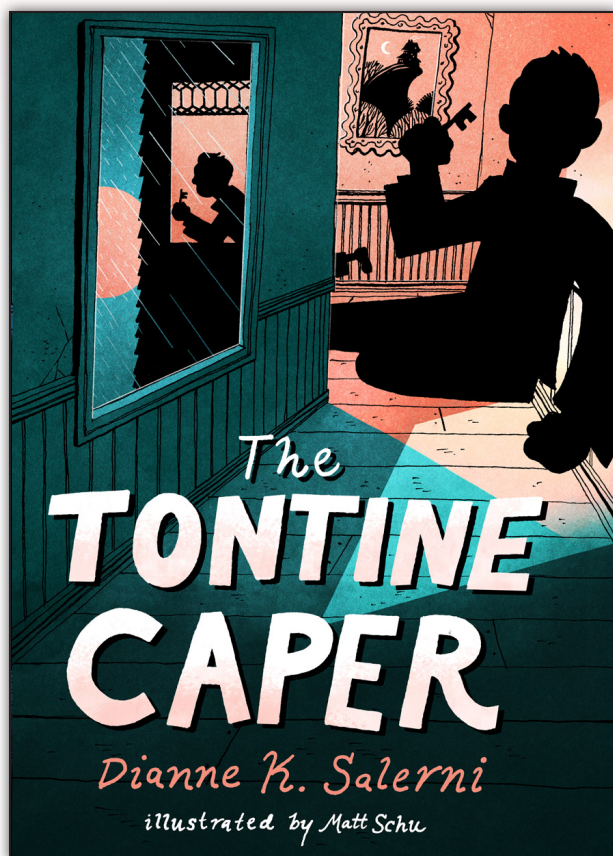


HOLIDAY HOUSE BOOK CLUB GUIDE



HC: 9780823458103 · Ebook: 9780823462179

The Tontine Caper

by **Dianne K. Salerni**

illustrated by **Matt Schu**

A Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection

ABOUT THE BOOK

Clue meets *Knives Out* for the younger set in this twisty-turny middle grade mystery-comedy with dry humor, impeccable plotting, and fun interactive bonus content.

Eleven-year-old orphan Nico Lombardi has been unfairly indentured at a remote mountain inn for five years now.

Just as he gathers the courage to escape, the inn gets booked by the remaining members of a “tontine,” an investment scheme where a cash prize is awarded to whomever lives the longest. In other words, every guest wants access to the fortune. Preferably as soon as possible.

During their stay, a chaotic race to control the fate of the tontine takes over the normally sleepy inn. Nico watches in horror as a series of comically disastrous events unfolds—some of which might aid his escape, and some of which might get him in big trouble. Before he can even put the right clues together, three unexpected revelations change the course of everyone’s future!

Arch humor and an incredible cast of strange and calculating characters keep the pages turning in this Wes Anderson-esque mystery filled with funny mishaps and misunderstandings.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Before reading the novel, take the quiz at the end of book, “Which Person Do You Most Resemble?” As you read the book decide if the result of the quiz is correct.
- Setting is when and where a novel takes place. Identify the setting of this book. Explain how the author reveals the time period in which the novel is set. How does the Precipice Inn create the perfect atmosphere for a mystery? Discuss the importance of room 5 and the summit room.

- The most important element of a mystery is the problem or puzzle to be solved. What is the problem or puzzle in this novel? At what point is it revealed?
- Clues are essential for solving a mystery. Discuss the clues in the novel. A “red herring” is a false clue. What is the “red herring” in this novel?
- Discuss the structure of the novel. How do the illustrations contribute to character and plot development?
- Nico’s grandfather, Nonno, died and left him an orphan. When does Nico miss Nonno the most? Explain why the painting of the Precipice Inn is so important to Nico. Why is this painting and others by Nonno of interest to Beau and Beatrice Beauregard?
- Describe Gunther, the owner of the Precipice Inn. Discuss how he treats Nico. How is Nico an easy target for Gunther? Define “indentured.” In what way is Nico indentured to Gunther?
- Gunther refers to Nico as a “foreigner.” Beatrice corrects him and says, “immigrant.” Nico is neither a foreigner nor an immigrant. Why does Gunther insist on labeling Nico in this way?
- Nico has many treasures that he has stolen from guests. The narrator states, “Their names were burned into his conscience” (p. 10). Why does Nico steal when he knows it’s wrong?
- Describe each guest at the Precipice Inn. Nico thinks, “Sometimes, even the most unpleasant people have redeeming qualities” (p. 15). Which is the most unpleasant character? What are the redeeming qualities of each guest? Discuss the “unmasking” of each guest at the end of the novel.
- An idiom is a phrase that means something different than its literal words. Explain the following idiom used by the younger Mrs. Deetlebaum: “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush” (p. 20). Point out other idioms in the novel.
- The guests receive mislabeled luggage. Discuss the contents of the luggage they receive. How does this add an element of intrigue?
- Explain the concept of tontine. Discuss the rules of the Carbon County Tontine. What is the purpose of the meeting of the remaining three subscribers?
- Why does Mr. Hawes, the lawyer, insist that the subscribers of the tontine meet in this “ridiculously inaccessible location” (p. 17)? How does this play into his great plan? At what point does his plan begin to fall apart? Debate whether his late arrival is part of his scheme.
- There are references to trust throughout the novel. Explain why Nico is reluctant to trust the people at the inn. Debate whether trust is an underlying theme in the novel. Identify the most trustworthy character. Cite the moment this “trustworthiness” is revealed.
- Discuss the many ways Nico’s life changes as a result of the tontine caper. Speculate about his future.
- “How Would You Fare in a Tontine Caper?” allows the reader to put themselves in the story. Choose your own “caper” and discuss the many twists in the plot and the outcome the group uncovers.

Guide created by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

Don't Miss Other Books by This Author!



PB: 9780823453382



PB: 9780823458868

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dianne K. Salerni has written many books for children and young adults, including *The Carrefour Curse*, which received three starred reviews and was a *Kirkus* Best Book of the Year, and Junior Library Guild Gold Standard selections *Eleanor*, *Alice*, and *the Roosevelt Ghosts* and *Jadie in Five Dimensions*. She attended the University of Delaware and the University of Pennsylvania before teaching fourth and fifth grades for many years. Now Dianne spends her time hanging around creepy cemeteries, climbing two-thousand-year-old pyramids for book research, and volunteering at her local rescue animal shelter. She lives in Pennsylvania with her family. Visit her at DianneSalerni.com.