



Walker Books Classroom Ideas



The Spy Who Raised Me

Ted Anderson
Illustrated by Gianna Meola
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*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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Outline:

Some parents want their children to turn out just like them. Only a few secretly turn their kids into elite special operatives.

Josie Black can infiltrate any building, speak a dozen languages, and fight like a martial arts master. But no one told her that. After J.B. detects gaps in her memory, her mom reveals the truth: she works for a covert agency, and she's given J.B. the skills of a super spy. After J.B. freaks out, runs off, and tries to escape the weird world of espionage, she'll have to decide who she wants to be.

Author/Illustrator Information:

Ted Anderson is a librarian, educator, and comics writer from Minnesota. He has written licensed and creator-owned comics for multiple publishers, including BOOM! Studios, IDW Publishing, and Aftershock Comics. He lives in Minneapolis with several plants and zero regrets. To the best of his knowledge, he is not an internationally renowned spy.

Gianna Meola is a freelance illustrator and cartoonist from New York, currently living in Brooklyn. Her work has appeared in the anthologies *Comics for Choice* and *Group Chat*. She also draws storyboards and makes prints. In her spare time, she likes to volunteer with animals. Her website is GiannaMeola.com

How to Use These Notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

These notes are for:

- Primary 7-12
- Ages 13+

Key Learning Areas:

- English

Example of:

- Graphic Novel

Themes/Ideas:

- Truth and lies
- Friendship
- Family



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Discussion Questions and Activities:

Identify the orientation, complication and resolution of the story. Ask students to try to identify this structure in other books or movies. As a class, discuss how these narrative features give meaning to stories.

How does Josie change as a character throughout the course of the book? You could consider the secrets being kept from Josie when we meet her, how Josie approaches danger, and her relationships with her mother and with Zoe.

Have a class discussion on traditional family roles, including the characteristics of each role and what relationship you would expect each role to have with the other.

Consider questions such as:

- What are the responsibilities of a parent?
- How would you expect a parent to behave around their child when they're upset?
- What role does trust play in a family?
- How does this apply to Josie's parents and family life in *The Spy Who Raised Me*?

How are right and wrong presented in the book? Are some characters presented purely as 'good' or 'bad' or are there shades of grey in everyone? Did you find yourself forgiving some characters for their actions easier than others? Particularly consider this question in regards to Josie's mother. Do you agree with how she treats Josie and the decisions she's made about their lives? Why or why not?

Discuss why truth is so important to Josie as a character, and the roles truth and lies play in the narrative and character building in *The Spy Who Raised Me*.

Compare the design style of the pages where Josie has a bag over her head with the design style of the rest of the book. How are they similar or different? Why do you think Gianna Meola drew them this way?

Write a short story about Josie as a freelance spy. Create it in a graphic novel style similar to Gianna Meola's. After the comic strips are created, share them and discuss the process of this kind of writing. Was it difficult to write in such a limited space? How do the words and pictures work together?

Take a section of the graphic novel and recreate it as unillustrated prose. Think about how to convey the mood, imagery, action and dialogue in words, rather than in graphic novel style. After completing this exercise, have a class discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of each style. Which do you prefer writing?

In most graphic novels (and comics), there is usually a white space between the panels called the gutter. Consider the difference between large and small panels, square and irregular shapes and full page illustrations.

Copy a page of the book, cut out the frames and arrange them on a piece of paper with a smaller gutter between each frame and then with a larger gutter. What difference does this make to our reading?

The graphic novel format allows authors to employ filmic techniques in the narrative. Find examples of filmic techniques in the novel and discuss how the author has used them to enhance the narrative.

Choose several spreads from the book and perform a visual analysis by responding to the following points:

- Objects – What objects and people can you see?
- Size – What size are the objects in relation to each other?
- Setting – Is a setting obvious? What is it?
- Colours – What are the predominant colours used?
- Position – Where are objects in relation to each other? Are they in the fore-, middle- or background?
- 'Camera' angle – From what angle do the pictures appear to be drawn? For example: high eye level, low, bird's eye view.
- 'Shot' type – What type of 'shot' has been used: close-up, medium, long, very long, etc.?
- Depth of Field – What is and isn't in focus?
- Light – Is the picture light or dark? Is it the same all over?
- Lines and vectors – In what direction do lines in the picture lead the eye?
- Body language and clothing – What facial expressions, gestures and use of space can you see? What is being worn?

Visit your school or public library and collect several other graphic novels. Compare them with *The Spy Who Raised Me*. How is *The Spy Who Raised Me* similar or different to other graphic novels?