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Activity Guide

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Sammy Keyes and the Runaway Elf

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ABOUT THE STORY

Every year, Sammy Keyes' hometown has a Christmas parade. This year, Sammy has gotten roped into helping out on one of the floats – the one carrying the dogs wearing antlers. As the float moves down the street, people wearing Three Kings costumes throw cats at the float. The dogs go crazy, and when the dust settles, Sammy realizes the prize Pomeranian she has been watching has disappeared. How Sammy goes after the dognapper and solves the mystery makes for another great adventure in the Sammy Keyes series.

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 any of them have dogs, and have them describe their dogs and tell their breeds. Explain that in this mystery, a girl detective must find out who has dognapped a valuable Pomeranian.

READING ACTIVITIES

Comprehension/Thinking Skills

- “How does Sammy wind up on the float?”
- “What events lead to the disappearance of Marique?”
- “What happens to Mrs. Graybill?”
- “Who ends up being the dognapper?”
- “Why did the dognapper take Marique?”
- “What lesson does Mrs. Graybill’s situation teach Sammy?” (*Cause and effect*)
- “How does Sammy feel about her mother’s visit? Why?” (*Analyze*)

Vocabulary

Write these vocabulary words on the chalkboard. Ask volunteers to define them. Students may wish to use a dictionary to define the words they do not know. Then ask them to use each word in a sentence.

foyer	adrenaline	harass	confrontational
instigator	assimilated	gaudy	despondent

CROSS-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Math: Follow the Stock Market

Lilia Landvogt made her money by investing in the stock market. Have students try the same exercise, on paper. Ask each student to pick a stock and pretend they have invested \$1000.00 in it. By dividing the cost of each into \$1000, they can determine how many shares they can buy. Then have them track the stock for several weeks. At the end of the designated time, they can determine how much their stock is worth by multiplying the cost of a share by the number of shares they have. Students can report on whether they have made or lost money.

Science: Dog Breeds

Many different kinds of dogs make an appearance in *Sammy Keyes and the Runaway Elf*. Ask students to choose one breed of dog to research. They can look in encyclopedias and books about dogs to find out about the breed, and then use the information to write a brief description. Students can collect their descriptions in a class book of dogs.

Art: Calendar

The trouble at the parade is linked with the town calendar, which features photos of dogs. Have students work in groups to collect pictures for their own calendars. They can use magazines of their own drawings or photographs, or they can print pictures off the Internet. The calendar can be on a topic of their own choice. Have them find an illustration for each month, make a page with each day marked for each month, and fasten the pages together by punching holes and tying them.

Language Arts: “The Tell-Tale Heart”

Sammy’s friend Hudson advises her to use a strategy from the Edgar Allan Poe story, “The Tell-Tale Heart”, to uncover the guilty party. Make the story available to students, either in written or audio form. After they have had a brief explanation of the strategy Hudson is recommending that Sammy use and how it might work.

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.

Prize Pomeranians

Have students find out about the Pomeranian breed of dog by going online, using the keyword *Pomeranian*. Students can learn what the dogs look like, what their habits are, and who the best-known breeders and trainers are. Encourage them to print pictures of the dogs from the websites they find and show them to the rest of the class.