



# SAMANTHA SPINNER

AND THE  
SUPER-SECRET  
PLANS

RUSSELL GINNS

ACTIVITY GUIDE

## ABOUT THE BOOK

### THE FIRST BOOK IN A HILARIOUS NEW SERIES ABOUT A GIRL, HER BROTHER, AND SOME SUPER-BIG GLOBE-TROTTING ADVENTURE.

Samantha Spinner's uncle Paul disappeared, and here's what he left:

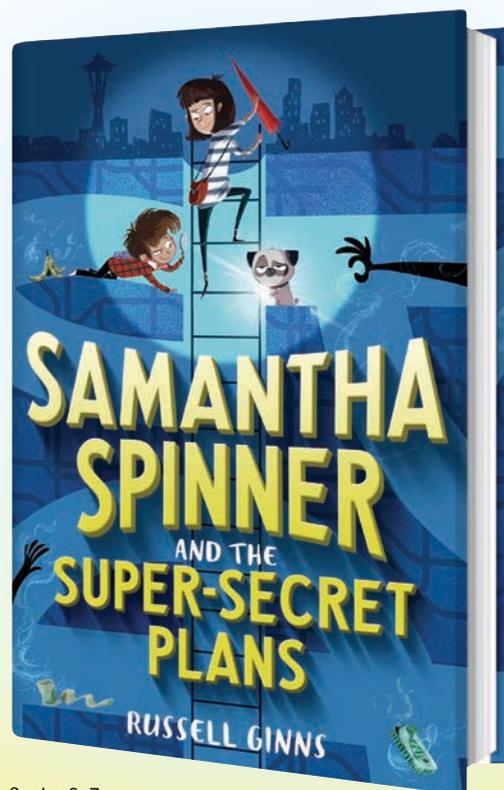
- ★ Samantha's sister got a check for \$2,400,000,000.
- ★ Samantha's brother got the New York Yankees.
- ★ Samantha got a rusty red umbrella with a tag hanging off its worn handle. The tag says:

"Watch out for the RAIN."

*Thanks a lot, Uncle Paul.*

After all the strawberry waffles, stories, and puzzles they'd shared, how could he just leave without saying goodbye? And what is the meaning of that mysterious message? The answer is simple. Sam knows in her heart that Uncle Paul is in danger. And if he taught her anything, it's that not everything is exactly what it seems. Which is why we should pay close attention to that rusty red umbrella, and never trust a monkey at a hula-hoop contest.

The RAIN is coming, and Samantha Spinner is about to find herself mixed up in some super-important, super-dangerous, super-secret plans.



Grades 3–7

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Art © 2018 by Barbara Flieger

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**RUSSELL GINNS** is a writer and game designer who specializes in puzzles, songs, and smart fun. He has worked on projects for a wide variety of organizations and publications, including Sesame Workshop, Nintendo, *Scientific American*, and the Girl Scouts of America. Russell lives and writes in Washington, D.C. To learn more about him, visit [russellginns.com](http://russellginns.com) and follow @rginns on Twitter.



# HEY, TEACHERS!

## HAVE YOU EVER WANTED TO TAKE YOUR LEARNERS ON A FIELD TRIP AROUND THE WORLD?

Have you ever wished you could take them to the place that you are studying in class? Samantha Spinner and her brother, Nipper, can help get your class as close to a trip around the world as possible—without leaving the school! They even add mystery, intrigue, and adventure to their excursions. Take this virtual field trip and give your students a peek at their amazing world.

Choose the travel itinerary that works for your classroom, copy the travel documents (reproducible), and pack your bags (prepare the materials). Get ready for the trip (activities) of a lifetime!

Excursions can be set up as stations for more flexible pacing, or the whole class can work on one destination at a time. Create groups to “travel” to each destination. We have provided resources and links related to each activity to share with your students. Before you give them each activity sheet, be sure to introduce them to students. When a group completes the assignment, they will receive an envelope from you that contains a one-word clue. **At the end of their trip, each group will work together and unscramble the words to discover the advice that Uncle Paul might leave for his family.** Once the sentence is correctly unscrambled, each group will be given one final envelope that contains a compass. **The challenge will be to figure out the relationship between Uncle Paul’s advice and this important travel tool.**

Offer your travelers maps, globes, and online tools, like Google Earth. With each destination, they can experience virtual world travel. Samantha and Nipper will take your learners on an exciting adventure around the globe that they won’t soon forget!



# PREPARING FOR YOUR TRIP!



## TRAVEL CHECKLIST



Dear tour guides (teachers), be sure to check off all the items on the list before embarking on your virtual field trip. Make sure to copy all of the pages marked For Students!

- Travel Documents
- Envelopes (five for each travel group)
- Mystery Words (reproducible)
- Internet Access
- Toothpicks (one hundred per travel group)
- Mini Marshmallows (two cups per group)
- Compasses (real or printed)
- Map-Making Supplies (paper or other writing surface, crayons, markers, colored pencils)
- Imagination
- Creativity

## WHAT YOUR GROUP TRAVEL WILL LOOK LIKE

The trip is almost here! But wait—a few more details before you embark. To prepare:

- Copy (for as many travel groups as you have) and distribute the Travel Document directions. The teacher notes for all Travel Documents are together, following these instructions.
- Copy (for as many travel groups as you have) and then cut apart the mystery word cards and seal each word in separate envelopes for each group.
- Seal one compass into a separate envelope for each group.
- At the conclusion of each excursion, hand an envelope containing one of the words to each group. By the end of their trip, each group will have earned four envelopes (clue words).
- After all the excursions are done, the groups will unscramble Uncle Paul's mystery advice\* (from the envelope clue words).
- You will then distribute the final envelope\*\* to each group for their last challenge.
- Then you can ask your travelers: How is Uncle Paul's advice related to the compass?\*\*\* Why would this secret message be important to a world traveler?

\* Uncle Paul's advice is Never Eat Soggy Waffles. Be sure to hand out the envelopes out of order so groups have to unscramble! It's more fun that way!

\*\* the compass

\*\*\* North, East, South, West begin with the same letters as Never Eat Soggy Waffles. This is a common mnemonic device to help students remember the cardinal directions on a compass. Very important for travel!

## BON VOYAGE!





# MYSTERY WORDS AND COMPASS



NEVER

EAT

SOGGY

WAFFLES

**Instructions:** Copy the mystery words and compass (for as many travel groups as you have). Then cut apart the mystery word cards and seal each word in a separate envelope for each group. Seal one compass into a separate envelope for each group.

**FOR  
TEACHERS!**

# TRAVEL ITINERARIES

Use these notes for all of the travel itineraries as instructions. Student instructions and handouts follow!

## Travel Itinerary 1: Temple of Edfu, Egypt

Visit the Temple of Horus at Edfu, Egypt, just like Samantha and Nipper. Send your students to [ancient-egypt.info/2013/08/temple-of-horus-at-edfu.html](http://ancient-egypt.info/2013/08/temple-of-horus-at-edfu.html) to read about the stories on the walls of the temple, told through symbols and pictures, which are called hieroglyphs. Explain that before archaeologists could study the hieroglyphs, they had to translate them, like cracking a code. Your students can learn more about hieroglyphs at [natgeokids.com/uk/discover/history/egypt/hieroglyphics-uncovered](http://natgeokids.com/uk/discover/history/egypt/hieroglyphics-uncovered). The inscriptions at Edfu give us information about the language, myths, and religion of ancient Egypt. This excursion will have students using the key on their travel documents to crack a code and discover an important question. **This question\* will launch your travelers into the mystery of the entire trip! Direct students to save this decoded question because they will need it to complete the final challenge. This is the only excursion for which they will not receive an envelope from you.** Later, challenge students to create their own codes or research other common codes. Once they have written something in code, they can ask classmates to solve their mystery messages!

\* QUESTION: "What advice about breakfast might Uncle Paul leave for the kids?"



## Travel Itinerary 2: Eiffel Tower, Paris, France

Using Google Earth, travel to the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France, with your students. Have them explore the tallest building in the city, and encourage them to look carefully at the architecture. Can your world travelers build their own strong, tall structure? They will use the toothpicks and mini marshmallows to build the tallest structure possible! Have them measure their structures and record their results. At the end of the trip, compare the height of each group's building.



**FOR  
TEACHERS!**

# TRAVEL ITINERARIES

## Travel Itinerary 3: Florence, Italy

Samantha impressed the people in the places she and her brother visited with her ability to say *please* and *thank you* in eleven languages. Manners are so important! Travelers will find out which language the words belong to. Finally, each group can discuss why Uncle Paul thought this would be a valuable lesson to teach his niece.

## Travel Itinerary 4: Louvre, Paris, France

Visit the Louvre and the Louvre Pyramid by checking out the official website: [louvre.fr/en](http://louvre.fr/en). Here, your travelers will see Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, one of the most famous pieces of artwork in the world. Ask them to study it very carefully. There is much speculation about this painting—many people have asked why the subject is smiling. Have each group discuss possible ideas and complete a piece of writing explaining their thoughts. Encourage creativity and close attention to detail.



## Travel Itinerary 5: Seattle, Washington

The ninjas followed Samantha and Nipper to Seattle, but their smell gave them away. Assign travelers to find and examine the language the author uses to describe the warnings that Samantha got every time the ninjas were closing in (pp. 72, 90, 138, 142, 144, 197, 200, 210). Some of the descriptions were gag-worthy (blah!), but they made the point that these were not the stealthiest ninjas. Discuss how Ginns taps into readers' senses to connect them to the scenes. What do your travelers smell, see, taste, hear, and feel when reading his words? Groups will use descriptive language to make simple sentences much more exciting.



## FOR TEACHERS!

# FINAL CHALLENGE

Now that your travelers have successfully completed each excursion (activity), complete the checklist below to help your groups succeed in their final challenge. Once each group earns their four envelopes, they should:

- Reread the important decoded question\* from the Temple of Edfu excursion.
- Unscramble the four words\*\* (from their envelopes) to discover Uncle Paul’s advice.
- Once the words are unscrambled, groups earn the final envelope, which contains the compass.
- Groups discuss: How is Uncle Paul’s advice connected to the compass?\*\*\*
- Groups brainstorm possible answers to this question: Why would this secret message be important to a world traveler?

\* “What advice about breakfast might Uncle Paul leave for the kids?”

\*\* “Never Eat Soggy Waffles.”

\*\*\* North, East, South, and West—also known as cardinal directions—begin with the same letters as Never Eat Soggy Waffles.

## Travel Itinerary 6: Home

Dear tour guide, now that your travelers have completed (and survived . . . phew!) their whirlwind adventures, it’s time to take them home. The culminating activity for *Samantha Spinner and the Super-Secret Plans* is a map-making project inspired by the red umbrella that Uncle Paul left for Samantha. The umbrella included famous landmarks from around the world, as well as clues to guide the characters from place to place. Your travelers can construct a map of a place they know well. It can be their neighborhood, school, home, or even their favorite place to visit. The goal is for students to develop a sense of direction and spatial awareness. They can use their creativity and imagination by adding fantasy objects, paths, and landmarks. The map can even be a treasure map or scavenger hunt with a fun surprise to be discovered at the end. The sky’s the limit!

Use these websites to introduce the concepts of map-making.

- [readingrockets.org/article/map-making](http://readingrockets.org/article/map-making),
- [nationalgeographic.org/education/map-skills-elementary-students/](http://nationalgeographic.org/education/map-skills-elementary-students/)



FOR  
TEACHERS!

## WHAT'S NEXT?



### THE ADVENTURES DON'T NEED TO END!

Ask your young travelers to make predictions about what is next for Samantha Spinner in the sequel, *Samantha Spinner and the Spectacular Specs*. Rereading Samantha's journal (pp. 221–223) is an excellent place to start.

For more information, they can visit the following websites:

[natgeokids.com/nz/discover/geography/countries/30-cool-facts-about-china/](http://natgeokids.com/nz/discover/geography/countries/30-cool-facts-about-china/)

[kids.nationalgeographic.com/explore/countries/china/#china-dragon.jpg](http://kids.nationalgeographic.com/explore/countries/china/#china-dragon.jpg)

[sciencekids.co.nz/sciencefacts/countries/china.html](http://sciencekids.co.nz/sciencefacts/countries/china.html)

Invite your students to create their own story lines! Where would they like Samantha to go? What mysteries are left to be unraveled? Where IS Uncle Paul?

Have students present their stories to their classmates and discuss the adventures!

**Extra Excursion:** Study the amazing photos of Seattle at [movoto.com/blog/opinions/photos-of-seattle-wa](http://movoto.com/blog/opinions/photos-of-seattle-wa). Use descriptive language to explain what you see in the images. Using your portrayals, write a letter to convince a friend to travel to Seattle. (Remember to pay attention to your five senses!)



FOR STUDENTS!

# TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

## COPY THESE DOCUMENTS FOR YOUR STUDENTS!

### Travel Document 1: Temple of Horus at Edfu, Egypt

#### CRACK THE CODE: UNCLE PAUL'S ADVICE

In this excursion, you will be decoding an important question. *This is the only time you will not receive an envelope from your tour guide, but you must save the question to complete the final challenge at the end of your trip.* Like the ancient hieroglyphs on the walls of the Temple of Edfu, messages can be hidden in different codes. A code can be any consistent representation of letters, words, numbers, or pictures. Use the key below to discover an important question. The question you decode here will be extremely important once you've completed all the excursions. You will uncover the answer to this question once you collect all four envelopes from your tour guide. (For an extra challenge, write a message using the code below, or create your own code!)

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13

N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26

23 8 1 20      1 4 22 9 3 5      1 2 15 21 20

2 18 5 1 11 6 1 19 20      13 9 7 8 20

21 14 3 12 5      16 1 21 12      12 5 1 22 5 ?



**FOR  
STUDENTS!**

# TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

## Travel Document 2: Eiffel Tower STEM Challenge

### HOW TALL IS YOUR TOWER?

Visit the Eiffel Tower via Google Earth, and read about its history and construction at [toureiffel.paris/en/all-about-the-eiffel-tower/history-and-figures-about-the-eiffel-tower/the-eiffel-tower-at-a-glance](http://toureiffel.paris/en/all-about-the-eiffel-tower/history-and-figures-about-the-eiffel-tower/the-eiffel-tower-at-a-glance). Examine the elements and strategies the architects used to create a building so tall and strong. Once you have explored the tallest structure in Paris, try to make your own freestanding structure. You may only use the materials that you have been given. At the end of your adventure, the structures will be measured and compared. Complete the graphic organizer below as you work through the challenge. Teamwork will be very important on this excursion! *Once you have completed a freestanding structure you may collect an envelope with a clue from your tour guide.*

#### Materials:

100 toothpicks

2 cups of mini marshmallows

Ask
Imagine
Plan
Create
Improve

FOR  
STUDENTS!

# TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

## Travel Document 3: Florence, Italy

### MIND YOUR MANNERS

Another stop on Samantha and Nipper's trip was Florence, Italy. Although they didn't speak Italian, Samantha remembered that Uncle Paul taught her how to say *please* and *thank you* in eleven languages! How useful! Manners are important in any language. Match the correct language to each set of words below. A little research may be necessary.

Please	Language	Thank You
Por favor		Gracias
S'il vous plaît		Merci
Per favore		Grazie
Onegaishimasu		Arigatō
Bitte		Danke
E 'olu 'olu		Mahalo
Min fadlik		Shukraan
Tack		Tack
Please		Thank you
Qǐng		Xièxiè
Tafadhali		Asante

Italian      Japanese      Swedish      English      Spanish  
Hawaiian      German      Swahili      French      Arabic      Mandarin

Discuss with your group why Uncle Paul may have thought it was important for Samantha to know how to say *please* and *thank you* in different languages. Have you ever traveled to a place where you didn't speak the language? Have you ever interacted with someone who spoke a different language from you? Describe the situation to your fellow travelers and what you learned from it. Since you are in Florence, Italy, ask your tour guide for your envelope in Italian. Don't forget to say *please* and *thank you*! Write the sentence out and practice aloud before meeting up with your tour guide.



**FOR  
STUDENTS!**

# TRAVEL DOCUMENTS



## Travel Document 5: Seattle, Washington

### SLEEPY VS. SPICY SENTENCES

*Samantha Spinner and the Super-Secret Plans* is filled with imagery that draws you in and lets your imagination take flight. The adventures are fun and exciting, and the descriptive language creates a setting that can be seen, heard, and smelled in our minds' eyes. The sentences below are so underdeveloped that they won't even take your imagination through the classroom door; Ginns didn't become a great author by writing sleepy sentences like these! As a group, read and rewrite them in a way that will inspire readers to pack their bags and take off on a real adventure! Read your sentences to fellow travelers. What do they hear, see, smell, feel, and taste in your writing? *When you've completed the adventures below, remember to check in with your tour guide to collect an envelope!* Then, as you wait for your fellow travelers, complete the extra excursions below.

The half-pipe track to Florence was bumpy.

When I got my umbrella, I was disappointed.

The ninjas were dirty.

Dennis was holding a light.

The magtrain was smooth.

Dad knows about lightbulbs.

**Next: Search the story and find more sentences that activate the reader's senses. List here:**

**FOR  
STUDENTS!**

# TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

## Travel Document: Homeward Bound

### CULMINATING ADVENTURE: MAKING A MAP

Time to go home! Now that you have been on an exciting journey around the world, it's time to head home. Uncle Paul left a unique map for Samantha that led her around the world. She just had to figure out how to read it and what it all meant. Try your hand at map-making, and find out how fun and challenging cartography can be.

Choose one of the following activities to complete as part of your return trip:

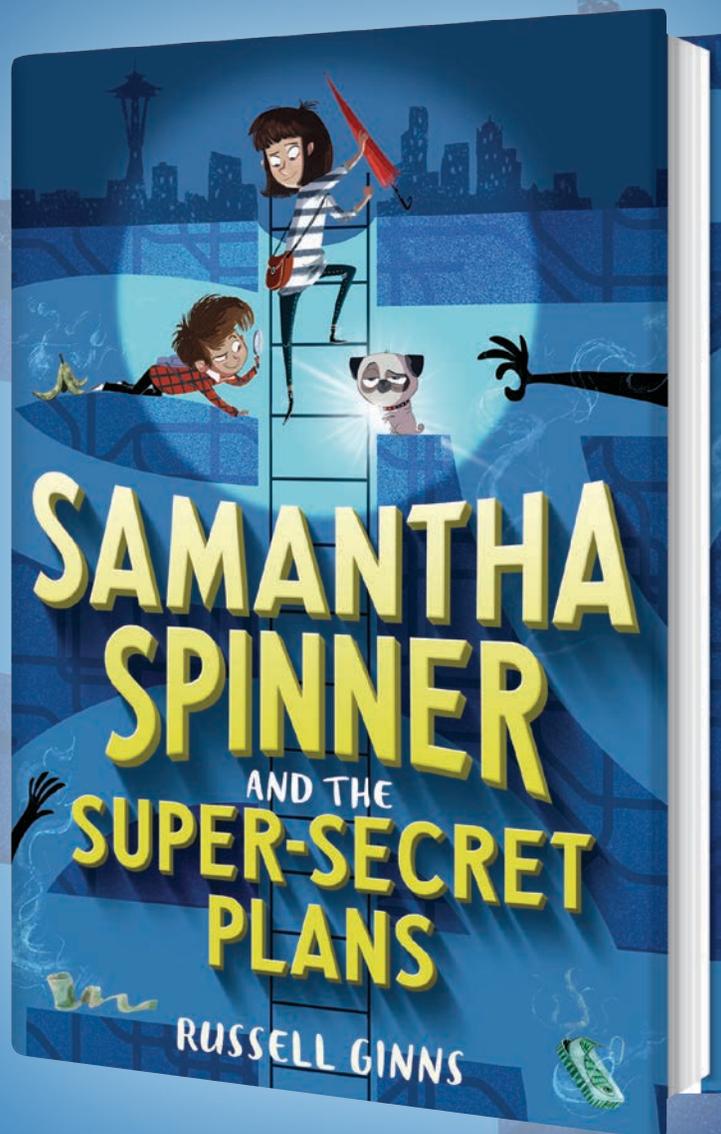
### ON YOUR OWN: INDEPENDENT ACTIVITY

Make a map of an area that you are very familiar with. Your map can be created on a unique object (like Samantha's umbrella was) or simply on paper. The area can be your neighborhood, home, school, classroom, bedroom, or any place that you can easily "see" in your mind. Your map should include pictures, words, symbols, a key, and colors. A compass would also be a great addition to your map! Challenge a friend or family member to follow your map to a hidden treasure.

### TEAMWORK: COOPERATIVE GROUP ACTIVITY

Make a map of the classroom, school, or playground. Create a set of clues that your classmates can follow to find a fun surprise at the end of the challenge. Your map should include pictures, words, symbols, a key, and colors. Make sure that your clues are clear and will lead groups in the correct direction. Give your map a try before you challenge others.





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“A WINNING MIX OF FAST-PACED ACTION, fascinating facts, bathroom humor, and hidden puzzles.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

“KIDS WHO LOVE CIPHERS AND TREASURES will be in their element here, with clues to follow, puzzles to solve, and the Hope Diamond, a Honus Wagner baseball card, and the Mona Lisa up for grabs.” —*Booklist*

“The well-developed plot is **FULL OF ADVENTURE AND SURVIVAL**. The characters are likable, realistic, and well rounded. The clues are fun to follow and help draw readers into Samantha’s world.” —*School Library Journal*



@RHCBEducators



TheRandomSchoolHouse

This guide was written by Room 228 Educational Consulting, with public school teacher Shannon Rheault as lead teacher. We are a company not above being stumped by a good puzzle. [rm228.com](http://rm228.com)