

New Windmills

2004

Resource sheets

Skeleton Key

By Anthony Horowitz

Activities by Alan Pearce
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Synopsis

Alex is a fifteen-year-old secret agent, working for MI6. However, he is not entirely enthusiastic about this work. Contacted during a PE lesson, he is asked to be a ball boy at Wimbledon, which he reluctantly agrees to. While he is there he uncovers a triad gang who has been drugging top players and betting on weaker players. To escape the revenge of the triad gang, Alex has to accept a holiday on a Cuban island, with two CIA agents. The two agents are killed, and consequently Alex has the responsibility of saving the world from a Russian General and his nuclear bomb.

Prior learning

This story continues the escapades of a teenage secret agent, who works for MI6, and whose latest project takes him to Cuba. To introduce the students to the concept of a secret agent, one of the James Bond films could be watched. To introduce the students to the geography of Cuba, you could look at a website. A link is provided through the Heinemann website. Visit <http://www.heinemann.co.uk/hotlinks> and type in Express code **0994P**. The purpose of going through the Heinemann website is to keep the link updated and to avoid offensive material.

Study areas

This is a very accessible novel, and at one level it is just an adventure story. However, the novel does ask questions about the morality of the secret services, and it does explore the problems Alex experiences as an orphan. Possible areas for study include:

- **Author's craft:** Trace the way the author structures the text.
(Author's craft: **Yr7 R15; Yr8 R10**)
- **Sentence choice:** Consider the use of short sentences in this genre.
(Sentence choice: **Yr7 R14; Yr8 S2**)
- **Discursive writing:** Can we condone all of Alex's behaviour?
(Write to argue: **Yr7 Wr16; Yr8 Wr13; Yr9 Wr13**)
- **Personal view:** Would you like to be a secret agent?
(Writing to persuade: **Yr7 Wr15; Yr8 Wr13; Yr9 Wr13**)
- **Creative writing:** Write another episode for Alex.
(Write to imagine: **Yr7 Wr5; Yr8 Wr8; Yr9 Wr6**)
- **Personal view:** Produce a personal review of the novel.
(Write to analyse: **Yr7 Wr19; Yr8 Wr18; Yr9 Wr17**)
- **Collaborative Drama:** Dramatise significant scenes from the novel:
 - any of the scenes at Wimbledon that do not involve fighting
 - any conversations between Alex and General Sarov.
 (Collaborative drama: **Yr7 S&L16; Yr8 S&L15; Yr9 S&L14**)

Teacher Guidance

Resource Sheet 1

This task requires the students to read a range of pages, and to combine information in order to produce a series of record cards. Page references are provided to help the students to direct their reading. The students need to make a decision about an appropriate style for the writing.

Literacy Framework Objectives

Year 7: S15 Vary the formality of language; **R2** Use appropriate reading strategies; **R7** Identify the main points in a text; **Wr2** Select and assemble ideas appropriately; **Wr6** Portray character through writing; **Wr11** Select and organise information.

Year 8: S12 Explore and use different degrees of formality; **R1** Combine information from various sources; **R4** Review active reading strategies; **Wr7** Creating tone in writing; **Wr10** Organise and present information.

Year 9: S9 Write in Standard English; **R2** Synthesise information from a range of sources; **Wr1** Write for specific audience and purpose.

Guided Reading Opportunities

This task requires the students to read a range of pages, and to combine information in order to produce a series of record cards. The following page references are offered:

Characters	Age	Nationality	Description	Personal history	Strengths/Weaknesses
Alex Rider	Page 67	Page 133		Pages 42, 139	Page 67
Tom Turner	Page 68	Page 133	Page 68	Pages 78–9	Page 68
Belinda Troy	Page 68	Page 133	Pages 68–9		Page 68
General Sarov	Page 5	Page 55	Pages 5, 138	Pages 55–6, 147–8	

With a small group of students, select the character Alex Rider. Read page 42 together and demonstrate how you select appropriate information from this page. Afterwards, ask the students to read page 139 and select any appropriate information they find. Next, show how the information from the different sections of the text can be combined in order to summarise what the reader knows about Alex Rider's background.

This cycle of activities can be repeated by selecting the character General Sarov and reading the pages that provide information about his description (pages 5 and 138).

It may be necessary to study examples of formal record cards in order to demonstrate to the students how record cards adopt a formal style of writing.

Resource Sheet 2

This task requires the students to select relevant information and then present it in a style appropriate for a brochure. The students also need to consider the use of suitable presentational features. Page references are provided to help the students to select the relevant areas of the novel.

Literacy Framework Objectives

- Year 7:** **S13** Revise the conventions of non-fiction; **S17** Use Standard English;
R2 Use appropriate reading strategies; **R6** Adopt active reading strategies;
Wr2 Select and assemble ideas appropriately; **Wr10** Organise texts appropriately;
Wr11 Select and organise information; **Wr14** Describe an object, person or setting.
- Year 8:** **S9** Adapt the stylistic conventions of non-fiction; **R4** Review active reading strategies; **R7** Identify implied and explicit meanings; **Wr10** Organise and present information.
- Year 9:** **S9** Write in Standard English; **R1** Review and extend reading strategies;
R2 Synthesise information from a range of sources; **Wr1** Write for specific audience and purpose; **Wr4** Choose a range of presentational devices;
Wr7 Explore how non-fiction texts can convey information in amusing ways.

Guided Reading Opportunities

This task requires the students to select relevant information and then present it in a style appropriate for a brochure. The students also need to consider the use of suitable presentational features. The following page references are suggested:

Gadget	Pages
Poncho	60
Mobile phone	60–1, 89
Bubblegum	62, 199–200
Michael Owen keyring	62, 182–3

With a small group of students, select 'bubblegum' and read pages 62, 199 and 200. Show the students how to select the necessary information. Afterwards, encourage the students to consider an appropriate style in which to present the information for an MI5 brochure.

This activity can be repeated by asking the students to focus on the Michael Owen keyring. Support the students in their selection of the necessary details, and in their selection of an appropriate style in which to present the information.

It may be necessary to study a range of brochures before considering an appropriate style.

Resource Sheet 3

This task requires the students to select appropriate information in order to produce an estate agent's brochure for General Sarov's house. The students need to read relevant pages, select the necessary information, and then present the information in an appropriate style. The relevant page references are provided.

Literacy Framework Objectives

- Year 7:** **S13** Revise the conventions of non-fiction; **S17** Use Standard English;
R2 Use appropriate reading strategies; **R6** Adopt active reading strategies;
Wr2 Select and assemble ideas appropriately; **Wr10** Organise texts appropriately;
Wr11 Select and organise information; **Wr14** Describe an object, person or setting.
- Year 8:** **S9** Adapt the stylistic conventions of non-fiction; **R4** Review active reading strategies; **R7** Identify implied and explicit meanings; **Wr10** Organise and present information.
- Year 9:** **S9** Write in Standard English; **R1** Review and extend reading strategies;
R2 Synthesise information from a range of sources; **Wr1** Write for specific audience and purpose; **Wr4** Choose a range of presentational devices;
Wr7 Explore how non-fiction texts can convey information in amusing ways.

Guided Reading Opportunities

This task requires the students to select appropriate information in order to produce an estate agent's brochure for General Sarov's house. The students need to read relevant pages, select the necessary information, and then present the information in an appropriate style. The following page references are offered:

Details	Pages
The crusher	131–7
Bedroom	137–8
Breakfast	143
The grounds	145–7, 154–5
The barracón (slave quarters)	150
Security	159–60

With a group of students select 'the bedroom' and read pages 137 and 138. Show the students how to select the necessary information. Afterwards, model how you would use adjectives and adverbs in order to describe the bedroom as positively as possible.

Next, select 'security' and support the students in their reading of the pages, extracting the necessary information, and then their generating of adjectives and adverbs to describe the security as positively as possible.

1 Record Cards

Introduction

It is quite clear from *Skeleton Key* that the CIA and MI6 keep very detailed records about their spies, and about their enemies. These records would have details such as people's ages, their strengths and weaknesses, and their backgrounds.

Imagine that Alex accidentally came across a box of top-secret CIA records. In the box he found records about himself, Tom Turner, Belinda Troy, and General Sarov.

Imagine that you have worked for the CIA. Your task is to research the following characters and to complete their CIA records: Alex Rider, Tom Turner, Belinda Troy and General Sarov.

Planning

First, you will need to make four copies of the record card that appears on page 7. Then, in the table below you will find some page references for important information about Alex Rider, Tom Turner, Belinda Troy and General Sarov which you can use to fill in the record card. However, the CIA researchers have not yet completed their research, so you will have to locate some of the information yourself. You will not be able to find information for cells in the table that are shaded, so leave these out.

Characters	Age	Nationality	Description	Personal history	Strengths/Weaknesses
Alex Rider	Page 67	Page 133		Pages 42, 139	Page 67
Tom Turner	Page 68	Page 133	Page 68	Pages 78–9	Page 68
Belinda Troy	Page 68	Page 133	Pages 68–9		Page 68
General Sarov		Page 55	Pages 5, 138	Pages 55–6, 147–8	

When you fill in each of the record cards, bear in mind that the CIA would like you to include as much information as possible.

1

Record Cards

CIA Official Record Card

Name:

Age:

Nationality:

Description:

Strengths and weaknesses:

History:

Signed: _____

Date: _____

2 Secret gadgets

Introduction

In all good spy stories the agents have secret gadgets. This is true of the MI6 agents in *Skeleton Key*. Even Smithers' office has a range of gadgets, including a lift that is disguised as a sofa.

Your task is to produce an MI6 brochure for the agents. The brochure will describe all of the latest gadgets available.

Planning

In the table on page 9 you will find a list of some of the most recently developed MI6 gadgets. First of all, re-read the relevant page references and make notes about the gadgets.

Now think carefully about how you are going to present this information; you will need to make decisions about what the MI6 gadget brochure will look like. In the brochure, describe the gadgets and include illustrations if you can.

Finally, create two more gadgets yourself that will be included in the brochure. Each gadget that you design needs to look like a normal household item, but must have some secret power that can be used in an emergency.

Notes:

- Try to provide an appropriate image of each gadget.
- Describe what each gadget looks like.
- Explain clearly what secret power each gadget has.

2

Secret gadgets

Gadget	Pages	Notes
Poncho	60	
Mobile phone	60–1, 89	
Bubblegum	62, 199– 200	
Michael Owen keyring	62, 182–3	

3 House for Sale

Introduction

In the final chapter of *Skeleton Key* General Sarov commits suicide. We are told by Mrs Jones that Sarov could not bear to live once Alex had rejected him. As General Sarov had no family, his house on Skeleton Key could not be passed on to a relative. It would have to be sold.

Imagine that you work for an Estate Agent who has been given the task of selling General Sarov's house. Because it is such an impressive property, the Estate Agent would like a booklet produced that gives as much information about the house as possible. The Estate Agent would like the booklet, if possible, to include a map of the local area, a diagram of the house, and photographs.

Your task is to produce the booklet that will be used to advertise General Sarov's house.

Planning

In the table on page 11 you will find a list of references to General Sarov's house. Re-read the pages carefully and make notes about the house. Remember, your task is to sell the house – only select details that will be helpful. Afterwards, organise your notes appropriately and then produce your brochure.

Notes:

- The novel provides details about the house. However, you might need to use your imagination to fill in some gaps.
- Your task is to sell the house. Use adjectives and adverbs in your descriptions.
- It might be possible to find appropriate images of an impressive house on the Internet.

3

House for sale

Details	Pages	Notes
The crusher	131-7	
Bedroom	137-8	
Breakfast	143	
The grounds	145-7, 154-5	
The barracón (slave quarters)	150	
Security	159-60	