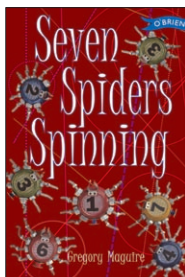


# SEVEN SPIDERS SPINNING



by Gregory Maguire

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When seven orphaned Siberian spiders, survivors of an Ice Age countless thousands of years ago, are suddenly defrosted and find themselves in Vermont, they cast their eyes on the seven Tattletales, fall immediately in love and each picks one to be its mother. The seven girls, meanwhile, are preparing a performance for their school's annual Pageant of Horrors hoping once again to beat that of their male rivals, the Copycats. The Josiah Fawcett Elementary School, always stimulating as a result of Miss Earth's inspirational teaching, becomes ever more interesting as the spiders make their way toward the objects of their affection. The Hallowe'en celebrations take on an unexpected dimension when an arachnid participates in the seasonal festivities, with dramatic results.

## LANGUAGE – ENGLISH

- ◆ Descriptive names: Thekla Mustard, Sammy Grubb, Pearl Hotchkiss, Head Nurse Crisp.
- ◆ Vocabulary extension: Carp, bane, rhetorical, dominance, agog, adjourned, rebuttal, excruciatingly.
- ◆ Language of humorous abuse: 'A clot of simpering namby-pambies, idiotic goody-goody two-shoes, authority-bound *mush-brains*' (p.3). Children suggest similar, humorous descriptions for the Copycats.
- ◆ Literary references: Children identify some literary references, naming author and original work where possible, e.g., *The Three Musketeers* (p.62), 'It's a far, far better ... than I have ever ...' (p.49).
- ◆ Nursery rhymes (p.94): Children note rhythm of verse, which nursery song comes to mind? Children could also invent their own songs/rhymes, modelled on Pearl's version of *Little Miss Muffet*.
- ◆ Humorous writing: Children identify their favourite examples of humour and discuss. Is some of the humour aimed at adult readers? Identify examples and suggest reasons why this might be intentional.
- ◆ Discussion: 'It's a question of the Natural Order ... A cat is superior to a mouse. A girl is superior to a boy' (p.3). Children analyse Thekla's theory, possibly in the form of light-hearted debate.
- ◆ Creative: Children examine timetable on p.24, discuss the topics chosen by Miss Earth, compare with their own timetable. Then design a daily schedule, which should cover most curricular areas.
- ◆ Creative: Write your own version of the Frankenstein rap, the winning entry in the Hallowe'en Pageant of Horrors (p.7) **or** with the class, write more Epic Verses of Hubda the Magnificent.
- ◆ Creative: When called on to say what they knew about Russia, Miss Earth's class volunteered phrases such as 'Ballet dancers! Beet soup! Baba Yaga! Potatoes and vodka!' (p.26). Choose your own neighbourhood, locality or country and write descriptive words and phrases that create a picture of that area.
- ◆ Creative: Miss Earth could be saved only by an antidote created especially for her, one which contained the right combination of

sweet ingredients (p.121) and eventually it was her fondness for doughnuts which inspired the children to produce the vital formula (p.124). Imagine your friend or your teacher is depending on a similar potion: List the ingredients that will produce 'the right combination' and say why you have chosen those particular items.

- ◆ Story: Children read or listen to Anansi, the spider folk-tales of creation, and compare with the local legends mentioned (p.2, Preface).

## SESE – SCIENCE

- ◆ Living things: Plant and animal life. Characteristics of the spider (Preface and pp.10, 21, 37–8).

## SESE – GEOGRAPHY

- ◆ Human environments: People and other lands. Developing a sense of belonging to local, European and global communities by studying some aspects of the environment and lives of people in Russia (p.25), and/or finding out about Hamlet, Vermont, where the story is set.
- ◆ Human environments: People at work. Exploring/investigating, especially through practical studies, activities of people who work in hospitals (pp.45, 57, 98, 108–109), in schools, in the media (pp.75–77).

## SESE – HISTORY

- ◆ Local studies: My school. Contrasting school life in Miss Earth's class (or child's own class) with school life in the past. Comparing subject areas, rules, school furniture and equipment of the past with those of today. Visit the Museum of Irish Education, CICE, 96 Upr Rathmines Rd, Dublin 6 (Tel: 497 0033).
- ◆ Local studies: Feasts and festivals in the past. Becoming familiar with the origins and traditions associated with common festivals in Ireland and other countries. Hallowe'en celebrations in New England, USA (p.79) and in Ireland.

## SPHE

- ◆ Myself: Self-identity. Realising that each person has a unique contribution to make to various groups, situations and friendships. Discuss Miss Earth's definition of clubs on p.17 and analyse Pearl's position on p.10. Suggest positive and negative effects of joining clubs.
- ◆ Myself: Taking care of my body. Beginning to develop strategies to cope with peer pressure and bullying. Discuss Thekla's relationship with

her friends and her position as Empress of the Tattletales. Did Thekla use undue influence to undermine her classmates' self-confidence? Did she make use of bullying tactics to achieve her aims (p.54)?

- ◆ Myself: Growing and changing. Recognising and discussing how feelings and emotions are affected by the changes that take place at puberty. Discuss Pearl's changing and developing friendship with Sammy (pp.34, 51–52, 78, 83).

- ◆ Myself and the wider world: Developing citizenship. Exploring the various ways in which the school promotes a sense of belonging (pp.15, 24, 33, 79, 90).

- ◆ Myself and the wider world: Media education. Exploring the different ways in which information can be transmitted, and learning to be selective about this information. Discuss the language, behaviour, authenticity and attitudes of Meg Snooble (pp.75–77, 98–100, 117–122).

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

- ◆ Movement and dance: The boys in the class 'took turns being Hubda', demonstrating a catalogue of 'strides, slinks, wobbles, goose steps and limps' (p.51). Choose your own movements to illustrate a poem or song, using a variety of steps.

## MUSIC

- ◆ Listening and responding: *The Nutcracker Suite*. Miss Earth's class was familiar with 'the unsurpassed genius of Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky, whose music for the *Nutcracker Suite* has become an indelible part of the culture of childhood' (p.26). Listen to some musical extracts from this composer and give your reactions.

## VISUAL ARTS

- ◆ Tasty spiders: Make plain pastry using butter, flour, eggs and water. Roll thin, bent shapes for spider legs, round shapes for bodies and cook. Chocolate chips for eyes. Using an icing-bag, pipe chocolate-icing spider's web on plate and serve.
- ◆ Spider web: Using construction straws, tie four in shape of web arms. Loop black wool in and out, around centre and circle outwards, once around each arm, until edge is reached. Tie.