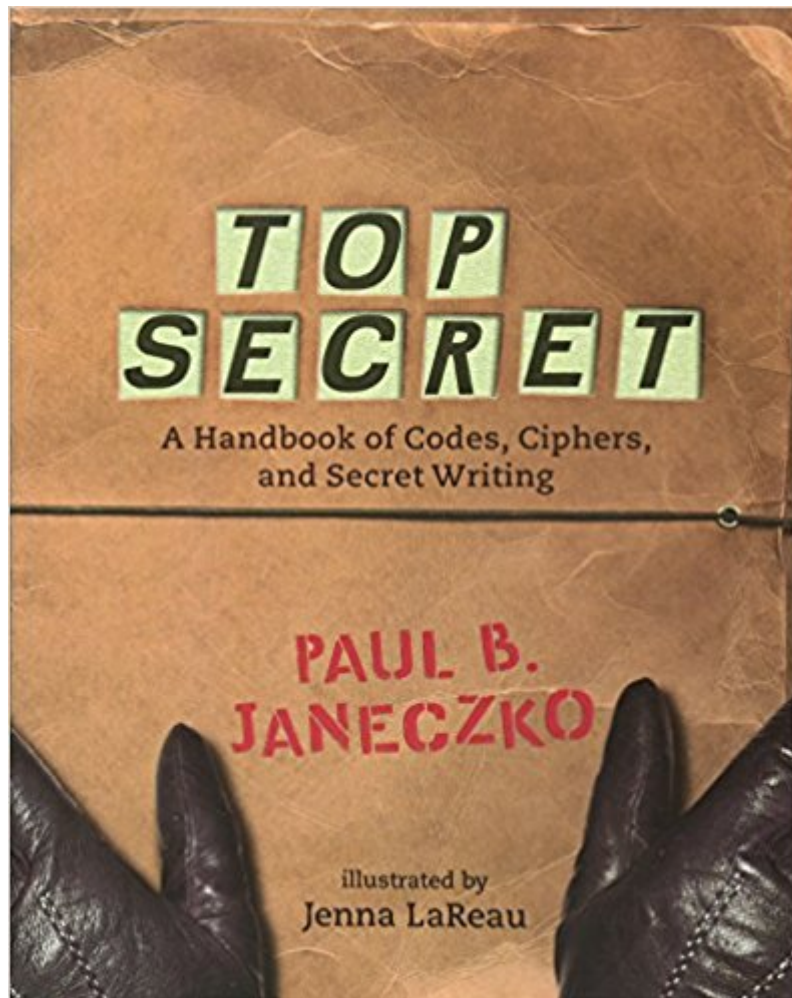




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# Top Secret: A Handbook Of Codes, Ciphers And Secret Writing



## Synopsis

"The author's upbeat, positive tone is refreshing and his enthusiasm about his topic is contagious."   
 —**SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL** (starred review)   
 Pssst! Do you know the difference between a code and a cipher? Can you tell a St. Cyr slide from a Cardano grille? Did you know that the discovery of a substitution cipher caused Mary Queen of Scots to lose her head? Don't look now, but packed into this practical field guide is everything a young person needs to know about the art of concealment - making and breaking codes, mastering cipher systems, and experimenting with secret writing. Offering plenty of hands-on practice sessions, tips for creating a code-making kit, sidebars on secret codes in history, and an amusing pair of spies to illustrate techniques, Paul B. Janeczko's tantalizing TOP SECRET won't stay a secret for long.

## Book Information

Paperback: 144 pages

Publisher: Candlewick; Reprint edition (April 11, 2006)

Language: English

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Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 63 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #38,315 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #24 in [Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > History > Military & Wars](#) #56 in [Books > Children's Books > Activities, Crafts & Games > Games > Puzzles](#) #129 in [Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > Reference](#)

Age Range: 9 - 12 years

Grade Level: 4 - 7

## Customer Reviews

Grade 4-8-A wonderful guide to secret writing. Janeczko relates how different codes came to be and why they were needed, and gives some historical examples. The book also contains information and exercises (with answers) on deciphering codes and provides children with the tools to make their own field kit. In addition to numerous codes and ciphers, invisible ink recipes and a number of concealment techniques are included. Humorous black-and-white sketches featuring two figures in sunglasses and trench coats are found throughout the book. The author's upbeat, positive tone is

refreshing and his enthusiasm about his topic is contagious. He recommends that readers go to the library to learn more about the subject, and encourages them to use their imaginations and share the fun of secret writing with friends. Cynde Suite, Bartow County Library System, Adairsville, GA  
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**\*Starred Review\*** Gr. 4-7. Although readers familiar with Janeczko's poetry anthologies may be surprised to see his name on a book about cryptography, the connection between his two passions rapidly comes clear. After all, codes, like poems, allow one to conceal or unveil meaning in satisfyingly elegant ways. Janeczko gives aspiring codemakers and codebreakers everything they need for staging their own information exchanges--terminology; instructions for making simple devices (using index cards and an exacto knife to create Cardano Grilles, a message-concealment tool first used in 1556); concrete advice (assemble a "spy toolkit," using film-canister "vials" to store homemade invisible ink); and plenty of practice activities with answers at the back of the book. Fascinating historical anecdotes keep things lively, as do LaReau's stylish black-and-white illustrations, which show two spies, a male and a female, slinking through the pages as if to the furtive beat of the Pink Panther theme song. A certain category of puzzle-loving kids, especially those whose interest has been whetted by Blue Balliett's code-rich adventure *Chasing Vermeer* [BKL Ap 1 04], will take to this packed-to-the-gills volume like a spy to a cat suit. Jennifer Mattson  
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Although this book seems to be recommended for middle schoolers, I bought it for my just-turned 6-year-old son as a birthday gift. We had initially checked it out from our library and he absolutely loved it. Expect to find page upon page of engaging codes and ciphers. Parents are forewarned! Arm yourself with the patience to solve the numerous scribbled codes your kids are going to bring you. Fabulous book. I'm so glad we got our own copy. Another book I'd recommend is Martin Gardner's *Codes, Ciphers and Secret Writing*.

The book covers the basics of several types of ciphers as well as the basics of steganography. It's a great introduction at the middle school level. Younger kids could learn plenty from this but may need someone adept at explaining things from the material in the book.

Pretty cool book. I love the little historical side notes.

I got this book to help me teach a spy class for elementary and middle school aged students. It's a winner. I recommended it to the parents. Great background and information, with lots of history and science. The projects are fun and will provide many hours of exploration. Top notch!

very informative.

Written mainly for younger readers ( say from 8-18), but even older people can get some interesting ideas from this. I'm not seriously into codes and ciphers, but if anyone is, this would be too basic for them. OK for an introduction.

My son absolutely loved this book. He was 11 when I got it for him and it turned out to be a quick and captivating read. The book covers a number of different codes and what not, so there's plenty to interest a young mind. Each new chapter yielded a new favorite, and it obviously got him thinking. My daughter's 10 now, and she's tackling it with his help. They've been inspired, in fact, to create their own secret code. Hopefully I'll be able to crack it!

This was a gift to go with the Decoder Ring. I don't believe my granddaughter had a lot of time to get into the book yet but I know she will.

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