



Surprising Spies

Unexpected Heroes of World War II

by Karen Gray Ruelle

HC: 9780823437573 • E-Book: 9780823437573 • Ages 8–12

About the Book

Would you spy for your country? Some of these World War II spies lived among the shadows while others lived in the limelight—disguised in plain sight—putting themselves in danger for a cause larger than themselves.

This thoroughly researched collection of biographies profiles several courageous individuals who resisted the Axis Powers via espionage and heroism. It includes numerous photos and features such fascinating accounts as that of Moe Berg, a major-league baseball player and potential assassin; Noor Inayat Khan, a Sufi princess and wireless operator; and Juan Pujol Garcia, a storyteller and double agent. It also features sections on invisible ink, ciphers and codes, resistance fighters, and infamous missions such as Operation Mincemeat.

Classroom Discussion

- What personality traits do most spies have in common? Describe their communication skills. Why was it important to be schooled in Nazi propaganda? Explain why it was important to have spies who spoke several languages. Discuss the contribution of the Navajo code talkers. Why was their language especially helpful against the Japanese?
- Why were spies called “secret warriors”? Explain the tremendous risks of their work. How was betrayal the greatest risk? Discuss why it was important for their work to remain secret even after the war.
- Define *pacifist*. Which of the “surprising spies” were pacifists, or came from families who were pacifists? Explain the irony in a pacifist working for the war effort. How was working as a spy more in keeping with their beliefs than serving in combat?



- The surprising spies had many talents. How did they use their unique talents to make a contribution to the war effort? How were most of the spies like “magicians”? Many of the spies worked in disguise. How many disguises did Virginia Hall master? Josephine Baker was too famous to take a disguise. How did she use her fame to gather and send information to benefit the allied forces? Explain how all of the spies were masters of deception.
- Discuss the importance of code names. What is a *handler*? How did the spies and handlers work in tandem? What is a *subagent*? Explain how Juan Pujol Garcia used his storytelling skills to effectively create subagents.
- Explain how many of the spies acted as double or triple agents to carry out their work. Discuss how Eddie Chapman, the Safecracker Spy, used his time in prison to plan his work as a double agent. Why was Zigzag an appropriate code name for him? What special skills did Eddie learn as a double agent? Explain why the British government eventually fired him.
- Why did the spies carry cyanide pills with them at all times? Discuss why most spies believed that dying was better than being captured. Noor Inayat Khan was captured by the Gestapo. How was she betrayed, and by whom? Why did the Germans label her “night and fog”? She was tortured and killed at Dachau. How did her family and friends learn of her fate?
- Many of the World War II spies have been honored with medals and statues. Why did it take so long for the United States to honor the Navajo code talkers? Virginia Hall was the only civilian woman in World War II to receive the Distinguished Service Cross by the President of the United States. While she was respected and honored for her work as a spy, she didn’t get the job she really wanted with the CIA after the war. How were she and the Navajo code talkers discriminated against by the United States government?
- Consider the tools that the World War II spies used. Then debate how technology has changed the way government conducts spying today. Consider whether technological changes have made spying more difficult and dangerous. How must twenty-first century spies possess the same personality traits as the World War II spies?

Guide created by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

About the Author



Karen Gray Ruelle, author of *Surprising Spies: Unexpected Heroes of World War II*, is a former librarian turned full-time author and illustrator of numerous children’s books. Her collaborations with Deborah Durland DeSaix have garnered much acclaim. These nonfiction works include *Peter’s War: A Boy’s True Story of Survival in World War II Europe*; *The Grand Mosque of Paris*, an ALA Notable Book; and *Hidden on the Mountain*, a Sydney Taylor Notable Book. Karen lives in New York City.

8.2020



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