

Chapter Charter: Questions to Guide Your Reading



I Hole Up in a Snowstorm

- When do you think Sam wrote the first part of the chapter?
How can you tell this is a flashback?
- Why does he need to remind himself why he left home?
- Does Sam seem content at the end of the chapter?

I Get Started on This Venture

- Why is Sam so scared and hungry even after he catches the fish?
- What is the most important skill Sam learns in this chapter?
- What do you think Sam would have done if he hadn't found the man in the cabin?

I Find Gribley's Farm

- Why is it so important to Sam to find his great-grandfather's farm?
- Why do you think Sam's father wants him to tell someone in Delhi about Gribley Farm?
- Why is the meal Sam prepares at the end of this chapter so satisfying to him?

I Find Many Useful Plants

- When Sam decides to sit by the river and eat his mussels instead of heading back to his camp, what has he realized? Do you think this is a satisfying moment for Sam?
- Do you know what Sam's idea is when he looks at the big trees?

The Old, Old Tree

- What do you learn about Sam's personality from his early attempts to build a home and feed himself?
- Why do you think planning ahead excites Sam so much?

I Meet One of My Own Kind and Have a Terrible Time

Getting Away

- Sam spends a lot of time making his tree house. Describe what you think the inside looks like.
- Why does Sam lie to the strawberry-picking woman? Do you think it was the right thing to do? Why or why not?
- Why is he so interested in the duck hawk?

The King's Provider

- Why does Sam set up a lean-to near the cliffs?
- Do you think it was mean of Sam to take Frightful from her mother?

What I Did About the First Man Who Was After Me

- When Sam sees the man by his tree, he realizes that he is not bound by anything, that he can leave the tree and find a new

home if he has to. Do you think Sam would be sad if he had to find a new home?

- How does Sam begin to relate to Frightful?

I Learn to Season My Food

- Why does Sam think the weasel is brave?
- Sam tells the reader he was “too frightened to move” when the weasel burst out of the trap. How do you think you would have reacted in a similar situation?

How a Door Came to Me

- Why does Sam think it is okay to take the hunter’s deer?
- Why does the “*pop, pip*” of the earthworms make Sam so happy?

Frightful Learns Her ABC’s

- What is Sam trying to train Frightful to do? Do you think he will succeed?
- How does the deerskin suit help Sam live more comfortably?

I Find a Real Live Man

- How does Jessie Coon James help Sam?
- Why does Bando call Sam “Thoreau”?
- Sam is lonely when Bando leaves. How might you have handled the loneliness?

The Autumn Provides Food and Loneliness

- What makes Sam think about winter?
- Sam decides to stay instead of going home. How does he overcome his fear?

We All Learn About Halloween

- Why do you think Sam hosts a Halloween party?
- Sam tells the reader that “might is right.” What do you think that means for the creatures in the woods?

I Find Out What to Do with Hunters

- Do you think it’s okay that Sam uses the lost game for himself?

Trouble Begins

- Sam surprises himself in this chapter by doing what? Why is it unexpected?
- Were you surprised that Sam makes a new friend?

I Pile Up Wood and Go on with Winter

- Sam does not write about that first, awful snowstorm again. Why?
- Why do you think Sam is relieved when the storm arrives?

I Learn About Birds and People

- Why does Sam compare the birds in the woods to his neighbors on Third Avenue?
- Why do you think Sam is excited for Bando’s visit?
- How does Mr. Gribbley feel about his son’s lifestyle? How can you tell?

I Have a Good Look at Winter and Find Spring in the Snow

- Do you think Sam really feels confident that his health problems will be solved, or do you think he might have actually been a little scared?

- Why does Sam cry when he sees the land peek through the snow?

The Spring in the Winter and the Beginning of My Story's End

- Why do you think Sam doesn't try too hard to throw Matt off course?

I Cooperate with the Ending

- Why does Sam open up to Matt?
- Is he happy that Matt and Bando want to make a guesthouse? Why?

The City Comes to Me

- Does Sam seem satisfied with the new arrangement at the end of the book?
- What do you think Sam will do next?



Plot: What's Happening?

"Oh, this was a different night than the first dark frightful one....[N]ever have I enjoyed a meal as much as that one, and never have I felt so independent again."

—Sam, *My Side of the Mountain*

My *Side of the Mountain* is the fictional story of Sam Gribley's survival alone in the wilderness. The story is told from Sam's point of view and includes journal entries, notes, and drawings. Sam keeps an account of what happens to him when he leaves his home in New York City to live on his own in the Catskill Mountains in New York State.

We first meet Sam in the middle of a treacherous snowstorm. He is holed up in a tree he describes as his home. He has not been outdoors in days. Slowly, Sam reveals the circumstances that led him to his tree house.

Sam has had enough of the crowded, busy life he lives with his family of eleven people in the big city of New York. He wants a simpler, quieter life. Sam tells his parents that he plans to leave the city and live in the Catskill Mountains. He takes a penknife,

flint and steel, a ball of cord, an ax, and forty dollars, and hops on a train. His father thinks he'll come back the very next day, so he lets Sam go. But Sam doesn't come back the next day.

When he gets off the train, Sam searches for Gribley Farm, his great-grandfather's farm that has been unoccupied for years.

In the beginning, the going is rough for Sam. In fact, Sam cannot even start a fire the first night. On his first full day in the mountains, Sam goes to the library and finds out where Gribley Farm is. When he finally locates the land where the farm once stood, he sets out to make a home for himself. Sam creates a place to live in the hollow of a giant old tree. He builds a bed out of hemlock boughs.

Having read many nature guides and other reference materials about living in the wilderness, Sam eats fish that he catches and berries and vegetables that he gathers from the land. One day, an old woman discovers him on the mountain. In an effort to make his presence there seem normal, Sam helps her pick strawberries. While they are out, he notices a peregrine falcon flying overhead. Sam decides to capture one and train it to hunt for his food.

Sam succeeds in catching one of the falcon's young. He names her Frightful and begins the training process. As he trains her, she becomes his faithful companion, in addition to being a wonderful hunter. Sam also makes other animal friends during his stay on the mountain, including a weasel he calls The Baron and a raccoon he names Jessie Coon James.

As winter approaches, Sam realizes he must plan ahead because food will be scarce in the coming months. He begins to stockpile acorn flour and wood. Sam also makes a deerskin suit from deer left by hunters in the woods.

Sam finds more than animals in his woods. One day, he comes upon a man taking a nap near his tree. Though Sam thinks that perhaps the man is a bandit hiding out in the woods, he learns that he is actually a college professor who took a wrong turn. Sam and Bando become friends and Bando promises to visit again at Christmas.

Bando follows through on this promise and returns on Christmas Eve. He says that Sam has been written up in all the newspapers. Bando shows Sam the headlines about a wild boy living in the Catskill Mountains. Sam worries that he will be discovered and forced to return to his home in New York City. Then, on Christmas Day, Sam hears his father calling to him. Sam is overjoyed that his father has come to visit. Mr. Gribley is proud of his son. He stays on after Bando leaves just to spend some time with Sam and to see how he lives now. When his father leaves, Sam prepares to live through the winter snows and cold.

At last, after a particularly dramatic ice storm, which Sam describes as having “sheets of ice binding the aspens to earth,” spring finally begins to arrive. Sam is relieved that the worst is past and is excited for better weather, which will make it easier to find food.

Spring brings a host of new issues for Sam. One day he is surprised to meet a young boy named Matt Spell. Matt is in the woods looking for the “wild boy” who was written about in the newspapers. He wants to meet him and write a story about him. Though Sam tries to prove otherwise, Matt knows Sam is the boy in the newspaper articles. Sam agrees to help Matt with the story and lets him return during his spring vacation. At this point, Sam begins to wonder why he spoke to Matt at all. Sam thinks to himself that perhaps he wants human contact again.

When Bando comes back, he and Matt build a guesthouse. Sam realizes that he has started a city in the woods.

In the end, Sam’s entire family shows up—all ten of them. He is torn. “I could cross to Asia in a canoe via the Bering Strait. I could raft to an island. I could go around the world on the fruits of the land. I started to run. I got as far as the gorge and turned back. I wanted to see Dad.”

Excited to see his parents and siblings, Sam hugs his mother tight. They have not come to visit, but to stay permanently and make a home with him on the mountain.

Thinking about the plot

- Why does Sam leave home?
- What does he prove to himself on the mountain?
- What does he finally give into in the end?