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Review: A Week in the Woods

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Clements, Andrew, *A Week in the Woods*. Aladdin Paperbacks/Simon&Schuster, 2002. ISBN: 0689858027, Ages 9-13.

Description

Mr. Maxwell has planned, hosted, and successfully shepherded the tradition of “Week in the Woods” for fifth graders at Hardy Elementary for sixteen years. Other teachers and parents may be involved in instructing and chaperoning, but the real responsibility of the event lies at the feet of Mr. Maxwell. Students always look forward with great anticipation to the week of study of all aspects of nature, geography, math, geology, and just plain survival. Then comes Mark Chelmsley (the fourth)--the new really rich kid on the block. Bored with subjects that he already knows, and chauffeured to school by the family hired man, Mark arrives at the small town school at a disadvantage. At first cold, distant, and disinterested, Mark establishes his less-than-desirable reputation with all of his teachers. Meanwhile, fighting his own battles with loneliness and affluent neglect, the young man gradually discovers the delights and mysteries of the great outdoors around his newly refurbished estate. As he learns about nature, Mark also learns about camping and survival in the wild. Little does anyone realize how beneficial this knowledge will prove to be during the week in the woods.

Critique:

Pitting teachers and students against one another is a tricky game, but Clements manages to pull it off well in this survival story. “Survival” takes on a double meaning as readers follow the life of the too wealthy and too neglected child. Teachers may chafe at the attitude that persists in Mr. Maxwell as Mark’s perspective on school work begins to shift, but the scenario is realistic. Readers realize that teachers are human, too. For Clements’ fans, Mark and Mr. Maxwell join the ranks of the characters for which the author has become famous.