

Opening Day

Susan Bartlett

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Children/Nature, Grades 3-6

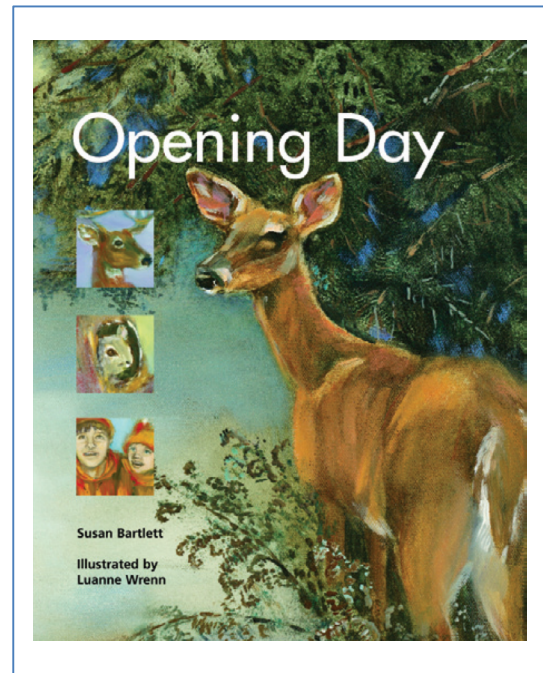
Summary

Young people are sometimes swayed one way or the other by the opinions of folks around them. Not Sam. Sam makes his own decisions. He isn't going to be a vegetarian just because his mom is, and he's not going to hunt just because his best friend does. It's not that Sam is stubborn; he is instead interested in making his own decisions based on what is right for his own sensibility.

Sam gathers information, experience and understanding of himself and his world before he reaches any conclusions. And when he does make a decision, he knows it is one that is true to himself. But Sam is sensitive to the fact that his decisions sometimes go counter to those of people he cares about. Though he decides not to go hunting again, diplomacy plays a major part in this story of friendship and self-discovery.

Opening Day will help inspire classroom conversations about:

- Decision-making
- Peer pressure
- Friendship, and the importance of compromise and forgiveness
- Animal habits and habitats
- Predator-prey relationships in nature
- Observation as a tool for gaining knowledge



Before You Read

Wondering

Here are some wondering questions to share with your class:

- I wonder what the sky looks like at four o'clock in the morning?
- I wonder if you have ever been at an event with everyone in your town, something like an "opening day" breakfast?
- I wonder if you have ever tried coffee?
- I wonder what it feels like to try something for the very first time, with your best friend there beside you? Is your best friend a comfort or a source of anxiety?
- I wonder what it feels like to do something accidentally that makes your best friend mad?
- I wonder what it is like to understand the signs and sounds animals make in the woods?
- I wonder what it is like to make a decision that your best friend does not like?
- I wonder if you have ever compromised in order to keep a friendship?
- I wonder if you have ever eaten tofu?

Background

University of Michigan Health System discusses hunting for children

<http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/huntresources.htm>

Hunting Rules for Children in Maine

<http://www.eregulations.com/maine/hunting/junior-hunters/>

Access Prior Knowledge

- Has anyone ever been hunting?
- Do you know anyone who has been hunting?
- Have you ever eaten anything that has killed in the wild?

Debate

Randomly choose teams for a debate on the pros and cons of hunting. The kids can research their arguments or speak from their hearts, depending on their age-level. Says author Susan Bartlett: "The hunting debate is complicated and people feel strongly about both sides. Find out everything you can about it and make up your own mind." Author Susan Bartlett offers some food for thought with the following "For Hunting" and "Against Hunting" arguments:

- For Hunting: Deer populations grow too large when there are no natural predators, such as wolves or coyotes. When there is not enough food for all the deer, many starve. Hunting keeps the animal population under control. Human beings become the needed predator.
- Against Hunting: Nature keeps the number of animals under control. Starvation and disease are nature's way of making sure the strongest survive. The weak die or are eaten by natural predators, such as wolves and mountain lions. We need to help preserve the natural predators.

- Against Hunting: Scientists are experimenting with ways to neuter the does or female deer, so they cannot have fawns. This is a kinder way to prevent the deer population from growing too big.
- For Hunting: Neutering female deer will not solve the overpopulation problem. It is expensive and there are too many deer.
- For Hunting: A food source. Some people need the venison, moose, duck or other meat to feed their families.
- Against Hunting: Today people do not need to hunt to get food like the Native Americans and the early settlers did long ago. It is wrong to kill for sport. It is cruel.
- For Hunting: Hunting is a natural part of the food chain.
- Against Hunting: People with their high-powered rifles, binoculars, all-terrain vehicles, imitation bird calls, and scents to hide their human smell have an unfair advantage. Hunting this way does not make man a "natural" part of the food chain.
- For Hunting: All animals, including humans, depend on one another- the fox on the rabbit, the coyote on the wild turkey, the hawk on the mouse. Why not man on deer and moose and bear?
- Against Hunting: Some people think that the killing of any animal is wrong. They do not eat meat or fish. They call themselves vegetarians.
- For Hunting: Many hunters are conservationists. They support public and private wildlife refuges where land stays wild, so animals have a place to live in a crowded world. They have helped preserve millions of acres from suburban and mall sprawl, which steadily eats up forests and wetlands. Money from hunting licenses goes to state and federal government agencies that protect wildlife. So do taxes from the sale of guns and ammunition.
- Against Hunting: The money collected from hunting license sales and taxes from gun sales does not always help animals. Some helps what the hunter wants instead - more land set aside for hunting, for example. Too much money is spent on making hunting easier for the hunter instead of on saving wildlife.
- For Hunting: Many hunters like to be out in the woods and mountains with their families and friends. They like to learn about wildlife, how to track animals, and how to read animal signs. It is fun to learn to handle guns responsibly and to become a skilled shot.
- Against Hunting: People can enjoy nature without hunting. They can hike, camp, snowmobile, watch birds without harming wildlife. They can hunt with binoculars and cameras.
- For Hunting: Most hunters support hunter education programs, safety locks on guns, and bans on automatic weapons. They say that guns used responsibly are not dangerous.
- Against Hunting: Hunting encourages people to buy guns. Guns are dangerous. Every year people are killed by mistake during hunting season.

Observation Game

Children are naturally curious when you point out that there are signs of animals passing all around them if they look. Spend some time with a pile of books on animal tracking, animal tracks and wildlife habitats, then go outside. You can either walk and search for signs or sit down and wait to see what might come to you. (If you do choose to sit, see if you can stay completely quiet and still for a period of time, maybe even an hour. What do you see?)

Miming Game

After reading about deer behavior at [www.huntingpa.com/Deer behavior.html](http://www.huntingpa.com/Deer%20behavior.html), have your pupils gather in a circle with plenty of space to move around. In this exercise, you are guiding your pupils toward deer behavior by your leading questions. Say to them:

- Pretend you are all deer browsing through the forest. Do you walk together as family units—does, fawns and bucks? Do you stand close but not look at each other? Do you keep your big, sensitive ears ever alert and moving?
- Pretend you hear something. Do you stop and stand still, waiting to see what made the sound? Do you stomp your feet to release the warning scent gland between your toes? Do you flash your white tail and leap quickly away through the trees?
- Pretend you are a doe and have a fawn sleeping nearby. Do you run away from the fawn if danger comes, to lure the danger away?
- Pretend you are a fawn whose mother has gone to search for food or lure a predator away. Do you bleat for her, calling her to you?
- Pretend you are searching for a place to sleep. Do you gather together and trample down grasses to make comfortable bedding?
- Pretend it is time now to sleep.