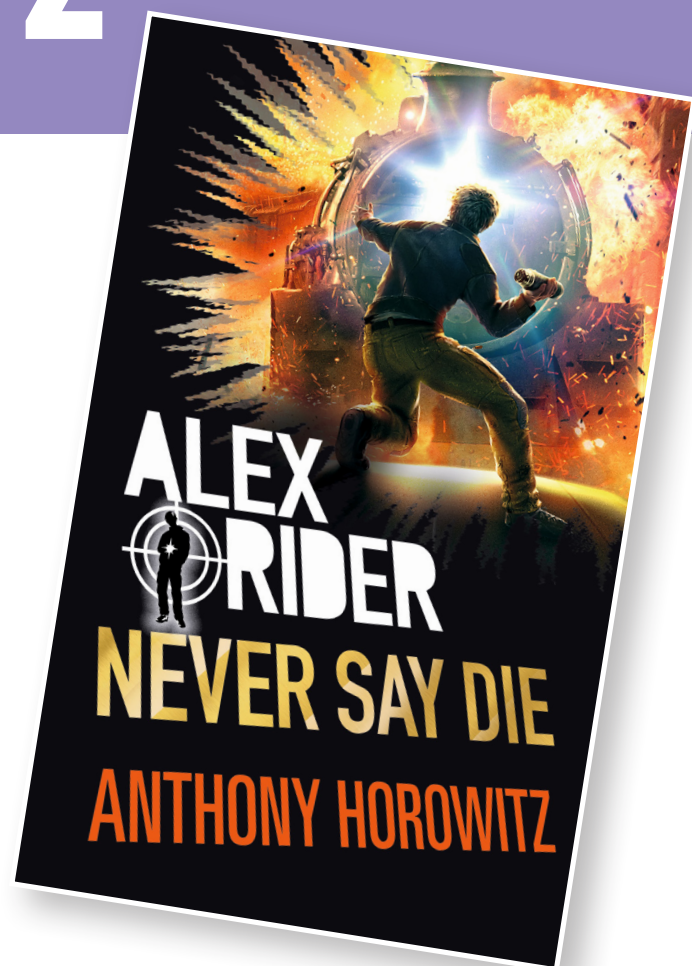


A National Literacy Trust resource

Never Say Die

by **ANTHONY
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A literacy-based
transition resource
for Years 6 and 7



CONTENTS

Introduction.....	page 3
Themes to explore.....	page 4
Transition overview.....	page 6
Transition project ideas.....	page 8
Key Stage 2 activities.....	page 10
School library activities.....	page 15
Key Stage 3 activities.....	page 18
Celebration ideas.....	page 21
And finally.....	page 22

INTRODUCTION

The much anticipated next instalment in the Alex Rider series, *Never Say Die*, has finally arrived and for fans of the series it was worth the wait, with enough action and suspense to sink a battleship!

Never Say Die tracks teen super-spy Alex Rider, as he searches for his cherished friend and confidante, Jack Starbright. However, his mission quickly becomes entangled with the twists and turns of a dark criminal operation, ensuring action and adventure are lurking ominously around every corner. Whether your students are long-standing fans of the Alex Rider series or new to the books, *Never Say Die* will hook them in from the first chapter.

To celebrate the launch of *Never Say Die*, Anthony Horowitz is holding a live-streamed fan event between 14.00 and 15.00 on Thursday 15 June 2017. Anthony Horowitz Live will include a reading and a fan Q&A session. You can watch live via the [Alex Rider Facebook page](#) and submit your questions to the author. If you were unable to tune in on the day, the video is available to watch on the [National Literacy Trust website](#) and on [Alexrider.com](#).

This resource has been created to support primary and secondary practitioners to deliver an exciting transition project, complementing the live event, although not depending on it. It features ideas which focus on the plot's themes, characters and the range of international settings within *Never Say Die*. However, if you are not in a position to run a transition project, the wealth of activities include those which could be run as standalone activities, as part of a sequence of lessons or in the library at lunchtime or after school.

Whether you deliver a full-scale transition project, or a simple one-off lesson, this book will be sure to allow your students to achieve a range of curriculum outcomes and promote reading for enjoyment simultaneously. Given the abundance of plot and sub-plot themes arising from the story, it can be used to meet English and other subject objectives, both in the classroom and in the library.

In this resource, we start by exploring some of the book's overarching themes, followed by an overview of the importance of successful transition. These sections provide a context for the wealth of practical ideas which then make up the remainder of the toolkit.

The Key Stage 2 (KS2) activities are mostly English and drama-based, giving students the opportunity to develop their understanding of and engagement with the book. The Key Stage 3 (KS3) activities then focus on a cross-curricular approach, involving as many subject staff as possible. With sessions being delivered at the beginning of the new academic year, the project will give students an opportunity to get to know their new teachers, against the backdrop of a familiar book.

However, please note this approach is not intended as a rigid structure and any of the ideas featured can be used in Year 6 or Year 7. We have also included a range of ideas which could be run by school library staff, whom we know will be a key partner in your project.

THEMES TO EXPLORE

Through Alex's journey to find Jack, the young reader is provided with an insight into the dark underworld of criminal organisations and the perilous role of agents to thwart and foil their malicious plots. The activities in this resource are inspired by themes, such as these, which underpin *Never Say Die's* multi-faceted story. If you are looking for further ideas or stimulus for conversations about the book, this is a good place to start for inspiration.

A criminal underworld

Students may have heard of criminal organisations such as the mafia. Against the backdrop of a fictional story, this novel provides an unthreatening insight into the minds of criminal masterminds, the Grimaldi twins. Discussing these characters and their motivations, may provide a stimulus to help students to develop their understanding in this area.

Riches and luxury

Wealth is an ongoing theme which saturates this story, particularly money earned through criminal activities. From the turbulent events at the luxurious Villa Siciliana (chapter 11), to the violence erupting at the super-yacht Quicksilver (chapter 9), to Dragana's thirst for riches which ultimately led to her demise (chapter 11), lavish lifestyles are entangled with greed and power. Did the characters' wealth lead to their power or was it the other way around? Why do these characters crave riches and luxury?

The Secret Intelligence Service (MI6)

MI6 always seem to be working meticulously in the background to protect both Alex and the safety of those in danger, namely the 52 school children. Although this is a fictional story, the SIS is a key organisation in this country which is working to make the UK a safe place to live. Given the current climate, this book may be a means to begin to develop students' understanding of our intelligence services and the vital role they play.

Transport and journeys

Alex makes a number of journeys throughout the book, to a number of different countries and towns: San Francisco in America; Siwa in Egypt; Saint-Tropez in France and to Oxford, Stratford-upon-Avon and the Brecon Beacons in the UK. He also encounters a number of types of transport: plane, train, helicopter, coach and car. During these journeys, he crosses a range of landscapes, both rural and urban, which make for interesting discussion and comparison. To develop this theme, you might like to explore the parallel journey which Alex's character makes during the book: the school boy who returns to the role of secret agent, accepting towards the end of the story that this is his destiny. Do the physical journeys he makes in any way mirror the evolution of his character?

Solving puzzles

Like any spy worthy of his or her stripes, Alex is particularly adept at detecting and solving puzzles. The email from Jack, the Henry V reference and the BENZENE container label are all examples of his prowess in this field. This recurring theme could provide an opportunity to discuss the skills needed to problem-solve in this way and how they are vital if you want to become a spy. You could even give students examples to try and solve themselves. Alexrider.com features lots of puzzles and codebreaking games for students to try.

- 1. Disguise** There are several examples where disguises are used by characters. For example, Alex escapes from the hotel in Egypt in disguise, dresses as a ghost to fool Frankie Stallone, and Dragana also accesses the air show in disguise. In addition, crimes are also disguised more subtly throughout the book, for example the concealed wire in the Grimaldis' roses. You could not only discuss these examples, but also whether there are metaphorical disguises which appear. For example would you consider Alex a spy disguised as a schoolboy or vice versa?
- 2. Gadgets** There are a number of hi-tech gadgets that are used throughout the book and are sure to spark the interest of your students. The gadgets in the MI6 car would be particularly exciting to explore and discuss whether this type of technology is a reality or belongs to the world of fictional spy novels.

3. Surveillance and tracking technology As you might expect in a spy novel, the story advances on several occasions thanks to the wonders of surveillance and tracking technology. Alex is recovered from Needle Point after being tracked. Shadia fits Alex's computer with tracking technology. The source of Jack's email is tracked thanks to advanced technology. These examples could provide an interesting discussion surrounding the advancement of this type of technology, but also the ethics of their implementation alongside an individual's right to privacy.

A spotlight on characterisation

The characters in *Never Say Die* are both complex and intriguing and there are a number of themes which are developed throughout the book related to Alex and the other main characters. Many of these themes are embedded within the activities suggested in this resource and could be explored further through your English lessons.

- 1. Addiction to danger and risk-taking** Many of the characters have a rather blasé attitude to danger and risk-taking. Where Alex is concerned, he is fully aware of the dangers he faces and the risks he takes in order to fulfil a mission. Could you say that these characters are addicted to 'life on the edge' and explore what it is that drives them towards dangerous situations? The following quote (page 372) will support exploration of this theme: "That's exactly what I mean. I warned you that danger can become a drug and it seems to me that in your case, it's too late. You're already hooked." (Mrs Jones to Alex)
- 2. The role of 'family'** Although Alex's parents are no longer alive, he does have a number of people around the world who look out for him or look after him, for example, Colonel Manzour, Mrs Jones, Edward Pleasure and the closest person he has to a mother, Jack Starbright. However, do these characters have his best interest at heart? Could they really be considered his guardians or even family?
- 3. Moral conscience** Crimes are committed in abundance throughout the novel by characters such as Dragana Novak (and her cousin), the Grimaldi twins, the Vospers and even Alex himself (trespassing on the yacht). Are the perpetrators of these crimes affected by their actions? Do they have any regrets? Do any of the characters battle with their moral conscience in this respect?
- 4. Self-identity** Alex's self-identity is constantly changing throughout the book. In some ways, he craves the simple life of a schoolboy, but knows his destiny will always lead him back to his secret life as an agent. How does he view himself at different stages in the story? Which external factors shape his self-identity?
- 5. Survival** Survival is a key theme for characters in the story: Alex, the school children, Jack and, in a different way, the Grimaldi twins. How do these different characters 'survive' (or not) and which actions and decisions demonstrate this?
- 6. The transition from childhood to adulthood** By the end of the story, it seems as though Alex has become an adult. Mrs Jones states, "We can't keep on treating you like a child" (page 372). At what point does this transition take place? Which events define this passage into adulthood? Or is there a part of Alex that is still just a London schoolboy?

There are of course other themes related to the book's plot and characters which could be explored. One of these themes relates to the tragic terrorist events which have taken place in this country in recent times. This is a reality which understandably can worry children. Fiction books and stories are often a way into discussing these sensitive subjects and provide students with a safe place to discuss how a character is feeling and how they might overcome their anxieties. In *Never Say Die*, we learn about the important role of the Secret Intelligence Services. Developing children's understanding regarding how people are working hard to protect us, and how these events are rare, will hopefully reassure them and provide a starting point for a conversation. Other support materials around this subject include:

- **Newsround - Advice if you're upset by the news**
- **After the event: supporting children after a frightening event** by Richard Bailie, Lucy Serpell and David Trickey (child psychologists)

"Alex lay where he was, recovering his strength, preparing himself for what was to come. He would have one chance."

TRANSITION OVERVIEW

The journey from primary to secondary school can be both an exciting and daunting prospect for Year 6 students. Supporting our young people as they transition to secondary school is therefore vital in ensuring they get their secondary school career off to a good start.

Key Stage 3: the wasted years? (Ofsted, September 2015) makes a strong case for transition. It recommends that schools should:

- ensure that transition from Key Stage 2 to 3 focuses as much on pupils' academic needs as it does on their pastoral needs
- create better cross-partnerships with primary schools to ensure that Key Stage 3 teachers build on pupils' prior knowledge, understanding and skills
- have literacy and numeracy strategies in Key Stage 3 that ensure pupils build on their prior attainment in Key Stage 2 in these crucial areas.

This literacy-based project provides an opportunity to build upon all of these key areas. To expand upon the criteria above, a project such as this one should also feature the following ingredients which are also essential to any transition project:

- involve as many subject staff as possible, as well as the school librarian
- provide an interesting stimulus for summer holiday activities which keep the project alive
- include physical project/work books that can be taken up to secondary school and developed further
- give students the chance to fully explore the stimulus in Year 6, so that they are already very familiar with the context of project tasks in Year 7
- jointly plan and assess students' work, as well as evaluating the success of the project.

We have all read about highly successful transition projects that exemplify these success criteria and understand their benefits. However, it is important to acknowledge that setting up and running a project of this nature is not without its challenges. Below we have described possible barriers, with a suggested solution for each.

Challenge	Suggested solution
Lack of time. The final half term in Year 6 is very busy with productions, residential trips and sports days.	Scale the project according to the time and resources that you have available to you. You can always expand its scope next year. It can be as simple as getting Year 6s and Year 7s to each write a book review and then hold a giant reading club with, what will be, Year 7s and 8s in the new academic year, discussing those reviews and opinions.
Primary schools feed into multiple secondary schools.	The ambitious solution is to run a cross-area project involving all of a secondary school's feeder schools. If this is not possible, then encourage prospective Year 7 students who did not take part in the project in Year 6 to read the book over the summer holidays, maybe by borrowing it from the local library. Finally, provide students who have not read the book by September with a synopsis and read extracts to them in tutor time, assembly or in lessons.
Hard to engage staff at the beginning of the academic year when they already have lots to get through and achieve.	Work with teachers to ensure that curriculum objectives can be met through the project, so that teachers know that this project is not an add-on and that there will be opportunities for students to meet objectives in their programme of study.

Students have lost interest in/forgotten the stimulus by September.

Encourage them to do some of the summer holiday activities suggested on page 8. Make sure that parents are aware and understand the purpose of these activities. Then, at the start of Year 7, start the project again with a 'wow event' to reignite any wavering enthusiasm.

We hope that with the support of these materials, against the backdrop of an action-packed book which will be sure to engage even the most reluctant of readers, you will feel equipped to undertake a transition project, whatever its size or scope.

"He sat back and closed his eyes as the engines roared and the plane jolted forward. Jack was alive. He was sure of it. He was going to find her."

TRANSITION PROJECT IDEAS

The following sections of this resource outline what a transition project might look like for your school. The overall project idea is based on your students becoming apprentice secret agents and completing a series of missions in order to graduate as fully fledged spies, just like Alex! These missions are to be completed in the summer term and the autumn term, with the opportunity for bonus point missions during the summer holidays.

The KS2 activities section focuses on getting to know *Never Say Die*, mainly through creative English and dramabased activities. The school library section shows all the different ways in which your school library can contribute to the project, whilst encouraging students to read for enjoyment more broadly and creating a wholeschool reading culture. These ideas could be run by both primary and secondary schools. Finally, the KS3 section introduces a more cross-curricular approach, with ideas for PSHE, maths, science, modern foreign languages, computing, art & design, music and PE. Of course, it may not be possible for all of these departments to get involved, but the ideas are there if they do need persuading how relevant the project is for their subject too!

Importantly, ideas from the KS2 section can be adapted for use in Year 7 in English lessons and a cross-curricular approach could be very successful in Year 6. The project structure is flexible and can be changed to suit your project.

Project books

As mentioned in the previous section, it is important for each student to have a project book for the duration of the activities. This is a scrapbook and presentation book for all their writing, a space for illustrations and quotes, as well as photographs of activities in action. If you do choose to take on the idea of students completing missions, they will also need an area in the scrapbook to display a menu of their missions and record signatures once completed. Project books don't have to be fancy or expensive. They could simply be A4 sized exercise books. But they do need to provide students with the space to be creative and personalise them, so that they look and feel different from a normal exercise book.

Summer holiday activities

It is important for students to be given the opportunity to undertake related project activities during the summer holidays, to maintain momentum and interest in the book and project, if they wish to. Completed activities could give them the chance to earn secret agent bonus points and the project book would be an ideal space to record the fun they have had. Below are several suggestions, as if written directly for students. We are sure you will be able to think of many more.

- **Secret agent treasure hunt.** Write and set up a secret treasure hunt in your garden, with clues relating to the *Never Say Die* plot. For example, the clue "Go to the flower which the Grimaldi twins used to kill Dragana Novak", would lead your friends to your parents' rose bush.
- **Role play and dressing up.** Make secret agent costumes – this could be as simple as wearing all black and creating a gadget belt. Following this, take on the role of secret agents and act out some of the scenes with your friends.
- **Design and build a secret agent device or gadget.** Take inspiration from secret agent Ben Daniels' Vehicle 7K and design a gadget or device that would enable Ben and Alex to catch the coach before Operation Steel Claw takes place. Or design a gadget or device that would make Alex, Jack and the children's escape from Smoke City a little smoother!
- **Ordering in a café.** Some of you will be visiting France during the summer holidays. Why not order a peppermint tea in a café (just like Mrs Jones), or a croissant, fruit and cheese (just like Alex in the bakery and market). You could imagine you are in Saint-Tropez, just like the book's characters. If you are not going to France, you may need to use your imagination and role play these scenarios in your back garden!
- **Read the entire Alex Rider series!** In addition to *Never Say Die*, did you know there are ten other titles in the Alex Rider series? Why not challenge yourself to try and read the entire series over the summer holidays? Titles can be reserved from your local library (sometimes for a small fee). Or you and your friends could club your pocket money together and purchase a set of books between you and you could then swap them over the summer break. Serious secret agent points to be earned here!

- **Design a card game.** Design your own cards, one for each of the main characters. Allocate each character on the card points for a set of personality traits, for example: intelligence; agility; problem-solving skills; kindness; driving skills. Play against your friends and see who can win all the cards.
- **Dear diary...** Write a diary in the style of Alex Rider, describing all the things you have been doing over the holidays.
- **Alex Rider survival kit.** If Alex Rider was stranded in Smoke City again, what would he include in his survival kit to ensure a smoother and less risky escape with the children? You could make a survival kit and take a photograph of it or draw one directly in your project book.
- **Top up your secret agent skillset.** Alex Rider is at the top of his game when it comes to his secret agent abilities. What would you need to do to improve your spy skills? Play memory games (such as Kim's game), read information books about honing your spy skills and complete riddle books to improve your problem-solving abilities.

"Siwa. The location of Razim's desert fort. The place where Jack had died. Even thinking about it made him feel sick."



Alex Rider™ and Boy with Torch Logo™ © 2015 Stormbreaker Productions Ltd

KEY STAGE 2 ACTIVITIES

As described in the section above, ideally students would need to get to know *Never Say Die* inside out, before breaking up for the summer holidays. Therefore, this would mean students having read the book themselves. The easiest and cheapest way to do this would be to read it to the class. But let's face it, we don't live in an ideal world! If you are not able to read the book with your class by the time you break up, then you can still run some of the following activities, by focusing on key extracts/chapters collectively.

If you are going down the route of students completing a series of Secret Agent missions to become super spies, then your first step is to meet with the Year 7 teachers and decide what these are going to be.

The following sequence of activities, based on the Secret Agent approach, is designed to meet objectives in the English curriculum, including reading, writing, speaking and listening objectives. They are divided into three sections:

- An explosive start! – hooking them in
- Delving deeper into the book – developing reading comprehension
- Completing missions – writing and drama activities

These ideas could work in Year 6 or Year 7, although ideally it would be best for the first two sections of the activity sequence to take place in Year 6.

An explosive start! – hooking them in

From the first lesson, try and grab the students' attention so that they become enthused about the project. After all, this enthusiasm needs to last all the way to Year 7. If Year 7 teachers can attend this launch, then even better! Announce the project in a special assembly and then go straight to the first lesson.

To engage students, try to make sure that you take an experiential route for that first lesson. When we suggest 'an explosive start', we are of course referring to the explosion of enthusiasm you will witness. We do not suggest that you create a real explosion! A selection of spy-themed ideas is listed below.

- Taking inspiration from Jack's cryptic email, set students a series of riddles to solve. For example, what is all around us and broken when we say its name? The answer is of course, silence! As groups solve each riddle, ask them to identify one of the letters in each word. Finally, challenge students to collate all of these letters in a particular order, where they make up a word or phrase related to *Never Say Die*. Check out the Spy Academy section at AlexRider.com for more ideas.
- Set up a spy-themed treasure hunt. 'Dress' your playground or field as a crime scene. Through a treasure hunt, with clues related to the book's plot and characters, students must complete the treasure hunt and discover the perpetrator of the crime. This is like a book quiz, just more active and fun!
- Challenge students to create their own spy persona, complete with a spy name, special talents and preferred gadgets. They could then make themselves an identity badge, to be kept for the duration of the project and, of course, so that students can gain access to the MI6 building!
- Set up a series of team-building challenges on the field, for example to pass a hoop around a circle without breaking hands. Put students into small groups and set them the challenge of completing these challenges. Not quite SAS training, but it will require them to work together effectively, an essential skill for any budding secret agent.
- Give each table a basket of objects, including everyday items, such as a colander or a wooden honey dipper! Set students the challenge of re-imagining the items as essential Alex Rider style-gadgets. You may need to give some examples to get their imaginations going. You could extend this activity by then asking the groups to create and act out role play scenarios which demonstrate the gadget in action!

At some point in the lesson you will need to explain the project to your students. You may have already held a special assembly to announce it. But if not, the first lesson would be an opportunity to explain the activity in more detail, hand out project books and for them to ask questions. Also, if the Year 7 teachers were able to visit, it is a chance to talk to and meet them as well. You could make the announcement extra special by dressing up as a spy (head to toe black and a gadget belt) and delivering the announcement secretly!

At this point, students will be raring to go and your project will be underway.

Delving deeper into the book – developing reading comprehension

With their enthusiasm for the project ignited, it is now the time for students to immerse themselves in the world of Alex Rider and Operation Steel Claw in order to give them the tools to successfully complete their missions later in the project. The following activities will provide the opportunity to develop their comprehension of the book, as well as developing an internal bank of key vocabulary.

- **Starter discussions.** This starter activity could be an initial discussion where students explore their overall views on the book/an extract of the book in groups, using Aidan Chambers' *Tell Me* grid:

Likes	Dislikes
What did you like about this book? Why? What especially caught your attention? Were there any aspects you would have liked more of?	Was there anything you disliked? Why? How would you have liked this part to have been written?
Puzzles	Connections
Was there anything that puzzled you? Do you have any questions you would want to ask Anthony Horowitz? Was there anything that took you completely by surprise?	Were there any patterns or themes that you noticed? Were there any connections that you made with real life or any other books you have read?

Students should then share their thoughts during a whole-class discussion, recording each different section on a large piece of poster paper which can be displayed for future reference.

Conscience alley

This drama activity can be applied to any scenario in the book, where a character is facing a decision or moral dilemma. For example, should Alex leave the US and travel to Egypt in his search for Jack? Prior to the activity, students should discuss the different possible answers to the question, with reasons why they should take one action or another. Then, the class should split in two and form two lines, facing each other. One person should be chosen as the character in question and they should then walk between the two lines, as their fellow students tell them what they should do, with reasons. The student should keep walking, taking in as many of the views as possible. You could repeat this with several students, as they will all hear different things as they walk down the aisle. Following this, they can share what they heard with the whole class and what they would then do if they were the character. Other key questions could include: Should Alex enter the Villa Siciliana? Should they rescue the children or wait for the authorities? Should Alex walk away from MI6 for good? Take photos of the activity for students to stick in their project book.

Jigsaw talk

This activity allows students to focus on one aspect of the book as a group and then share those collective views with others in new groups, before returning to their original groups to share what they have heard elsewhere.

- Divide the class into five or six groups. There should be as many students in each group as there are groups. Therefore, as you are likely to have more than 25 students, assign the extra children beyond 25 a partner and they effectively become one person when they move tables. Number each student in each group one to five. Then give each group a topic to discuss. Alternatively, you may like to focus on one question as a class. Why not use the questions in the school library section of this resource (reading group ideas)? For example, what are Alex's most positive and negative characteristics? Is Dragana Novak a villain or victim? Does MI6 manipulate Alex, as he suggests on page 372? Once

group discussions are drawing to a close, then send all the number ones to one table, all the number twos to another table, etc. At their new tables, they hear the ideas that came out of the original discussions. Finally, students return to their original groups and share what they have heard elsewhere. By pooling a wealth of ideas, they hear everyone's thoughts, without having to sit through a long whole-class discussion!

Book quiz

- Divide the class into groups and have fun with a book quiz about *Never Say Die*. Make it interesting by including different types of questions.
- Read quotes from the book and get students to work out who said them.
- What happened next? Describe an event in the book and students have to recall what happened next. You could give them multiple choice answers here.
- Provide a series of events from the book in a jumbled-up order. Students have to put them back in chronological order.
- True or false questions
- Take an extract of a setting description from the book and get students to match it to the appropriate setting: the US, England, Wales, Egypt or France. Only give them a snippet of information from which they have to deduce where Alex was at this point in the book.

Hot seating

This is a popular drama activity, which sees one of your students taking on the role of a main character in a book. The student acting out the role sits in the 'hot seat'. The rest of the class asks him/her questions and he/she must answer in role. If you have adult support in the classroom, this can work more effectively if you divide the class into two or three, to ensure as many students participate as possible. This becomes even more enjoyable if students in the 'hot seat' have props or accessories and if several children get to experience being interviewed. Discuss some of the answers being given and if appropriate in your class, allow members of the audience to call a time-out and challenge an answer given by a 'hot-seater'. Remember to take photos for your project books!

Vocabulary games

Anthony Horowitz's writing is brimming with beautiful, action-packed vocabulary which we hope your students will want to use in their writing. Therefore an important aspect of any project would be to play fun word games to support students in learning and internalising this language. You will undoubtedly have a raft of games up your sleeve that you play all the time with your class. Here are a few suggestions to add to that bank!

Roll it, do it

Give each group a die and display a slide with the following information:

1. Define
2. Use it in a sentence
3. Synonym
4. Antonym
5. Draw it
6. Act it out

Then give each group a pack of cards, each with a different key word from the novel. Choose words you hope they would use in their writing. In turn, students select a card and then role the die to determine which word-related activity they have to do.

Word bingo

Make a list of challenging words from the book which you feel you could easily define. Randomly distribute these across the bingo cards. Then play a game of class bingo, but instead of calling out the words, provide definitions and clues.

Matching pairs

An example of a pair for this version of the game includes the word on one card and its definition on the other card. Again, choose words which will challenge the children. Students can then play the game in the traditional way, taking it in turns to turn over the cards and find a match.

Word search

Set students the task of creating a word search for their partner to solve, featuring their chosen vocabulary from the book. You could give each student a photocopy of a chapter of the book for them to search through and find words they like and want to include.

Sort it!

To prepare this game, you need to choose about 25 words/phrases from the novel/extract you have chosen. Within your 25 words, you should have five groups of words. A group of words should all be related to each other, for example: conveyor belt; soundproof; smuggle; corrugated iron; swallowed up. In this example, all the words relate to the conveyor belt scene which they use to escape the coke works and get onto the coach. Give each group a pack of all the cards and set them the task of sorting the cards into groups, justifying their choices as they go.

Alternative reality

Choose key scenes from the book where events take a turn and as a class, discuss the impact of these events on the characters. For example, Alex is caught in the Villa Siciliana. Then set students the task of creating and acting out these scenes, imagining an alternative outcome. For example, imagine Alex isn't caught in the Villa. What would he have done next if he hadn't have been captured and taken to Needle Point?

Competing the missions – writing and drama activities

Having immersed themselves in the world of Alex Rider through some of the reading and drama activities described above, students will now be equipped to embark upon their secret agent missions which focus more on writing and production. In this section, you will find a series of ideas which could represent missions. They can all be adapted and you can add your own ideas in order to make the missions work for your class and the needs of your students.

The first set of ideas includes examples relating to some of the different text types. Being at the end of Year 6, your students will be more than familiar with the success criteria for each type of writing. Therefore, you may prefer to run a writing task over a couple of lessons, rather than undertake a unit of work. Also, the final stage of the writing process, presentation, will be key during this project. So make sure you allow plenty of time for students to write/type up their work for their project books, as well as for any illustrations or drawings.

- **Information text.** Students could research the Super Stallion helicopter and write an engaging text on its capabilities and functionality.
- **Instructions.** Students could write a guide entitled *How to become a teenage super-spy*, imagining it has been authored by Alex. Include stepbystep instructions detailing the skills you need to develop and the training process.
- **Letter writing.** Students could write a letter from one of the school children to Alex, thanking him for rescuing them.
- **Diary entry.** Students could write a diary entry, as if penned by one of the school children, describing what happened in Smoke City from their point of view. This is an important exercise for them to try and see events in the book from a different character's perspective.
- **Newspaper article.** Students could imagine that the kidnapping story has broken and hit the news. They could then write a newspaper article, including quotes and if they choose, include bias and/or exaggeration.
- **Narrative text.** There are lots of opportunities for creative writing through this novel. You might prefer to offer open-ended story writing opportunities. However, if students need guidance, you could suggest they write: an alternative-ending story; one of the character's back stories; or the Smoke City experience, told from the point of view of one of the children.

- **Poetry.** Students could write poems about the dramatic settings which feature in *Never Say Die*. It would then be interesting to compare a student's poem about for example, the beautiful and glamorous Saint-Tropez, compared with the derelict and rat-infested coke works.
- **Playscript.** Students could write a script for an interview between the police and the school's drama teacher, where he is able to recount his experience of being captured and then rescued by our teenage hero.
- **Persuasive text.** Students could write an email from Colonel Manzour/Edward Pleasure/Mrs Jones persuading Alex to return to the US and his life as a high school student.

The next series of ideas is creative and fun, involving writing, art and drama. They would all be perfect for creating displays in your classroom and around school, as well as students' project books.

- **Spy survival kit.** Challenge students to create a spy survival kit. They could make one up and then take a picture of it or simply draw the items they would include. Next, they should write a description, followed by an explanation as to why they have chosen each item.
- **Storyboard/comic strip.** Students could create a storyboard or comic strip depicting a scene or one of the chapters from the book. The challenge will be for them to interpret a raft of words in the book through speech bubbles and simple illustrations!
- **Map production.** Students could draw, label and annotate a map of Smoke City, the fort in Siwa or perhaps the boat *Quicksilver*. They will need to review the relevant section of the book to identify and make notes about the appropriate descriptions.
- **Alex meets his new nemesis.** Students could write a dialogue between the series' newest character (introduced at the end of *Never Say Die*) and Alex Rider the first time they meet. Encourage them to choose an intriguing setting, such as a backstreet café in Rio de Janeiro. If they worked on the dialogue in pairs, they could then act this out to the rest of the class.
- **New vacancy!** Students could write a job description for a new role that has just come on the job market. They could choose to advertise for a new MI6 recruit, or on the other side of the coin, advertise for a new assassin for the newly reformed Scorpia.
- **Design character profile cards.** Provide students with a template to create profile cards for each of the characters, detailing their appearance, skill set and special talents! As suggested in the school library section, they could also then turn these into a card game, by adding points to a set of defined characteristics.
- **Film-of-the-book trailer.** Students could imagine that *Never Say Die* is being turned into a film. They could then create a film trailer using simple presentation software. Ensure they spend time focusing on the quality of the script, as well as the fancy transitions between the images!
- **Reporting from Smoke City.** Ask students to imagine that the events in Smoke City have now hit the media. In small groups, they could write and act out a scene where the drama is being reported. Characters could include: an on-the-scene reporter; a presenter in the studio and a witness/character being interviewed.
- **Debate it!** Set up a class debate where students consider questions such as: Are MI6 being responsible in recruiting Alex at such a young age? If you have adult support in the classroom, it would be better to split the class in half and run more than one debate, to make sure that everyone can participate. Give students time to prepare for the debate and form their opinions, and recruit some students to manage/chair the debate.
- **Themed spy day.** You might like to run a themed Alex Rider day, where students come to school dressed as spies and take part in a carousel of activities throughout the day.

As well as all of the ideas listed in this section, you will also find other creative activities in the school library section below. These ideas would work just as well in the classroom and will help you to promote your classroom reading culture!

"Then he took a breath. The air might be canned but he had never tasted anything more delicious."

SCHOOL LIBRARY ACTIVITIES

Your school library and school librarian will play a key role in your *Never Say Die* project activities and will undoubtedly be keen to use the opportunity to promote reading for pleasure, and the library's services to your new Year 7 students. You could even tie in their induction to the library with the project. Furthermore, if you don't have the capacity to run a full-scale project, your librarian may be able to run some of the activities as standalone sessions. Their expertise will be invaluable and sharing their ideas and knowledge with primary colleagues will also be of great benefit to the project.

Please note:

- All uses of the term 'school library' are intended to include the Learning Resource Centre
- All uses of the term 'school librarian' are intended to include the Learning Resource Centre Manager or the person who is responsible for your library

Reading groups

Never Say Die and the Alex Rider series more broadly provide the perfect stimulus for a book or reading group. Below are some example questions for stimulating discussion, as well as suggestions to make your session extra special.

Possible questions

- In the long-term, could Alex be happier returning to life as fulltime student and distancing himself from MI6?
- Does MI6 manipulate Alex, as he suggests on page 372?
- Which are Alex's strongest skills as a secret agent? Are there any skills he still needs to improve as he progresses in his career in your opinion?
- Does Alex make decisions with his heart or his head? Can you give examples?
- Was the destiny of the Grimaldi twins sealed the moment they were born into a Mafia family?
- Is Jack a mother figure to Alex? How?
- What are Alex's most positive and negative characteristics?
- Is Dragana Novak a villain or victim?
- Were you satisfied with how the story ended? Would you change any of the final moments if you were the author?
- Which part of the book did you find the most exhilarating? Why?

To add extra excitement to your session, you could:

- Hold the session in a secret location, giving students clues in advance of where it is being held
- Play French or Egyptian music and try foods from these countries
- Give students who sign up in advance a secret agent password which they have to say or perform as they arrive at the session
- Hold quick ice-breaker activities at the start of the session to help them get to know each other. For example, they could invent a secret agent or evil Scorpia villain name in pairs
- Give each student character cards when they arrive and get them to play the yes/no game in pairs where they have to guess which character card their partner has. Alternatively, they could take the role of a given character for the first ten minutes of the reading group and everyone has to guess who is who. If given advance warning, they could even dress up as their character!

Competitions

Competitions will be sure to generate excitement, especially if there is a sought-after prize up for grabs. You could set the competition whilst the children are still in Year 6, giving them the opportunity to work on their entry over the summer holidays. Following this, time could be given during tutor time at the start of term to finish, discuss or even pitch entries to their new tutor (if one entry is being entered per class, for example).

- **Design a new Never Say Die book cover.** Set students the task of designing their own alternative book cover, based on their interpretation of the story
- **Create character profile cards.** Provide students with a template to design a profile card for their favourite character for a MI6 Operation Steel Claw display board
- **Codebreakers needed.** Set students the task of cracking a code you have created based around the book. You could imagine that the code has been sent from rogue exScorpia members who are attempting to reform the organisation. Cracking the code is essential to stopping them in their tracks. All correct entries could be entered into a prize draw
- **Write a new chapter for the book.** Set students the challenge of writing a new chapter for the book. For example, they could write another scene depicting Alex's life at the US high school. An alternative could be how the children are rescued by the authorities once the other side of the tunnel. This could form part of a writing group run by your school library
- **Design a book trailer.** Use presentation software to design a trailer for the book, including peer reviews, quotes and teasers. The winner could have their trailer run on screens around the school

Never Say Die displays

Displays themed around *Never Say Die* will be sure to catch students' attention when in the library at the start of term. The following ideas range from being quick and easy to implement, to being more involved and requiring more planning.

- **Bellybands, shelf talkers and other ways to display book reviews.** Encourage students to review the novel and post their reviews in the library at the start of term. Alternatively, Year 6 teachers could do this activity and send secondary school librarians the reviews before schools break up. Reviews could be printed on strips of paper and wrapped around all copies of *Never Say Die* (bellybands). They could be printed on folded card and tucked under books on spy/action genre shelves, as shelf-talkers. Or librarians could create a dedicated display for the reviews
- **Alex Rider screensavers.** If you have computer screens in your library, then why not use the Alex Rider website (www.alexrider.com) as your screensaver?
- **Transition project display.** Collect some of the most eye-catching work completed by students in Year 6 and make a display somewhere prominent in the library
- **Character profile cards.** Get students to create profile cards for each of the characters. Enlarge them and make a display somewhere prominent in the library
- **Tweet book reviews.** Set students the challenge of reviewing *Never Say Die* in 140 characters or less, the length of a tweet. Enlarge these and make a display in the library. Encourage students to include hashtags in their tweet
- **Spy-themed bookshelf or carousel.** Collate all the library's books from the spy/detective genre and make a themed bookshelf or carousel to showcase other series and authors that students could try
- **Library makeover.** A more ambitious idea would be to give your library a spy-themed makeover. This could include: the outline of a figure on the floor, cordoned off with police tape; a carousel full of spy themed books; quotes from *Never Say Die* displayed around the library, as well as the ideas listed above

Raising the profile of your Never Say Die event

The following ideas will help to raise the profile of a *Never Say Die* event or the transition project more broadly.

- Create a PowerPoint presentation with quotes from the book and details of your activity or event. Run it on a loop on your library screen (if you have one) or on a school screen. Quotes might include:
 - "You're 15 years old now, Alex. Things have changed. We can't keep on treating you like a child."
(Mrs Jones, page 372)

- "Alex Rider," he said in an exaggerated Arabic accent. "You are a very naughty boy." (Colonel Manzour, page 92)
- "The location of Razim's desert fort. The place where Jack had died. Even the thought of it made him feel sick." (page 62)
- "That was it. No sign-off. No image. No link. No explanation. But Alex stared at the screen as if he had been electrocuted." (page 40)
- "It was if he was being snapped into pieces. The blood was already rushing to his head as he hung upside down and it was only with difficulty that he managed to snatch some air into his mouth and breathe." (page 361)
- Use your school's social media channels and website to promote the project and the book. For example, challenge students to advertise or review the book in less than 140 characters for the school Twitter account
- Display a mysterious spy-themed symbol around school, directing students to the library to find out more about the book or project
- Challenge your Alex Rider fans to put together a short film or to design a film trailer showcasing the book or project
- In your reading group, brainstorm all the key words which reflect students' views on the book. Turn these into a word cloud poster and display them around the school

Collaboration with other Departments

Ideally, as many subject areas as possible will be involved in the *Never Say Die* project. In advance of the project, speak to Year 7 teachers about the key learning areas which classes will be exploring and put together themed book boxes to support this learning, if practical and possible. Alternatively, create a spy-themed book box which could be circulated around the different tutor groups during registration. Finally, through your school communication channels, explain to staff the resources that are available to students for the project and the events that you are running, so that they are able to promote them early in the term.

"She took a file out of her top drawer of her desk and laid it in front of her. There was a single word on the cover. NIGHTSHADE."

KEY STAGE 3 ACTIVITIES

As students enter Year 7, they will be taking in lots of new information, making new friends and crucially, navigating their way around a maze of classrooms. Therefore, the familiarity of a text they know well and have hopefully enjoyed will be reassuring and confidence-boosting.

All of the subject ideas in this section are suggested for KS3 and could form part of the series of missions that students have to complete to graduate as a secret agent. They are all linked to the national curriculum, but could be adapted and undertaken in Year 6 as well. Finally, you may be looking to deliver a one-off session to Year 7 students. All of these ideas would still work well as standalone activities, if not part of a more established transition project.

PSHE/tutor time

Books are an excellent backdrop against which tutors and students can get to know each other. The ideas below are designed to bring about fruitful discussions where everyone can participate.

Students could create a "How to Survive Secondary School Guide", as if written by Alex Rider. This could be a small booklet or a joint class poster. It would provide the opportunity to discuss how it feels to be starting in a new school

- During a class discussion, explore the expression "growing up too fast" in the context of Alex taking on an adult career, exploring its advantages and disadvantages. Students should discuss whether they feel children grow up too fast nowadays and whether they feel more like children or adults as they start Year 7
- In *Never Say Die*, Alex has an unconventional family life, with the maternal figure in his life being more like a friend. Discuss how families are all different and what it feels like to be different
- Alex takes many risks throughout the book, particularly towards the end of the story, where he rescues the school children from the coke works. Discuss when risk-taking can be positive and negative, what a risk looks like and what to do if students are confronted with taking a risk that may present a potential danger to themselves or others
- This novel sees its main protagonist working in a career at a young age. Discuss with students what age they think children should start working (part time or full time) and how this practice has changed over history

Mathematics

While it may not be immediately obvious how *Never Say Die* links to mathematics, there are some possible interesting lessons related to one of the book's key themes... money!

- In the story, Alex uses British pounds, US dollars, Egyptian dollars and Euros. Students could convert an amount from one currency into another, for example, the cost of the Egyptian taxi ride in British pounds
- Operation Steel Claw was an expensive enterprise for the Grimaldi twins ("...just over 5 million pounds", page 292). Practise using large numbers and calculate how much 'each item' cost. You could invent listed items (such as paying their security guards) and either give them the cost of each, or ask them to estimate their value
- Discuss with students the ratio of adults to students on the coach initially (2:52) and how there would be more adults in real life. Based on real life requirements, give students different ratio combinations of adults to students to calculate, simplifying to their lowest form where possible
- In all the countries which Alex visits in *Never Say Die*, some use miles (the UK and US) and others use kilometres (France and Egypt). Invent distances for the different journeys Alex completes and challenge students to convert from the imperial to metric measure, or vice versa

Modern Foreign Languages (MFL)

Given the number of settings in different countries in the book, there really are endless ideas regarding how your MFL department could get involved. Below are a few suggestions.

In French lessons:

- learn vocabulary to describe Saint-Tropez
- undertake a mini-cultural study of Saint-Tropez (or the Côte d'Azur more broadly) and compare it with areas in the north of France (for example, Paris)

- Practise role-play scenarios related to Alex's time in France. This could include ordering in a café, checking in to a hotel or visiting the tourist office

Arabic, related to scenes set in Egypt:

- Learn how to greet people and introduce yourself in Arabic
- Do you have any Arabic speakers in the school that would be willing to visit your class and teach students key phrases or talk about the language more broadly?
- Look at the names of Egyptian towns/cities described in the book (Cairo, Siwa and Alexandria) and use a website such as Google Translate to prepare slides of these place names in Arabic. Students could then copy the Arabic letters and make posters of street signs

Humanities

There is a wealth of geographical and historical references entwined neatly within the plot of *Never Say Die* which could provide an interesting platform for a mini-study about one of the settings. Below is a selection of ideas which your history or geography department may be interested in exploring.

- The scenes set in Egypt could lend themselves to students being given the opportunity to learn about Egypt and the Arab Uprising in 2011
- The Grimaldi twins were originally part of the Italian Mafia, as was their father. Students may have heard about this criminal organisation, but not know about its impact on part of Italian society. An introduction to the Italian Mafia would provide students with a greater insight into the Grimaldi twins' back story
- The coach of school children was impossible for the authorities to track, as it wound through the Welsh hills and valleys. Set up a lesson where children will learn how to read and interpret Ordnance Survey maps. You could provide them with grid references of where the coach has been spotted and ask students to plot these points on a map
- Alex travels many miles over the course of the novel. Use atlases and their scales to calculate the distances that Alex has covered

Science

Never Say Die's plot involves biological and chemical processes throughout, as well as incidents relating to physics. There are therefore plenty of opportunities for the science department to get involved!

- Would it really have been possible for the helicopter to have lifted up the coach using a giant magnet? Investigate this question, building upon the work students did on magnets in upper KS2.
- The Midnight Flyer is a steam train, a form of travel which students may well not have experienced before. Explore the processes which allow a train to be powered by steam and, if time, discuss the move to electric trains in this country in the late 19th century.
- There are several moments in the book where a key chemical reaction moves the story forward. Could students identify any of these? Develop their understanding of what occurs during these chemical reactions. Examples would include:
 - Alex using sulphuric acid to burn through metal and release the BENZENE (chapter 21)
 - The butane gas explosion aboard the *Quicksilver* (chapter 10)
 - The diesel-filled Thermos flask explosion (chapter 22)
- On page 209, Ben Daniels ensures that Alex does not rise to the surface too quickly which would risk decompression sickness ("the bends"). Have any of your students done scuba diving and understand "the bends"? Undertake a brief study to develop their understanding of what happens in the body during depressurisation events

Computing

The ideas in this section could be taken and adapted by your computing department.

- In chapter 7, Shadia identifies that Jack's email had bounced all around the world before it reached Alex's computer, using a network called The Onion Route. This is a complex subject area and so you might like to start by looking at IP addresses and how the authorities can use an IP address to track the origin of an email

- At the end of chapter 7, Shadia informs Alex about the amendments she has made to Alex's computer, for example, the function to press CONTROL three times followed by S for Shadia to be able to see and hear everything Alex shows her from the computer. Explore with students whether this technology is fact or fiction and how it is used by the authorities
- Jack attempts to contact Alex by email without being detected by her captors. Use this example and the theme of tracking and surveillance in the book more widely to discuss how to use technology safely and online privacy. This could also be explored in a PSHE lesson
- We learn that Razim had staged Jack's death through use of video editing software. This could be an interesting introduction to any video editing lessons that you are doing and an opportunity to discuss how editing can be used to make us see things in a certain way
- Use software to create digital presentations for work completed as part of the project. This could include animations, video or digital slideshows

Art & design

Landscapes, as well as fire and chemical reactions are just some of the potential inspirations for students to develop their artistic skills in this project. Your art specialists will undoubtedly have many more ideas!

- Use different materials or tools to create pictures representing the different landscapes in the book. For example, how would they choose to depict the contrast between the Egyptian desert, the sea of Saint-Tropez and the concrete buildings of London?
- Source a picture of a wave on the Mediterranean sea and divide it up vertically into several sections. Each member of the group could use different art materials (pastels, watercolours, chalks) to copy their section of the wave. At the end, piece the collage back together and admire the effect it creates
- Design an alternative book cover for *Never Say Die*, based on their interpretation of the story
- Draw portraits of different characters, as students picture them in their minds
- There are a number of chemical reactions in the book. Discuss the colours that these reactions might have produced and set students the task of drawing/painting or creating a collage of one of these, using a range of material

Music

If *Never Say Die* were ever turned into a film, you can imagine that the soundtrack would be rich and varied! Why not take the opportunity to explore the range of musical influences from the different cultural settings permeating the book or create part of that imagined soundtrack?

- Create a piece of music or a soundscape to reflect different parts of the plot. For example, how would the Saint-Tropez café scene with Mrs Jones, compare to the moment when Alex deposits the Thermos bomb on the Midnight Flyer?
- Explore traditional or modern Egyptian music, imagining some of the songs that Alex may have listened to in the back of the taxi on the way to Siwa
- Whilst France is geographically very close to the UK, its music has never really made it to our shores, due to the language barrier. Use this project as an opportunity for students to listen to music which their French counterpart students would be listening to across the channel
- Create a theme tune for a *Never Say Die* book trailer (or future film trailer)

“Alex Rider,’ he said in an exaggerated Arabic accent. ‘You are a very naughty boy.’”

PE

Below are a handful of ideas to show how the PE department could get involved. The number of settings in *Never Say Die* lends itself to exploring the sports and dance practised in the countries that Alex travels to.

- Give students the opportunity to try out one of the sports most likely to be practised in Alex's US high school and not in the UK, namely baseball and American football
- Why not try something completely different and give students a taste of traditional Egyptian dancing?
- In order to rescue the children from the coke works, Alex and Jack needed to work effectively as a team. Run a session where students have to complete physical team-building activities

CELEBRATION IDEAS

Once your project has been completed in Year 7, take the opportunity to bring everyone together and showcase all that the students have achieved when completing their missions, including the work undertaken in Year 6. Be sure to invite the Year 6 teachers to come and join you. The students will be delighted to see them and they will be eager to see the completed project books. Event ideas could include:

- A spy-themed tea party, where everyone gets dressed up James Bond style and circulates around the different tables, looking at the other project books
- An award ceremony, held in the evening, where awards and prizes could be given for outstanding project books, special effort and creativity. Prizes could be spy-related or simply, the complete set of Alex Rider books. Films and images of the project could also be shown on a big screen. If you really wanted to make it a special night, everyone could dress up!
- A special assembly, for the whole school or Key Stage 3. This would be a good opportunity for older students to see all that the new Year 7s have achieved. You could also book a guest speaker to make it different from normal assemblies. Ideally this would be someone whose role relates to the book, such as a detective
- A project book gallery. Set aside an area of school to make a display of the project. This could include examples of project books, photographs and work resulting from the different subject areas. Be sure to include photographs of students in action. In advance of the exhibition opening, you could take pictures of staff and students reading *Never Say Die* and display these around the gallery with quotes explaining why they enjoyed the book
- As a reward, Year 7s could watch the *Stormbreaker* film in the hall one morning. Their screening could come complete with popcorn (if you don't mind the mess!)

At the end of your celebration event, why not set the Year 7s a new reading challenge? This could be a good way to keep momentum going and ensure they return to the library to borrow more books. Keeping them reading is now the next mission!

AND FINALLY...

Whether you are planning an ambitious transition project, a series of lessons at the end of Year 6 or a one-off library/English session, we hope that this resource has inspired you with the ideas and a structure to make it a success. If you do decide to go ahead and run a project, we would love to hear from you and to share your experiences as a case study with other schools.

Anthony Horowitz Live, broadcast via Facebook on 15 June will be an engaging event for fans of the series and newcomers to the genre alike. However, do not fret if you miss it! You can still download the recording from the **National Literacy Trust website** and from **AlexRider.com**. A screening of this event could form part of your early activities to raise the profile of your project. You could then ask students what questions they would have asked Anthony Horowitz and how they think he would have responded.

After the success of your *Never Say Die* activities, we do suggest reviewing and reflecting upon your project, particularly if you have worked in collaboration with your local primary/secondary school. This could include surveying students about their views on the project or activities, in order to inform the development of future transition endeavours. It is also an invaluable opportunity to make the most of your students' increased motivation for reading. Your school librarian/reading for enjoyment lead will be vital in talking with students and running activities to read other books in the Alex Rider series, as well as the action adventure genre more widely.

Good luck!

For information related to Anthony Horowitz Live, visit the **National Literacy Trust website**.

For Alex Rider series news and updates, visit **www.alexrider.com**, **www.anthonhorowitz.com** or **facebook.com/AlexRiderUK**.

Never Say Die is now available in hardback, eBook and audio format.

