SOFTWARE & TECH

Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen

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Introduction to Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen

Gary Paulsen is widely celebrated for his gripping adventure novels, especially those set in the wilderness, such as **Hatchet** and **The River**. However, one of his most emotionally resonant and lesser-known works is the short story **Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen**. This powerful narrative steps away from the natural world and into the turbulent landscape of the human mind, focusing on the lingering trauma of war. The story explores the painful and often silent struggle of a Vietnam War veteran and the deep emotional divide this creates between him and his teenage son. For readers and students alike, **Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen** serves as a profound gateway into understanding post-traumatic stress disorder, the weight of family secrets, and the difficult journey toward empathy. In this article, we will conduct a thorough literary analysis, examining the plot, characters, major themes, and the lasting impact of this poignant short story.

Plot Summary of Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen

The narrative centers on a fourteen-year-old boy named Terry Erickson, who is struggling to understand his father's strange and unpredictable behavior. Terry's father is a Vietnam veteran who experiences severe episodes of dissociation, during which he appears to be mentally transported back to the battlefields of the Vietnam War. These episodes embarrass and frighten Terry, especially when they occur in public places like shopping malls, causing his father to stare blankly into space or flinch violently at sudden noises. The central conflict of **Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen** revolves around Terry's desperate need for an explanation, coupled with his father's inability or unwillingness to articulate the horrors he endured. The story reaches its climax when Terry finally confronts his father, demanding to know what happened "over there." The father's heartbreaking response reveals the depth of his trauma as he explains the complete and utter terror of war—a terror so profound that he feels he must "stop the sun" just to survive another day. This moment of raw honesty becomes the turning point, allowing Terry to replace his resentment with a nascent understanding and compassion.

Character Analysis

Terry Erickson: The Seeking Son

Terry is the protagonist and the lens through which the reader experiences the story. He is a typical adolescent, caught between the desire for a normal family life and the confusing reality of his father's condition. Terry's emotional arc in **Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen** is one of maturation. Initially, his primary feeling is embarrassment. He is ashamed of his father's episodes and worries about what others think. However, as the story progresses, his shame evolves into a genuine need to understand. Terry represents the children of veterans who inherit the secondary trauma of war without ever having experienced combat themselves. His journey is about moving from fear and frustration to a place of empathy, ultimately accepting that his father's love is still present, even if it is obscured by the shadows of the past.

The Father: A Man Trapped in Time

Although the father is never named in the story, his presence is overwhelming. He is a man who is physically present but mentally trapped in the jungles of Vietnam. Paulsen portrays him with incredible sensitivity, avoiding stereotypes of the violent or broken veteran. Instead, the father is shown as a gentle, loving man who is simply unable to control the triggers that send him spiraling back into his memories. His condition, now recognized as PTSD, manifests in dissociation and hyper-vigilance. His plea to "stop the sun" is a desperate metaphor for the desire to freeze time and escape an unbearable reality. Through the father, **Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen** humanizes the invisible wounds of war, showing that the battle does not end when the soldier returns home.

Major Themes in Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen

The Invisible Wounds of War and PTSD

Perhaps the most significant theme in **Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen** is the exploration of post-traumatic stress disorder. Long before PTSD was widely understood or commonly discussed, Paulsen captured its essence with stark accuracy. The father's episodes are not signs of weakness or madness; they are the direct result of a psyche overwhelmed by trauma. The story educates the reader on how seemingly mundane stimuli—a loud noise, a specific smell, a certain time of day—can trigger a complete sensory flashback. This theme is handled with exceptional care, emphasizing that healing requires patience, understanding, and the willingness to listen to experiences that are almost impossible to articulate.

Family Communication and Understanding

A central conflict in the story is the breakdown of communication between father and son. Terry's mother seems to understand the situation and has adopted a protective silence, but Terry is left in the dark. This lack of communication breeds confusion and resentment. The turning point comes when Terry finds the courage to ask the difficult question, and his father finds the strength to give an honest answer. **Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen** powerfully illustrates that while the truth can be painful, it is often the essential first step toward healing fractured relationships. It suggests that love is not enough without understanding, and that understanding requires difficult conversations.

The Transition from Childhood to Adulthood

The story is also a coming-of-age narrative. Terry's journey is not just about understanding his father; it is about confronting the harsh realities of the adult world. War, trauma, and mortality are no longer abstract concepts but very real forces shaping his family. In forcing himself to face these truths, Terry takes a significant step toward maturity. **Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen** suggests that part of growing up is learning to see our parents not just as authority figures, but as flawed, complex human beings with their own histories and burdens.

Literary Devices and Writing Style

The Central Metaphor: Stopping the Sun

The title itself is the story's most powerful metaphor. When the father explains that he wanted to "stop the sun," he is describing a primal, impossible wish to halt time and prevent the next moment of terror from arriving. This metaphor encapsulates the experience of severe anxiety and trauma, where each day feels like a battle for survival. It is a lyrical and haunting image that lingers with the reader long after the story ends.

Imagery and Sensory Language

Paulsen is a master of sensory detail, and in **Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen**, he uses imagery to bridge the gap between the present and the past. The reader can almost feel the oppressive heat of the jungle and hear the sounds that haunt the father. This technique allows readers to experience, on a small scale, the intensity of the father's flashbacks. The contrast between the mundane American landscape of shopping malls and the

terrifying landscape of war heightens the sense of disconnection the father feels.

Point of View and Narrative Voice

Told from Terry's limited third-person perspective, the story masterfully conveys confusion and unease. The reader knows only what Terry knows and sees only what he sees. This perspective creates a powerful sense of mystery in the first half of the story, mirroring Terry's own bafflement. It also ensures that the final revelation carries maximum emotional weight. The narrative voice is simple, direct, and unadorned, which makes the profound subject matter accessible to a wide audience, particularly young adult readers.

The Historical Context of the Story

To fully appreciate **Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen**, it is helpful to understand the historical backdrop of the Vietnam War and its aftermath. The Vietnam War was a deeply divisive conflict, and many returning veterans were met not with gratitude but with hostility or indifference. The concept of PTSD was not officially recognized until 1980, years after the war ended. Consequently, many veterans suffered in silence, with little access to effective treatment. Paulsen wrote this story to give a voice to that generation of soldiers and their families. It is a testament to the long-term psychological cost of war and a call for compassion toward those who bear those scars. The story serves as a timeless reminder that the effects of war ripple outward through families and communities for decades.

Why Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen Matters Today

Despite being a shorter work, the message of **Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen** remains incredibly relevant. In an era where mental health is finally receiving the attention it deserves, the story offers a powerful framework for discussing trauma and empathy. It is frequently included in middle school and high school curricula because it introduces young readers to complex emotional and psychological concepts in an accessible way. The story also resonates deeply with military families and veterans, validating their experiences and struggles. Furthermore, the story is a vital tool for fostering empathy in young readers, teaching them to look beyond outward behavior and consider the hidden pain others might be carrying.

Discussion Questions for Classroom Study

For educators and readers looking to engage more deeply with the text, here are several discussion questions related to **Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen**:

- Why does Terry feel embarrassed by his father's behavior at the beginning of the story? How does this feeling change by the end?
- What do you think the metaphor "stop the sun" means in the context of the father's experience in Vietnam?
- How does Gary Paulsen use sensory details to help the reader understand the father's flashbacks?
- What role does the mother play in the family dynamic? Why does she not explain things to Terry earlier?
- How does this story challenge stereotypes about soldiers and masculinity?
- What is the significance of the father's admission at the end of the story? Why is it so difficult for him to speak about the war?

Comparative Analysis with Other Works

Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen can be fruitfully compared to other works that explore the impact of war. In many ways, it shares thematic DNA with Tim O'Brien's **The Things They Carried**, another seminal work about Vietnam that blurs the line between story and truth. Both works emphasize the psychological burden of war rather than the action of battle. Another useful comparison is with Ernest Hemingway's **Soldier's Home**, which explores the alienation felt by a World War I veteran upon returning home. Like Paulsen's story, Hemingway's

work highlights the chasm of experience that separates a soldier from his community. However, Paulsen's unique contribution is focusing not on the veteran himself but on the child who must navigate that chasm. **Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen** is a valuable and distinct addition to the literature of war and its aftermath.

Conclusion: The Enduring Power of Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen

In just a few short pages, **Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen** achieves what many full-length novels strive for: a deep, emotional connection with the reader and a lasting lesson in humanity. It is a story that asks us to be patient with those who are hurting, to seek understanding over judgment, and to recognize that love sometimes requires facing uncomfortable truths. Through the characters of Terry and his father, Paulsen reminds us that the sun does not stop for anyone, but we can choose to face each new day with courage and compassion. Whether you are reading it for a literature class, teaching it to students, or simply exploring Paulsen's work, this story leaves an indelible mark. It stands as a testament to Gary Paulsen's versatility as a writer—not just a chronicler of wilderness adventures, but a profound observer of the human heart. For anyone seeking to understand the invisible wounds of war and the healing power of empathy, **Stop The Sun By Gary Paulsen** remains an essential and unforgettable read.

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