### BLOOMSBURY

## **Teachers' Guide**

## Spy Toys by Mark Powers

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### **BOOK BLURB**

The world's leading toy manufacturer makes playthings for the rich and famous, and every toy they create contains a tiny computerised brain and a unique personality. These toys are seriously awesome! But every so often there's a faulty toy ...

Dan is a Snugaliffic Cuddlestar bear – he *should* be perfect for hugging. But because of a faulty chip, Dan is so strong he could crush a car. Thrown on the reject pile, he meets Arabella, a Loadsasmiles Sunshine Doll, who has a *very* short temper and is absolutely NOT good with children. Soon Dan, Arabella and Flax (a custom-made police robot rabbit gone AWOL) are recruited by

the mysterious Auntie Roz to join a top secret team dedicated to stopping criminals in their track. Together they are... THE SPY TOYS.

### **AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND**

Author **Mark Powers** has been making up ridiculous stories since primary school and is slightly shocked to find that people now pay him to do it. As a child he always daydreamed that his teddy bear went off on top secret missions when he was at school, so a team of toys recruited as spies seemed a great idea for a story. He grew up in north Wales and now lives in Manchester. His favourite animals are the binturong, the aye-aye and the dodo.

Illustrator **Tim Wesson** was born somewhere in England. As a young boy he enjoyed climbing trees and drawing pictures of dogs in cars. Eventually he became an illustrator who creates children's books. Tim doodles and paints whenever he can and likes to draw the first thing that pops into his head. He lives by the sea in Suffolk with his family.

#### **CLASSROOM DISCUSSION GUIDE**

Open a discussion with your class regarding topics such as:

- Why are we fascinated by spies?
- What does 'hiding in plain sight' mean? What else hides in plain sight?

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- There are countless stories about how you should not underestimate the 'little guy'. David and Goliath, The Tortoise and the Hare, 'Toy Story', and more. What do these stories teach us?
- What could toys represent in this book? Is it possible they represent children, who are also often underestimated? Who else is underestimated in the real world?
- One of the major themes in 'Spy Toys' is 'defective toys'. These toys have a quality that others consider 'faulty', and they are treated differently because of it. Why is it important to treat everyone equally, regardless of their skin colour, religion, sexuality, disabilities, etc? It is important to remember that something we see as a negative quality about ourselves, may actually be our greatest strength.
- To succeed, the toys had to work as a team. How did they work as a team? Did they argue or did they each use their own strengths to come up with a solution? What does this tell us about working in teams?
- What would happen in the real world if toys had the ability to act like humans? We call this Artificial Intelligence.

#### **CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES**

### **Creative Writing**

- Write a short story starring one of the characters from 'Spy Toys'
- Write a short story pretending your favourite childhood toy was a spy toy!
- Write a short story about you as a spy toy. What toy would you be? What made you 'faulty'? How did you overcome this?

### Art

- Create your own spy toy
- Invent your own spy gadget
- Try fingerprinting. Use a fingerprinting kit to dust for fingerprints, or an ink kit to take fingerprints)
- Write in invisible ink. Use lemon juice or specific 'invisible' ink pens.

#### Science

- Al stands for Artificial Intelligence, and it refers to machines (like computers, robots or toys) that have the ability to act like humans (they have their own thoughts and personalities and can make independent decisions). Research Als and discuss what could happen if machines could think like humans.
- There are already machines that act like humans they are called chatterbots. They are websites you can go on and chat to a machine that essentially acts like a human.

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• A program passes the Turing test if a person can have a conversation with both it and a person and not be able to tell which one is the computer. Go online and chat with a chatterbot to see if it passes the Turing test.

Here are some chatterbots you can chat with to learn more about AI (you can find more by searching Google):

- 1. Cleverbot (cleverbot.com)
- 2. A.L.I.C.E (alice.pandorabots.com)
- 3. Various other chatterbots (personalityforge.com/halloffame.php)

#### **Drama**

• Paper Not Floor (a teamwork activity)

Place several sheets of paper on the floor; there should be enough so the whole group can stand on the paper comfortably. Invite everyone to stand around the paper. Give the instruction, 'Everyone must be in contact with the paper and not the floor.' When the group have found a solution (usually they all stand on the paper) take away a sheet of paper and then repeat the instruction, 'Everyone must be in contact with the paper and not the floor.' Again, remove a sheet of paper. Continue as above and after a while the group will no longer all be able to fit on the paper. They will then have to find new solutions. Reward every solution as long as it is viable but continue to remove more paper each time. Eventually you will be left with one sheet which you can begin to tear into smaller and smaller pieces. To make this more spy-themed, you could add a 'ticking bomb' (a time limit) for each round.

Spy Handshake game (a game to test your observational skills)

The goal of this game is to guess which child is the spy. One child is selected as the Host of the party and begins the game. Everyone else sits down and closes their eyes. The Host selects the Spy by patting one child on the head. The game begins when the Host announces, 'Welcome to my (tea, slumber, rock and roll, birthday, dance) party.' Everyone gets up and pretends to be at the kind of party named. They walk around and shake hands with the other guests. The Spy must remove guests from the party by gently scratching or tickling the inside of their hand when shaking it. The Spy does not have to eliminate everyone whose hand they shake. A victim waits ten seconds before leaving the party very dramatically. It is very important for the victim to wait ten seconds and shake other children's hands so as not to give away the identity of the Spy. A child may guess who the Spy is at any time after at least one person has left the party. If the guess is wrong, he or she must leave the party too. A child cannot refuse to shake another's hand. The person who correctly guesses the identity of the Spy becomes the Host of the next party.

#### **Bonus Activity**

 The members of Spy Toys are considered defective but Auntie Roz sees their potential. Make a list of their good qualities, followed by a list of your own good qualities.

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### **FURTHER READING (Some may be for younger or older children)**

#### **Novels:**

- Harriet the Spy Louise Fitzhugh
- The Alex Rider series Anthony Horowitz
- Secret Agent 6th Grader Marcus Emerson
- The *Percy Jackson* series Rick Riordan
- The Spy School series Stuart Gibbs
- The Famous Five series Enid Blyton
- N.E.R.D.S. Michael Buckley
- The Gallagher Girls series Ally Carter
- The *Almost Super* series Marion Jensen
- The Absolutely Amazing Adventures of Agent Auggie Spinoza Steven Stickler
- The Genius Files series Dan Gutman
- The Zeke Bartholomew series Jason Pinter
- The Code Busters Club series Penny Warner
- The Trixie Belden series Julie Campbell Tatham
- The Artemis Fowl series Eoin Colfer
- The Max Remy series Deborah Abela

### TV Shows / Films:

- Spy Kids
- Toy Story
- Sky High
- Agent Cody Banks
- The Spy Next Door
- Cats and Dogs
- The Lego movie
- Harriet the Spy
- Catch That Kid
- Babes in Toyland
- The Nutcracker
- Pinocchio
- The Indian in the Cupboard
- Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles
- Jumanji
- Zathura
- Winnie the Pooh