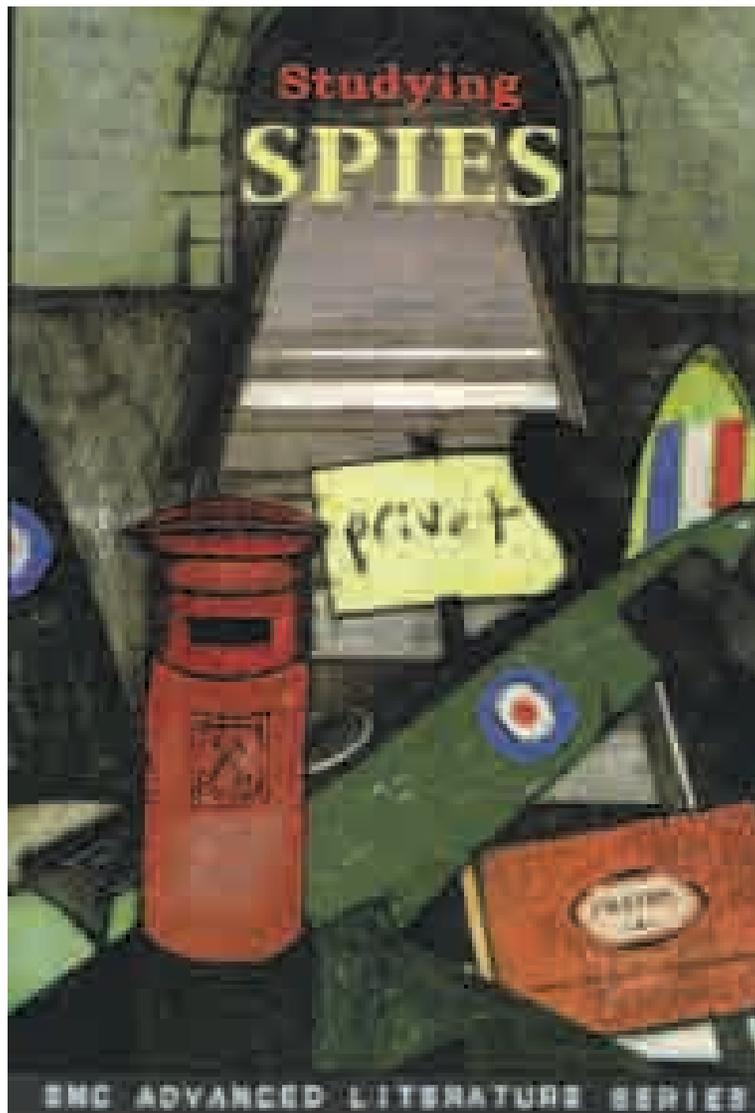


Spies:

An EMC Study Guide



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Activities which use a video clip are indicated with this icon: 

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Credits

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A note on the text

Please note, this is an edited version of the print publication (2005). Copyright restrictions prevent the inclusion of text extracts in the download edition. Where extracts from the novel were included in the print edition, page references are now given to the paperback edition of *Spies* published by Faber and Faber in 2002. Where necessary activities have been adapted.

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Video interview

1. The idea of the book
2. Childhood
3. Why '*Spies*'?
4. The theme of perception
5. The female world
6. The two narrators
7. Motifs – the privet

Introduction

Studying Spies – an overview

Studying Spies is a flexible resource which provides support for reading, analysing and writing about the novel. It includes a wide range of activities on plot, theme and character including drama, role-play, charting, creative writing and visual representations. There is, however, a particular focus on some of the trickier aspects of the novel: narrative structure, perspective and voice. To gain confidence in writing about form, structure and language, Literature students are encouraged to explore the novel from a linguistic perspective in unusual and well-supported ways. Contextual material (historical, social and literary) and a diverse range of provocative critical extracts are integrated into the study of the novel in ways which develop students' critical and creative skills.

The study guide is complemented and extended by an EMC video interview with Michael Frayn. Topics covered include: the world of the novel; the theme of spying; the methods of narration; the structure of the novel; representations of childhood and the use of motifs.

How the study guide is organised

The study guide is divided into four sections:

- Before Reading
- Reading the Novel
- After Reading
- Critical Responses

There is also a section of 'Teachers' Notes' providing brief guidance on some of the activities which might require more teacher input (for example mapping the locations, segmenting the novel and linguistic approaches to the text).

Using the study guide

While the material in 'Reading the Novel' focuses on key aspects of each chapter, it is structured as a route through the novel, providing students with opportunities to speculate about what will happen (e.g. predictive role-play, discussion, creative writing activities). If your students have read the novel on their own before coming to study it in class, you may want to pick out some of these prediction activities to support their independent reading.

Even if you are reading parts of the novel in class, you may want to hold back some of the longer activities on specific chapters in order that the reading of the novel itself is not interrupted for too long.

The guide includes far more activities than any class could cover in the time available; it is not intended that you work through all the material but that you select from it, depending on the needs of your students and what you feel to be particularly important aspects of the novel. One possible route through the material and the novel is offered on page 6.

A Route Through

A Route Through

Week	Class	Homework
0	Preparation for the first full week of reading.	'Childhood memories' (page 8).
1	'A few extracts from the novel' (page 7). Listen to some of the childhood memory pieces (page 8). 'Perception – a classroom experiment' (page 8). Share thoughts on the paradox and expectations of the novel. Read Chapter 1 out loud and do 'Group work on Chapter 1' (page 12). Set up 'Charting the narrative voice' (page 11).	'A paradox' (page 7) plus expectations of the novel. Read Chapter 2.
2	Feed back on Chapter 2 including 'The last line' (page 13). 'The narrative voice' (page 13); 'Keith and Stephen' (page 17) and 'Motifs' (page 18). 'A classroom experiment – one week later' (page 8). Feed back on Chapter 3; 'Annotating fragments' (page 24); 'Life in the Second World War' (page 18). Set up 'Becoming an expert' (page 27), allocating different aspects to each group.	Read Chapter 3 and 'The most important points' (page 24). Read Chapter 4 focusing on the aspect allocated for 'Becoming an expert' (page 27).
3	Group work on Chapter 4 followed by presentations to the class ('Becoming an expert' page 27). 'Narrative voice' (page 27; see also page 11). 'Map of the locations' (see pages 14 and 26). Feed back on 'A shift in perspective' (page 31). 'A close focus on style' (page 31) and 'Before reading on – the tunnel' (page 33).	Read Chapter 5 up to page 89 including 'A shift in perspective' (page 31). Read the rest of Chapter 5 and do 'What is the chapter about?' (page 34).
4	Feed back on 'What is the chapter about? Finding evidence' (page 34). Very brief, oral version of 'Writing the next section' (page 37). Read Chapter 6, stopping at the points listed in 'Predicting and titling' (page 37). 'Before reading the chapter' on page 42 and update 'Narrative voice' chart (page 11); 'Reading the Chapter' up to the end of page 141; 'Before reading pages 142 to the end' (page 39). Read the rest of the chapter and do 'All my betrayals and failures' (page 42).	'What does Stephen think now?' (pages 37-38). 'Summing up the Chapter' (page 39).
5	Feed back on 'Summing up the Chapter' (page 39). Read up to page 162 of the novel and do 'Barbara Berrill, Stephen and the reader' (page 40). Read the rest of the chapter and do 'Sequencing the events' (page 40). Set up 'A boxing match' (page 41) for students to prepare at home. 'A boxing match' (page 41); 'Secrets and betrayals' (page 41).	Prepare for 'A boxing match' (page 41). Read 1st section of Chapter 9 and script the dialogue for 'The conversation' (page 45).
6	Listen to a few examples of 'The conversation' (page 42). Read the rest of Chapter 9 in sections to page 181 'The basket – Stephen's dilemma' (page 42); to 187 'Barbara and the basket' (page 43); to 190 'Can I have a word with you old chap?'. 'Just a minute' debate (page 44); Work on the motifs: 'A value for x' (page 44). Read Chapter 10, then complete 'The game's finally over' (page 45); 'Hero or coward' (page 46); speculation about the man in the Barn using 'Stephen' (page 44) and 'Looking for clues' (page 45).	Prepare for 'Just a minute' (page 44). Predicting the ending using 'What now? Predictions' (page 47).
7	Listen to predictions. Read up to page 228 and do 'A revelation' (page 47). Read the rest of Chapter 11 and write a personal response using a combination of 'A personal response' (page 48), 'An appropriate ending' (page 48), 'Summing up the novel' (page 50) and 'A response chain' (page 51). Feed back on 'Back to the beginning' (page 49).	'Back to the beginning' (page 49). 'Instant revision' – preparation (page 64).
8-12	'Instant revision' – presentation (page 64). 'Narrative perspective – First explorations' (page 55). 'Narrative perspective – The shifting perspective' (page 56). 'Narrative structure – Patterns, shifts and repetition' (page 59). 'Openings and endings' (page 62). 'Genre' (page 67) or 'Two more novels for comparison' (page 67). 'Critical responses – The critics' (page 68).	'Narrative structure – Segmenting the novel' (page 58). 'Male and female characters' (page 53).

Before Reading

A paradox

Everything is as it was, I discover when I reach my destination, and everything has changed.

This phrase is taken from early in the novel and it recurs in different forms several times.

- Talk about the phrase and explore the paradox.
- What might it tell you about the novel you're going to read?

A few extracts from the novel

Below are four extracts from the novel.

- Talk about what impressions they give you of the kind of novel this is going to be.
- Go on to explore anything you find interesting about:
 - the narrative voice
 - the use of tenses
 - the balance of narration, events, dialogue and reflection.

I look up at the sky, the one feature of every landscape and townscape that endures from generation to generation and century to century. Even the sky has changed. Once the war was written across it in a tangled scribble of heroic vapour trails. There were the upraised fingers of the searchlights at night, and the immense coloured palaces of falling flares. Now even the sky has become mild and bland. *(Page 10)*

1

Everything that we'd once taken for granted now seems open to question. Even what appears to be happening directly in front of your eyes, you realise when you think about it, turns out to be something you can't actually quite see after all, to involve all kinds of assumptions and interpretations. *(Pages 41-42)*

2

The sound that's changed, I realise, is the sound of my breathing. It's grown more complex. It no longer corresponds precisely to the rise and fall I can feel inside my chest.

3

I stop breathing. The sound of breathing continues. *(Page 117)*

What he wanted, I think, was for all the shifting thoughts inside his head to cease, for everything to stop happening and to go back to what it had been before. The clean simplicity of espionage, that had promised so well, had turned into such a sticky mess. *(Page 141)*

4

Before Reading



Perception – a classroom experiment

In interview (video clip 4) Michael Frayn said:

I think the philosophical seed of this story is the question of perception, how we make sense of what's in front of our eyes, how we see it through our own ideas and our own narratives.

I think what the book is really about is how people make sense of the world in front of them. I mean if you think about the way we look at things, for a start it seems very obvious, you just look at the world, and the world comes into your head, and you see what's in front of your eyes, but the more you think about it, the more you realise it's not like that, that you have to interpret what's in front of your eyes in order to see it. You bring your own ideas to bear on it, and you see it through the stories you have heard about it, the stories you have told about it yourself. This is true of everyone, adults as well as children, but it's perhaps more visible in the case of children because they see the world in a subtly different way.

- In the last ten minutes of your lesson, write a description of what happened during the lesson. You can include anything that strikes you – not just the facts of what happened but also your thoughts, sensations and memories of important moments. Don't talk to anyone else about what you have written.
- Read out some of these accounts. What was similar or different about the way different people in the class perceived the lesson?
- Your teacher will collect in your writing.

A classroom experiment – one week later

- Without looking at what you originally wrote, write again about that same lesson. Feel free to put it in the context of what's happened in between if you want to, or focus most on what you now think it is important to say.
- Now listen to both the first and second accounts of one or two people. What has changed from one account to the next?
- As a group, discuss what you've learned about how people see the world. Make a list of some key points raised by this activity.

Childhood memories

One of the things Michael Frayn's novel is about is the past and childhood memories. The novel starts with this first paragraph:

The third week of June, and there it is again: the same almost embarrassingly familiar breath of sweetness that comes every year about this time. I catch it on the warm evening air as I walk past the well-ordered gardens in my quiet street, and for a moment I'm a child again and everything's before me – all the frightening, half-understood promise of life. (*Page 3*)

- Talk about this opening and what ideas it raises about memory.
- To help you think about how Frayn evokes a child's world, think back to your own early childhood and try to evoke it for yourself through memories. Use the chart on page 9 of this study guide to record your memories. Look at the example on page 10 for someone who is in their fifties, to get you thinking about the kinds of things you might include.

Before Reading

	Age 1-5	Age 5-10	Age 10-15
A smell			
A food/taste			
An item of clothing			
A phrase			
A song			
A place			
An object			
A TV programme/ film			
A moment			
Something that's gone			

Before Reading

An example, filled in by a 52-year-old.

	Aged 5	Aged 8	Aged 10
A smell	Talcum powder	Warm school milk	Hyacinths
A food/taste	Ice cream and jelly	Spangles	Fray Bentos pie
An item of clothing	Start-rite red shoes	An apron, made at Brownies	Mini-skirt
A phrase	'Short back and sides'	'Swinging sixties'	'With it'
A song	'Ring a ring a roses'	'Bill and Ben'	'My Boy Lollipop'
A place	The woods opposite my home	An old church hall	The lido, that's now a multiplex cinema
An object	A pair of pink ballet shoes	Ford popular car	<i>With the Beatles</i> LP
A TV programme/film	No TV set	<i>The Lone Ranger</i>	<i>Ready, Steady, Go</i>
A moment	A nightmare about drowning	Sitting under the tree at school listening to a story	Hearing about the death of President Kennedy
Something that's gone	Hair ribbons	London smog	Vyella school shirts

Writing about memories – experimenting with narrative voice

- Use the memories in your chart to write two or three paragraphs about being a particular age, using a different narrative voice for each one. You could choose from the following:
 - first person narrator looking back
 - first person narrator, from close-up, as if it's happening now
 - all-knowing, distant third person narrator
 - indirect free style, in which the third person narrator sometimes seems to see things from the point of view of one person.
- Talk about the different effects you achieved using each of the narrative voices.
- When reading the novel, bear in mind what you've discovered about the range of possible narrative techniques for writing about memory.

Reading the Novel

Charting the narrative voice/time frames – an ongoing activity

- As you read the novel, record any shifts you notice in the narrative voice and time frame (such as flashbacks, jumps forward) on the chart below.

Chapter and page	Shifts in narrative voice	Shifts in time frame
1	Adult voice of old man (whole chapter)	Old man prompted to think about his childhood by the smell of a particular plant.
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		

Chapter 1

Group work on Chapter 1

- Listen to this chapter being read aloud.
- In small groups, focus on one aspect of the chapter, then feed back your ideas to the whole class. Pool your expectations of the rest of the novel.

Group 1 – The narrator

Is this a first or third person narrative? Does the narrator seem to be a character in the story? What do we find out about the narrator? What kind of voice does he have? Does he speak in the same tense throughout? Is it a voice of certainty? Is he a reliable narrator, one whose viewpoint you feel you can trust? Is he an all-knowing narrator, who stands above the action? Does it vary at all?

Group 2 – Oppositions, contrasts, paradoxes, oxymorons

The chapter sets up all kinds of conflicting feelings. What are they? How does the writer use contrast, oppositions and oxymorons to create the narrator's disturbing, contradictory feelings?

(Note: an oxymoron is the putting together of two seemingly opposite things, for instance the phrase 'bittersweet' is an oxymoron.)

Group 3 – Questions

The first chapter is full of questions. What are these? Why are there so many? Are there any answers? What kind of effect does all this questioning have on the reader? What questions is the reader left with at the end of this chapter?

Group 4 – Drawing the reader in

Is this a good opening chapter for a novel? Does it draw the reader in and, if so, how? How does it go about introducing the characters and giving the reader a sense of what kind of novel this is going to be?

Group 5 – Themes

Are there any early indications in this first chapter of the kinds of themes that are going to be raised in the novel? What are they and how are they introduced?

Group 6 – Characters

Jot down all the names mentioned in this first chapter. What do you find out about them? How are they introduced? How can you tell whether they are going to be significant or not?

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