

Grizzly Peak

Jonathan London

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Jonathan London's *Grizzly Peak* is the third novel in the gripping Aaron's Wilderness adventure series. Aaron has changed: he has quit sports, gotten into rap music, and let his grades slip. Then a teacher finds a Swiss Army knife in his backpack and pronounces automatic expulsion, just weeks before eighth-grade graduation. The school makes a deal: instead of being expelled, Aaron can do a two-week British Columbia wilderness trek with his father, provided he writes up the story of the trip. There's typical teenage friction between Aaron and his dad, so he's reluctant: "Somehow I'd have to survive two weeks alone with my dad, and become a writer!" he grumbles.

Kayaking from lake to lake in Western Canada, Aaron and his dad set up camp and portage the boat in between. It's a grueling routine, even without accounting for the mosquitoes, moose, rainstorms, and a persistent grizzly bear outside their tent. One day they face greater danger than usual, and their roles reverse: Aaron is now in charge, and it takes all his strength and courage to plan a safe return.

The book is presented as budding author Aaron's journal turned story, and he's a pro at chapter-ending cliffhangers and convincing dialogue. Black-and-white illustrations by the author's son, Sean London, are a great addition, especially the eagle's-eye view of the kayak.

Best of all, it's touching to see Aaron and his dad repair their relationship. Rebellion and disagreement made Aaron feel he'd lost his dad's approval, but their wild expedition reminds him of two things: "Sometimes it's a battle. But he cares about me. I know that," and "I can be my worst enemy or I can be my own best friend. It's up to me." This is a survival tale in the vein of Gary Paulsen's *Hatchet*, but also a story of family bonds enduring.

REBECCA FOSTER (Children's 2017)

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