



A Curriculum Guide to  
*Spy School Revolution*  
By Stuart Gibbs

### About the Book

Superspy middle schooler Ben Ripley faces the Croatoan, a new evil organization that's so mysterious, the only proof it exists is from the American Revolution. With SPYDER defeated, Ben is looking forward to life returning to normal, or as normal as possible when you're a superspy in training. For once, everything seems to be right in Ben's world . . . until someone bombs the CIA conference room next door. To Ben's astonishment, the attacker is none other than Erica Hale, the spy-in-training he respects more than any other. Ben refuses to believe Erica is working for the enemy, even if the rest of the CIA does. His mission: prove Erica is not a double agent working against the US, locate a fabled colonial-era insurgent group, figure out what their devious plot is, and thwart it. But this time, Ben finds himself up against opponents he has never encountered before: his own friends. They're not as ready to trust in Erica as he is, and Ben is forced to rely on his wits and skills more than ever before. How can he succeed when he doesn't even know who he can trust?

## Discussion Questions

The following questions may be utilized throughout the study of *Spy School Revolution* as reflective writing prompts; alternatively, they can be used as targeted questions for class discussion and reflection. The discussion questions and activities particularly address the following English Language Arts Common Core State Standards: (R. L. 4.1-3, 7, 9) (R. L. 5.1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9) (R.L. 6.1-3) (W.4-6.4)

1. After defeating SPYDER in his last adventure, Ben is looking forward to life resuming some normalcy. Do you believe a return to some sort of routine is a possibility for him? If so, what might that look like for a kid like Ben? What do you think he enjoys most and least about being a spy?
2. In a classified document, readers learn that due to a previous European mission, Ben's family is in danger; the CIA will need to implement a "domestic reassignment procedure" to secure their safety. What might be the greatest challenges to participating in such a relocation procedure? Do you see any benefits?
3. Ben's parents finally learn the truth about his education and secret spy life. Ben's father states, "We thought you were just going to some boring science school! But you're training to be a spy! My son, a spy!" Consider his parents' reactions to this shocking news. What do you think Ben is feeling? How might your family react if they found out you were involved in similar training and missions?
4. As he reflects on his family learning his secret, Ben thinks, "Lying to them had been one of the worst things about being a spy." Like Ben, do you find keeping secrets from the people you love to be difficult, even if it is to protect others? When do you think it's okay to keep secrets? When is it not? Explain your answers.
5. When the CIA discovers that Erica Hale is responsible for the bombing of a CIA conference room, she is instantly believed to have been working for an enemy and becomes the CIA's most wanted. Why does Ben feel so confident that Erica isn't to blame? What does his faith in her indicate? How do you feel about his choice to risk his own reputation to try to prove her innocence?
6. When learning that they'll likely be moved by the government for their own protection, Ben's mother tells his father, "Don't take this the wrong way, but our lives could use a little shaking up." What does this remark help you understand about her? Are there ways in which you see similar qualities in Ben? Explain your answer.
7. As he searches for Erica to help prove her innocence, Ben states, "Why does she always have to be so cryptic? If she really wanted me to find her, you'd think she would just write it down in a simple, easy-to-understand way." Consider Ben's comment and what you've learned about Erica. Do you believe this is a fair assessment? If so, in what ways?
8. When Ben and Zoe eventually locate Erica at the Library of Congress, she tells Ben, "I thought you'd be coming alone. I left the message for you. In your room. If I had wanted this to be a party, I would have sent out invitations." Consider Erica's reaction to Ben including Zoe in the search. Do you think Erica's response is appropriate? Explain your answer.
9. Erica tells Ben, "I've told you before, friendships can be a liability in this business." Do you agree or disagree with her assessment? Review the events of *Spy School Revolution*. What are some specific ways that Erica is proven wrong? From your perspective, who are the most loyal friends you've encountered while reading the novel?

10. What have you learned about the Croatoan in *Spy School Revolution*? How does this mysterious evil organization compare to SPYDER? What do you predict will be most challenging about running a campaign against them?

11. Ben tells Erica, “I can’t believe Zoe’s ratting us out. She’s our friend.” Consider Zoe’s choice to double-cross Ben as a means of getting to Erica. Are her actions simply professional given Erica’s wanted status, or do you believe the issue is more complicated than Zoe will admit? Explain your answer. In what ways do Mike’s questions about Zoe’s involvement complicate the issue for Ben?

12. What are your earliest impressions of Agent Nora Taco? Given what is learned about her throughout the course of the novel, do you believe she’s an effective agent for the CIA? Explain your answer.

13. While arguing about Erica, Zoe tells Ben, “I thought she might be trying to kill you . . . and you were too blind to see it! You’ve always been blind where Erica is concerned. Ever since you met her, she has consistently put your life in danger to further her own career.” Do you think Zoe’s assessment of Erica is fair? What other factors might be in play? Explain your position.

14. In sharing background about the mysterious Croatoan organization, Erica tells Ben, “Over the past four centuries, the Croatoan has become more and more fanatical, with one singular mission: to destroy the United States of America once and for all.” In what ways does learning about Spain’s early influence and unsuccessful intentions to colonize America lead to the Croatoan’s frustration and desire for revenge? How does this ultimately drive the events that happen in *Spy School Revolution*? Given what you learn about the Croatoan and Agent Durkee, do you feel their anger is justified? Explain your answers.

15. After Erica tells Ben that the Croatoan found her weakness, Ben retorts, “Weakness? . . . You don’t have any weaknesses.” How does learning about Erica’s vulnerabilities make Ben feel? What’s your reaction to this revelation?

16. In trying to determine why the Croatoan has suddenly targeted both Erica and Ben, Erica says, “Because it’s good business. In theory, they’re plotting something big and don’t want us causing any trouble. But now they also have the CIA looking for us and not them.” If this is true, why is finding evidence of the Croatoan’s existence so essential?

17. As Erica, Ben, and Catherine drift down the Potomac River in a rowboat, Catherine says, “My goodness. It’s a lovely night for a covert operation.” What does this innocent statement indicate about Catherine’s general disposition? What are some of the ways Erica is like her mother? Do you see any notable differences? What makes their general family dynamics so complicated?

18. After explaining to Ben why she’s never told him about her sister, Trixie, Erica replies, “As you know, my family isn’t normal.” Do you agree or disagree with her assessment? What does “normal” mean to you? What might “normal” mean to others? Does learning that Erica wants to protect her sister at all costs surprise you? Explain your answers.

19. In what ways does Ben and Mike’s arrival at their former school cause disruptions? In what ways is returning to the campus complicated for them? Are there ways in which they are ultimately pleased with the outcome?

20. Catherine tells Ben and Mike, ““Especially in this business . . . More so than any other, perhaps. This won’t be the last time you find yourselves with your job and your heart at odds.”” What are some of the ways that relationships might be challenging for secret agents? How does this apply to each of these characters?

21. Thinking back on events in this book and other novels in the Spy School series, what has been your favorite mission for Ben and his team? Explain your answer.

22. As the novel closes, Trixie tells Ben and Mike, ““I didn’t only come looking for you because of Erica. For years, I’ve suspected something strange was going on with my family, but no one would ever tell me the truth. And now it appears you might know what that is . . . There’s a hard way to do this and an easy way. Which would you prefer? . . . I’m all ears, boys. So start talking.”” What do you predict Ben and Mike will ultimately tell Trixie? In what ways might Trixie’s involvement with their team shift moving forward?

## Extension Activities

1. In *Spy School Revolution*, readers learn about George Washington’s role as a spy master and the efforts he likely went through to secure or protect delicate or classified information. Using the History Channel article “How George Washington Used Spies to Win the American Revolution”

(<https://www.history.com/news/george-washington-general-espionage-culper-spy-ring>), research the role of spying in the Revolutionary War, and focus on answering the following questions:

- How important was the spy network to the war’s outcome?
- In what ways did George Washington rely on spies and the information gleaned from them to make strategic decisions about his campaigns?
- What types of individuals were recruited to be spies?
- How were ciphers and codes used?

After reading, break into small groups for a focused discussion about the article and how it relates to what you learned while reading *Spy School Revolution*.

2. Due to the potential threat to their lives, Ben’s parents are placed in domestic reassignment by the CIA, a program similar to that of the United States Federal Witness Protection Program (WPP). Research the WPP to learn the following:

- How is the Witness Protection Program defined?
- Why are individuals and their families typically placed in this program?
- What are the general statistics of the number of people placed in the WPP?
- Are there ways in which this program has similar characteristics to the program in which the Ripleys are placed? Are there any notable differences?

After completing your research, share the three most interesting things you learned with your classmates.

3. While the CIA searches for Erica, Ben learns that she is at the Library of Congress trying to undercover clues to help learn more about the mysterious Croatoan. Using internet resources, research the Library of Congress to discover the following:

- Where is the Library of Congress (LOC)?

- When was the library established?
- How big is the library, and how many items are in its collection?
- How many visitors does it have annually?
- What system was created to get books from the building to Congress?
- What are some of the most celebrated items in the library's collection?
- What makes the LOC such a treasure to our country?
- Are there any popular movies or TV shows that have used the LOC as a setting?

After completing the research, share your new knowledge with your classmates, and plan out what you might see or do if you were to take a trip there.

4. Ben learns that he'll need to break into Mount Vernon to search for clues about the mysterious Croatoan organization. Working with a small group, first answer the following:

- When was the Mount Vernon estate established, and by whom?
- What makes the architecture particularly noteworthy?
- How is Mount Vernon utilized today?
- What are the three most interesting things you've discovered from your research?

Next, using a map of Mount Vernon's grounds and details from the novel, find and highlight the route Ben, Mike, and Catherine take as they search for clues that Washington hid about the Croatoans. Are there any alternate routes the trio could have taken? Though the estate is sizable, can you see any additional obstacles or challenges that Ben and the rest of the team may have faced? After finishing your analysis, share your discoveries with other groups.

5. In *Spy School Revolution*, readers learn that sympathetic ink, commonly known as invisible ink, and ciphers have been used to hide top secret messages throughout history. First, use the following link to visit Kiddle ([https://kids.kiddle.co/Invisible\\_ink](https://kids.kiddle.co/Invisible_ink)) to learn more about invisible ink. After taking time to review the article, share what you've discovered with your classmates. Next, go to WikiHow to learn how to make your own invisible ink: <https://www.wikihow.com/Make-an-Invisible-Ink-Message>. Work as a small group or as a class to make a batch of invisible ink. Then use it to write a note to Ben or another favorite character from *Spy School Revolution*. After finishing the letter, exchange with a partner and work to decode their message. Alternatively, you can learn more about ciphers here: <https://www.wikihow.com/Create-Secret-Codes-and-Ciphers>. After gaining some understanding of how ciphers work, create your own and allow a friend to attempt to crack your code.

6. As part of their mission to destroy the United States, the Croatoan use Hahn/Cock, an enormous rooster sculpture housed at the National Gallery of Art, as a Trojan horse for a strategic attack. Using a variety of resources, learn more about what it means to use a Trojan horse by discovering the following:

- What actually is a Trojan horse?
- Historically, where did this concept originate?
- What does a Trojan horse symbolize?
- Are there any other examples of the use of Trojan horse war campaigns?
- In the tech world, how is the Trojan horse used today?

After a group discussion focused on sharing what you've learned about Trojan horses, take a look at the Hahn/Cock sculpture and the history of where the piece—and a similar companion piece—have resided; this includes the museum roof of the National Gallery of Art. Learn a bit more about the artist who created these works, and the possible inspiration behind them.

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