

Civil War Spies

Activity Overview: Ready to crack Goldie's secret codes? You will find the hidden message by deciphering the secret questions on the Civil War Spies worksheet. Start with deciphering the first message with your decoder. Complete the four clues, record your answers and become a master spy.

Connection to Iowa History

General Grenville Mellen Dodge settled in Council Bluffs, Iowa, and became a Union army officer and a pioneering figure in military intelligence. During the Civil War, Dodge led one of the largest intelligence gathering networks with over 100 agents (spies) for the Union Army under Ulysses S. Grant. The initial group, known as the "Corps of Scouts," included soldiers, unionists, female citizens and formerly-enslaved people in the Confederate territory. They were able to gather information by tapping telegraph wires and even intercepting mail. Dodge was known for his tight operational security. For example, his spies corresponded by courier rather than telegraph and he would not share the names of his agents, even with Grant.



Instructions [\(Video Instructions Available\)](#)

- 1 **Create your spy decoder.** Either use the [template](#) and cut out the circular Goldie's decoder. Or create it from scratch and draw a circle on paper and cut it out. Within the circle, write the alphabet clockwise along the outer border.
- 2 **Rotate.** Turn your decoder so the letter "I" is at the top. Underneath the letter "I," write the letter "A" right below it. This will be the beginning of your inner circle of code.
- 3 **Continue to rotate.** Turn the decoder clockwise as you continue to write the rest of the alphabet underneath the outer ring. Each letter on the inside circle should be lined up underneath a different letter on the outer circle.
 - For example, outer circle "J" = inner circle "B";
 - outer circle "K" = inner circle "C," outer letter "L" = inner circle "D"
- 4 **Complete the worksheet.** Once your decoder is finished, move on to using in with the [Civil War Spies worksheet](#). There are warm-up exercises on the worksheet to teach you how to correctly use the decoder. Finish the worksheet and uncover the secret Goldie codes to become a master spy.
- 5 **Create your own code.** Try your hand at creating codes. Use the decoder template and instead of starting at the letter "I," start at another letter and write the alphabet clockwise from that letter.
- 6 **Share!** If you want to share your codes with the State Historical Museum of Iowa, please email your secret messages to museum.education@iowa.gov. We want to share your work with other young historians!
- 7 **Questions to Spark Learning**
 - Why do you think spies are important during wartime?
 - What kind of skills do you think you will need if you became a spy?

Materials

- Spy decoder (make from scratch or [use template](#))
- [Activity worksheet](#)
- Pencil or pen
- Scissors
- Paper (if making decoder from scratch)

Create Your Spy Decoder

Step 1

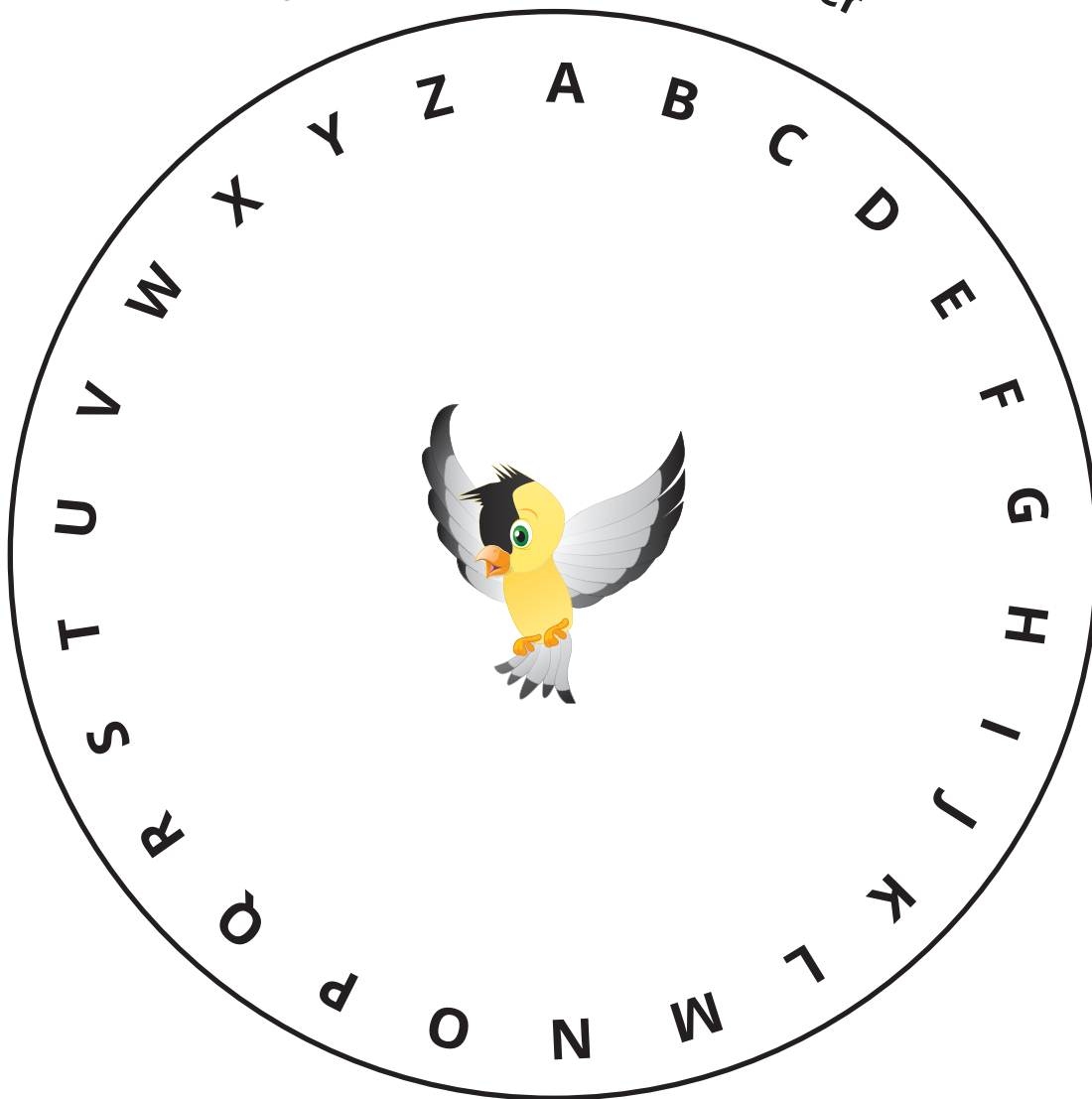
Follow the line of the decoder below and cut out the circle.

Step 2

Grab a pencil or pen. Rotate the decoder to the letter "I." And below "I" write the letter "A." Now, working clockwise, you will finish writing the alphabet under the outer circle of letters starting from letter "I."

- For example, outer circle "J" = inner circle "B"; outer circle "K" = inner circle C

Cut out Goldie's spy decoder



Civil War Spy Worksheet



Ready to crack the Goldie's secret codes? Use the outer letters of your decoder to match the code, and then write the inner letters to understand the message. Complete the four clues, record your answers and become a master spy.

First, do these two warm-up exercises to practice your decoding skills.

1. Decipher the code and write your answer below. The code is: **OWWL UWZVQVO**

2. Now, you are going to use your decoder to create your own message. Think of a word, phrase or sentence and write it in code below.

Get Started

Now, you will use your decoder and skills to decipher the questions and answers below to learn interesting facts about Iowa history. Each of the five clues include a question and an answer to decipher from Goldie's secret code.

Clue 1

Secret Message

Question: QWEI ABIBW JQZL

Answer: OWTLNQVKP

Clue 2

Secret Message

Question: QWEI ABIBW BZMM

Answer: JCZ WIS

Clue 3

Secret Message

Question: QWEI ABIBW NTWEMZ

Answer: EQTL JWAM

Clue 4

Secret Message

Question: QWEI'K KIXQBIT KQBG

Answer: LMA UWQVMA

Clue 5

Secret Message

Question: QWEI NQZAB BMZZQBWZG OWDMVWZ

Answer: ZWJMZB TCKIA

Secret Message

Final Coded Message: OZMIB RWJ UIABMZ AXG!
