

# An Essential Essay on the Identity of Shaun the Sheep

It was a long flight from the San Francisco Airport to Nice. Thirteen hours on the plane of numbly sleeping and watching the movies offered. I claimed the seat next to my dad for maximum headrest surface area. When the plane's lights dimmed and blankets were unpacked, my dad was watching a stop-motion movie on the eight inch screen. Despite my attempts to silence him, my dad was deeply amused by the clay sheep.

It's years later now that I wonder—Would Shaun the Sheep work if Shaun, the sheep, was a goat instead?



Produced and created by Aardman Animation, *Shaun the Sheep* is a stop motion comedy series. It features Shaun with his herd of sheep that get into hijinks. A dog named Bitzer does their best to keep the sheep in line. Occasionally, Shaun and Bitzer will work together to fight a greater evil. From watching the shows and movies, there are traits you'd pick up from Shaun.

Qualities that define Shaun the Sheep:

- Polite
- Leader
- Human-like
- Curious
- Independent

With these traits, we'll be able to see how the mythos, facts, and stories history has for sheep and goats to compare against Shaun. I'd also like to acknowledge that there are personal anecdotes that shift my own perspective on the animals; sheep and goats.

## The Farm

In 1980s Romania, Nicolae Ceaușescu was a communist dictator and a common job for the people was farming. Near mountainous regions and Dobruja, sheep and goats were an optimal option for farmers to raise.<sup>1</sup> My mom grew up in the city with her parents. When she visited her grandparents (also known as my Great Grandparents), she'd be able to see the everyday life of a farmer and the animals occupying the land.

It was from her grandparents that my mom learned the diet separates the two animals. The goats ate the finest of vegetation available with their selective diets, thus making the milk and cheese from them better in quality than the sheep's.

## The Domestication

We domesticated sheep approximately in 500 BCE. Sheep and goats were one of the, if not the first, animals we domesticated<sup>2</sup>. They like to follow their companions in herd behavior, so you'd be able to control their routes with the help of a herding dog. Their herbivore diets make them optimal first choices for domestication. However, sheep and goats have different preferences for their meals.

The temperament and personality of the sheep and goat is a factor for how the animals seek food.

The Crafty Goat	The Ruminant Sheep
- Goods that match their eye level.	- Grass blades like the shear blades

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<sup>1</sup> Bachman, Ronald D. "AGRICULTURE." Romania - Agriculture, US Library of Congress, <http://countrystudies.us/romania/63.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Rutledge, Kim, et al. "Domestication." *National Geographic Society*, The Walt Disney Company, 9 Oct. 2012, <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/domestication/>.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Barriers of bark found on the backsides of trees.<sup>3</sup></li> <li>- Branches of bushes (preferably with fruit)</li> <li>- A pocket of chaffhaye (to spare you the search, alfalfa with yeast)</li> </ul>	<p>that relieve them of their wool coats but unlike the blades that kiss their necks<sup>4</sup>.</p>
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They're bold, a trait needed to ditch your herd, heave yourself, and jump across rocks to shove your face in the chaotic mazes of branches. With a specific palette as theirs, the time they take to find the treats rewards the goat in a more nutritious diet<sup>5</sup>.

Lambs follow, loyal to their mother's side and faithful to the call of their shepherd. Perhaps that's what made them optimal candidates for religious imagery. They're pure as the milk they suckle and innocent from the womb they pulled their shaking legs from. They don't know the evils of our world, keeping their soft noses brushing over the fragrances of grass.

Shaun the Sheep is a team player. He's famous for guiding his herd through thick and thin. As the leader of the flock, it's his responsibility to make sure they're safe.

This parallels the societal structure of goats, where the dominant male and female protect their flock and gain first priority in the hierarchy<sup>6</sup>.

In the first short episode of *Shaun the Sheep*, a cabbage falls out from the farmer's wagon into the flocks' pasture. Shaun is the first to investigate the cabbage head before creatively using it as a soccer ball.<sup>7</sup> Shaun demonstrates he has the curiosity, courage, and leadership goats have when encountering the unfamiliar.

<sup>3</sup> "Difference between Sheep and Goats to Guide Beginners." *Rural Living Gardening | Hydroponics | Generators*, 15 May 2021, <https://rurallivingtoday.com/livestock/difference-between-sheep-and-goats/>.

<sup>4</sup> Shaun the Sheep was named Shaun because in the third *Wallace and Gromit* movie, Shaun was accidentally shorn by Wallace's machine.

<sup>5</sup> I don't think I'd eat goat meat. I don't like lamb either. Every time I've eaten lamb for our Easter dinner, it just tasted like death. I love pork chops, ham, steak, grilled chicken, liver pate, beef wellington. I don't like eating lamb.

<sup>6</sup> "Goat Behaviour." *Goat Behaviour*, ACS Distance Education, <https://www.acsedu.co.uk/Info/Pets/Animal-Behaviour/Goat-Behaviour.aspx>.

<sup>7</sup> Goleszowski, Richard and Christopher Christopher Sadler, directors. *Shaun the Sheep*. *Shaun the Sheep Season 1 | Episodes 01-10 [1 HOUR]*, *Shaun the Sheep*, 15 July 2015, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ktla3HsLxng&ab\\_channel=ShauntheSheep](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ktla3HsLxng&ab_channel=ShauntheSheep). Accessed 6 Dec. 2021.

Shaun's traits of being a creative and curious leader make him resemble a goat more personality wise than a sheep. Besides the playful name of the series, *Shaun the Sheep*, why can't Shaun just be a goat?

## The Keystone Duo

The series relies on Shaun's dynamic with Bitzer the dog.

You can try to herd goats with a dog, but a much more popular dynamic would be the herding dog with a flock of sheep. Sheep have a natural instinct to keep with their kind. They're gregarious animals that rely on this flocked behavior to avoid being picked off by predators. People would find it easier to connect to the series with this "predator"<sup>8</sup> and prey relationship, and a dog chasing a goat would be un-immersing the audience as they'd be wondering why this bold animal is getting controlled by a dog.

Putting this dynamic at risk would cause a toppling domino effect to the series.

If you want Shaun the Sheep, you need Bitzer the dog and the deeply rooted power struggle caused by the attributes of their species. When the two work together, it opens the audience's eye to a subtle comedy and the twist of roles we know so well.

It also makes dads chuckle on an airplane.

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<sup>8</sup> Harming the sheep in any way is a big "No-No" for herding dogs.

## Bibliography

“Difference between Sheep and Goats to Guide Beginners.” *Rural Living Gardening* |

*Hydroponics* | *Generators*, 15 May 2021,

<https://rurallivingtoday.com/livestock/difference-between-sheep-and-goats/>.

The article, “Difference between Sheep and Goats to Guide Beginners” from *Rural Living Gardening* was especially important for me when learning more about the temperament and diet of goats and sheep. It clearly explained the differences between the species in specific ways, such as their behavior and strategies for finding food. The foraging information especially inspired the table I made for the essay. The website does not provide an accessible or easy way to find out who is writing the articles and what company is responsible for the site. However, my mom’s anecdote about the information her grandparents told her regarding sheep and goat diets makes me willing to trust the information the site gave.

“Goat Behaviour.” *Goat Behaviour*, ACS Distance Education,

<https://www.acsedu.co.uk/Info/Pets/Animal-Behaviour/Goat-Behaviour.aspx>.

I wanted to learn more about the associations connected to goats and how their social hierarchy works in the trip of goats. Although no specific author is cited for the article, “Goat Behavior”, ACS Distance Education is a service for students to help them with their employment journeys. The program has been around since 1979. The article taught me about how there's a dominant male and female goat in charge of the flock that get priority with resources. They also carry the responsibility of protecting the herd.

Goleszowski, Richard and Christopher Christopher Sadler, directors. Shaun the Sheep. Shaun the Sheep Season 1 | Episodes 01-10 [1 HOUR], Shaun the Sheep, 15 July 2015, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KtIa3HsLxng&ab\\_channel=ShauntheSheep](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KtIa3HsLxng&ab_channel=ShauntheSheep). Accessed 6 Dec. 2021.

*Shaun the Sheep* became a critical aspect of my essay because it provided a goal for me to complete. The series features Shaun, the sheep, and his flock getting into shenanigans with Bitzer the Dog and other characters at the farm. The episode I featured in my essay was the first one where the sheep play soccer with a head of lettuce (or cabbage). I thought using this entry episode would make it easier for people who haven't seen the series to understand the essay.

"Sheep and Goats ." Encyclopedia of Religion. . Encyclopedia.com. (November 24, 2021).

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/sheep-and-goats>

Although the article "Sheep and Goats" from the Encyclopedia is not directly mentioned in the essay, it provided me with a lot of ideas for topics to research regarding sheep and goats. It goes through the history of the animals' involvement in different cultures and how they were used, as well as incorporating rams in the comparisons. Some of the meanings of the animals mentioned are the association of rams and Hermes in ancient Greece, weddings and sheep, and the scapegoat. Without this article, I wouldn't have known how deeply rooted the sheep and goat is in so many cultures. They're the earliest animals we've domesticated, so they had a lot of time to ingrain themselves in our stories.

Rutledge, Kim, et al. "Domestication." *National Geographic Society*, The Walt Disney Company, 9 Oct. 2012, <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/domestication/>.

National Geographic Society is a well known organization that publishes online articles. This particular article, "Domestication" written by a team of writers, focuses on the history of domestication of plants and animals. It highlights the impact goats had for domestication in human history and how different cultures utilized the animal. I used this article to guide me on the history of domestication of animals. I wanted to include that chapter of information in the essay because it'd help the audience understand the magnitude of time we've been living with goats and sheep. What I found especially interesting about the article was it put into perspective that herbivores were the animals we domesticated first. It's easier to provide vegetation and raise an herbivore instead of going out to hunt for a carnivore you're raising.

#### Intention Statement

"An Essential Essay on the Identity of Shaun the Sheep" is a lyrical essay about the duality of goats and sheep filtered through an analytical lens of *Shaun the Sheep*. I initially started with the broad scope of how our myths and perceptions of sheep and goats differ. As I continued writing, I got feedback from peers that my essay needed a clearer goal. They liked the creativity with the essay, so I decided to make a thesis I can use as my thread for the essay to make a clear end goal. When brainstorming my personal connection with the topic, the time my dad watched *Shaun the Sheep* on the plane came to mind.

A poetic device I used was repetition for the part where I talked about sheeps' diet and life of the word "blade". I wanted to highlight how prominent the word was in a sheep's life and more controlled environment than the spontaneous life of a goat. The table was to show the difference between the animals while taking advantage of the lyrical essay format. A peer advised me to make the titles of the table parallel each other in format, which I did by making sure it's formatted to be "The [adjective] [animal]". A metaphor I used was "pure as milk" to push the associations we have with milk and our idea of how sweet and innocent the animal is.

From the lyrical essays we've read, I saw a lot of authors connect the research topic to personal stories. "Consider the Lobster..." inspired me in particular because of the intensive focus and research on an animal intertwined with the author's experience.