Start of the Year
STUDENT MATERIALS
“You hate living here.”

Michael looked at the woman speaking to him.

“No, Aunt Esther. I don’t.” He said it dully, sliding his milk glass back and forth on the table. “I don’t hate it here.”

Esther removed the last pan from the dishwasher and hung it above the oven.

“You hate it here,” she said, “and you hate me.”

“I don’t!” Michael yelled. “It’s not you!”

The woman turned to face him in the kitchen.

“Don’t yell at me!” she yelled. “I’ll not have it in my home. I can’t make you happy, Michael. You just refuse to be happy here. And you punish me every day for it.”
“Punish you?” Michael gawked at her. “I don’t punish you! I don’t care about you! I don’t care what you eat or how you dress or where you go or what you think. Can’t you just leave me alone?”

He slammed down the glass, scraped his chair back from the table and ran out the door.

“Michael!” yelled Esther.

They had been living together, the two of them, for six months. Michael’s parents had died and only Esther could take him in—or, only she had offered to. Michael’s other relatives could not imagine dealing with a fourteen-year-old boy. They wanted peaceful lives.

Esther lived in a condominium in a wealthy section of Detroit. Most of the area’s residents were older (like her) and afraid of the world they lived in (like her). They stayed indoors much of the time. They trusted few people.

Esther liked living alone. She had never married or had children. She had never lived anywhere but Detroit. She liked her condominium.

But she was fiercely loyal to her family, and when her only sister had died, Esther insisted she be allowed to care for Michael. And Michael, afraid of going anywhere else, had accepted.
Oh, he was lonely. Even six months after their deaths, he still expected to see his parents—sitting on the couch as he walked into Esther’s living room, waiting for the bathroom as he came out of the shower, coming in the door late at night. He still smelled his father’s Old Spice somewhere, his mother’s talc. Sometimes he was so sure one of them was somewhere around him that he thought maybe he was going crazy. His heart hurt him. He wondered if he would ever get better.

And though he denied it, he did hate Esther. She was so different from his mother and father. Prejudiced—she admired only those who were white and Presbyterian. Selfish—she wouldn’t allow him to use her phone. Complaining—she always had a headache or a backache or a stomachache.

He didn’t want to, but he hated her. And he didn’t know what to do except lie about it.
Michael hadn’t made any friends at his new school, and his teachers barely noticed him. He came home alone every day and usually found Esther on the phone. She kept in close touch with several other women in nearby condominiums.

Esther told her friends she didn’t understand Michael. She said she knew he must grieve for his parents, but why punish her? She said she thought she might send him away if he couldn’t be nicer. She said she didn’t deserve this.

But when Michael came in the door, she always quickly changed the subject.

One day after school Michael came home with a hermit crab. He had gone into a pet store, looking for some small, living thing, and hermit crabs were selling for just a few dollars. He’d bought one, and a bowl.

Esther, for a change, was not on the phone when he arrived home. She was having tea and a crescent roll and seemed cheerful. Michael wanted badly to show someone what he had bought. So he showed her.

Esther surprised him. She picked up the shell and poked the long, shiny nail of her little finger at the crab’s claws.

“Where is he?” she asked.

Michael showed her the crab’s eyes peering through the small opening of the shell.

“Well, for heaven’s sake, come out
of there!” she said to the crab, and she turned the shell upside
down and shook it.

“Aunt Esther!” Michael grabbed for the shell.

“All right, all right.” She turned it right side up. “Well,” she
said, “what does he do?”

Michael grinned and shrugged his shoulders.

“I don’t know,” he answered. “Just grows, I guess.”

His aunt looked at him.

“An attraction to a crab is something I cannot identify with.
However, it’s fine with me if you keep him, as long as I can be
assured he won’t grow out of that bowl.” She gave him a hard
stare.

“He won’t,” Michael answered. “I promise.”

The hermit crab moved into the condominium. Michael
named him Sluggo and kept the bowl beside his bed. Michael
had to watch the bowl for very long periods of time to catch
Sluggo with his head poking out of his shell, moving around.
Bedtime seemed to be Sluggo’s liveliest part of the day, and
Michael found it easy to lie and watch the busy crab as sleep
slowly came on.

One day Michael arrived home to find Esther sitting on the
edge of his bed, looking at the bowl. Esther usually did not
intrude in Michael’s room, and seeing her there disturbed him.
But he stood at the doorway and said nothing.

Esther seemed perfectly comfortable, although she looked
over at him with a frown on her face.

“I think he needs a companion,” she said.

“What?” Michael’s eyebrows went up as his jaw dropped
down.

Esther sniffed.

“I think Sluggo needs a girl friend.” She stood up. “Where
is that pet store?”
Michael took her. In the store was a huge tank full of hermit crabs.

“Oh my!” Esther grabbed the rim of the tank and craned her neck over the side. “Look at them!”

Michael was looking more at his Aunt Esther than at the crabs. He couldn’t believe it.

“Oh, look at those shells. You say they grow out of them? We must stock up with several sizes. See the pink in that one? Michael, look! He’s got his little head out!”

Esther was so dramatic—leaning into the tank, her bangle bracelets clanking, earrings swinging, red pumps clicking on the linoleum—that she attracted the attention of everyone in the store. Michael pretended not to know her well.

He and Esther returned to the condominium with a thirty-gallon tank and twenty hermit crabs.

Michael figured he’d have a heart attack before he got the heavy tank into their living room. He figured he’d die and Aunt Esther would inherit twenty-one crabs and funeral expenses.

But he made it. Esther carried the box of crabs.
“Won’t Sluggo be surprised?” she asked happily. “Oh, I do hope we’ll be able to tell him apart from the rest. He’s their founding father!”

Michael, in a stupor over his Aunt Esther and the phenomenon of twenty-one hermit crabs, wiped out the tank, arranged it with gravel and sticks (as well as the plastic scuba diver Aunt Esther insisted on buying) and assisted her in loading it up, one by one, with the new residents. The crabs were as overwhelmed as Michael. Not one showed its face.

Before moving Sluggo from his bowl, Aunt Esther marked his shell with some red fingernail polish so she could distinguish him from the rest. Then she flopped down on the couch beside Michael.

“Oh, what would your mother think, Michael, if she could see this mess we’ve gotten ourselves into!”

She looked at Michael with a broad smile, but it quickly disappeared. The boy’s eyes were full of pain.

“Oh, my,” she whispered. “I’m sorry.”

Michael turned his head away.

Aunt Esther, who had not embraced anyone in years, gently put her arm about his shoulders.

“I am so sorry, Michael. Oh, you must hate me.”

Michael sensed a familiar smell then. His mother’s talc.

He looked at his aunt.

“No, Aunt Esther.” He shook his head solemnly. “I don’t hate you.”

Esther’s mouth trembled and her bangles clanked as she patted his arm. She took a deep, strong breath.

“Well, let’s look in on our friend Sluggo,” she said.

They leaned their heads over the tank and found him. The crab, finished with the old home that no longer fit, was coming out of his shell.
Hatchet

by Gary Paulsen
AT FIRST HE THOUGHT IT WAS A GROWL.
In the still darkness of the shelter in the middle of the night his eyes came open and he was awake and he thought there was a growl. But it was the wind, a medium wind in the pines had made some sound that brought him up, brought him awake. He sat up and was hit with the smell.

It terrified him. The smell was one of rot, some musty rot that made him think only of graves with cobwebs and dust and old death. His nostrils widened and he opened his eyes wider, but he could see nothing. It was too dark, too hard dark with clouds covering even the small light from the stars, and he could not see. But the smell was alive, alive and full and in the shelter. He thought of the bear, thought of Big Foot and every monster he had ever seen in every fright movie he had ever watched, and his heart hammered his throat. Then he heard the slithering. A brushing sound, a slithering brushing sound near his feet—and he kicked out as hard as he could, kicked out and threw the hatchet at the sound, a noise coming from

Brian is on his way to visit his father in northern Canada, when the pilot of the small, single-engine plane in which he is flying suffers a fatal heart attack. Forced to crash-land the plane, Brian suddenly finds himself alone in the Canadian wilderness, with only a hatchet to help him survive.
his throat. But the hatchet missed, sailed into the wall where it hit the rocks with a shower of sparks, and his leg was instantly torn with pain, as if a hundred needles had been driven into it. “Unnnngh!”

Now he screamed, with the pain and fear, and skittered on his backside up into the corner of the shelter, breathing through his mouth, straining to see, to hear.

The slithering moved again, he thought toward him at first, and terror took him, stopping his breath. He felt he could see a low dark form, a bulk in the darkness, a shadow that lived, but now it moved away, slithering and scraping it moved away, and he saw or thought he saw it go out of the door opening.

He lay on his side for a moment, then pulled a rasping breath in and held it, listening for the attacker to return. When it was apparent that the shadow wasn’t coming back he felt the calf of his leg, where the pain was centered and spreading to fill the whole leg.

His fingers gingerly touched a group of needles that had been driven through his pants and into the fleshy part of his calf. They were stiff and very sharp on the ends that stuck out, and he knew then what the attacker had been. A porcupine had stumbled into his shelter and when he had kicked it, the thing had slapped him with its tail of quills.
He touched each quill carefully. The pain made it seem as if dozens of them had been slammed into his leg, but there were only eight, pinning the cloth against his skin. He leaned back against the wall for a minute. He couldn’t leave them in, they had to come out, but just touching them made the pain more intense.

*So fast, he thought.*
*So fast things change.*

When he’d gone to sleep he had satisfaction and in just a moment it was all different. He grasped one of the quills, held his breath, and jerked. It sent pain signals to his brain in tight waves, but he grabbed another, pulled it, then another quill. When he had pulled four of them he stopped for a moment. The pain had gone from being a pointed injury pain to spreading in a hot smear up his leg, and it made him catch his breath.

Some of the quills were driven in deeper than others, and they tore when they came out. He breathed deeply twice, let half of the breath out, and went back to work. Jerk, pause, jerk—and three more times before he lay back in the darkness, done. The pain filled his leg now, and with it came new waves of self-pity. Sitting alone in the dark, his leg aching, some mosquitos finding him again, he started crying. It was all too much, just too much, and he couldn’t take it. Not the way it was.

I can’t take it this way, alone with no fire and in the dark, and next time it might be something worse, maybe a bear, and it wouldn’t be just quills in the leg, it would be worse. *I can’t do this,* he thought, again and again. *I can’t.*
Brian pulled himself up until he was sitting upright back in the corner of the cave. He put his head down on his arms across his knees, with stiffness taking his left leg, and cried until he was cried out.

He did not know how long it took, but later he looked back on this time of crying in the corner of the dark cave and thought of it as when he learned the most important rule of survival, which was that feeling sorry for yourself didn’t work. It wasn’t just that it was wrong to do, or that it was considered incorrect. It was more than that—it didn’t work. When he sat alone in the darkness and cried and was done, was all done with it, nothing had changed. His leg still hurt, it was still dark, he was still alone, and the self-pity had accomplished nothing.

At last he slept again, but already his patterns were changing and the sleep was light, a resting doze more than a deep sleep, with small sounds awakening him twice in the rest of the night. In the last doze period before daylight, before he awakened finally with the morning light and the clouds of new mosquitos, he dreamed. This time it was not of his mother, but of his father at first and then of his friend Terry.

In the initial segment of the dream his father was standing at the side of a living room looking at him, and it was clear from his expression that he was trying to tell Brian something. His lips moved but there was no sound, not a whisper. He waved his hands at Brian, made gestures in front of his face as if he were scratching something, and he worked to make a word
with his mouth but at first Brian could not see it. Then the lips made an mmmmmm shape but no sound came. Mmmmmm-maaaaa. Brian could not hear it, could not understand it and he wanted to so badly; it was so important to understand his father, to know what he was saying. He was trying to help, trying so hard, and when Brian couldn’t understand he looked cross, the way he did when Brian asked questions more than once, and he faded. Brian’s father faded into a fog place Brian could not see, and the dream was almost over, or seemed to be, when Terry came.

He was not gesturing to Brian but was sitting in the park at a bench looking at a barbecue pit and for a time nothing happened. Then he got up and poured some charcoal from a bag into the cooker, then some starter fluid, and he took a flick type of lighter and lit the fluid. When it was burning and the charcoal was at last getting hot he turned, noticing Brian for the first time in the dream. He turned and smiled and pointed to the fire as if to say, see, a fire.

But it meant nothing to Brian, except that he wished he had a fire. He saw a grocery sack on the table next to Terry. Brian thought it must contain hot dogs and chips and mustard, and he could think only of the food. But Terry shook his head and pointed again to the fire, and twice more he pointed to the fire, made Brian see the flames, and Brian felt his frustration and anger rise and he thought all right, all right, I see the fire but so what? I don’t have a fire.

I know about fire.
I know I need a fire.
I know that.
His eyes opened and there was light in the cave, a gray dim light of morning. He wiped his mouth and tried to move his leg, which had stiffened like wood. There was thirst, and hunger, and he ate some raspberries from the jacket. They had spoiled a bit, seemed softer and mushier, but still had a rich sweetness. He crushed the berries against the roof of his mouth with his tongue and drank the sweet juice as it ran down his throat. A flash of metal caught his eye, and he saw his hatchet in the sand where he had thrown it at the porcupine in the dark.

He scootched up, wincing a bit when he bent his stiff leg, and crawled to where the hatchet lay. He picked it up and examined it and saw a chip in the top of the head.

The nick wasn’t large, but the hatchet was important to him, was his only tool, and he should not have thrown it. He should keep it in his hand and make a tool of some kind to help push an animal away. *Make a staff*, he thought, *or a lance, and save the hatchet*. Something came then, a thought as he held the hatchet, something about the dream and his father and Terry, but he couldn’t pin it down.

“Ahhh . . .” He scrambled out and stood in the morning sun and stretched his back muscles and his sore leg. The hatchet was still in his hand, and as he stretched and raised it over his head it caught the first rays of the morning sun.
The first faint light hit the silver of the hatchet and, flashed a brilliant gold in the light. Like fire. *That is it,* he thought. *What they were trying to tell me.*

Fire. The hatchet was the key to it all. When he threw the hatchet at the porcupine in the cave and missed and hit the stone wall, it had showered sparks, a golden shower of sparks in the dark, as golden with fire as the sun was now.

The hatchet was the answer. That’s what his father and Terry had been trying to tell him. Somehow he could get fire from the hatchet. The sparks would make fire.

Brian went back into the shelter and studied the wall. It was some form of chalky granite, or a sandstone, but imbedded in it were large pieces of a darker stone, a harder and darker stone. It only took him a moment to find where the hatchet had struck. The steel had nicked into the edge of one of the darker stone pieces. Brian turned the head backward so he would strike with the flat rear of the hatchet and hit the black rock gently. Too gently, and nothing happened. He struck harder, a glancing blow, and two or three weak sparks skipped off the rock and died immediately.

He swung harder, held the hatchet so it would hit a longer, sliding blow, and the black rock exploded in fire. Sparks flew so heavily that several of them skittered and jumped on the sand beneath the rock, and he smiled and struck again and again.

*There could be fire here, he thought.*
Brian found it was a long way from sparks to fire.

Clearly there had to be something for the sparks to ignite, some kind of tinder or kindling—but what? He brought some dried grass in, tapped sparks into it and watched them die. He tried small twigs, breaking them into little pieces, but that was worse than the grass. Then he tried a combination of the two, grass and twigs.

Nothing. He had no trouble getting sparks, but the tiny bits of hot stone or metal—he couldn’t tell which they were—just sputtered and died.

He settled back on his haunches in exasperation, looking at the pitiful clump of grass and twigs.

He needed something finer, something soft and fine and fluffy to catch the bits of fire.

Shredded paper would be nice, but he had no paper.

“So close,” he said aloud, “so close. . . .”

He put the hatchet back in his belt and went out of the shelter, limping on his sore leg. There had to be something, had to be. Man had made fire. There had been fire for thousands, millions of years. There had to be a way. He dug in his pockets and found the twenty-dollar bill in his wallet. Paper. Worthless paper out here. But if he could get a fire going . . .
He ripped the twenty into tiny pieces, made a pile of pieces, and hit sparks into them. Nothing happened. They just wouldn’t take the sparks. But there had to be a way—some way to do it.

Not twenty feet to his right, leaning out over the water were birches, and he stood looking at them for a full half-minute before they registered on his mind. They were a beautiful white with bark like clean, slightly speckled paper.

Paper.

He moved to the trees. Where the bark was peeling from the trunks it lifted in tiny tendrils, almost fluffs. Brian plucked some of them loose, rolled them in his fingers. They seemed flammable, dry, and nearly powdery. He pulled and twisted bits off the trees, packing them in one hand while he picked them with the other, picking and gathering until he had a wad close to the size of a baseball.

Then he went back into the shelter and arranged the ball of birchbark peelings at the base of the black rock. As an afterthought he threw in the remains of the twenty-dollar bill. He struck and a stream of sparks fell into the bark and quickly died. But this time one spark fell on one small hair of dry bark—almost a thread of bark—and seemed to glow a bit brighter before it died.

The material had to be finer. There had to be a soft and incredibly fine nest for the sparks.

I must make a home for the sparks, he thought. A perfect home or they won't stay or they won't make a fire.
He started ripping the bark, using his fingernails at first, and when that didn’t work he used the sharp edge of the hatchet, cutting the bark in thin slivers, hairs so fine they were almost not there. It was painstaking work, slow work, and he stayed with it for over two hours. Twice he stopped for a handful of berries and once to go to the lake for a drink. Then back to work, the sun on his back, until at last he had a ball of fluff as big as a grapefruit—dry birchbark fluff.

He positioned his spark nest—as he thought of it—at the base of the rock, used his thumb to make a small depression in the middle, and slammed the back of the hatchet down across the black rock. A cloud of sparks rained down, most of them missing the nest, but some, perhaps thirty or so, hit in the depression and, of those, six or seven found fuel and grew, smoldered and caused the bark to take on the red glow.

Then they went out.

Close—he was close. He repositioned the nest, made a new and smaller dent with his thumb, and struck again.

More sparks, a slight glow, then nothing.

*It’s me,* he thought. *I’m doing something wrong. I do not know this—a cave dweller would have had a fire by now, a Cro-Magnon man would have a fire by now—but I don’t know this. I don’t know how to make a fire.*

Maybe not enough sparks. He settled the nest in place once more and hit the rock with a series of blows, as fast as he could. The sparks poured like a golden waterfall. At first they seemed to take, there were several, many sparks that found life and took briefly, but they all died.
Starved.

He leaned back. They are like me. They are starving. It wasn’t quantity, there were plenty of sparks, but they needed more.

_I would kill_, he thought suddenly, _for a book of matches_. _Just one book. Just one match. I would kill._

What makes fire? He thought back to school. To all those science classes. Had he ever learned what made a fire? Did a teacher ever stand up there and say, “This is what makes a fire . . .”

He shook his head, tried to focus his thoughts. What did it take? _You have to have fuel_, he thought—and he had that. The bark was fuel. Oxygen—there had to be air.

He needed to add air. He had to fan on it, blow on it.

He made the nest ready again, held the hatchet backward, tensed, and struck four quick blows. Sparks came down and he leaned forward as fast as he could and blew.

Too hard. There was a bright, almost intense glow, then it was gone. He had blown it out.

Another set of strikes, more sparks. He leaned and blew, but gently this time, holding back and aiming the stream of air from his mouth to hit the brightest spot. Five or six sparks had fallen in a tight mass of bark hair, and Brian centered his efforts there.

The sparks grew with his gentle breath. The red glow moved from the sparks themselves into the bark, moved and grew and became worms, glowing red worms that crawled up the bark hairs and caught other threads of bark and grew until there was a pocket of red as big as a quarter, a glowing red coal of heat.

And when he ran out of breath and paused to inhale, the red ball suddenly burst into flame.
But the flames were thick and oily and burning fast, consuming the ball of bark as fast as if it were gasoline. He had to feed the flames, keep them going. Working as fast as he could he carefully placed the dried grass and wood pieces he had tried at first on top of the bark and was gratified to see them take.

But they would go fast. He needed more, and more. He could not let the flames go out.

He ran from the shelter to the pines and started breaking off the low, dead, small limbs. These he threw in the shelter, went back for more, threw those in, and squatted to break and feed the hungry flames. When the small wood was going well he went out and found larger wood and did not relax until that was going. Then he leaned back against the wood brace of his door opening and smiled.

_I have a friend_, he thought—_I have a friend now. A hungry friend, but a good one. I have a friend named fire._

_“Hello, fire...”_

The curve of the rock back made an almost perfect drawing flue that carried the smoke up through the cracks of the roof but held the heat. If he kept the fire small it would be perfect and would keep anything like the porcupine from coming through the door again.

_A friend and a guard_, he thought.

_So much from a little spark. A friend and a guard from a tiny spark._

He looked around and wished he had somebody to tell this thing, to show this thing he had done. But there was nobody.

Nothing but the trees and the sun and the breeze and the lake.

Nobody.
Pale

by Janet Schulman

illustrated by Meilo So
Male
Citizen Hawk of New York
One crisp autumn day in 1991, a red-tailed hawk flew across the Hudson River from New Jersey. He flew over smokestacks, skyscrapers, and ant-like traffic to a rectangular oasis smack in the center of New York City. The hawk soared above Central Park. He surveyed the trees, the small lakes, the tall buildings on all four sides. And with his keen hawk vision, he spotted lunch—so many plump pigeons and rats and squirrels!
Red-tailed hawks often stop for a few days and sometimes spend the winter in Central Park, but they are shy birds and eventually fly away to quiet farmlands or wooded mountains.

This bird was different. He liked what he saw, and he stayed.

Birdwatchers in Central Park liked what they saw, too. A spectacular red-tailed hawk! He loomed large in the sky with a wingspan of four feet. And his unusual coloring—beige rather than dark brown, with breast and belly feathers nearly pure white—made him easy to track.
The birdwatchers named him Pale Male and kept notes on him daily. Pale Male hung around the park the way a teenager hangs out at a mall. He dive-bombed tasty pigeons and rats at their litter-can snack bars. He chased after ducks and was spotted terrorizing squirrels, seemingly just for the fun of it. As red-tailed hawks go, he was a teenager. His brown tail feathers gave it away. These hawks don’t get their distinctive reddish brown tail feathers until they are mature, about two years old.
Pale Male thrived in his new home. And the birders were thrilled when he began courting another redtail. Day after day they performed an aerial ballet of circling and swooping in unison over the park until, young as he was, Pale Male won her as his mate.
In March the two hawks began building a nest in a tree near a baseball diamond on the Great Lawn. This was the first time that hawks had nested in the park since it opened in 1858.

But Pale Male and his mate were inexperienced builders. Their nest fell apart a month later.

Undaunted, the two hawks immediately began building another nest in a tree near East 70th Street. This time it was not poor construction but location that did them in. The tree they chose housed a crows’ nest the year before. Crows are natural enemies of hawks, and the crows of Central Park responded with unusual ferocity when they saw hawks nesting in “their” tree. Flocks of screaming black birds harassed the two hawks every time they left their nest. Finally, Pale Male’s mate became so disoriented that she slammed into a high-rise at East 73rd Street. Witnesses called the Audubon Society. Her wing was badly broken, and she was taken to a hawk rescue center in New Jersey.
The birdwatchers wondered what would happen to Pale Male now. They waited and watched, and the following winter Pale Male, now sporting a flashy red tail, found a new mate. In March they began building a nest. This nest would be different. This time Pale Male moved his residence to a ledge above a top-floor window at 927 Fifth Avenue, one of New York City’s most exclusive apartment buildings.

Bird experts had never heard of a red-tailed hawk with its nest on a building in the center of a bustling city. Maybe Pale Male wasn’t too smart.

But soon they saw that this bird was actually very smart. Metal spikes had been embedded in the ledge above the window to keep pigeons away. By forcing sticks and branches between these spikes, the hawks made a nest that could withstand hurricane winds. An ornate cornice hanging over the ledge provided protection from the elements. The building was just across the street from some of Pale Male’s favorite hunting grounds. And the view of the park from the twelfth floor was spectacular! New Yorkers couldn’t ask for a better address. Neither could Pale Male.
As spring progressed, Pale Male and his mate took turns sitting on three eggs. Ignoring window washers and wailing fire engines and honking horns below, they sat and they sat. And birders watched and waited. The eggs should have hatched by late April or early May. Finally in June it became obvious that the eggs were not going to hatch. The hawks’ small fan club was disappointed.
But later in June, their sadness turned to shock when they discovered that the building management of 927 Fifth Avenue had removed the nest. Residents had complained about bird droppings, feathers, and the remains of dead animals sometimes falling to the sidewalk in front of their building. The wealthy New Yorkers who lived there did not consider these messy hawks to be the kind of neighbors they wanted.
Some hawk experts thought that Pale Male would find a new nest site. But Pale Male would not be evicted. He and his mate returned in the spring and built a new nest exactly where the old one had been.

This time the building management left it alone, thanks to a stern warning from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, threatening substantial fines. Hawks were protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. Destroying their nests was a serious violation.

And a year later, in April 1995, the hawks’ perseverance was rewarded! Three fluffy white chicks were born in New York City.

The hawk watchers of Central Park were ecstatic. From early morning until nightfall they gathered around the model-boat pond to get the best view of the nest. They watched Mom and Dad Hawk tend their babies and talked about the chicks like proud new aunts and uncles.
New Yorkers on their way to work or out for a stroll wondered what celebrity these people could be spying on with their binoculars and telescopes. The enthusiastic hawk watchers were always happy to point out the nest, and it was the rare person who was not surprised and delighted to discover a family of hawks making a home in the city.

News of the hawks spread, and soon New Yorkers who had never been birdwatchers before were stopping by the model-boat pond to see what they could see. The hawks were becoming Fifth Avenue’s most admired celebrities!
By June the chicks had grown almost as large as their parents. Gone was their baby down—now they had flight feathers. They began jumping up and down in the nest and flapping their wings in preparation for their first flights. In the wild their nest would have been in a tree with branches to hop down to until they got the hang of flying.

The birders were worried. Would these city hawks survive that scary first flight with nothing but cement and asphalt below them? The first fledgling took off with a big hop and then began flapping his wings madly like an oversized sparrow until he landed—awkwardly but safely—on the roof of an apartment building several blocks up Fifth Avenue.

The fledgling spent the day half-flying, half-hopping from balcony to balcony until Pale Male gave his brave baby a first lesson in how to fly like a self-respecting hawk.
The fledgling watched his father soar over the Metropolitan Museum of Art and circle back with scarcely a flap of his wings. The novice caught on and proudly flapped—slowly—back to his nest, just in time for dinner.

Within a few days all three fledglings had abandoned their cramped nest for the trees of Central Park.
Each spring more and more fans of the hawks came out to watch Pale Male and his mate renovate their nest with new twigs and leaves. And there was always a great celebration when new chicks hatched. The birders watched the hardworking parents ferry home pigeons, rats, and occasionally a squirrel or a songbird from their well-stocked Central Park meat market. Even after fledglings left the nest, they would stay under the protection of their parents for several months. Pale Male would always respond to their hungry cries with some meat. He would chase off those pesky crows and let his hawklets know that the blue jay bullies couldn’t really harm them. This good dad was once observed helping his hawklets learn to catch rodents by dropping a live mouse near one of them.
Over the next nine years the hawks would rear twenty-three chicks. And a CBS News commentator actually nominated Pale Male for Father of the Year! Life in the big city was good for the hawks. Little did Pale Male know that his greatest challenge was yet to come.
In December 2004 the owners of 927 Fifth Avenue removed Pale Male’s nest along with the anti-pigeon spikes that anchored it. Most of the tenants had been irked for years that they couldn’t legally get rid of the hawks. Then in 2003, during a time when many conservation and wildlife laws were being relaxed by President George W. Bush’s administration, the Migratory Bird Treaty was changed. It now permitted destruction of nests as long as there were no eggs or chicks in the nest. Hawks lay their eggs in March and the chicks fledge in June. In December Pale Male’s nest was empty. The owners of the hawk building were quick to take advantage of the new law.

All of New York heard about it in a flash. Television newscasts told all of America. The news traveled abroad in Japanese, French, Arabic, and other languages. New Yorkers and nature lovers everywhere were stunned. Taking down the nest seemed like such a heartless act coming from people living in their own well-feathered nests.
The dedicated birdwatchers and the Audubon Society immediately organized protests across Fifth Avenue from the hawk building. Every day more and more people joined the chorus chanting, “Bring back the nest,” “Bring back the spikes,” “Shame! Shame!” Two protestors dressed as birds urged cars on Fifth Avenue to “Honk 4 Hawks.” Taxis, cars, and city buses honked. Trucks let out ear-piercing blasts of their air horns. Even fire trucks let loose their sirens.

Pale Male circled high above the protesters, silently watching.
After a week with hundreds of protesters blocking the sidewalk, with traffic slowed to a crawl, and with constant, relentless noise, the building owners backed down. The publicity had been terrible for them! The Audubon Society and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service finally persuaded the owners to reinstall the anti-pigeon spikes and to construct an apron, or cradle, below the nest to catch the hawks’ garbage.

The hawks kept a wary eye on the ledge until the spikes and apron were installed and the workers’ scaffolding was finally removed. Within minutes the hawk couple began bringing new twigs to the ledge. They would rebuild their home and start over again.
The red-tailed hawks had brought great joy to the people of New York, and now the people of New York returned the favor. The hawks were welcome to stay at 927 Fifth Avenue as long as they wanted.

They were true-blue New Yorkers—tough, resourceful, and determined to make it in the city. New Yorkers loved them for bringing a touch of the wild and a respect for nature to a teeming urban landscape.
Pale Male gave the city another gift as well. In the spring of 2005, some fifteen blocks south of Pale Male’s nest, another redtail and his mate set up housekeeping. They built their nest on a ledge on the thirty-fifth floor of Trump Parc on Central Park South and hatched two chicks. Birdwatchers believe that this light-colored hawk with a taste for high-rise apartments is a son of Pale Male. Junior is his name.

And so the legacy of Pale Male, the majestic hawk who is different, lives on.

Long live Pale Male!
D R Y A S D U S T

spadefoot toads

They can deal solo
with dryness, but give them rain
and then: toads explode.

Marilyn Singer
Colorful Guy

by Avis Harley

Brown and gray and quietly drab
is the conical home of the hermit crab.

But wait till you see the owner alight:
all flame and fire and ruby bright,
where a splendid spill of scarlet anoints
the crimson cluster of legs and joints.
It must have been some job, that task of carrying precious fire from Stone Age camp to camp. Holding high a flaming branch like an Olympic torch, or bearing embers in a coconut husk, a pink-edged shell. Taking care it never went out. Was it the finest athlete, the wisest mother, the oldest granddad who had the honor? How many children dreamed of following in their footsteps? Could any have imagined metal pots and matches, chimneys and tinderboxes, and kitchens with cheerful potbellied stoves?
One Drop at a Time
by Laura Purdie Salas

Flashing from skies
Splashing in puddles
Dripping off leaftips
Slipping down hills
Rushing in rivers
Gushing toward oceans
Spilling past rocks
Filling up creeks
Streaming in valleys
Steaming the very air

Water creates rain forest creates water
In the Flooded Forest

by Susan Katz

The river carries us to the sky,
Where a tiny catfish spends its life in a tree.
Neon tetras dart among leaves,
And a sting ray ripples beneath a branch.

We paddle through the treetops
Past a colony of dangling, woven nests.
Orchids grow within our grasp,
And a monkey leans from a nearby limb to spy.

Here we see the forest twice.
Banana blossoms kiss their own reflections.
A dolphin leaps past a parrot’s perch
As we drift between the worlds.
FOOD CHAIN

by John Scieszka
illustrated by Lane Smith

I’ve been working in the food chain,
All the livelong day.
In the middle of the food chain,
I’ve got no time to play.

Can’t you see the green plants growing?
That’s energy, okay?
Consumer eats up the producer,
Predator eats prey.
Who’s for lunch today?
Who’s for lunch today?
Don’t you just wonder, who’s for lunch today?
Predator or prey.
Predator or prey.
Eat or be eaten, that’s the only way.
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