

# My Side of the Mountain Study Guide



by Carol Clark

For the novel by  
Jean Craighead George



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## **Synopsis**

With 11 family members living in one apartment in New York City, it is way too crowded for young Sam Gribley, so he sets off on his own with \$40, a ball of cord, a penknife, an ax, and some flint and steel. He has heard many stories about how his great-grandfather built a farmstead in the Catskill Mountains, but failed and went to sea. “The land is no place for a Gribley,” Sam’s father tells him. But Sam determines to find the remains of his great-grandfather’s farm, and he is sure that the land is the perfect place for a Gribley to settle.

Arriving at the old Gribley farmstead, Sam hollows out a tree for his home and learns to hunt, fish, trap, and forage for edible plants. When he captures a young falcon, Frightful, and trains her to hunt, she becomes a good friend and a great help in supplying food.

However, as time goes on, Sam comes into contact with local people and some begin to search him out in his forest sanctuary. A few people, including his father, are welcome visitors to his sanctuary, but eventually stories of the “wild boy” begin to circulate and even make it into the newspapers, and reporters and photographers start to search the woods for him. Eventually, Sam has to decide whether he will stay away from people or whether people, and family, are also important to have in his life.

**Section 4**  
**How a Door Came to Me**  
**Frightful Learns Her ABC's**  
**I Find a Real Live Man**

**Vocabulary:**

A thesaurus is a reference tool which lists synonyms for words. Using a thesaurus (or a dictionary), write one to three synonyms for each given vocabulary word.

1. loping: \_\_\_\_\_
2. hypnotized: \_\_\_\_\_
3. fierce: \_\_\_\_\_
4. misshapen: \_\_\_\_\_
5. vessel: \_\_\_\_\_
6. inspiration: \_\_\_\_\_
7. personable: \_\_\_\_\_
8. preen: \_\_\_\_\_
9. furtively: \_\_\_\_\_

**Questions:**

1. How does The Baron warn Sam of danger?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Explain how Sam obtains his first deer. How does he deceive the poacher?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Why and how does Sam hypnotize Frightful?

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4. Explain how Sam trains Frightful. Why does he take away the prey that Frightful catches? Why is this important?
5. What does Sam mean when he says that Frightful's puffing of her feathers while she sits on his hand is "a feather word"? Why is this important to Sam?

### **Thinking About the Story:**

6. *Onomatopoeia* (ahn-uh-ma-tuh-PE-uh) is a word used to represent a particular sound. For example, we use "woof" to represent the sound of a dog, "ding dong" for a doorbell sound, "clip-clop" for the sound of a horse walking, etc. Locate the paragraph near the end of "How a Door Came to Me," in which Sam hears earthworms. Write the onomatopoeia words that describe the earthworms rising from the ground.
7. Authors often include a humorous character or characters in a story at a dramatic or tragic point to provide *comic relief*, or a break from the tension of the plot. How does The Baron provide comic relief when Sam has to hide from the hikers?
8. Sam says that The Baron "liked me for what I was." What do you think Sam means by this?
9. Why does Sam take the risk of speaking to the stranger who has fallen asleep at his campfire? Do you think Sam's decision is wise? Why or why not?

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10. Why does Sam call the stranger “Bando”? Research who Henry David Thoreau is and explain why Bando thinks this would be an appropriate name for Sam.
  
11. In what ways is Bando a help and encouragement to Sam?

**Dig Deeper:**

12. Sam been able to accumulate much food in these summer months by paying attention to what is around him and working hard to identify, make use of, and collect all that is around him. Read Genesis 1:9–11, Ecclesiastes 5:18–19, and 1 Timothy 6:17. What do these verses tell us? How does this relate to Sam’s situation?
  
13. Both Frightful and The Baron seem to accept Sam for who he is and enjoy his company. This makes Sam feel very good, knowing that he is accepted and appreciated as he is. Read John 3:16–17, Romans 5:8, 1 Peter 3:18, and 1 John 4:9–10. In a few words, summarize what these verses tell us about how God accepts us.
  
14. What is true hospitality? Read 1 Peter 4:8–9 and Romans 12:13. How does Sam show this to Bando?

## Optional Projects and Activities:

1. *Class discussion:* Sam showed true friendship and hospitality when he helped Bando and fed him and allowed him to sleep in the tree, and that is a very good thing, but it was also not a safe thing to do. How do we know how to balance being kind and hospitable and being safe? You may wish to have a class discussion about how to figure out how to make such decisions. Discussion with a public safety officer, parents, or other knowledgeable officials would be beneficial.
2. *Think about it:* Make a list of foods you enjoy eating in the summer months that, if you had to grow them yourself or pick them wild, would not be available fresh during other times of the year.
3. *Cooking center:* Did you know that frog legs taste very similar to chicken? Enjoy making a pot of “Frog” soup almost like Sam’s. Since you probably don’t have water lily bulbs, wild carrot, or acorn flour, we’ve substituted some easily available ingredients.

### Sam’s Mock “Frog” Soup (Serves 4–6)

#### Ingredients:

2 chicken breasts or 4 cups shredded/chopped precooked chicken

1–2 large carrots, peeled and sliced

2 stalks celery, with leaves chopped

1/2 large onion chopped

1–2 large potatoes cubed

1/2 tsp salt

1/4 tsp pepper

5–6 cups water

Optional: 1 tsp minced garlic or 1/2 tsp garlic powder

Put chicken, carrot, celery, onion, salt, pepper, and water in medium pot and simmer gently for 30–40 minutes until chicken is thoroughly cooked and tender. Remove chicken breasts (if used) from broth to a plate and chop or shred (you may need to allow them to cool a bit). Put back in the pot and add potato.

Simmer 30 minutes until potatoes are tender. Delicious served with biscuits or hot bread. (You can pretend they are made with acorn flour!)

4. *Snack time:* Buy some nuts that are still in their shell and sit down with a nutcracker to open and enjoy them. Suggested nuts: pecans, walnuts, pistachios, hazelnuts, etc. (Use caution in case of student allergies.) Also, try some jerky much like Sam’s smoked dried venison!
5. *Cooking center:* Make sautéed mushrooms just like Sam does for his guest.

### Sautéed Mushrooms

#### Ingredients:

1 cup fresh mushrooms, sliced

1/2 tsp minced garlic or 1/4 tsp garlic powder

## *My Side of the Mountain Study Guide Answer Key*

7. He tracks the days by making notches on an aspen pole. Sam has been on his own for eight months when he starts the book with the snow storm.

8. Students should mention some of the following. He has been gathering nuts, acorns, and berries, chipping storage pockets in his tree, making his bed, burning out the tree for his home, learning how to light a fire, trapping animals, catching fish and turtles, and making acorn flour for pancakes.

*Thinking about the Story:*

9. *My Side of the Mountain* is written in first-person narrative. We can tell because the narrator uses the words *I*, *me*, and *my* often. Sam Gribley is telling his own story.

10. a. The first two pages are written in present tense. b. Examples may vary, but should include some of the following: is, am, eat, keep, guess, blows, moans, etc. c. In the rest of the chapter, Sam writes in the past tense. d. Examples may vary, but should include some of the following: wrote, was scared, thought, came, laughed, was, laced, shouted, poked, whistled, etc. e. The first two pages of the book are written in December as things were happening and Sam is in the middle of the snow-storm. It seems to be something like a diary entry. In the rest of the first chapter, Sam describes how he has worked since May and through summer and fall and how the snow storm at the beginning of the chapter arrives. The different parts of the chapter are written at different times.

11. the tree is not crying so much; the whole tree moans. Crying and moaning are things people or animals do, not plants or things.

12. Answers will vary. As soon as he left, Sam says he knew he would not be coming back to Bill's—he is determined to make it on his own. Perhaps Sam feels that he will have no problem surviving alone, since he has already done so for one night. Maybe he feels that going back to Bill's house would be an admission that he is unable to make it on his own. He wants to be independent!

13. Sam repeats out loud his father's statements that the land is no place for a Gribley, but he specifically came out to be on this land of his family's and he is actually doing well. It is ironic that his father's saying doesn't actually seem to be true.

*Dig Deeper:*

14. Answers will vary. All life—animal, plant, and human—and all the rest of creation show the glory and planning and creativity of God. In observing nature, we see God as the creator and sustainer of life; there is beauty and order to what he has made. Seeing God's creation can stir us to worship our creator. The verses in Colossians remind us that Jesus was and is the creator of everything, and through his power everything holds together.

15. These verses teach us that we can be brave because God is always with us no matter what. He takes care of the birds and plants, and he knows everything we need. He reminds us to follow him first and he will help provide what we need. We should not worry. Personal answers will vary.

### *Section 2*

#### *I Find Many Useful Plants*

##### *The Old, Old Tree*

#### *I Meet One of My Own Kind and Have a Terrible Time Getting Away*

*Vocabulary:*

1. meaning: a hole, a sunken or decayed spot; clues: the heart rotting away. 2. meaning: tools; clues: iron, could use. 3. meaning: fertile, soft soil; clues: leaves fallen, plants died. 4. meaning: seasonal