***Sign of the Beaver* Learning Activity**

Adapted from Chapter 3

Today you will read an excerpt from the story, *Sign of the Beaver* by Elizabeth George Speare and answer questions. As you read, pay attention to how the author has used casual, conversational language to make the characters appear very real. This is not formal language and may contain slang and grammar errors. At the end of the task, you will be asked to write a sequel to this story.

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| 1 | He was sitting on the flat stone that served as a doorstep, waiting for his supper to cook. The late sun slanted in long yellow bars across the clearing. The forest beyond was already in shadow. Matt was feeling well pleased with his day. That morning he had shot a rabbit. He had skinned it carefully, stretching the fur against the cabin wall to dry. Chunks of the meat were boiling now in the kettle over the fire, and the good smell came through the door and made his mouth water. |
| 2 | In the dimness of the trees, a darker shadow moved. This time it didn’t disappear but came steadily nearer. He could hear the crackle of twigs under heavy boots. Matt leaped to his feet. |
| 3 | “Pa!” |
| 4 | No answer. It wasn’t his father, of course. It couldn’t be. An Indian? Matt felt a **curl of alarm** against his backbone. He stood waiting, his muscles tensed. |
| 5 | The man who came tramping out from the trees was not an Indian. He was heavyset, the fat bulging under a ragged blue army coat. His face was almost invisible behind a table of reddish whiskers. Halfway across the clearing he stopped. |
| 6 | “Howdy!” he called cheerfully. |
| 7 | “Hello,” Matt answered uncertainly. Was this someone who ought to be greeted like a deacon? |
| 8 | The stranger came closer, so that Matt could see the small blue eyes that glittered in the weather-hardened face. The man stood, deliberately taking his time, looking over the cabin and the cornfield.  “Nice place you got here.” |
| 9 | Matt said nothing. |
| 10 | The man peered curiously over Matt’s shoulder through the open door. He could easily see that the cabin was empty. |
| 11 | “You all alone here?” |
| 12 | Matt hesitated. “My father is away just now.” |
| 13 | “Be back soon, will he?” |
| 14 | Matt was puzzled by his own unwillingness to answer. He ought to be glad to see anyone after all these days alone, but somehow he wasn’t. He didn’t quite know why he found himself lying. |
| 15 | “Anytime now,” he said. “He went back to the river to get supplies. He might be back tonight. When I saw you coming I thought it was him.” |
| 16 | “Guess I surprised you. Reckon you don’t get much company way off here.” |
| 17 | “No, we don’t, “Matt answered. |
| 18 | “Then your pappy wouldn’t want you to turn away a visitor, would he?” the man asked. “Thought mebbe you’d ask me to stay for supper. I got a whiff of it half a mile off.” |
| 19 | Matt remembered his manners. The man’s easy grin was beginning to wipe away some of his doubts. “Of course,” he said. “Come in – sir.” |
| 20 | The man snorted. “Ben’s the name.” he said. “You may of heard of me in the river town.” |
| 21 | “We didn’t stay in the town very long,” Matt answered. He hurried now to light a candle. The stranger stood inside the door, taking in every inch of the small room. |
| 22 | “Your pappy knows how to build a good, tight house,” he said. “You reckon on staying here for good?” |
| 23 | “It’s our land,” Matt told him. In the candle light the room looked snug and homey, something to be proud of showing off to a stranger. “My mother and sister will be coming soon.” |
| 24 | “More folks comin’ all the time,” the man said. “Time was you could tramp for a month and never see a chimney. Now the towns is spreading out from the river every which way. |
| 25 | His eye fell on the rifle hanging over the door. He let out a slow, admiring whistle and walked over to run his hand along the stock. “Mighty fine piece,” he said. “Worth a passel of beaver.” |
| 26 | “My father wouldn’t see it,” Matt said shortly. He was busying himself now to make this stranger welcome. He scooped out a good measure of flour, stirred in some water, patted the dough out on a clean ash board, and propped it up in front of the fire to bake. He laid out the two bowls on the table and the two pewter spoons. He poured molasses into the one pewter dish. Then he ladled the hot stew into the bowls. |
| 27 | The way that stew disappeared, the stranger couldn’t have eaten a meal for a good while. Matt took a very small share for himself. He pulled back his hand and watched the man snatch the last bit of corn cake, sopping up the last of the molasses with it. Finally Ben pushed back his stool and drew the back of his hand across his beard. |
| 28 | “That was mighty tasty, son. Mighty tasty..." |
| 29 | In the easy silence that followed, Matt decided to ask a question of his own, “Are you traveling to the river?” |
| 30 | Ben snorted again. “Not likely. I’m keeping as fur off from that river’s I can, till things quiet down.” |
| 31 | Matt waited. |
| 32 | “Tell the truth, I got away from that town just in time. Warn’t nothin’ they could prove, but they sure had it in for me. So I says, Ben, I says, you been planning on getting yourself beaver pelts. Looks like now’s the time to get moving. I aim to settle in with the (Natives) a bit, maybe move on north.” |
| 33 | “You mean you’re going to live with the Indians?” |
| 34 | “Could do worse. I can bed down ‘bout anywheres.” |
| 35 | “When I was not much more’n your age,” he drawled, well-fed and ready to talk, “I’d spend the whole winder with the (Natives). Hunt with ‘em, trap. Easy to pick up their lingo. Still remember a deal of it. But this country ain’t the same anymore. You got to go west, Ohio mebbe, to get any decent trapping.” |
| 36 | “The Indians still hunt here, don’t they?” Matt asked. |
| 37 | “The Indians has mostly cleared out of these parts,” Ben told him. “What wasn’t killed off in the war got took with the sickness. A deal of ‘em moved on to Canada. What’s left makes a mighty poor living, game getting’ so scarce.” |
| 38 | “Where do they live?” |
| 39 | “Round about.” Ben waved vaguely toward the forest. “They make small camps for a while and the move on...” |
| 40 | “Reason you ain’t seen ‘em,” he went on, “they got enough sense to clear out of these parts when the bugs is bad. They move off, the whole lot, down to the coast to get their year’s mess of clams. Should be movin’ back ‘bout now. They’ll stay the summer and then go off for the big hunt come fall. |
| 41 | Ben’s voice drawled on and on, thickened with food and drowsiness... Listening, Matt couldn’t make the man out. To hear him talk, he had been as big as a hero as Jack the Giant Killer, but he didn’t look the part. He had certainly fallen on hard times of late. No doubt about it, however, he could tell a good story. |
| 42 | The man’s voice was trailing off, and he slumped lower and lower. Presently he was sprawled flat on the floor and snoring. It was clear enough that he could bed down anywhere. At least he hadn’t taken over Matt’s bed. |
| 43 | Matt moved about quietly, though he doubted anything could disturb his guest. He leaned off the bowls with his twig brush. Then he banked the fire with ashes. Finally he settled down on his hemlock mattress. |
| 44 | But he couldn’t sleep. He lay staring up at the log roof, even after the last flickers of firelight had died away and the cabin was in darkness. He couldn’t quiet his uneasy thoughts. Bragging about his adventures by the fire, Ben had seemed harmless, just a fat, tired old man grateful for a good meal. To be honest, Matt had enjoyed his company. Now he began to worry. How long was Ben going to stay? He was sure to find out soon that Matt was living alone. When he did, would he decide it was more comfortable here than in an Indian village? At the rate he had wolfed down that supper, the flour and molasses wouldn’t hold out long. Would he expect Matt to go on providing meals and waiting on him? |
| 45 | And why had he left that town on the river in such a hurry? Was there really some charge against him? Was he dangerous-perhaps even a murderer? At the thought, Matt sat up on his pine bed. He’d be sensible to stay awake and on guard. He’d half a mind to fetch down his father’s rifle and keep it near at hand. Then he felt ashamed. What would his father say about begrudging a stranger a meal and a night’s rest? All the same, he was determined not shut his eyes that night. |
| 46 | He kept them open for a long time, but suddenly he jerked out of a deep sleep and saw that daylight was streaming across the cabin floor. The cabin door was open and the man was gone. |
| 47 | Perhaps he had only stepped outside. Matt stumbled to the door. No sign of the stranger. Relief flooded over him. All the worrying and the man had never intended to stay. Perhaps he had actually believe the lie that his father was returning that day. Then once again, Matt felt ashamed. He must have made it only too plain that Ben wasn’t welcome. Would Pa say he had done wrong? |
| 48 | Still, it was too early to be sure. At any moment Ben might appear, hungry for breakfast. He had better stir up some fresh corncake. |
| 49 | It was then that he noticed. His father’s rifle was not hanging over the door. In a panic, he searched the cabin, his own bed, the former shelves, under the table and the stools. He rushed back to the door and onto the edge of the forest. It was no use. No way of telling which way the man had taken or how long he had been on his way while Matt slept. Ben was gone, and so was the rifle. |
| 50 | He should have kept it in his hands, as his hunch had warned him. He could see now that the man had had his mind set on that gun from the moment he laid eyes on it. But even if Matt had had it in his hands, could he have held out against those burly arms? And to keep his gun, could he actually have shot a man, even a criminal? |
| 51 | It was only later, when his rage began to die down, that he felt a prickle of fear. Now he had no protection. And no way to get meat. Sick with anger, he sat staring at his row of notched sticks. It would be a month at least before his father returned. A month of nothing but fish! And what would his father say? |

1. **Part A:**

What is the meaning of the phrase **curl of alarm** as it is used in Paragraph 4 of the selection? (RL 5.4)

* 1. A feeling of fear and worry
  2. A feeling of anger and frustration
  3. A feeling of excitement and joy
  4. A feeling of comfort and calm

**Part B**:

Which detail from the selection **best** supports the answer to Part A?

(RL 5.1)

1. "The late sun slanted in long yellow bars across the clearing. The forest beyond was already in shadow."
2. "Matt was feeling well pleased with his day."
3. “In the dimness of the trees, a darker shadow moved. This time it didn’t disappear but came steadily nearer.”
4. "He ought to be glad to see anyone after all these days alone, but somehow he wasn’t."

1. **Part A:**

Which pair of sentences provides the **best** summary of the selection from *Sign of the Beaver*? (RL 5.2)

* 1. Matt protects himself by lying to Ben. Ben believes Matt and leaves before Matt wakes up.
  2. Matt stays awake all night because he does not trust what Ben might do. Ben leaves early in the morning before having breakfast.
  3. Matt invites a stranger into his home because he was raised to be polite. The stranger steals something valuable.
  4. A hungry Ben smells stew cooking and hints that he would like something to eat. Matt offers to share his meal with Ben.

**Part B:**

Which **two** details from the selection **best** support the answer to Part A? (RL 5.1)

1. “His father’s rifle was not hanging over the door.”
2. “Was he dangerous-perhaps even a murderer?”
3. “Matt remembered his manners. The man’s easy grin was beginning to wipe away some of his doubts.
4. "All the same he was determined not to shut his eyes that night."
5. "Was there really some charge against him?"
6. #2 & #5
7. #1 & #3
8. #1 & #4
9. #2 & #3
10. **Part A:**

In the passage from *Sign of the Beaver*, how are Matt and Ben different? (RL 5.3)

* 1. Matt is generous but Ben is greedy
  2. Matt is active but Ben is quiet
  3. Matt is careful and Ben is shy
  4. Matt is welcoming and Ben is hesitant

**Part B:**

Which detail from the selection **best** supports the answer to Part A?

(RL 5.1)

1. “Matt took a very small share for himself. He pulled back his hand and watched the man snatch the last bit of corn cake…”
2. “The man peered curiously over Matt’s shoulder through the open door. He could easily see that the cabin was empty.”
3. “Matt remembered his manners. The man’s easy grin was beginning to wipe away some of his doubts. Of course, he said. Come in-sir.”
4. “Thought mebbe you’d ask me to stay for supper. I got a wiff of it half a mile off.”
5. **Part A:**

How does Ben’s visit impact Matt’s overall attitude? (RL 5.3)

* 1. Matt remains pleased with himself.
  2. Matt changes from confident to panicked.
  3. Matt remains fearful.
  4. Matt changes from anxious to peaceful.

**Part B:**

Which detail from the selection best supports the answer to Part A?

(RL 5.1)

1. “…or how long he had been on his way while Matt slept.”
2. “Now he had no protection. And no way to get meat."
3. “…he sat staring at his row of notched sticks.”
4. “A month of nothing but fish!”
5. **Part A:**

What concept about Native American contact with Europeans is confirmed in this story?

1. Native Americans taught European settlers to hunt, farm and fish in order to survive in the New World.
2. European settlers traded with Native Americans for land and food.
3. European settlers and Native Americans had a very unfriendly relationship with much violence between them.
4. Native American population dwindled as many died from diseases settlers brought from Europe and others moved farther west.

**Part B:**

Which detail from the reading selection **best** supports the answer to Part A?

1. “When I was not much more’n your age,” he drawled, well-fed and ready to talk, “I’d spend the whole winder with the (Natives).
2. “The Indians has mostly cleared out of these parts,” Ben told him. “What wasn’t killed off in the war got took with the sickness..."
3. “The Indians still hunt here, don’t they?” Matt asked.
4. "They move off, the whole lot, down to the coast to get their year’s mess of clams. Should be movin’ back ‘bout now."
5. You have read Chapter 3 from the novel, *Sign of the Beaver*, about Matt’s visit with a stranger in his cabin. Use what you have learned about Matt’s feelings and experiences from Chapter 3 to write a realistic continuation of Matt’s story in the wilderness.

After writing, remember to proof and edit your responses. Your work will be scored for comprehension, written expression and language conventions. Your final response should be written on the lines below.

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**Assessment Map**

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| **Question** | **Answer** | **Standard(s)** | **Teacher Notes** |
| 1(A) | A | **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.4**  Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative language such as metaphors and similes. |  |
| 1(B) | C | **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1**  Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text. |  |
| 2(A) | C | **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.2**  Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text. |  |
| 2(B) | B | **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1**  Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text. |  |
| 3(A) | A | **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3**  Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact). |  |
| 3(B) | A | **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1**  Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text. |  |
| 4(A) | B | **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.3**  Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact). |  |
| 4(B) | B | **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1**  Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text. |  |
| 5(A) | D | **Unit 1 Learning Outcome**  Analyze how various Native American societies had to adjust to the presence of European colonists. |  |
| 5(B) | B | **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.5.1**  Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text. |  |