



# TEACHER, TAILOR, SOLDIER, SPY

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to follow Jonathan Lear's instructions and draw children into an educational world of espionage...

**W**hilst it may not be everyone's cup of tea, I love a bit of dressing up to aid the introduction of a new topic. Admittedly, it's sometimes my teaching assistant that cops it; after all, the back end of the cow won't operate itself.

Although some of the outfits require a bit of Dutch courage, I will never need any encouragement to get into character for this spy-themed topic starter.

Creating a secret agent topic opens the door to a huge range of learning opportunities, but if the children are to be engaged and inspired it needs to be presented in just the right way...

## **Selling it to the children**

A secret agent is nothing without a mission. But before we get ahead of ourselves, there needs to be a recruitment drive. In preparation for the introduction of the topic, a little of the aforementioned dressing up is required. My personal preference for the secret agent would be a heavily disguised character sporting a joke shop nose, moustache and glasses combos, maybe teamed with a trench coat and trilby. If you'd prefer to avoid cliché, you could always try something suave – think Daniel Craig or Judi Dench. With costume at the ready, you are in position to record your first film, which will be the main method of communication between you (in role as super spy) and the children (lowly recruits) throughout the topic.

The initial film will introduce the idea of secret agents to the children and ask them for help. A neutral, anonymous background, and a heavily disguised voice are useful, but part of the enjoyment stems from the fact the kids know it's just you wearing a stupid costume – they don't need to be fooled because they'll be so desperate to be involved. The filmed message will relay that there is a terrible shortage of secret agents operating

in the area and that this shortfall needs to be rapidly addressed. It needs to finish with a note that the children will receive further instruction from their teacher.

## **Add a little magic**

When you're ready to present the film to the children, find a time when they will be caught off-guard. While they are busy with another activity, or even in the middle of a lesson, the class can be interrupted by a mysterious stranger (your teaching assistant in spy get-up) who bursts in breathlessly and delivers a package, before leaving just as abruptly. When the shock has abated, the package can be opened to reveal a CD (featuring the pre-recorded film) and a small piece of paper.

Having watched the film with the children, you are left with the piece of paper containing the necessary instructions for their first mission. We'll get onto the finer details in a minute, but before that, there's one more piece of theatre worth including. As any aficionado of spy films will tell you, mission-related instructions always self destruct after 30 seconds. This can be achieved in the classroom with something called 'flash paper'. Flash paper is a highly flammable sheet most commonly used in

“ *When the shock has abated, the package can be opened up to reveal a mysterious CD and a small piece of paper* ”

**JONATHAN LEAR | TEACHER AND AST**

magic tricks. It can be bought online and is perfectly safe if used by an adult.

When you've read out the instructions and the final line about how they will self destruct, you're ready for the magic moment. Carefully light one corner of the paper – you'll need to practise this without an audience first because the speed at which it burns is a bit of a surprise. The effect is brilliant, there's no ash or mess to clean up afterwards, and it's guaranteed to get a great reception.

The details of the mission written on the paper need to revolve around the tasks children will have to complete in order to become fully fledged secret agents. These can be split into three different categories. The first task is based on mental agility (a made up, multiple-choice test); the second on physical prowess (an assault course in the playground or school hall); and the final task is

a stealth challenge (a group of spies are required to move through school unnoticed to plant a surveillance device in the headteacher's office).

Having the three tasks allows the class to be split (you'll never get 30 agents creeping around school unnoticed, but you might do it with 10), but if you can't beg steal or borrow additional adults for an hour, then you could open with an alternative whole class activity instead.

## **Spy themed lessons**

Now that the secret agent induction process is done and dusted (they all made it through!) we're ready to kick start a whole host of different missions (see below). As before, the missions will be sent via filmed messages. With each new film, you can comment on the success of the previous mission, dropping in the names of children (agents) who did particularly well.

## **1 Maths: code breaking**

Introduce the children to the real life story of the men and women who helped to break the Enigma Cipher during WWII. Challenge the children to create some of their own codes. This lends itself most neatly to maths and describing and extending number sequences, but they could also use letter codes to write secret messages to one another.

## **2 Science: explosives training**

Get your hands on a bag of black plastic film canisters and a couple of packets of effervescent tablets. Show the children how to construct a small explosive device by sticking a quarter of a tablet onto the lid before placing a small amount of water in the canister. Put the lid on tightly, place the canister on the floor (lid down) and stand back. Following the 'explosion' allow the children to make their own. What would happen if you use more than one quarter of a tablet? What if you change the amount of water? How many would you need to set off to destroy a Lego bridge or frighten the headteacher?

## **3 ICT/English: secret agent handbook**

The children could record their learning in a special top secret handbook. Each mission they complete could be added with their tips for success. If they use publishing software they could include photos of themselves from the various activities.

## **4 PSHE: stealth surprise**

Sneaking around the place unnoticed could be a means of doing good deeds. What if a team of agents secretly delivered a flower to each classroom before school started; or maybe a chocolate bar could be left in the cleaners' cupboard with a mysterious calling card – a bit like the milk tray man from the advert on the telly.

Whilst these suggestions are only the tip of the iceberg, they would certainly make for an entertaining start to the topic. You could do as much or as little as you liked – the filming does take a bit of time, but the more you do the quicker you'll get.

One final word of warning; as it's all too easy to get caught up in the glamorous lifestyle of a super spy, make sure you're prepared to come back down to earth when the topic ends. The mundane life of a teacher is no match for the excitement you've experienced over the past few weeks. Be sure to enjoy the martinis while they last.

