

## A Curriculum Guide for

### *Evil Spy School*

By Stuart Gibbs

#### About the Book

During a spy school game of Capture the Flag, twelve-year-old Ben Ripley somehow accidentally shoots a live mortar into the principal’s office—and immediately gets himself expelled. Not long after going back to the boring, old real world, Ben gets recruited by the evil crime organization SPYDER.

And he accepts.

As a new student in SPYDER’s evil spy school, which train kids to become bad guys with classes like *Counter* Counterespionage and Laying Low 101, Ben does some secret spying of his own. He’s acting as unofficial undercover agent, and it becomes quickly apparent that SPYDER is planning something very big—and very evil.

Ben can tell he’s a key part of the plan, but he’s not quite sure what the plan *is*. Can Ben figure out what SPYDER is up to—and get word to the good guys without getting caught—before it’s too late?

#### **CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS: READING, WRITING, AND RESEARCHING**

##### Prereading Activity

This activity aligns with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.2) (RL.6.2) (SL.4–6.1, 2, 3)

As a prereading activity, have students complete an anticipation guide structured in the following manner:

<i>Before Reading</i>	<i>After Reading</i>	<i>Statements</i>
		It is important to fight for what you believe in, regardless of the risk involved.
		It is acceptable to shy away from difficult tasks in order to protect yourself.
		No matter the situation, you should always be able to count on your friends.

Instruct students to complete the guide by placing a “+” sign in the box next to the statements for which they agree, and a “0” next to those for which they disagree. They must commit to agreement or disagreement—there are no conditional responses. Students should be assured that there are no correct or incorrect positions.

Once students have had the opportunity to complete the guide, the teacher reads each statement aloud and has students who agree show it by standing or raising their hands. Each student should be permitted to provide their rationale for agreeing if they wish.

### **Discussion Questions**

The following questions may be utilized throughout the novel study as reflective writing prompts or alternatively, they can be used as targeted questions for class discussion and reflection. These discussion questions align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.1, 2, 3, 7, 9) (RL.5.1, 2, 3, 4) (RL.6.1, 2, 3) (L.5.7, 9) (W.4–6.4)

1. As the novel opens, readers learn that SPYDER has a new diabolical plot under way. Given what you've learned about Ben Ripley, predict what role he will be selected to play in the attempt to foil SPYDER in this installment of *Spy School*.
2. In your opinion and given the circumstances, does Ben's principal react appropriately to the accidental destruction of his office?
3. One of the plot points of *Evil Spy School* revolves around secrets. Are secrets generally good or bad? Do you think they cause more troubles than they solve? Is honesty always the best policy or should some secrets remain contained?
4. How are things different for Ben after temporarily returning home and to his former middle school as a student? Do you think he will ever be able to be a "normal" kid after spending time at the CIA's Academy of Espionage? Why or why not?
5. Compare and contrast what it means to be a good spy based on the definitions given by the variety of characters in *Evil Spy School*.
6. After admitting she has lied to Ben's friend Mike about him, Erica tells Ben, "I'm a spy. It's my job to know things." Do you agree? In your opinion, is she a good friend to Ben? Do you think she's right to expect him to put himself at risk? Why or why not?
7. Compare and contrast Ben's experiences at *Spy School* versus *Evil Spy School*. How is it different? How is it the same? Do you believe Ben is justified in appreciating some of what SPYDER has to offer?
8. After Ben questions the CIA's plan to get him kicked out of school, Erica tells him, "Yes, it was planned. But not by the CIA. They don't have any idea we're doing this." Why does Erica believe that Ben is the best agent to infiltrate SPYDER from the inside? Why does she choose not to involve the CIA for this mission? Is her decision wise?
9. Erica tells Ben, "If I didn't have faith in you, do you think you'd even be doing this?" Analyze what you've learned about Ben. Do you think Erica is wise to put her faith in him?

10. Consider the cast of secondary characters in *Evil Spy School*. Who are your favorite or least favorite characters and why?
11. Erica shares that “Social pariahs are good targets for an organization like SPYDER.” Do you agree with her assessment? What is it about this organization that would appeal to those who struggle to fit in elsewhere?
12. What do you believe are the biggest challenges young spies like Ben, Erica, Ashley, and Nefarious have to face? Though they are on different sides, are there any similarities between their struggles?
13. Using the phrase, “In this story, trust means . . .” discuss the issue of trust in *Evil Spy School*. Explain your choices.
14. At the conclusion of *Evil Spy School*, SPYDER’s plans are foiled yet the secret leaders of the organization escape. Predict what mission awaits Ben and Erica in the next installment.

### **Activities**

These activities align with the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (RL.4.1, 2, 3) (RL.5.1, 2, 4) (RL.6.1, 2)

**Research.** Much of the story of *Evil Spy School* focuses on the blurred lines between the behavior of the CIA and that of SPYDER. Using a variety of reference sources, have students research the role of the CIA and consider:

- What is the CIA’s stated mission and purpose?
- Besides espionage, what types of work do they do?
- Are all actions by the CIA justified if it’s to serve the greater good and protection of our country?
- Though SPYDER is a fictitious group, the CIA has a number of real organizations that are their adversaries. Who are some of these groups, and why does the CIA find them to be worth pursuing?
- What are some additional facts about the CIA that you found interesting?

After gathering the students’ findings, have them create a digital presentation and share with the class.

**Aura Creation for Book Videos or Trailers:** At the culmination of reading *Evil Spy School*, have students create Animoto videos or book trailers that can be ultimately found after scanning “auras” created using the augmented reality app Aurasma. To do this, students will need to create trigger images representing a character from the book, which their classmates scan in order to watch the videos. Videos should feature an overview of the novel, but trigger images should be character specific.

**Resume Writing:** Challenge your student to select a character from *Evil Spy School* and compose a resume and cover letter for your character. Make sure they include in the

resume a statement of the applicant's goals and a detailed account of his or her experience and outside interests.

**“Dear Diary.”** Invite students to create a diary or journal and write at least five entries that might have been written by a character in *Evil Spy School*. The entries should share details about the events of the story but should also focus on the motivations of the character and how their chosen character would feel about specific events.

**Create a home page.** Ask students to select several characters from *Evil Spy School* and design a home page for each of them, picking out appropriate backgrounds and pictures and then creating information that would tell a viewer about their characters. Also, have them create links to at least five different sites that they think *Evil Spy School* characters would be interested in. Next, have them write up and post on the page an explanation of how they made their decisions and what they believe this tells us about the character.

**Chat room conversations.** Have students imagine that a selected character from *Evil Spy School* has found other people to talk with while in a chat room he or she found while surfing the Internet. Describe the chat room the character was in and why the character would be drawn to the kind of group that operates the chat room. Finally, have them construct the conversation their selected character had with others while in the chat room.

**E-mail directory.** Allow students to create the e-mail directory of all the people they can imagine a character from *Evil Spy School* keeping in touch with on e-mail. Require them to explain why they selected the people they did and what it shows about the character. Finally, have them construct several exchanges between their character and some of the people in that character’s directory.

**Character astrology signs.** After reading brief descriptions of the astrology or sun signs, ask students to figure out which signs they think three of the main characters from *Evil Spy School* were born under. Ask them to write an explanation of why they think they fit the sign, drawing on their actions, attitudes, and thoughts from the novel.

**Yearbook entries.** Ask learners to imagine what three or four characters from *Evil Spy School* will be like in high school. First, have them cut out a picture of a person from a magazine to represent each character. Next, mount one picture per page and under each picture place the following information that they will create: nickname of character; activities, clubs, sports they were in and what years; class mock award such as “class clown”; quotation that shows something about the person and what is important to him or her; favorites such as colors and foods; a book that has had a great impact on him or her; voted “most-likely-to” and their plans after high school.

**Awards.** Have students create an award for each of the main characters in *Evil Spy School* based on their actions in the novel. One might be awarded “most courageous” for the guidance he or she gave other characters. For each award, write a justification paragraph that explains why this character deserves this particular award.

**Talk Show Invitation.** Ask students to select a character from *Evil Spy School*, think about his or her experiences, then figure out which talk show would most want their character on as a guest. What would they want the character to talk about? Who else would they invite on the show to address the issues the character is involved in? Write up the correspondence between the talk show host and the character in which the host explains what the character should focus on while on the show. After the show, have them exchange one more letter mentioning how they felt about what happened.

**Podcast Creation:** Ask students to create a podcast around *Evil Spy School* or author Stuart Gibbs, perhaps inspired by the format of those found on NPR. Have them act as host and introduce several different segments, such as a mock interview with the author or an expert on the topic of espionage.

**Facebook Profile:** Though the story of *Evil Spy School* is fictional, if these characters were real, they would likely use the same social media as we do. Ask students to select a character of their choice and create a faux Facebook page for that character, being sure to complete all the pertinent information, like education, relationships, groups to follow, pages to like, as well as two to three status updates.

**Character Cube:** Using the cube template available at <http://www.innovativeclassroom.com>, ask students to create a character cube analyzing traits of a selected character from *Evil Spy School*. Provide students with a list of character traits. Students will choose five traits that describe one character from the story. List each trait on a side of the cube with a quote from the text that shows evidence of the trait. On the sixth side of the cube, students will draw a picture of the character they have chosen.

**Character Study:** Have students think about the characters in *Evil Spy School* and answer the following: Which characters are the most alike? Which are most different? Which character from the novel was your favorite? Least favorite? Why? Whose friendship would you like to emulate? Write a letter from a character in *Evil Spy School* to another. What would you want to know? Exchange letters and have fellow students write a response from the other character.

*This guide was created by Dr. Rose Brock, a teacher and school librarian in Coppell, Texas. Dr. Brock holds a Ph.D. in Library Science, specializing in children's and young adult literature.*

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