

## Secret Mission: Teacher Guidance

Based on the ever popular Alex Rider teen spy series, and launched by a star appearance from author Anthony Horowitz, this flexible resource can be used as a whole theme across a number of weeks, a special collapsed curriculum day or selectively integrated into existing literacy plans.

The resource is built on experiential learning principles and seeks to engage pupils in a 'real life' scenario to develop literacy skills across the curriculum, and is matched to the statutory requirements within the new curriculum regarding 'writing for purpose'.

For research and examples of the impact of experiential learning see:

- Everybody Writes resources and guidance  
<http://www.booktrust.org.uk/programmes/primary/everybody-writes/>
- DFE funded writing project : The Black Country Challenge available to download here : <http://www.gillmatthews.co.uk/noticeboard.html>

## The Hook

### Video Challenge

In *Scorpia Rising*, Anthony Horowitz's penultimate Alex Rider book, Alex leaves MI6 and retires as a teenage spy. This experiential learning opportunity is built around an initial video in which Anthony Horowitz himself presents to pupils as an MI6 consultant operative, to help recruit new young agents.

Anthony explains and introduces a range of tasks and challenges designed to assess the suitability of pupils to become MI6 special agents. **Your pupils have been specifically selected to be part of the recruitment process!** These 9 Tests will immerse pupils in a range of writing opportunities across the curriculum from explanations and instructions for spy gadget design to the history of Morse code.

## Immersion

This is a fantastic opportunity to immerse your class into the world of Alex Rider and all things to do with the world of spies. In preparation you may want to collect a range of resources and material to enhance reading and writing areas within the classroom:

- Copies of each of the Alex Rider books from the series for pupils to read and explore
- Copies of the graphic novel versions of the books
- Access to the Alex Rider website: <http://www.alexrider.com/Home>
- Watch the Anthony Horowitz LIVE interview <http://www.alexrider.com/videos>
- Artefacts & Clues:  
Have some fun collecting and leaving clues about the theme: invisible ink, disguise costumes, black gloves, a torch, binoculars, a camera, recording devices etc
- The Tests are built around the spy recruitment process. Alex himself was forcibly recruited in book one of the series, *Stormbreaker*. Reading *Stormbreaker* as a whole class reader throughout the unit would be a great way to enhance the learning opportunity overall.
- Use clips from *Stormbreaker – the Movie*.

## Taking up the challenge

### Organisation

As the video reveals you, as class teacher, have been given special clearance to guide the pupils through the different tests. Depending on time, curriculum organisation and pupil target areas in writing, the resource is designed to be flexible, so you may wish to select only certain tasks to complete or craft a whole themed unit around the tests and complete all 9.

Why not invite pupils by secret message to a specific location, for a specific time to watch the initial video transmission. The video hints that a special MI6 envoy will be employed to deliver the tasks. Perhaps you can recruit another member of staff, caretaker or parent to take on that role when needed and provide special envelopes marked **TOP SECRET**.

After pupils have watched the video, each task in turn can be introduced when needed by your special envoy. If you really want to create something special, allocate pupils their own document folders to act as personnel files to collect all the work completed in response to the recruitment process. They will need to think up a code name to label their file; in *Stormbreaker* Alex Rider was given the code name 'Cub' on his initial training camp (*Chapter 5: Double O Nothing*). What will they choose and why?

# The Tests

For each test you can download a pupil secret message, which can be printed, put into a sealed 'Top Secret' envelope and delivered by your special envoy.

## Test 1: The 'application' test

### Download Secret Message 1 from the resource page

Pupils complete a CV and application to become a special agent. First get pupils in groups to discuss the qualities needed to become a great agent. With initial discussions in mind, read Chapters 3 and 4 of *Stormbreaker* together and encourage pupils to make notes on the characteristics Alex Rider seems to possess that attract the attention of Mr Blunt and MI6. Now ask the pupils to think about the qualities and skills they possess. Have they got good powers of observation? What about a special talent? Get them to design and complete their own CV and application form for MI6. Use the following headings as a guide. Can they add a photo for identification? Ask them to add their application to their personnel file.

Name:	
Code Name:	
Age:	
Address:	
Top Qualities and Characteristics.	<i>Please note: state qualities eg bravery, loyalty etc but give an example of when or how you have demonstrated that quality</i>
Physical Skills:	<i>eg good balance / karate training / gymnastics / swimming level ...</i>
Technical Ability:	<i>eg expert computer gaming skills, ability to use a camera effectively ...</i>
Special Talent:	<i>eg ability to speak with different accents / ability to apply make-up for disguises, good at mental maths ...</i>
Personal Statement:	<i>Please add a short description of why you believe you would be suitable for the position of special agent</i>

## Test 2: The interview test

Download Secret Message 2 from the resource page

Following discussions from Test 1, set up mock interview panels. The panels might include roles as Mrs Jones, Alan Blunt and Smithers (the MI6 gadget designer and expert). Organise pupils into groups to role-play special agent interviews. Encourage groups to have a panel, potential candidate, even a character witness and someone to film the interview. Pupils can swap roles and following the activity can compare how well they performed using video playback.

## Test 3: The 'spot the criminal' test

Download Secret Message 3 from the resource page

Criminals play a key role in all MI6 activity. Can your pupils spot the signs and characteristics of a true criminal? Think about Nadia Vole, one of the associates of arch-criminal Herod Sayle, who manages to trick Alex in Chapter 14 (*Deep Water*) of *Stormbreaker* but comes to a rather terrifying end! Use the Alex Rider website and books to research typical criminals, their character traits and physical descriptions. Many of Anthony Horowitz's criminals for example have unusual physical traits. Based on what they have learned, ask pupils to invent and then write a character description of the perfect criminal. Don't forget to describe both appearance and personality and possibly a potential weakness that field agents might exploit.

They can add labelled illustrations and should of course create the perfect villainous name...

## Test 4: The 'ideal agent kit' test

Download Secret Message 4 from the resource page

Be prepared at all times. The ideal special agent should have a kit bag ready for action at all times. Quick reactions in a crisis are essential and agents should be ready to react and hop on a helicopter at very short notice to complete their mission. But what to include?

Encourage pupils to work in teams of 3 to design a poster of what an ideal agent's kit might contain. There are different skills tested here; one, how well can they work in a team to collaborate effectively and two, do they have a logical and practical side which will stand them in good stead for work in the field. Encourage them to think originally. We can all imagine that maps, cameras, mobiles and matches may be key; but what else will show their inventive side: matchboxes with hidden compartments, chalk for marking signs, micro USBs disguised as pen tops ...

Imagination and practical thinking are key for this test.

## Test 5: 'The 'innovation' test

Download Secret Message 5 from the resource page

Every great agent has great gadgets. Like Alex Rider, when he was first recruited, young agents are not permitted to carry firearms of any kind. Alex was however introduced to the amazing Mr Smithers who kitted him out with some gadgets, which proved in *Stormbreaker* to be life-saving. Remember the lethal spot cream which could dissolve any metal and which eventually made Sayle's huge jelly fish tank disintegrate and explode (right on top of the manipulative Nadia Vole!); or the amazing motorized yo-yo with a very special sort of string? Check out Smithers' explanation of the gadgets to Alex in the *Stormbreaker* Chapter, *Toys Aren't Us* or research some of his other classified inventions here for inspiration: <http://www.alexrider.com/gadgets>

As for this test, originality, innovation and an eye for detail are needed. Challenge pupils to invent, design and explain through diagrams and labels a new special agent gadget. Smithers himself is to judge this test, so precision and clarity of explanation will be key. Remember, what would a young person normally carry? Can they adapt that into a special gadget or tool for extra design skill and ultimate secrecy?

## Test 6: 'The 'the gift of the gab' test

Download Secret Message 6 from the resource page

All agents should be confident, eloquent and able to communicate on many different levels. The power of persuasion is a valuable asset for agents and this task aims to test that skill. Having designed their gadget, pupils must now use their persuasive skills to promote and sell their gadget on the black market. This challenge is to create a TV advert for their gadget, packed with persuasive language and dynamic delivery. Pupils can film each other, evaluate their performance and the level of their communication skills. Pupils will need to prepare a script, practise learning their lines and hone their camera skills. No mean feat!

## Test 7: 'The 'fitness' test

Download Secret Message 7 from the resource page

Alex, unbeknown to himself, had been in training for his future career throughout his entire life. His uncle, Ian Rider, had given him many experiences and skills from scuba-diving and rock climbing, even to becoming a black belt in karate. Once recruited by MI6, he went through extensive SAS training to prepare him for his first mission. Not the most pleasurable experience of his life!

Your pupils' mission is to design the ultimate assault course. Encourage them to take an inventory of all the equipment available in school and in groups, design an assault course to test the fitness of even the most experienced agent. Perhaps add elements of circuit training: numbers of repetitions, times expected etc. They will have to try it out for effectiveness obviously and even perhaps introduce an element of competition...

## Test 8: 'The 'research' test

Download Secret Message 8 from the resource page

The life of an agent is not all glamour and action. Even the most glamorous agents have other elements to their job. Observation, research, compiling profiles, planning etc. are all expectations of the special agent's role. Project files are an important part of the planning process, whether it is compiling research into the layout of a foreign embassy or the assassination background file for an enemy agent. *Keep your friends close and your enemies closer* is a classic motto but let's start with our friends. Would you want to work for an employer who you didn't know anything about? Or go for a job interview without researching your interviewer? This challenge concentrates on the skill of research. Can pupils create a TOP SECRET report on the famous organisation that wants to recruit them – MI6?

Use the internet, the Alex Rider website and as many of the Alex Rider books as possible to compile a report on MI6. This might include the history of the organisation, key figures; past and present, past missions and location or anything else the pupils want to include about this mysterious secret institution. Mrs Jones might be intrigued to know what you find out about her...

## Test 9: 'The 'code-breaker' test

Download Secret Message 9 from the resource page

A secret agent is just that ... '*secret*'. The ability to go unnoticed, to keep huge secrets from friends and family, to maintain entire alternative identities and exist in what seems at times to be a parallel world is the challenge an agent takes on. But how to prepare for such a role? Secret identities, clandestine meetings and messages are an integral part of a special agent's world. The final challenge seeks to begin the process of preparation.

Code making and breaking has always been an element of an agent's training. The most famous code maker was of course Morse but so many other codes exist. Research with your pupils this fascinating ancient area and tradition.

1. Native American Sioux Indian symbols and Meanings

<http://www.warpaths2peacepipes.com/native-american-symbols/symbols-and-meanings.htm>

2. The history of the famous American, Samuel **Morse** himself

<http://www.wrvmuseum.org/morsecodehistory.htm>

3. Aboriginal signs and symbols

[http://www.aboriginal-dreamtime.net2go.info/Aboriginal/Aboriginal\\_Symbole.htm](http://www.aboriginal-dreamtime.net2go.info/Aboriginal/Aboriginal_Symbole.htm)

4. Egyptian Hieroglyphics

<http://discoveringegypt.com/egyptian-hieroglyphic-writing/>

Now encourage the pupils to use their knowledge to come up with their own secret code.

Once designed and worked out, they can practise sending messages to each other to see if their fellow recruits can 'crack the code'!

Here are some simple example ideas for code creation:

- Take a message and write it backwards but change where the finger spaces would normally go
- Take the alphabet and create your own versions using different letters – make sure you keep the copy to help you translate!
- Pair up the letters in each word and then in pairs reverse them
- Assign a special symbol to each letter – just like Morse did

The pupils will no doubt come up with their own inventive ways of creating codes

If you really want to have some fun, teach the pupils Morse code:

<http://www.learnmorsecode.com/>

<http://morsecode.scphillips.com/jtranslator.html>

You might even want to revise what you know about electrical circuits and create your own Morse operation with small lamps and switches!

### **Your Mission is now complete.**

Applications are pending and successful recruits will be contacted personally. They will have to sign the Official Secrets Act, so you may never know how many of your class are now members of MI6, but rest assured your government will be for ever grateful for the role you have played in the recruitment process.

Please destroy all instructions and paperwork relating to your mission on completion, or this document may well self-destruct...