

HOLIDAY HOUSE



BOOK CLUB GUIDE



HC: 9780823460380 · Ebook: 9780823463367

The Steps

by **Wendelin Van Draanen**

ABOUT THE BOOK

Riverdale meets *The Queen's Gambit* in this fun, twisty thriller featuring a deliciously dysfunctional family with dark secrets and shifting alliances.

Fourteen-year-old chess whiz Ruby Vossen tries to keep to herself. She refuses to be a pawn in her wealthy family's web of deception.

But ever since Ruby's mother and aunt died in a car wreck, the battle lines drawn within the Vossen clan have ruled her life. Ruby's father and uncle became irreparably estranged, and within months, Ruby's cousin/BFF was banished from her life, her father remarried, and she wound up with a gold-digging stepmom who has two teens of her own—the Steps.

So when strange and dangerous things begin happening on the Vossen estate, Ruby sees only one logical explanation: The Steps are scheming to inherit the Vossen fortune. And as things get more and more intense, it seems like killing is in their playbook. It's time to checkmate the Steps before they can finish the Vossens off.

Secrets, lies, and lethal threats abound in this clever, quirky thriller by the award-winning, bestselling author of *Flipped* and the Sammy Keyes mysteries.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- The novel opens with Ruby describing a tree outside her attic bedroom. Discuss the significance of the tree to the story. In what way does the opening paragraph foreshadow the ending of the book?
- Discuss the cause of the Vossen family feud. What are the rules that Ruby and her cousin, Sterling, must follow? Debate whether Uncle Axel knew the cause of the accident. If not, what is the basis for his accusations?
- Sterling and Ruby were best friends. What ended their friendship? Contrast Ruby and Sterling's personalities.
- In what ways does Ruby miss Sterling? Debate whether Ruby can ever have a relationship with Sterling, even after she saves Sterling's life.

- Describe Tante Katrina. Why was she banished from the family? How is Katrina always there for Ruby? What insight does Katrina provide about the entire Vossen family?
- Discuss first impressions of Oma. How was Oma different when Opa was alive? When does Ruby realize that Oma manipulates and uses people?
- Why does Ruby call Vivian, her father’s new wife, “Stepmommy Dearest”?
- Describe Vivian’s daughter and son. What is Ruby’s opinion of Brielle? Why does Ruby have sympathy for Liam?
- Ruby is paranoid about many things. What contributes to her paranoia? How does this explain the rope, hatchet, and saw that she keeps under her bed? Why did Ruby’s dad refuse to put a lock on her bedroom door? Explain why the Steps scare her. How does Detective Raven sense Ruby’s fear?
- Why does Ruby feel she must use code names on her phone? Discuss the significance of “Nevermore” that she assigns to Detective Raven.
- A cliffhanger is a plot device that leaves the reader in suspense. How does the author make use of cliffhangers at the end of each chapter?
- What is the overall theme of the novel?
- The elements of a mystery novel include clues, suspects, a satisfying resolution, and sometimes a red herring. What is the red herring in the story? Think about the ending. Debate whether it’s a satisfying resolution.
- The elements of horror fiction include a haunting atmosphere, suspense, exploration of deep-seated fears, and well-developed antagonists. In what way is the novel both a mystery and horror fiction?

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

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Wendelin Van Draanen is the award-winning, bestselling author of more than thirty novels for children and teens. Her books include *Flipped*, which was named a Top 100 Children’s Novel for the 21st Century by *School Library Journal* and became a Warner Brothers feature film; the Edgar Award–winning Sammy Keyes mystery series; and *The Running Dream*, which won ALA’s Schneider Family Book Award. *The Steps* is her new YA from Holiday House. A high school teacher for fifteen years, Wendelin is now a full-time writer who enjoys staying active in the school author-visit space. Visit her at wendelinvand.com.