



# A WEEK IN THE WOODS

**Andrew Clements**

*Author of the million-copy best-seller FRINDLE*

# Preparations

Mr. Maxwell looked at the long checklist, and then looked at the calendar, and then he shook his head. It was February thirteenth, and he was sitting at his desk in his classroom at quarter of seven on a Friday morning. And a question formed in his mind: *Why on earth do I do this year after year?* He quickly pushed that thought out of his head and turned back to the checklist.

It had become a tradition at Hardy Elementary School: Bright and early on the Monday morning of the third week in April, the whole fifth grade piled into three buses and went off for a week in the woods.

And that's what the program was called: A Week in the Woods. It was nature studies and it was environmental science and it was campfires and creative writing and storytelling and woodcraft. It was always the

last big event for the fifth-graders before they went on to the middle school. It was always fun, always memorable. And the person who always made it happen was Mr. Maxwell, the fifth-grade science teacher.

The kids looked forward to A Week in the Woods. They all loved it. The fifth grade-teachers also looked forward to A Week in the Woods. But not all of them loved it. Not even most of them.

In fact, there was a rumor that if Mr. Maxwell ever moved or retired, the program might change. It might become A Day in the Woods. And at this year's early planning meeting, Mrs. Leghorn had been heard muttering, "This is Whitson, New Hampshire, for Pete's sake! *Every* week is a week in the woods!"

Mrs. Leghorn was the fifth-grade math teacher, and if she got her way, the program would become An Hour in the Woods—Without Me!

But Mr. Maxwell had originated the program, and this would be his sixteenth year as its director. As always, he wanted the fifth-graders to have an outdoors experience that they would remember all their lives. So once again, it was going to be A Week in the Woods.

Bill Maxwell was a big man. He cut and split his own firewood, and he had the shoulders and arms to prove it. He always wore dress pants and a white shirt and tie to school, and that helped make him look less

rugged and a little less imposing. But it was fair to say that Mr. Maxwell had never had a discipline problem in any of his classes. Ever.

At forty-five years old, his thick brown hair was starting to turn gray, but apart from that, he looked like a man ten years younger. He wasn't handsome, but he had a pleasant face, open and honest, with clear blue eyes and a strong jawline.

He had grown up in northern New Hampshire and had majored in environmental studies at the state university. Then at the end of his junior year he took part in an Earth Day event at a grade school. That's when Bill Maxwell discovered that he loved to teach almost as much as he loved the outdoors. He shifted his major to education, and one month after graduation he landed a job in Whitson as a fifth-grade science teacher.

Bill and his college sweetheart had planned to get married, but after she graduated she took a job as an accountant for a big paper company. The marriage never happened. Young Bill Maxwell could not understand how anyone could work for an industry that did such bad things to the environment.

During his next three years of teaching Mr. Maxwell lived in a boardinghouse in the nearby town of Atlinboro. During the summers he painted houses, and he saved every penny. Then he bought forty-five acres of wooded land about fifty miles north of Whitson and built himself a log house. He installed

# COLLISION COURSE

The fifth-grade Week in the Woods is a beloved tradition of Hardy Elementary, where Mark Chelmsley (the Fourth) is pretty much killing time before his parents send him off to an exclusive prep school. But then Mark realizes the Week might be a chance to prove to Mr. Maxwell that he's not just another of the slacker rich kids the teacher can't stand.

But it may be too late for Mark to change Mr. Maxwell's opinion of him. On the first day of the Week, the tension between teacher and student explodes, and in a reckless moment, Mark puts not only himself, but also Mr. Maxwell, in grave danger. Can two such strong adversaries work together to save their lives?

**"This one will be a popular choice, particularly with fans of Gary Paulsen and Jean Craighead George." —School Library Journal**

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