

Spies & Secret Agents

How have women spied during wars and revolutions? This worksheet covers four women who have taken incredible risks in name of duty.



Individual exercises



Group discussion



Variable length

Policarpa was a seamstress who spied for the resistance during the fight for independence of what is now Colombia.

In the early 1800s it was part of the Viceroyalty of New Granada, and it was ruled by the Spanish. She was also known as La Pola and as Apolonia, and her full legal name is uncertain. She worked on clothing for the wives and daughters of royalists and officers, passing intelligence to the revolutionaries. She was captured and executed by firing squad, famously turning around to face her executioners and curse the Spaniards.

Discuss in pairs or small groups: Compare Policarpa's story with the story of Manuela Sáenz on the next page. Which of these roles would you find most difficult?

Writing exercise: You are Policarpa, and you have discovered that the officers of the Royal Army will be leaving the city at dawn tomorrow. Write a letter to your brother explaining what you have heard.

Policarpa Salavarrieta

1795-1817



Noor Inayat Khan 1914-1944

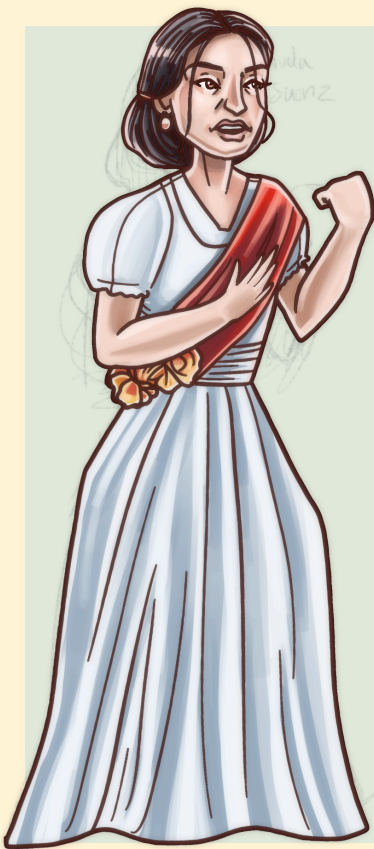


Noor Inayat Khan was a British spy during World War II. She was the first British female wireless operator sent into France to aid the resistance during WWII, where she worked under the codename "Madeleine". She was also known as Noor-un-Nisa and Nora Baker.

Noor joined the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (the WAAF) in 1940 when she was 26 years old, and then later transferred to the Special Operations Unit. She was deeply concerned about the ethics of war, and decided that this was the way in which she could help, staying at her post in France despite increasing danger. In 1943 Noor was betrayed to the Nazi forces and after nearly a year of imprisonment she was executed. She was posthumously awarded the George Cross by the British and the Croix de Guerre (with a silver star) by the French.

Discuss in pairs or small groups: What are the different roles which someone might take in a war or revolution? Do you feel uncomfortable about some roles?

Writing exercise: Design a medal. What achievements would the medal reward? What would the medal be called, and why? Describe the medal in detail. If you like, you could also draw it.



Manuela Sáenz de Vergara y Aizpuru

1797-1856

Manuela was an Ecuadorean revolutionary and spy who gathered information for the revolution. At that time, Ecuador was part of the Viceroyalty of New Granada, which also included present-day Colombia, Venezuela, and Panama.

Manuela was a wealthy socialite who held popular parties where she spied on the generals. She became a collaborator and lover of Simon Bolivar, the military and political leader who led the fight for independence, and on one occasion she saved his life. She received the Caballeresa del Sol (Order of the Sun) medal for her role in the revolution, but died forgotten in Peru, buried in a mass grave. In 2010 her remains were symbolically reinterred.

Discuss in pairs or small groups: How would you feel if all your good deeds were forgotten?

Writing exercise: You are Manuela. Write a letter to a friend. The letter should look as though it is about a recent party, but should actually contain a hidden message.

The Chevalier d'Eon

1728-1810

The Chevalier d'Eon was a French diplomat, soldier, and spy. She lived the first half of her life as man, and the last half as a woman. Her full chosen name was Charlotte-Geneviève-Louise-Augusta-Andréa-Timothéa d'Éon de Beaumont. While she was still presenting as male, rumours circulated (and may have been encouraged by her) that she was a woman, to the extent that a betting pool was started. She reportedly gained access to the Russian Court and spied for France. Her entire life was eventful, and dramatic, including being wounded in a fencing tournament and being sent to debtors' prison. She eventually died in poverty in London.

Discuss in pairs or small groups: If you're a spy, is it better to hide in plain sight? Who do you think would be the least likely person to be a spy?

Writing exercise: Write a short story in which the main character is a spy at a royal party. The story should be written in the first person. What happens? Are you the only spy there?



These worksheets have been sponsored by almost 150 people, and are part of the wider Library Labyrinth project created by Dissent Games. You can find details about the project (and the board game!) at www.librarylabyrinth.com

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