

A Reader's Theater adaptation of Gary Paulsen's *Lawn Boy*

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©*Lawn Boy* by Gary Paulsen, published by Wendy Lamb books, and imprint of Random House Children's Books.

Approximately 7 minutes.

Readers:

Main Character

Narrator 1

Narrator 2

Narrator 3

Narrator 4

Narrator 5

Grandmother

Father

Neighbor

Narrator 2: This scene is taken from the opening pages of Gary Paulsen's book, *Lawn Boy*.

Main Character: I don't have a clue how all this will end.

Narrator 1: There are people now who say he's some kind of wonder boy or that he knows some secret and that he had this big hairy plan.

Main Character: Nope.

Narrator 2: One minute he was twelve years old and wondering where he could get enough money for an inner tube for his old used ten-speed. He didn't have any money and his parents didn't have much either.

Narrator 3: His mom is a teacher in an experimental school.

Narrator 4: His dad's an inventor. Sometimes it takes a long time to work out a new idea.

Narrator 5: This was one of those times so they were a little broke.

Main Character: Mom and I have learned not to ask too many questions about what he's doing because if we do, he wants to use us as guinea pigs. We learned our lesson during what we now refer to as the Voice-Activated Door Incident.

Narrator 2: Dad swears Mom's nose is as cute as ever.

Main Character: I don't notice anything different about it.

Narrator 1: She still touches it gingerly when he starts talking about some new big idea he's got going.

Main Character: The next minute, it seems, I've got a business of my own, with employees, and to top it off, I'm rich. I'd better explain.

Narrator 5: It all began in the morning on my twelfth birthday when my grandmother gave me an old riding lawn mower.

Narrator 4: His grandmother is the kind of person who always thinks no matter how bad things seem, everything will always come out all right. Her hair could be on fire and she'd probably say, "Well, at least we have light to read by."

Narrator 3: She's the most positive person in the world, and amazing fun to be around, but in a strange and happy way sometimes she seems to be about nine bricks shy of a full load.

Narrator 4: For example, you can say, "You know, I think the Yankees will win the World Series again."

Narrator 1: And she'll answer, "Yes, but it's still nice to put carrots in the stew for flavor."

Narrator 5: And you think that possibly somewhere inside that brain maybe a screw came loose.

Narrator 2: Then you find out that the last time the Yankees won the World Series, she made a stew and forgot to put carrots in, and blamed the Yankees ...

Narrator 3: She'd never liked them anyway

Narrator 2: ...when the stew tasted funny.

Narrator 3: She still doesn't like the Yankees.

Grandmother: It all makes sense if you wait long enough.

Narrator 4: So when he turned twelve his grandmother came to the house with an old riding lawn mower in the back of her Toyota pickup.

Grandmother: Happy Birthday. It used to belong to your grandfather. He was always working on it. I thought you might like it.

Main Character: A lawnmower?

Narrator 1: They lived on the edge of what was termed an upper-middle-class neighborhood – Eden Prairie, Minnesota – their house was small, a “fixer-upper” when his folks bought it four years ago.

Narrator 5: It had a yard the size of a postage stamp and the grass never seemed to grow enough to need mowing. It just sprouted, stopped, gave up and died. Over and over again.

Narrator 2: My father and I lifted the mower down from the truck bed.

Main Character: A mower? Thank you.

Grandmother: My bridge club is meeting on Thursday night *[as she got back into her truck]* which makes it hard to watch CSI since it’s on Thursday too. Did you know that?

Narrator 1: And she drove away before he could answer.

Father: It appears you now have a lawn mower *[smiling, as he walked back into the house]*. I don’t know the connection with her bridge club either, although I’m sure there is one. She’s your mom’s mother, maybe your mom will know what that meant.

Main Character: I looked at the lawn mower. It was very old, low, and small. It looked like it only cut about a two-foot-wide area, and it was nothing like the fancy new machines. The seat was steel, without a pad, and the driver’s feet went over the top of the motor to rest on two foot pedals.

Narrator 3: One was a brake, the other a clutch that you had to push down to get the mower moving. It steered with two levers, like a very small bulldozer, and looked more like a toy than a mower.

Main Character: Okay. Since I was twelve, I didn’t have much experience with motors. I’ve never even had a dirt bike or a four-wheeler. I’m just not machine oriented.

Narrator 5: The birthday present sat there. He tried pushing it toward the garage, but it didn’t seem to want to move. Even turning around to put his back against it and push with his legs – which might give better leverage – didn’t help. It still sat there.

Narrator2: He studied it. On the left side of the motor was a small gas tank. He unscrewed the top and looked in.

Main Character: Yep, gas.

Narrator 1: On top of the tank were two levers; the first was next to pictures of a rabbit and a turtle.

Main Character: Even though I'm not good with machines, I figured out that was the throttle and the pictures meant fast and slow.

Narrator 4: The other lever said ON-OFF.

Main Character: I pushed ON.

Narrator 2: Nothing happened, of course.

Narrator 3: On the very top of the motor was a starting pull-rope.

Main Character: What the heck, why not?

Narrator 5: He gave it a jerk and the motor sputtered a little, popped once, then it died.

Main Character: I pulled the rope again.

Narrator 1: The motor hesitated, popped and then roared to life.

Main Character: I jumped back. No muffler.

Narrator 3: Once when he was little, his grandmother in her usual logic-defying fashion, answered his request for another cookie by saying that his grandfather had been a tinkerer.

Grandmother: He was always puttering with things, taking them apart, putting them back together. When he was around nothing ever broke. Nothing ever *dared* to break.

Narrator 2: Loud as the mower was, it still wasn't moving and the blade wasn't going around. He stood looking down at it.

Narrator 4: Then a strange thing happened.

Main Character: It spoke to me. Well, not really. I'm not one of those woo-woo people or a wack job. At least I didn't think I was. Maybe I am now.

Narrator 5: Anyway, there was some message that came from the mower through the air and into his brain.

Main Character: It was a warm settled feeling. Like I was supposed to be here and so was the mower-- the two of us.

Narrator 1: Like it was a friend.

Main Character: So all right, I know how *that* sounds too: We'll sit under a tree and talk to each other. Read poems about mowing. Totally wack.

Narrator 2: But the feeling was there.

Main Character: Next I found myself sitting on the mower, my feet on the pedals. I moved the throttle to the rabbit position – it had been on turtle – and pushed the left pedal down.

Narrator 4: The blade started whirring. The mower seemed to give a happy leap forward off the sidewalk and he was mowing the lawn.

Narrator 3: Or dirt. There wasn't much of a lawn. Dust and bits of dead grass flew everywhere and until he figured out the steering, the mailbox, his mother's flowers near the front step and a small bush were all in danger.

Main Character: But in a few minutes I got control of the thing and sheared off what little grass there was.

Narrator 5: The front lawn didn't take long, but before he was done the next-door neighbor came to the fence, attracted by the dust cloud.

Main Character: He waved me over.

Narrator 1: He stopped in front of the neighbor, pulled the throttle back and killed the engine. The sudden silence was almost deafening.

Narrator 2: His ears were humming. He stood up away from the mower so he could hear.

Neighbor: You mow lawns?

Narrators ALL: And that was how it started. Read Gary Paulsen's *Lawn Boy* to hear the full story.