how do you think Bass Reeves will do there?

Ch. 7

Pre-Reading

1. Bass cannot read or write. If he would have been able to write, and he knew his letter wouldn't get his Mammy in any danger, what might he tell her?

During Reading

2. Why does Bass pretend to be a slave buying for his master?
3. Make a list of the things Bass buys with twenty dollars. Which of these things was the most important?
4. Bass killed two men who approached him. Why did he do this? Did he have any other choice?
5. Bass took one of the men's boots. Was this a smart thing to do?
6. Bass believes "now he was a killer sure, at least as far as the law was concerned" (85). Has killing the two men made Bass a bad man?

Post Reading

7. Even though Bass hates the Comanches, he also admires the freedom they have. Explain the contradiction he feels.

Ch. 8

Pre-Reading

1. Bass knows he killed the two men. He doesn't know if he killed the mister. What do you think happened?

During Reading

2. We learn about how Bass "would kneel in the dirt and draw a picture of the place in the dust, how it looked from above, from the side" (88). Have you ever done this? How would drawing a "map" in the ground help Bass?
3. Bass fought the wolves that were chasing the little girl. Why did he do this? Until now, he had stayed back and blended in. What made him save her?

Post Reading

4. Although the chapter ends with Bass thinking "dying isn't so bad, not so bad at all," do you think Bass is really dead (91)?

Ch. 9

Pre-Reading

1. The title of this chapter is "A Family." What might happen to Bass in this chapter?

During Reading

2. On page 97, Bass begins to realize everything he missed during his time on the run. What three things might Bass have missed the most?
3. Peter said, "Sometimes Comanches even bad for Comanches" (99). What is he trying to say?

Post Reading

4. Why would Peter and his family invite Bass, a runaway slave, to live with them?

Ch. 10

Pre-Reading

1. Until Bass learned the Creek's language, how did they probably communicate?

During Reading

2. How much did a marshal make in this time period? Do you think it would be worth it to risk your life for that amount? Why or why not?
3. How many men did Bass kill in his job?

Post Reading

4. Do you think Bass kept in touch with the Creek family and the other Indians he met? Why or why not?

Ch. 11

Pre-Reading

1. This is the last chapter of the book. What do you anticipate will happen?

During Reading

2. Bass sounded like quite the actress. Do you think many marshals or bounty hunters dressed up in costumes to catch the outlaws?
3. Horses were essential to the men and women in the west. Explain the purpose and function of relay ranches.
4. As Bass chases Webb, he stopped twice and changed horses. Did you know marshals and outlaws did this? Have you ever seen it in a movie?
5. Explain Bass' secret for keeping his horse strong while traveling up and down hills.
6. Bass wanted to be the one to take his son, Bennie, into town to face a trial. If Bass wrote in a journal, what might he have written that day?

Post Reading

7. What surprised you about Bass Reeves?
8. If you were asked to tell someone else about Reeves, what two things would you say?

Language (Spelling/Vocabulary)

Definitions—found at <http://www.dictionary.com> and rewritten in more “accessible” language

Vocabulary Word	Definition	Page found
mesquite	N-trees and shrubs found in Western North America	3
meander	v- to wander around, with no clear purpose or goal. (Think about how you might <u>meander</u> when you go to the mall with your friends.)	16
longhorn	n- A type of beef cattle	20
unshod	Adj- without shoes or anything on feet (The refugees from the hurricane were hungry and their <u>unshod</u> feet were bleeding from walking over the glass and debris.)	30

Elizabeth von Buchler
Bloomington High School South
evonbuch@mccsc.edu

lance	n- a spear-like item used when fighting	31
vittles	n-An old fashioned word meaning food (such as beef jerky, corn bread, etc.)	33
quagmire	n- A difficult situation that can't be figured out or solved, a dilemma	41
lariat	n- another word for lasso (a rope used to catch cattle and horses)	57
adept	Adj- very skilled, an expert, very good at something (He is <u>adept</u> at playing the violin.)	75
plank	n- a piece of wood. (In pirate movies, prisoners were forced to “walk the <u>plank</u> ” before jumping into the water.)	93
tenacity	n- behaving in a stubborn way, refusing to give in to demand or begging	105
drovers	n-someone who drives cattle or sheep	115
undulations	n- a curving or bending that looks like a wave	122

Indiana Academic Standards:

Language Arts:

6.1.5, 6.2.7, 6.3.2, 6.3.3, 6.3.5, 6.3.6
 7.1.3, 7.2.4, 7.3.3, 7.3.4
 8.1.3, 8.2.6, 8.3.2, 8.3.4, 8.3.5

Social Studies:

6.1.22, 6.3.1, 8.3.1, 8.1.23

Anticipation Statements- Legend of Bass Reeves

1. Everyone has the right to his or her own personal freedom.
2. No one can ever really own another person.
3. Killing someone is always wrong, even if it was done in self-defense.
4. In order for the country to function, there must be some type of police force.
5. Illiteracy currently isn't much of a problem in the United States.
6. The stories about Billy the Kid, Jesse James, and Wyatt Earp are true.
7. The United States government treated Native Americans unfairly.

Read-Aloud Pages/Passages

1. Read, starting at the last full paragraph on page 41 (Starting with “By most standards...”) Continue reading until page 43 (stop at the end of the third paragraph “Two slabs of smoked bacon...”) In this section, Bass Reeves visits his first town ever and is amazed by everything he sees.

2. Read on p. 62 starting the end of the first paragraph (“Bass could see it all...”)

Elizabeth von Buchler
 Bloomington High School South
 evonbuch@mccsc.edu

Read until p. 63 next to the last paragraph (“She was pushing him...”)
In this climactic moment Bass hits the mister and doesn’t know if he killed him.
His mammy forces him to run away.

Read-Alikes

- Elijah Of Buxton* by Christopher Paul Curtis
- Hattie Big Sky* by Kirby Larson
- Copper Sun* by Sharon M. Draper
- Sold* by Patricia McCormick
- Moses: When Harriet Tubman Led Her People to Freedom* by Carole Boston Weatherford
- Wild West* (DK Eyewitness Books)
- Moccasin Thunder: American Indian Stories for Today* by Lori Marie Carlson
- Letters from a Slave Girl: The Story of Harriet Jacobs* by Mary E. Lyons

Suggested books by Gary Paulsen:

- Soldier’s Heart*
- Hatchet*
- The River*

Across the Curriculum Connections

1. In the book, Gary Paulsen explains a little about the “Trail of Tears.” Research this event in American History. Create a map showing the path the Native Americans were forced to travel. On your map, include names of states, rivers, and significant cities. Include a key.

Social Studies Standards Covered:

6.1.22, 6.3.1, 7.1.22, 8.1.31, 8.1.24, 8.1.28, 8.1.29

Resources to use:

<http://www.cviog.uga.edu/Projects/gainfo/trailtea.htm> (Website through University of Georgia)

<http://www.nps.gov/trte/> (U.S. National Park Service)

<http://www.42explore2.com/trailoftears.htm> (Information and links to explore)

Supplies Needed: History books and/or computer with Internet access, paper for map, colored pencils and black pen or felt tip marker for the key

2. What type of food, or vittles, did Bass Reeves eat? Research food in 1800’s and early 1900’s. Find 5 recipes of foods that would have been fairly easy to prepare and eat during this time period. Think about where Reeves cooked, where he went for groceries, and how he obtained meat.

Family and Consumer Science Standards Covered:

M-NW-3.3

Technology Education Standards Covered:

3-A, 3-B

Resources to Use:

<http://www.legendsofamerica.com/WE-Cooking.html>

<http://www.shadowwolf.org/frybread.html> (recipe for fry bread)
<http://www.foodtimeline.org/> (food timeline and information)
<http://www.foodtimeline.org/foodmexican.html> (Mexican and Tex Mex foods)
<http://www.foodtimeline.org/foodpioneer.html#civilwar> (Civil War-era recipes)
Supplies Needed: Computer with Internet Access, History books, paper to record the information

Resources

Resources are suggested materials that students could access if they have a particular interest in the book and its topics. Websites can be visited if students have free time in the library or computer labs. Due to limited class time, movies are not meant to be shown in the classroom; rather they are suggestions for students and parents/guardians to watch at home. Film ratings are included (when possible). Explanations for the film ratings can be found at <http://www.filmratings.org>

"American Experience: The Time of the Lincolns: Slavery and Freedom." PBS. 2000. 16 June 2008 <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/lincolns/slavery/>>.
A website that provides information about slavery in the United States.

Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee. Dir. Yves Simoneau. Perf. Aidan Quinn, Adam Beach. DVD. HBO Films, 2007. (Not rated—Film made for HBO)
A movie based on the book of the same name. The movie shows the struggle of Native Americans and how the United States government deceived them.

"New Book Tells of Indiana's 1st Black Sheriff." Chicago Tribune 16 June 2008. 17 June 2008 <<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chi-ap-in-archeyslife,0,3678289.story>>.
Newspaper article about Indiana's first African-American sheriff, Oatess Archey. After reading about Bass Reeves and his success as a marshal, students might like reading about a historical figure from Indiana.

Spartacus. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. Perf. Kirk Douglas, Laurence Olivier. DVD. Universal Pictures, 1960. (Not Rated)
Though taking place in a different time period than Bass Reeves, Spartacus shows the power of a man who was also treated as a slave, yet rose to great power.

Book Activities:

(Independently)

1. Write a letter from Bass to his mammy. (Pretend he could read and write and the letter wouldn't be confiscated by anyone.) What would he write about? What adventures would he share with his mammy and what might he leave out? What stories would he find important to tell his mammy?

Language Arts Standards Covered: 6.3.5, 6.5.1, 7.3.3, 8.5.2

Elizabeth von Buchler
Bloomington High School South
evonbuch@mccsc.edu

(Independently or with partner)

2. How would Bass Reeves' story have been different if he lived in Indiana rather than Texas and the southwest? Brainstorm or make a list about the impact the setting has on Bass Reeves' life. In a paragraph, clearly explain how Bass Reeves' home impacted his life.

Language Arts Standards Covered: 6.2.7, 6.3.3, 6.5.4, 7.5.2, 8.3.4

Bibliography

<http://www.amazon.com>

<http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/paulsen.htm>

http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/iditarod/top_mushers/index.asp?article=gary_paulsen

<http://www.imdb.com>

<http://www.dictionary.com>

<http://www.perma-bound.com>

<http://www.filmratings.org>

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chi-ap-in-archeyslife.0,3678289.story>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/lincolns/slavery/>

<http://www.legendsofamerica.com/WE-Cooking.html>

<http://www.shadowwolf.org/frybread.html>

<http://www.foodtimeline.org/>

<http://www.foodtimeline.org/foodmexican.html>

<http://www.foodtimeline.org/foodpioneer.html#civilwar>

<http://www.cviog.uga.edu/Projects/gainfo/trailtea.htm>

<http://www.nps.gov/trte/>

<http://www.42explore2.com/trailoftears.htm>

Elizabeth von Buchler
Bloomington High School South
evonbuch@mccsc.edu