

Opinion: What Have Other People Thought About *My Side of the Mountain*?



My *Side of the Mountain* is a hit with both kids and adults. Initially, the publisher had worried that readers would be alarmed that Sam's parents let him go off alone into the woods, but this received very little criticism. A few book reviewers said that the story was far-fetched, but everyone acknowledged that the story's themes and characters were marvelous. Jean Craighead George has said that her only criticism from readers was that they were disappointed that Sam's family joins him in the end!

Book reviewers, parents, teachers, and students agree that *My Side of the Mountain* encourages kids to think independently, to apply their knowledge, to pay attention to their environment, and to get comfortable with nature. As it was written in the *New York Times Book Review*, Jean Craighead George "provokes readers to a reassessment of their place in the natural world."

Besides receiving excellent book reviews, *My Side of the Mountain* has also won many awards. The most prestigious honor it has received was its selection as a Newbery Honor Book in 1960. The John Newbery Medal, introduced in 1921, was the first children's book award in the world. Its goal is "to encourage original creative work in the field of books for children . . . [t]o give those librarians, who make it their life work to serve children's

reading interests, an opportunity to encourage good writing in this field.”

Each year, the librarians on the committee award one Newbery Medal. In addition, they also recognize other books that are worthy of attention. These books are called “honor books.” The Newbery Medal and the Newbery Honors are the best known and most discussed children’s-book awards in this country.

In addition to her Newbery Honor, Jean Craighead George has received other awards for her books. In 1991, she was the first winner of the School Library Media Section of the New York Library Association’s Knickerbocker Award for Juvenile Literature. This award was presented to her for the “consistent superior quality” of her literary works.

In 1969, *My Side of the Mountain* won a George G. Stone Center for Children’s Books Merit Award. This is given annually by a committee of teachers, librarians, and children’s literature specialists for books “that have the capacity to arouse in children an awareness of the complexity and beauty of the expanding universe.”

If all the good reviews and awards weren’t enough, *My Side of the Mountain* is also a favorite among teachers. Sam’s adventure in the Catskill Mountains is at the top of many schools’ recommended-reading lists.

What is perhaps most remarkable about *My Side of the Mountain* is its long life. Published in 1959, this book was read widely

when it first hit bookstores. It is impressive that today's kids are just as fascinated by Sam's adventure as readers were some forty-five years ago. Sam's timeless tale is sure to entertain budding naturalists and adventure seekers for generations to come. A reviewer from *The Horn Book* called *My Side of the Mountain* "An extraordinary book. . . . It will be read year after year."

**Thinking about what others think of
*My Side of the Mountain***

- Do you think this book deserved a Newbery Honor?
- Do you think a twelve-year-old could really survive in the wilderness as well as Sam did?
- Why do you think this book is still so popular today?

Glossary



Here are some of the words used in *My Side of the Mountain*. Some may be new to you or used in new ways.

Understanding their meanings will make it easier for you to read and appreciate the novel.

barometer an instrument that measures changes in air pressure and indicates when the weather is going to change

bellow to shout or roar

bough a tree branch

brooding worrying or thinking about one's problems

combustible capable of catching fire

dale a small valley

deadfall a mass of fallen trees; an animal trap

fell to cut, knock, or bring down

flint a piece of quartz that, when struck by steel, creates a spark

furtive done in a secretive way

gangplank a bridge used to get on and off a docked ship

gorge a deep, narrow passage through land

hemlock an evergreen tree from the pine family

jess a short strap secured to the leg of a hawk, usually along with a ring for attaching a leash

loam loose, rich soil

marksmanship skill in shooting

perch a branch where a bird sits or nests

peewee a type of bird that feeds on insects

plumage a bird's feathers

poach to hunt illegally

preen to smooth or groom oneself

primitive in an early stage of development

sagely wisely

sanguine optimistic, confident

savory tasty

scant in insufficient supply

snare a trap that entangles birds or other animals, usually with a noose

tether to tie or fasten in order to restrain

thunderhead a rounded mass of clouds that often appears before a thunderstorm

tubers fleshy underground stems or roots, like a potato

vengeance an action that is taken to pay back someone for harm that that person inflicted on you or someone you care about

venison the edible meat of a deer

ventilate to allow fresh air into a place and to allow stale air to escape

whittle to carve something out of wood by chipping off small pieces