The Sign of the Beaver
By Elizabeth George Speare
Reviewed by Chris Muzi

How would you feel to be all alone in the woods in 1768, unsure of how to get food or how to stay safe? That’s what takes place in the book The Sign of the Beaver by Elizabeth George Speare.

The main character, Matt Hallowell, is left alone in a cabin in the wilderness of Maine. Matt and his father had been in Maine building the small cottage for his family to move into. When they are done, Matt’s father leaves him alone to return to Quincy, Massachusetts to get the rest of the family. The father is supposed to be gone only seven weeks but does not return. While on his own, Matt makes a lot of mistakes and the things he does are totally believable such as trying to get honey from a hive which leads to dozens of bee stings.

A native boy, Attean, teaches Matt about nature and how to live in the wilderness. Attean and Matt become very good friends. It is really interesting to read about how their friendship develops since the two boys come from such different worlds. As winter approaches, Matt must make some hard decisions and we see Matt grow and mature throughout the story. These characters are written so well that they sound like real people when they talk. It also becomes clear that they each learn from the other. Both come to understand that when you are most alone and most afraid, you must be willing to accept help from others, especially if it comes from people you don’t expect.

Even if you don’t usually read historical fiction, you will find this an exciting book filled with adventure and surprises. The descriptions the author gives us draws the reader right into the woods of Maine. Friendship, history and learning to count on yourself are all parts of this book.