

A BACKYARD MISSION

WHO'S HIDING OUT IN YOUR BACKYARD?

CASE FILE

THE CASE OF THE SNEAKY SNACKER

WHAT IT IS

A backyard mystery your child solves using real intelligence skills: **observing**, gathering **evidence**, mapping the scene, and making a case they can defend to you. Something has been **snacking** in the backyard, and it's their job to figure out who. **There's no answer key.** The conclusion is entirely their own.

YOUR ROLE: HEADQUARTERS (HQ)

You're **Headquarters**, the home base your agent reports to. It's an easy job: you **don't run the mission, solve it, or correct it.** Your agent does the fieldwork. You receive their reports when they check in, and at the end you receive their Debrief. Being there and interested is the whole role.

WHAT YOU NEED

These printed pages and a **pencil**. Crayons or markers are a bonus for the map. Works in a backyard, on a porch, or at a park.

QUICK FACTS

Time: 30 to 45 minutes for the four core missions (bonus adds more). **Best for:** all levels – a younger child can run it with a grown-up reading aloud; older children go deeper.

WHAT THIS BUILDS

Real observation and reasoning skills, the kind actual investigators use: **noticing carefully**, staying **patient**, organizing **evidence**, and forming a conclusion you can back up. The spy frame is the fun; the thinking is the point.

THE ONE THING TO KNOW

There is **no answer key**, on purpose. Two children could name different suspects and both be right, if they can explain their evidence. As HQ, your only job is to be curious about how they reasoned. The most useful thing you can say is: **"How did you know that?"** Try not to correct, and let them take their time. The patience is where the skill is.

"How did you know that?"

AGENT, WE HAVE A MYSTERY.

TOP SECRET

Something has been **sneaking** into your backyard and helping itself to **snacks**. Nibbled leaves. Dug-up dirt. A flower missing its petals. We're calling them the **Sneaky Snacker**.

The tricky part: they only come out when **nobody's watching**. A deer? A rabbit? A bird, a bug, a squirrel? Your job is to find out **who**.

You don't catch a sneaky snacker by **chasing**. You catch them by **NOTICING**. They leave clues everywhere: half-eaten leaves, tracks, little messes.

Backyard too clean to find a clue? **Even better** — that means they haven't struck yet. Your job: predict **where they'll hit next**.

Four missions. Do them in order. By the end, you'll have enough evidence to name the Sneaky Snacker and **prove it**.

Good luck, Agent. — Command

YOUR MISSION: FIND OUT WHO THE SNEAKY SNACKER IS.

Tell your grown-up: **"You're my HQ. I'll report in when I find something."**

REAL SPY SKILLS

Real agents almost never catch the suspect in the act. They figure out who it was from the **clues left behind**. That's your job too.

MISSION ROSTER

THE SWEEP

THE STAKEOUT

MAP THE TERRITORY

THE DEBRIEF

CODE YOUR REPORT

BONUS · ONLY IF YOU WANT MORE

THE SWEEP

01

SKILL: READING THE SCENE

Walk the whole yard. Hunt for clues the Snacker left behind. Look low, look high, look under things.

Pay special attention to plants, dirt, and anywhere food might be. Check the box when you spot one with your own eyes.

EVIDENCE HUNT

- Nibbled, chewed, or half-eaten leaves or plants
- A dug-up spot, hole, or disturbed dirt
- Tracks, paw prints, or flattened grass
- Droppings, fur, or a dropped feather
- Something missing or knocked over (fruit, flowers, seeds)

YOUR BEST CLUE — WHICH CLUE TELLS YOU THE **MOST** ABOUT THE SNACKER? DESCRIBE IT.

NO CLUES YET?

Switch to **prediction mode**. Find the spot the Snacker is most likely to hit — tastiest plants, easiest way in — and mark it. Why would you strike there?

AGENT'S NOTE

Found a clue you can't explain yet? **Write it down anyway**. Real agents record what they don't understand. It's often the most important evidence.

RADIO HQ (OPTIONAL)

Found something good? Report it: "**HQ, the roses have been nibbled!**"

THE STAKEOUT

02

SKILL: PATIENCE

2
MIN.

The Sweep was fast. This one is slow, and slow is the hard part. Sit down, hold still, and stay quiet.

The Snacker won't come near if they think someone's watching. So **fool them**: go still, and the backyard forgets you're there. That's when clues start to show up.

STAKEOUT LOG — ONE SENSE AT A TIME.

1 · SOUNDS I HEARD

2 · SMALL MOVEMENTS I SAW

3 · SMELLS IN THE AIR

REAL SPY SKILLS

The best agents aren't the fastest — they're the **most patient**. Staying still and watching is a real skill. You're practicing it right now.

AGENT'S NOTE

Heard a sound you can't name? **Describe it anyway**. "A scratchy rustle by the fence" is real evidence.

MAP THE TERRITORY

03

SKILL: MAPPING INTEL

Draw a spy's map of the whole scene. Put every clue in one place. This map is your whole case on one page.

Where each **clue** was · Where the **snacking** happened · Best **hiding spots** ·
How they **get in and out**

DRAW YOUR BACKYARD FROM ABOVE — LIKE A BIRD SEES IT. USE YOUR OWN SYMBOLS. IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE NEAT, JUST USEFUL.

MAP KEY — WHAT DO YOUR SYMBOLS MEAN?

_____ = _____ _____ = _____ _____ = _____

REAL SPY SKILLS

Real agents map every scene. A map turns scattered clues into a **picture you can read** — and shows patterns you couldn't see before.

THE DEBRIEF

04

SKILL: MAKING YOUR CASE

Time to close the case, Agent. Who is the Sneaky Snacker? A deer? A rabbit? A squirrel, a bird, a bug? You decide.

NAME THE SNACKER

DRAW WHO YOU THINK IT IS — EVEN IF YOU NEVER SAW THEM.

YOUR CASE

Start with "I think the Sneaky Snacker is..." and use your clues as proof.

REPORT TO HQ — SPOKEN, NO WRITE-IN NEEDED

((.)) Present your case **out loud** to HQ. Walk them through your suspect, your evidence, and your map. **Can you convince them?**

NO ANSWER KEY

You're right as long as your **evidence backs you up**. A different agent might name a different Snacker. That's allowed. Real cases work the same way.

**CASE
CLOSED**

CODE YOUR REPORT



BONUS · OPTIONAL

SKILL: TRADECRAFT

Real spies don't write so just anyone can read it. They use secret codes. Make your own.

BUILD YOUR CODE — PICK A SYMBOL OR A DIFFERENT LETTER FOR EACH ONE BELOW.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z

YOUR SECRET REPORT — WRITE THE SNACKER'S NAME (OR YOUR WHOLE CASE) IN YOUR CODE.

REAL SPY SKILLS

Codes are real spy tradecraft. For thousands of years, agents have hidden messages so the **wrong people couldn't read them.**

CASE CLOSED. GIVE YOUR CODED REPORT AND KEY TO SOMEONE YOU TRUST. CAN THEY CRACK IT?