

Sammy Keyes and the Hotel Thief

Recommended for Grades 4-8

Book Summary: Sammy Keyes and the Hotel Thief

Sammy secretly lives with her grandmother in a ‘seniors only’ apartment complex. She’s not allowed to make much noise, so she passes the time spying on her neighbors with binoculars. One morning she is looking into the windows of the hotel across the street, when she spots a thief burgling one of the rooms. Instead of calling the police, Sammy watches until the thief catches her staring. They both stare at each other until Sammy breaks the spell by waving at him.

Later, a threatening note is slipped under their neighbor’s door. Sammy realizes that unless she helps the police figure out who the thief is, she and her grandmother will be in danger. The only problem is that the police don’t want her help. However, Sammy won’t let that deter her.

[SPOILER] Sammy finally figures out that the thief is the ‘blind’ ice cream vendor and she sets a trap for him. She manages to catch him, at great risk to herself.

Author Biography: Wendelin Van Draanen

Wendelin Van Draanen was born January 6, 1965, in Chicago, Illinois. Her parents were chemists from the Netherlands who immigrated to the United States. She worked as a forklift driver and then as a high school computer science teacher in Santa Monica, California where she lives with her husband and two sons. She wrote for ten years before her first novel got published. The books she was writing were originally intended for adults to remind them of their mischievous adventures growing up. However, publishers decided that since the main character was a twelve year-old, they should be for children.

When she’s not writing, she likes to have fun with her two sons: acting zany in the grocery store, tossing ice cubes off the deck, skateboarding, swimming, playing chess, making some wild dessert in the kitchen.

To date, Wendelin Van Draanen has written ten books in the Sammy Keyes series, of which *Sammy Keyes and the Hotel Thief* won the 1999 Edgar Allen Poe Award for Best Juvenile Mystery. She has also written the Shredderman series and several stand alone novels.



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Discussion Questions: Sammy Keyes and the Hotel Thief

1. Is Sammy right to be angry with her mother for leaving her to live with her grandmother while mom pursues her acting career? Because you've had children, should you give up your dreams or should you go after them no matter who it affects? Why?
 2. Sammy struggles with whether or not to tell her grandmother about the thief she saw in the hotel (p.6-7). Why did she want to and why didn't she want to? What would you have done in her position?
 3. Sammy tends to get into a lot of trouble, but you never feel like she is a bad kid. If you knew someone like this in real life, would they be considered a trouble maker or just a regular kid? Why?
 4. Because Sammy had lied to Officer Borsch previously to get out of a jaywalking ticket (p. 20-21), she can't tell him the truth now. Does lying always come back to haunt you or is the occasional lie okay? Why?
 5. Officer Borsch treats Sammy like a bratty kid and doesn't listen to what she has to say. Do most adults do this? Why?
 6. Does Sammy react in the right way to Heather? Was hitting her the right way to respond (p. 34)? Why or why not? What would you have done?
 7. Why do you think everyone seems to think Sammy is a liar (p. 98)? Do adults naturally distrust kids? What can you do to make someone believe you when you are telling the truth, but they think you're not?
 8. Why do you think that Heather pretends her nose is broken? Is being embarrassed in front of the whole school punishment enough or does she deserve to be suspended, too? Why?
 9. Marissa thinks Sammy is lucky because her grandmother is always there and Sammy thinks Marissa is lucky because she has her own room and bed. Do people always want what they don't have? Who do you think is luckier? Why?
 10. Sammy uses a similar trick to sneak into her grandma's building as the thief uses to get into the hotel (p. 110). Is secretly living with her grandma turning her into a criminal?
 11. Sammy was upset that Heather judged her based on how she looked, but she does the same thing to Hudson's renter (p. 28, 126, 162). Is this just human nature? How can you avoid doing this?
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