

**Read this extract from the novel “Spies” and write an essay on the topic below.**

But of course what I'm looking at now is N.º 2, next to the Hardiments. Even this appears curiously like all the other houses now, in spite of the fact that it's attached to Nº3-the only semi-detached pair in the Close. It seems to have acquired a name: Wentworth. It was just a number when I lived in it, and scarcely even a number, since the plate on the gatepost had been creosoted over. There's still something faintly embarrassing about it, though, in spite of its grand new name, and its fresh white render, and the iron control exercised over its front garden by paving stones and impersonal-looking ground cover. Beneath the clean smoothness of the render I can almost see the old cracked and watermarked grey. Through the heavy flags sprout the ghosts of the promiscuous muddle of unidentified shrubs that my father never tended, and the little patch of bald lawn. Our house was made even more shameful by the partner it's yoked to, which was in an even worse state than ours because the Pinchers' garden was a dump for abandoned furniture warped by the rain, and off cuts of lumber and metal that Mr Pincher had stolen from work. Or so everyone in the street believed. Perhaps it was just because of the name, it occurs to me now. In any case the Pinchers were the undesirable elements in the Close – even less desirable than we were, and the terrible connectedness of our houses brought us down with them.

This is what I see as I look at it now. But is that the way that he sees it at his age? I mean the awkward boy who lives in that unkempt house between the Hardiments and the Pinchers – Stephen Wheatley, the one with the stick-out ears and the too-short grey flannel school shirt hanging out of the too-long grey flannel school shorts. I watch him emerge from the warped front door, still cramming food into his mouth from tea. Everything about him is in various shades of grey – even the elastic belt, striped like the hatband of an old-fashioned boater, and fastened with a metal snake curled into the shape of an S. The stripes on the belt are in two shades of grey, because he's entirely monochrome, and he's monochrome because this is how I recognise him now, from the old black- and -white snaps, or ever guess that he and I were related if it weren't for the name written on the back. In the tips of my fingers, though, even now, I can feel the delicious serrated texture of the snake's scaliness.

Stephen Wheatley... Or just plain Stephen... On his school reports S. J. Wheatley, in the classroom or the playground just plain Wheatley. Strange names. None of them seems quite to fit him as I watch him now. He turns back, before he slams the front door, and shouts some inadequate insult with his mouth full in response to yet another supercilious jibe from his insufferable elder brother. One of his grubby tennis shoes is undone and one of his long grey socks has slipped down his leg into a thick concertina; I can feel in my fingertips, as clearly as the scaliness of the snake, the hopeless bagginess of the failed garter beneath the turned-down top.

Does he know, even at that age, what his standing is in the street? He knows precisely, even if he doesn't know that he knows it. In the very marrow of his bones he understands that there's something not quite right about him and his family, something that doesn't quite fit with the pigtailed Geest girls and the oil-stained Avery boys, and never will.

He doesn't need to open the front gate because it's open already, rotted drunkenly away from the top hinge. I know where he's going.

**Describe and explore how Stephen Wheatley is introduced in this passage**