



Teachers' Notes written by Jean Yates

The Return of The Word Spy

By Ursula Dubosarsky
Illustrated by Tohby Riddle

The Return of the Word Spy continues the educational and highly entertaining look at language that started with *The Word Spy*. Like its predecessor, it can have many uses in the classroom. Teachers can work through it from start to finish, or pick and choose areas of interest depending on their needs. However, each chapter concludes with a word puzzle, the solution to which is needed to solve the final anagram.

This volume would work well on its own, or could be used in conjunction with the original title as references are made to the first book, especially to help solve the word puzzles.

The greatest value of this book is that it encourages students to enjoy and to play with language, including grammar. To be honest, very few students really enjoy formal grammar lessons and, in reality, many often retain little of what is taught during them. But, by having fun, they will be able to learn and develop their language skills without even realizing they are doing so.

The Return of the Word Spy makes language accessible and entertaining for even the most reluctant student. These activities have been designed to provide a starting point, a springboard for a whole range of fun and engaging exercises that cater for all interests. They are by no means an exhaustive list. The most important thing is that in each lesson, you try to have the students engaging in hands-on activities that require them to think about and utilise language in a number of different ways.

Chapter One: Meet the Family

Background information:

- Before reading, ask the students to provide their own definition of the word 'language'. If you were to invent a language, what would you need to include to ensure that all people using the language were able to communicate with ease and clarity? (Student responses should hopefully generate the response that rules would be needed. Discuss with them what sort of rules would help and how could these rules best be formulated?)

Now read the start of the chapter and consider the following:

- In what way is a language more than just a set of words?
- Make a list of all the languages you can think of. Try to divide these languages into 'families'. (If possible, provide the students with examples from a range of languages). Try to explain what similarities they share that led you to group them in this way.
- What is a linguist?
- What is a 'first language'?
- How can a language be said to be dormant or sleeping?
- What is a polyglot?
- What are the consequences of a country having an 'official language'?
- Why do languages die out?
- What do French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian and Romanian all have in common?
- Why was the language Esperanto devised? What would be the benefit of this? Given that we now live so globally, so you think it would be a good idea to introduce a formal universal language? Why do you think no-one has ever managed to introduce a common, universal language? What would be the arguments for and against?
- What is a pidgin language? If possible, play the students a story told in pidgin e.g. "Tripela liklik pik", *The Three Little Pigs Told in Pidgin* by Supt. "Mike" Thomas (available from Monash University Library <http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/1008811>).

Activity:

- What is an anagram? Use this knowledge to solve the clue on p32.

Chapter Two: Surprising Languages

- Try to learn to finger spell some basic words. Start with your own name and then learn some simple words, e.g. come, go, draw, drink, run. Put students in pairs and have one student finger sign a short message to the other who has to carry out the instruction.

- Have a look at (and feel of) the Braille alphabet on pages 46 and 47. Can you read the sentence? (*Answer: The Word Spy was here*).
- Listen to Miriam Makeba's *Click Song*. It can be found on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OHxkiXALQjU>
- Read some stories containing talking animals, e.g. *Winnie the Pooh*, *The Muddle Headed Wombat*, *The Magic Pudding*, *Snugglypot* and *Cuddlepie*.

Activities:

- Using the gestures on page 52, create your own conversation.
- Watch an episode of *Mr Bean* and look at the way the story is conveyed through body language rather than words.
- Play the theatre sports game, 'expert double figures' – have two students sit on chairs with their hands behind their backs. Have two other students kneel behind them, with their hands stretched out in front, so that the students behind act as the hands for those sitting. Have the seated characters carry out a conversation while the kneeling students provide them with appropriate gestures for what they are saying.
- Play the theatre sports game 'slow motion commentary'. Have two students on stage acting out a sporting event. Two other students sit at the front of the stage, facing these two actors, providing a commentary for the sporting event they are viewing. The actors need to carry out the actions in slow motion.
- Give the students a sentence or a news story to mime. Have one student mime while the others guess what the original text said.
- Using the illustrations on page 55, design a piece of Aboriginal artwork that provides a message.
- Write some 'hobo' or 'swaggie' messages of your own (p57).
- Design your own language of symbols. As a class, write each other messages in your own language.
- Write your own story with a talking animal in it. Consider how this specific animal might talk and what words he/she might use. Are they a snazzy, fast animal, or a slow and dopey one? Try to convey this through your language choices.

Chapter Three: Learning to Speak

- With regards to language, what is overextension?
- In what ways are Similes and Metaphors a form of overextension?
- Create some similes and metaphors of your own.
- Do you agree with Noam Chomsky's theory that we all have an innate form of Universal Grammar that we know from birth? How else can you explain our ability to teach ourselves a whole language?

Chapter Four: All the World's a Stage

- Identify all of the nouns, adjectives, definite articles, indefinite articles, verbs, adverbs, conjunctions, interjections, prepositions and pronouns in the following passage.

The boy raced out of the house, yelling with excitement. Today was the first day of the school holidays and he was not going to waste a minute. He was heading off to the beach to test his beautiful new surfboard. "Yahoo," he yelled loudly. "This is going to be awesome!"

Chapter Five: The Play's the Thing

- Complete the exercise page 116. Identify which pronouns are subjects and which are objects.

ANSWER:

I (*subject*) tapped my piano teacher on the shoulder. She (*subject*) asked me (*object*) what was wrong. I (*subject*) told her (*object*) that I (*subject*) was afraid to touch the piano keys because a giant hairy spider was sitting on them (*object*). 'Should I (*subject*) try to remove it (*object*)?' I (*subject*) asked my teacher, nervously. 'What if it (*subject*) attacks us (*object*)?' 'You (*subject*) mustn't worry about him (*object*),' she (*subject*) told me, smiling. 'He (*subject*) won't hurt you (*object*). He's (*subject*) just my Uncle Andrew, being friendly.'

Chapter Six: Nouns are like ice cream

- Have the class make a list of nouns (use a novel, newspaper or magazine as a source if preferred). Students are to classify the nouns as proper, common, count and non-count nouns.
- Ask students to provide three additional examples of each type of nouns.
- Create your own collective nouns (as per page 130).

Chapter Seven: Verbs are like goldfish

- Write a passage in the past tense. Now re-write the same passage, changing all of the verbs to the present tense. Does it change the meaning? Is either past tense or present tense easier to write in?
- Give students a piece of text written in passive voice (newspapers are a good source). Have students re-write the story using active voice. How does it change the tone and feel of the article?

Chapter Eight: What do words mean, anyway?

- Words often change their meaning over time. (Read the passage on page 160 as an example). Have the students compile a list of words that now have different meanings. (This would be a good homework activity as they may need input from older people).
- Can you think of a reason as to why words take on new meanings?
- Find meanings and origins for the expressions on page 163.
- Have students collect their own idioms. Try to work out how they might have originated.
- Why is it bad to swear in public?

Chapter Nine: Words, words, words.

- What is an etymologist?
- Play a game of 'balderdash' with the class. (The game can be purchased, or you can make your own with a dictionary as described on page 179).

Chapter Ten: Words wanted – dead or alive!

- What is an obsolete word?
- What is an archaic word?
- Why do you think words disappear from the language?
- Make a list of words that have disappeared from the language. (This would be a good homework activity, as parental input would be beneficial).
- What is a neologism? Make a list of new words that didn't exist in a previous generation.
- Create a conversation between a character from an earlier era and a very modern person. Try to use the language they might have used. Consider how well (or badly) these two people manage to understand each other.
- Challenge: have students create their own word. Give the word a definition or meaning and use it in a sentence. Use your new word at least 5 times a day for a week. Display all the new words around the class and set up a challenge for the class to use as many of the new words as possible during the week. At the end of the week, vote on which is the most popular (or easiest to use) new word. (See page 195 for assistance).
- What is a nonce word? Read some Dr Suess stories, Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky* or Mark Svendsen's *Circus Carnivore*.
- Read *Jabberwocky* and try to 'translate' the story. Consider and discuss what it loses in translation? In what ways are the nonce words more effective?
- Have students write their own stories using nonce words.

Chapter Eleven: The magical act of writing

- People have been writing for thousands of years, using any resources available to do so. Why do we have such a powerful need to write things down? Why don't we just communicate through talking?
- Consider how different our knowledge would be if we only had oral communication (talking). Take for example, the early tales of King Arthur, such as *Excalibur*. Whilst we all know the same stories, we all know a slightly different version. This is because many of these tales started as oral stories and were later written down. Check for yourself. Have students collect as many different versions of the story as they can.
- Write your own poem in the voice of a cockroach (p213). Now choose another animal and write a poem in that animal's voice. Would this character 'sound' different? Consider your language choices carefully.
- On loose pieces of paper, have students write the sentence *My handwriting is very difficult to copy. I bet I can tell who wrote this* (p216) in their normal handwriting. Collect all of the pieces of paper and have students guess who wrote each one. Can they identify each other's writing?
- Choose a manner of writing other than from left to right across a page. In this style, write (or copy) a paragraph of text. Swap your writing with another student and see if you can 'crack the code' to read each other's work.
- Write your own calligram (p220).

Chapter Twelve: Buried treasure

- Have students use a thesaurus. Give them words and have them look up synonyms and antonyms. Discuss when words that appear to have the same meaning can and can not be effectively substituted and give examples using words in sentences. (To facilitate this, provide students with a passage of text and have them use a thesaurus to substitute synonyms for certain words. Have a discussion as to whether or not these substitutions result in the same meaning or intention).

SOLUTION to the Secret Message:

The twelve secret code words are:

1. turtle 2. horse 3. kangaroo 4. rabbit 5. vulture 6. goldfish
7. swan 8. bear 9. mouse 10. jabberwocky 11. cockroach 12. ladybird

so the 12 letters for the final message are:

T H K R V G S B M J C L
Y L F S G N I W E V A H

!...NACUOYOS.....SDROW

!YLFNACUOYOSSGNIWEVAHSDROW

WORDS HAVE WINGS SO YOU CAN FLY!

Additional Activities:

- Now that you have covered all of these topics, encourage the students to create their own coded messages. Maybe you could run a competition in class. Or you (or the students) could provide a secret message each day that the class needs to crack.
- Make word finds or crosswords from the terminology learned in the book. (If you have access to an IWB, these could be made into interactive games for the class to play.)

Additional Resources:

Circus Carnivore by Mark Svendsen

Dr Doolittle by Hugh Lofting (or film starring Eddie Murphy or Rex Harrison)

Jabberwocky by Lewis Carroll

Mr Bean, starring Rowan Atkinson

The Muddle Headed Wombat by Ruth Park