

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## The Voyage of the Frog

by  
Gary Paulsen

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### Book Information

Gary Paulsen, *The Voyage of the Frog*  
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141 Pages  
Book Level: 6.0  
Interest Level: MG

When David goes out on his sailboat to scatter his recently deceased uncle's ashes to the wind, he is caught in a fierce storm and must survive many days on his own as he works out his feelings about life and his uncle.

**Award:** ALA Notable/Best Books

**Topics:** Adventure, Lost/Abandoned; Family Life, Growing Up; Family Life, Uncles; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Know Yourself

### Main Characters

Captain Henry Pierce the captain of the research freighter

David Alspeth a fourteen-year-old boy who sails alone

Owen Alspeth David's uncle

### Vocabulary

**halyard** a rope used for raising and lowering sails

**jib** a triangular-shaped sail set forward of the mainsail

**luffing** slapping of sails in the wind

**plankton** tiny animals and plants in the ocean

**tiller** the steering mechanism of a sailboat

### Synopsis

*The Voyage of the Frog* is the story of David Alspeth, a fourteen-year-old boy who survives a hazardous journey alone in the Pacific Ocean. The beginning of the story finds David boarding the sailboat "Frog" at a marina in Ventura, California. While preparing to set sail the next morning, he grieves as he recalls his uncle Owen's futile battle

with cancer. Owen had realized his death would come soon, so he had signed over the title of the "Frog" to David, who had been a frequent sailing companion. Owen had asked David to do one favor for him in return after his death: to scatter his ashes in the ocean beyond sight of land. Owen had died several days before, and now David is determined to honor his uncle's dying request. Although he had told his parents he would spend the night in the boat at the marina and cast off the next morning, the lure of the sea and the peacefulness of the evening lures him to begin his trip immediately.

David sails all night, and at nine o'clock the next morning he is approximately 120 miles off the coast when he is finally beyond the sight of land and the glow of lights from Los Angeles. He then scatters the ashes. But as he is preparing to begin the return trip, he suddenly spots a violent storm approaching. He immediately tries to lower his sails in preparation but cannot finish before the storm strikes. The wind then swings the boom around and knocks him into the open cabin, where he slips in and out of consciousness due to a serious head injury and the pain from a dislocated shoulder.

When David wakes, he fights panic as he realizes the seriousness of his predicament. He is over 300 miles out at sea, he has little food and no radio, he is injured, the boat is in danger of capsizing, and there is no wind to take him back to the coast. He forces himself to calm down, though, and he pumps the water out of the cabin, thereby making the boat seaworthy.

That night, a shark, attracted by the flash of the hull in the moonlight, attacks the boat. The shark does no serious damage to the boat and leaves when the moon's movement ends the reflection. The next morning, David cleans the interior of the cabin, which was strewn with the boat's gear and supplies during the storm. While cleaning, he discovers and reads the log book that Owen had kept and, to his relief, finds that the boat still has twenty one gallons of fresh water, which he estimates he can make last for six weeks.

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At about midnight that evening, a rumbling noise awakens David, and he discovers an enormous oil tanker bearing down on him. The tanker narrowly misses the "Frog." As the ship passes him, he frantically waves a candle, but no one on board spots him. The incident plunges him back into despair, until he reminds himself that discouragement will not solve any of his problems.

Finally, several days later, the wind begins to pick up and he heads east, believing he is heading toward California. The next morning at sunrise, a pod of whales swims alongside until mid-day. That night he nearly runs aground on a reef, but he steers back out to open water just before the surf can hurl his boat to destruction on the rocks. At daybreak, he sees the barren, uninhabited coastline and realizes he is off the coast of Baja, much farther south than he had expected. He guides the "Frog" into a bay and spends the day resting and watching whales.

That night he leaves the bay and immediately encounters a storm. But, because of his food shortage, he decides to continue, rather than turn back to the safety of the bay. David is more prepared for this storm and rides it much better than the first. Late the next day, he spots a small ship heading toward him and signals it to stop. The captain, Henry Pierce, tells him that searchers had been out looking for him far to the north but had eventually given up. Pierce offers to take him back, but David insists on sailing the "Frog" back to Ventura because he is not willing to leave the boat behind. The crew gives him food and water and promises to call his parents to let them know he is safe. David then waves and returns to his task of sailing the remaining 350 miles home.

### Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

### Initial Understanding

David comes to consider the whales as friends. What causes David to feel this way?

*The whales choose to swim alongside for hours. David probably feels a kinship with them in that they are peaceful, intelligent creatures who can communicate with each other and who seem to like his presence.*

### Literary Analysis

What were some of Owen's characteristics that influence David during his voyage?

*It was obvious that Owen was a knowledgeable sailor and a good teacher. He also had a business-like approach, which David used to assess his situation. David saw an avid desire for knowledge in Owen and realizes its value during the voyage.*

### Inferential Comprehension

The book ends with David continuing his sail toward home. Is it likely David will, or will not, make it home?

*Students might respond that the book ends on a positive note. They may also say that considering David's determination and strength of character, it is likely he will be successful in sailing home. Other students, however, may point out the captain's warning of the difficulty of sailing north and David's lack of experience to show the possibility that he will fail.*

### Constructing Meaning

David decides that, like Owen, he wants to try to learn each day. Realizing that he has no books or radio, he wonders if he can study. How might one go about studying oneself?

*Some ideas might be to sit in a quiet place to allow an uninterrupted flow of thoughts and feelings and then describe them in a journal. Another suggestion may be to make a personal list of good and bad qualities.*

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## Teachable Skills

**Making Predictions** At the end of the book, David has acquired supplies from the research freighter and is sailing alone toward home. Ask the students to write an additional chapter to the book. The students should highlight events along the way.

**Describing Actions or Events** During the voyage, David makes one entry in Owen's personal log. Ask the students to add to David's entries by chronicling events as they occurred from the beginning of the voyage until the end of the book.

**Recognizing Setting** Using the drawing of the "Frog" in the front of the book, ask those students who are interested to construct a primitive model of the boat. Make a large copy of the same drawing without the words and orally quiz the rest of the class on the parts of the boat.

**Responding to Literature** Ask the students to research and read about sailors' knots. Then ask a person in the community who has the ability to tie sailors' knots to give a demonstration to the class. Many Navy and Coast Guard veterans are experts in tying knots. (If no one is available, perhaps do research and learn to tie several.) Provide rope and allow students to learn to tie some knots.