

APHRA BEHN

ENGLAND'S SECRET WEAPON: A FEMALE SPY

Aphra Behn: a spy for the King

Although Aphra Behn is best known for her literary work, as the first Englishwoman to earn a living through writing plays, poetry, and fiction, before she became a writer she had another, very unusual job: she was a political spy for King Charles II. She travelled from England to Europe - working mainly in Belgium - to find information, which she sent back to the English government in the form of letters. The codename she used was 'Astrea', which means star in Greek. Working as a spy (especially as a woman) was a very frustrating and dangerous job, from which Aphra earned very little money, and so after around a year she returned to England and began her writing career instead.

Starter activity

Sometimes spies try to disguise their messages, to make sure they cannot be understood if they fall into the hands of their enemies. **Unscramble the following messages, to reveal some key information about Aphra Behn:**

**HRAFP HEBN EHT SYP
REH DOCEANIME WSA SATERA
EHS TRVALELDE OT GIUMLEB
YSPING SAW GERDNAOUS**

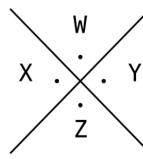
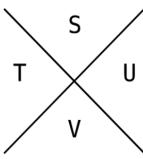
A common form of code writing involves the use of ciphers, and might exchange letters for symbols. **Using the grid at the bottom of the page (a pigpen cipher) write a short letter in code, as if you are spy like Aphra on a mission abroad. Think of a codename for yourself, describe the country you are in, and explain some secret information you have gathered about the people you have met.**

Activities

Although it was unusual at the time, one of the reasons Aphra Behn was hired by the English government was because she was a woman. One of her main missions involved a man called William Scott, an Englishman who was working for the Dutch government. Aphra had previously had a relationship with him, so it was believed that she would be able to use her feminine charms to convince him to become a double agent. **Write a short paragraph explaining why women might be well-suited to working as spies. Might women be able to disguise themselves more easily than men? Why/how? Would they be less likely to be suspected by others?**

A	B	C
D	E	F
G	H	I

J	.	K	.	L
M	.	N	.	O
P	.	Q	.	R



cipher - a secret or disguised way of writing (a code)
anagram - a word, phrase, or name formed by rearranging the letters of another
double agent - an agent who pretends to act as a spy for one country or organization while in fact acting on behalf of an enemy

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