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Activity Guide

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Sammy Keyes and the Curse of Moustache Mary

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ABOUT THE STORY

When Sammy visits her friend Dot for New Year's Eve, she meets a woman named Lucinda Huntley. After hearing Lucinda's story about her relative Moustache Mary, Sammy is once again off on an adventure that includes fire, an old diary, a ghost, a family feud, missing gold, a riddle, and, of course, Sammy's old enemy Heather Acosta.

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 what they know about pioneers who went west and the dangers they faced. Explain to them that the book they will read is about a mystery that begins with a journey west in the past and ends in the present.

READING ACTIVITIES

Comprehension/Thinking Skills

- "Who is Moustache Mary?"
- "What is the basis of the feud between the Murdochs and the Huntleys?"
- "Who is responsible for the fire?"
- "Who does Casey turn out to be?"
- "Where does Sammy finally find the gold?"
- "How does Sammy's feeling about Officer Borsch change throughout the story?" (*Compare and contrast*)
- "Why does Sammy feel good when Officer Borsch offers her a new bike?" (*Draw conclusions*)

Vocabulary

Write these adjectives on the chalkboard. Ask volunteers to define each word. Then have students write a description of a person, using at least two of the adjectives.

inquisitive
nauseating

unsuitable
sarcastic

desolate
notorious

CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Social Studies: Pioneer Days

Have students find examples of or excerpts from pioneer journals from the mid-1800's online or at the library. Ask them to copy an entry they find interesting and to write a brief description of the journal writer and his or her trip. Students can share their journal entries.

Math: Gold Values

Lucinda is thrilled to find the missing gold because gold is still valuable today. Point out to students that the value of gold is listed each day in the newspaper. Have them track the price of gold over a week and make a graph showing how gold values fluctuate over time.

Health: Skateboard Safety

Sammy is a great skateboarder, but she takes some risks when she is riding. Ask students to create a class list of skateboarding safety rules. The list should include information about safety gear and safe behavior on skateboards. Post the list in the classroom.

Language Arts: Write a Journal

Sammy enjoys reading Moustache Mary's journal because it gives her a real sense of what life was like long ago. Tell students that by keeping journals, they keep a record of what they were like. Have each student start a journal in a notebook. Encourage them to write about everyday events and to record their feelings about those events. Stress that their journal writing is private and does not have to be read or graded.

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.

Journeying West

Students can go west on the same trails the pioneers took by taking a virtual journey on the Internet. Using the keywords *California-Oregon Trail*, students can visit the website of the Trail and read about the journey west. They can stop at various points along the trail and read journal entries and descriptions of the trip.