



Terrific Trivia Tidbits

All spies try to do the same thing: get the right information. Trying to track down the truth is important business! But did you know spies have been around at least since Moses sent 12 spies to investigate the land of Canaan? And did you know a book on spying called *The Art of War* was written in 500 BC?

Use these fun facts and those below to start thinking about our fun theme—spies. These trivia tidbits can be shared ahead of time with adults at staff meetings and with kids during VBS week. They are also available on the [Resource Download](#) and can be used at arrival and dismissal time or during any downtime while kids wait to get to their next rotation.

Part 1: General Information

- Did you know spies have a code of ethics that was developed in 1982? Yep. Spies have rules to live by.
- Code-crackers, also called cryptologists, do more than crack codes. They also create codes. Have you ever created a code?
- Hehe! When a spy walks past another spy and secretly hands him a document, it's called a brush pass. Sometimes spies actually pass a real hairbrush, just to be funny.
- What's the oldest code? Well, it just might be the Julius Caesar code. To use it, substitute one letter of the alphabet for another, for example: A for Z, B for Y, C for X, etc.
- Ever heard of a microdot? It's a tiny photograph, about the size of a period, that contains a hidden message so small that you have to use a high-powered magnifying device to see it.
- Heads up! In ancient Greece, some spies would be asked to shave and tattoo messages on their heads. Then they had to wait until their hair grew and covered the message to go on their mission. First thing after arriving safely, it was time for another haircut so the message could be read.
- Rabbits, bugs, and moles, oh my! In spy speak, all these words have special meanings. *Rabbits* are people spies are sent to watch; *bugs* are tiny, secret recording devices; *moles* are agents who work for the enemy agency undercover.
- Doctors aren't the only ones who operate. A spy mission is also called an operation.
- Check out these code names of real spies: Snow, Garbo, Blinker, and Zigzag.
- Don't scratch that itch! During World War II, British spies would sprinkle itching powder on their captors. When the captors started scratching, the spies quickly escaped.
- Smile, you're on secret camera! Spy cameras can be hidden in buttons, book covers, belt buckles, watches, and pens. One time, a camera was hidden on a bee.
- Spy shoes can also be used as radios. So if you ever see a spy tying his shoe, he may be up to something sneaky.
- Some spies are robots . . . or satellites. Satellites in space can be used to detect objects on earth as small as an orange.
- Night vision goggles are useful when a spy needs to see in the dark. But even though these goggles are helpful, the spy can't see normal colors because everything is tinted green.
- Spies sometimes carry a few items with them in case they need to change appearance quickly. Sunglasses, hats, makeup, and even changes of clothes may come in handy.
- What do Boy Scouts, butterflies, and spying have in common? The answer is Robert Baden-Powell. He spied for the British secret service by hiding sketches of Eastern European forts in pretend drawings of butterflies. Later, he founded an international scouting club that became the Boy Scouts.
- Don't forget! Good spies should always empty their pockets before they wash their clothes. One spy forgot this rule and left a secret note in the pocket of a suit he sent to the dry cleaner. He was arrested after the dry cleaner found the secret note and called the FBI.
- Canes can be used for more than walking. About 1,600 years ago, Emperor Justinian sent spies to China to learn more about silk. The spies stashed silkworm moth eggs in their canes and brought them back to Rome.
- Spies dug a tunnel under the Berlin Wall that was almost as long as four football fields—just so they could listen to Russian conversations.

- Dolphins have been used by the US Navy for many years. They are trained to locate and mark mines in the ocean and to find suspicious swimmers and divers.
- We all know dogs can be special pets. But did you know dogs have been used in espionage? Dogs serve as guards, sniff out bombs, and even gather information by carrying an attached small camera or microphone.
- You think double agents are sneaky? What about triple agents? Agnes Smedly was a triple agent who worked for Russia, China, and India!
- Sometimes spies are so tricky that they trick each other. Once, a spy made a fake brick with money hidden inside and left it for another agent. The agent found the brick but thought it was real, so he didn't open it. Later, he went back and discovered the money inside the fake brick.
- Not all spies work out in the field. Some spies sit at home all day reading the newspaper and watching TV. Public information is important intelligence too!
- Did you know there are estimated to be about 100,000 people who work for US intelligence? And did you know that US intelligence costs over \$70 billion every year? That's a lot of people and a lot of money.
- Clean up! Spies must be very tidy and organized so they can notice if anything is missing from their desk or bookshelf. They also must have good memories to remember all their papers and books and where everything belongs.
- There are two British intelligence agencies: Mission Intelligence 5 (MI5) and Mission Intelligence 6 (MI6). MI5 agents work on domestic (homeland) security, and MI6 agents work on foreign intelligence.
- Teamwork! Although each country has its own spies, there is an international police organization called Interpol that helps countries work together to fight crime.
- The fictional character James Bond was created by Ian Fleming, an actual spy who became a writer. Many of Bond's daring feats were based on Ian Fleming's experiences!
- In the past, foreign spy agencies analyzed James Bond films to help them develop their country's spy technology!
- In the 1960s, the CIA used dead rats to pass important materials to operatives in Russia. Materials were stored inside a cavity in the rat's body, and it was left on the street to be picked up by an agent. To deter cats from eating them, they were sometimes doused in hot pepper sauce!
- In the twelfth century, Japan trained ninjas as masters of disguise and physical fitness. The word *ninja* comes from a Japanese word meaning "to make yourself invisible."
- One scientist turned a light bulb into a listening device, making it capable of picking up all the conversations taking place close to it. Creative, huh?
- The CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) was established by President Harry Truman in 1947. That means it's not even 100 years old!
- Toilet paper holders have been used in dead drops—quite an unlikely location for someone to snoop around, don't you think? One agent would place an important message or item inside what looked to be an ordinary toilet paper holder, but the other agent knew to unscrew it and look inside!
- Click! Cameras are an important tool for spies to have, and many ingenious ways of concealing them have been developed over the years. They've been sewn into gloves and belts and hidden within wristwatches, sunglasses cases, cuckoo clocks, handbags, umbrellas, matchboxes, eyeglasses, glue sticks, pens, and even tubes of lipstick!
- One special surveillance tool developed in France was a pair of binoculars that had an angled mirror inside one of its lenses. This made it appear as if the viewer was looking straight ahead, when really they were spying on something to the right. Sneaky!
- Acoustic kitty: Animals of all kinds can be used in spy operations because they seem less suspicious than human agents. The CIA trained a cat to wander into spaces while having a microphone and transmitter attached to its body. This allowed the CIA to hear what was going on around the cat.
- If you want to be a spy for the CIA, your career might start at Camp Peary, a spy school in Virginia also known as "the Farm." Here, wannabe agents learn typical spy skills like mastering disguises, surveillance, and how to live a double life. They also learn some more unusual skills like skydiving, how to drive around obstacles, and how to not get lost. Would you want to go there?

Part 2: Animal Pal Trivia

- Mimic octopuses are known as shape-shifters. God gave them the amazing ability to detect predators and quickly change shape, color, and texture to disguise themselves. They can even make themselves look like venomous animals, causing predators to steer clear!
- Did you know that all octopuses have blue blood? God designed them with a specific ingredient in their blood that makes it blue instead of red.
- Short but sweet: It's believed that the mimic octopus only lives to be about nine months old.
- A sugar glider's "wings" (called patagia) are made of a very thin, stretchy membrane that connects their wrists and ankles. They also use their tails as rudders to guide them along as they glide through the air.

- Sugar gliders are marsupials whose young develop mostly inside a pouch on the mother's body. They're a member of the gliding possum created kind.
- Sugar gliders get their name because of their love of sweet foods like sap, fruit, and nectar and because of their ability to glide impressive distances between trees.
- Shocker! Though generally plant-eaters, sugar gliders have also been known to eat lizards and small birds.
- Though they don't fly, sugar gliders can glide distances almost as wide as a football field (150+ feet) using their excellent aviation skills.
- Did you know sea lions can sleep while floating in the water?
- The sea lion has special muscles that seal its nostrils, larynx, and esophagus shut while its mouth is open underwater, allowing it to capture prey without swallowing a load of water. God thought of everything!
- Did you know California sea lions can rotate their back flippers to enable them to walk on land?
- Sea lions have special barks or calls they use to locate each other. A mother sea lion can find her baby in a crowd or from a distance using their special call. She then smells her baby for one final check to confirm that it's hers.
- Even though they have teeth, sea lions prefer to swallow their food whole. Gulp!
- People often confuse seals and sea lions, so how can you tell the difference? If it has ear flaps that turn downward, it's a sea lion. Seals just have tiny holes for ears. If it can turn its flippers and walk on them, it's a sea lion. Seals don't use their flippers to walk; they just wriggle along on land.
- Most kunekune pigs have fleshy tassels, known as "piripiri," hanging under their lower jaw. How . . . cute?
- A cute lawn mower: Instead of rooting around in dirt like most pigs, kunekune pigs prefer to munch on grass and other plants. God gave them short snouts that make them great at grazing in pastures.
- Over half a million homing pigeons were used to carry messages during World War I. Some also had tiny cameras attached to them that revealed the location of enemy forces.
- Have you ever heard the saying "A little birdie told me"? During World War II, homing pigeons carried messages, photos, and maps to military leaders. The messages were put in tiny tubes strapped to the birds. So it's actually true that a little birdie was used to tell them!