

THE TONTINE CAPER

Teaching Guide

Discussion Questions

1. In Chapter One we learn that Nico is planning an escape from the Precipice Inn and his ***DEBT*** to Gunther by stealing small items from guests. What are your feelings about this? Is it okay to do something wrong in a good cause? *Is Nico's escape a good cause?*
2. Why do you think the word ***DEBT*** appears in all capitals with bold and italic print? Does the visual appearance of this word affect its meaning?
3. In Chapter Two we learn that three of the guests are the final members in an investment scheme that will award a fortune to the last living survivor—unless they agree to divide it equally among them. So far, what is your impression of the three tontine finalists: Mabel Deetlebaum, Diana Evert VonTropp, and Beauregard Ames?
4. At the end of Chapter Two, how are Gunther, Agnetha, and Nico planning to use these guests to benefit themselves?
5. How does Chapter Three add a sense of mystery to the events happening at the Inn?
6. Why are the two chapters after Chapter Four so oddly numbered?
7. By the conclusion of the first night at the Precipice Inn, what questions do you have about Beau and Beatrice Ames?
8. Identify as many speakers as you can from the conversations in Chapter Five.
9. What does Nico think happened on the Very Worst Day of his life?
10. How did Nico's debt to Gunther turn into a ***DEBT***?
11. How does Nico feel about Lottie's offer in Chapter Nine?
12. What does Chapter Ten reveal about Beau Ames's purpose at the Inn, and how does Beatrice feel about it?
13. After Chapter Eleven, what questions do you have about Mr. Hawes, the lawyer?
14. Who is the red-haired lady Nico saw in Chapter Twelve?
15. What do we learn about Diana Evert VonTropp in Chapter Thirteen?

16. How does the VonTropp brothers' plot go awry in Chapter Fifteen?
17. What was Nico's plan to frame Gunther in Chapter Seventeen and how does it work out?
18. Explain the surprising discoveries about the three tontine finalists revealed in Chapters Twenty and Twenty-One.
19. In Chapter Twenty-Two, what truths do we learn about the tontine money and the death of Nonno?
20. **Ethics** are moral principles that govern a person's behavior. In the course of this story, a large number of characters do something that might be considered ethically wrong. Which (if any) of the following behaviors would you consider justified, in spite of being "wrong?"
 - a. Nico stealing items from guests
 - b. Gunther lying to Nico about owing him a debt
 - c. Omnia Deetlebaum masquerading as Mabel with the help of her family
 - d. Beau and Beatrice lying about their identities to examine (and possibly steal) Nonno's painting
 - e. The gardener's daughter masquerading as Diana Evert VonTropp
 - f. The VonTropp brothers attempting to hasten the demise of Mr. Ames
 - g. Mr. Hawes borrowing from the tontine fund to pay his own debts

Activities

Point of View:

The Tontine Caper is written in third person point of view. As students may know, there are two types of third person POV.

In **limited third person**, the narrative follows the thoughts and actions of one character at a time. The narration only reveals what that one character knows, sees, hears, and thinks, although it may switch to another character in a different scene.

In **omniscient third person**, the narrative reveals the thoughts and actions of many characters during a single scene and may even reveal information none of the characters know.

The Tontine Caper uses an omniscient point of view. Ask students to identify passages that demonstrate the narration revealing the thoughts of many characters in the same scene. Some examples for the teacher's use or example can be found on pages 21, 68-69, 76-77, and 109-110.

Vocabulary:

The following is a list of words from the text suitable for vocabulary development. Students may engage in a variety of vocabulary activities, including:

- Find the sentence containing this word in the text and guess the meaning through context clues.
- Look up the definition, being sure to select the meaning which matches the use of the word in the text (if the word has more than one meaning).
- Identify synonyms for the word.
- Use the word in an original sentence.
- Identify the part of speech and root word, if appropriate.
- Draw a picture or comic strip that demonstrates use of the word.

foliage pg. 1	prognostication pg. 2	unprepossessing pg. 4
purloining pg. 11	arduous pg. 17	impugn pg. 19
plausible pg. 29	inconsequential pg. 29	perambulator pg. 30
circumnavigation pg. 31	nemesis pg. 65	surreptitious pg. 68
garish pg. 75	brazen pg. 79	indentured pg. 80
parsimony pg. 81	dissuade pg. 84	profligate pg. 94
florid pg. 94	consternation pg. 96	demeanor pg. 98
impudence pg. 98	patron pg. 99	incendiary pg. 102
expeditiously pg. 104	misconstrued pg. 106	combustion pg. 107
accommodation pg. 109	disjointed pg. 115	amphibious pg. 116
gumption pg. 117	bedraggled pg.120	lackadaisical pg. 127
diligence pg. 127	banshee pg. 132	subterfuge pg. 138
sordid pg. 138	decorum pg. 143	executor pg. 145
executor pg. 145	pugilist pg. 151	ruination pg. 155
embezzled pg. 155	purveyor pg. 159	authenticated pg. 164
effervescent pg. 170	caricature pg. 171	celestial pg. 175

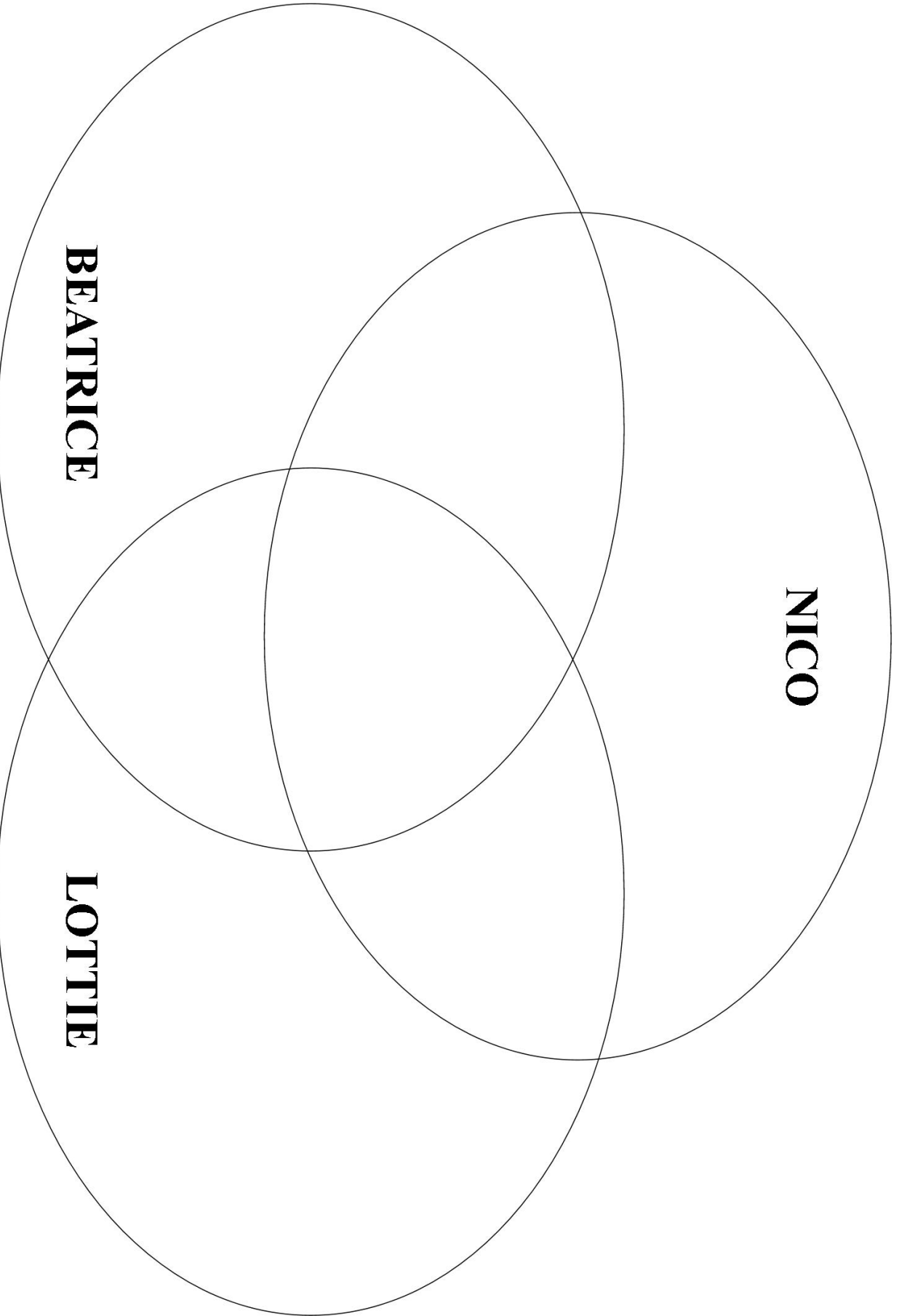
Character Traits:

Students use the accompanying 3-way Venn Diagram to compare and contrast the character traits of Nico, Lottie, and Beatrice.

Analytic Reading:

The events of Chapter Four, Chapter Four and Three Quarters, and Chapter Four and a Half are deliberately presented out of sequence in the timeline of that night.

Using the accompanying worksheet, students work in small groups to conduct a close re-reading of these chapters and put the events in the correct sequence. Groups compare their final sequence as a class and defend any discrepancies by providing textual evidence.



WHAT HAPPENED IN THE NIGHT?

Cut out the events below and put them in order to the best of your ability, according to the text of Chapter Four, Chapter Four and Three Quarters, and Chapter Four and a Half. Be prepared to defend your sequence of events.

Nico sneaks downstairs and gets the key to the drawing room.	Nico lets Raymond in through the kitchen door.	Beau and Beatrice hide in the drawing room.	The boys move into the hallway and Edgar convinces Raymond to hang out the window.
Nico mistakenly locks the drawing room door.	Nico mistakenly unlocks the drawing room door.	Beau relocks the door to the drawing room.	Raymond dangles the dummy in front of Beau's window.
Nico unlocks the drawing room door and enters.	Nico goes to bed.	Beau and Beatrice return to their room.	Agnetha arrives and Edgar drops Raymond into a bush.
Nico hides the cigarette case.	Beau and Beatrice sneak out of their room and pick the lock on the drawing room door.	Edgar and Raymond plot Beau's demise.	Raymond tramps around the inn and knocks on the kitchen door.
Nico hears a thump and looks out the window.	Beau examines the painting over the fireplace mantel.	Edgar builds a dummy to look like a deceased Raymond.	Raymond returns to his room.