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Activity Guide

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Sammy Keyes and the Sisters of Mercy

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ABOUT THE STORY

Sammy Keyes is helping out at St. Mary's church and soup kitchen to work off some detention time from school. When a valuable ivory cross is missing from the church, Sammy is the main suspect. As she tried to find out the identity of the real thief, more items – and a large amount of money – disappear. Sammy's search for the truth leads her to new friends – and some new enemies as well!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wendelin Van Draanen lives in Santa Monica, California, where she teaches math and computer science as well as writing books for young people. She grew up reading series such as the Nancy Drew and Encyclopedia Brown books, so writing about a young detective was a natural move for her. Ms. Van Draanen is the author of several more Sammy Keyes mysteries, including *Sammy Keyes and the Hotel Thief* and *Sammy Keyes and the Skeleton Man*, both Live Oak Readalongs.

INTRODUCING THE STORY

Ask students if they have ever been accused of doing something they did not do. Volunteers can describe how the accusation made them feel. Explain that in the book they will read, the main character is accused of doing something she didn't do, and she must go to great lengths to prove her innocence.

READING ACTIVITIES

Comprehension/Thinking Skills

- "Why is Sammy working at the church?"
- "What is the first item stolen?"
- "Where does Holly live?"
- "Who do the thieves turn out to be?"
- "Were you surprised at the identity of the thieves? Explain your answer." (Express opinions)
- "How would you describe Sammy's personality? What details from the story reveal her personality traits?" (Draw conclusions)

Vocabulary

Ask students to write a definition for each of these words from the story. Then they can use at least five of the words in a short mystery story of their own.

pilgrimage	repercussions
tournament	commentary
intrusive	contagious
strategy	figurines

CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Social Studies: Community Help for the Homeless

When Sammy meets twelve-year-old Holly, she has no home and is living in a box. Ask students to work in small groups to find out what services their communities offer to homeless people. Encourage them to find out about local shelters and food kitchens. Interested students might want to look into volunteering at one of these places.

Math: Phone Numbers / Letters

When Sammy is trying to figure out the safe combination, Meg tells her that the first two numbers of phone numbers used to correspond to the first two letters of a word. Have students find out what letters might correspond to the first two numbers in their phone numbers. They can decide on words that will signal part of their phone numbers, as Walnut 2-2812 signals the phone number 922-2812 in the story.

Physical Education: Softball Rules

In the story, Sammy is on a softball team. Have students work in small groups to find out about the rules of softball. Groups can create books of rules for the game.

Music: Gospel Singing

The Sisters of Mercy are gospel singers. Play some gospel music for the class. Explain to them that gospel music is religious music that is often played and sung to increase religious feeling in listeners. Ask students to write down their reactions to the music as you play it.

INTERNET ACTIVITY

Before you send children to do research using any of the keywords listed below, you may wish to try them yourself to be sure the sites are suitable.

Decorative Crosses

Have students look at examples of decorative crosses on museum websites, using the keywords *art museums* or the name of specific museums. Ask students to print out examples of crosses they find and to write down any information the sites give about the crosses. Students can share their findings with findings with the rest of the class.