

# The Girl Who Loved Spiders

I hate spiders. That's the first thing you should know about me.

My mom and I just moved from New York to Florida. That's the second thing you should know about me. We moved because my mom got a new teaching job at a university here.

Before we moved, my best friend, Billy, told me all kinds of creepy stories about spiders that live in Florida.

"My brother knows a guy from there who got bitten by a brown recluse spider," Billy said. "This guy was *smart* about spiders, too. He shook out his shoes. He watched his step. His bite healed, but it was the *worst*."

Mom has told me it takes three weeks to make a habit. It's only been a week since we moved, but I've already made one.

First thing every morning, I shake out my sneakers. Second thing, I put on my sneakers, though I'm still wearing pajamas. Third thing, I always watch my step.

Hey! Not one, but *three* new habits.

I blame them all on Billy.

I find Mom in the kitchen, drinking a glass of orange juice.

“You’re awake, Luis? It’s the crack of dawn!”

“Too hot.”

Mom laughs. “It’s summer. Aren’t those winter pajamas?”

I don’t tell her that flannel is better protection from spiders.

Over breakfast, Mom discusses her plan for the day. It’s the same as yesterday’s: unpack and settle in.

“Oh!” Mom sits up straight in her chair. “I found a dead scorpion yesterday. It was in perfect shape—not a leg missing. Fascinating, really. I saved it in case you wanted to see.”

I gulp. “No thanks.”

Great. Venomous spiders *and* scorpions.

Mom shrugs. “Okay. So what are you up to?”

“TV?”

Mom frowns.

“There’s always the trampoline,” I mutter.

Mom bought the trampoline the day after we arrived. It’s as big and bouncy as can be—something I always wanted that Billy had. I just wish Billy were here now to teach me how to do a flip.



Not even 8:30 in the morning, and I'm on the trampoline again. Every jump takes me higher and higher.

In mid-air, I see her—two yards over—a girl about my age. I keep jumping. The girl kneels before a bush, in tall grass where all kinds of biting and stinging things might be. She stays very still.

Next jump, I see something in her hands . . . a pink ball?

Jump higher!

The girl claps the ball. Poof! A white cloud explodes from between her fingers.

I collapse onto the trampoline and scramble down. This I have to see. As I enter her yard, where the grass is taller, I freeze.

The ball in the girl's hands is a rolled-up sock. A camera dangles from a strap around her neck. She carefully settles the sock on the grass. Then she raises the camera and peers through it. I look where she's looking, at a delicate shape against the bush's leaves, like lace against green velvet.

The shape is a gigantic spider web, whitened by whatever the girl clapped from the sock.

Photographers sometimes make spider webs more visible by dusting them with cornstarch.





Not all spiders make their homes in webs. Some dig burrows.

“Yikes!” I yell at the sight of the web.

The girl cries out, surprised, and falls into the web. She springs up, web clinging to her. “What’s the big idea?” she shouts.

“Um . . . I was warning you! Guess you don’t know about brown recluse spiders?”

“Of course I do. I’ve been trying to find one. They’re shy, like most arachnids. I’ve found rarer breeds, even the burrowing wolf spider. Still haven’t tracked down a brown recluse.” She points at the bush. “That was a common orb weaver. I’ve been watching her for days, until she got her web just

right.” The girl glares. “It sure was pretty—until you came along. Who are you, anyway?”

“Luis. I just moved here.”

“My name is Ashanti. Welcome to the neighborhood.” She still sounds mad.

I cross my arms over my chest. “So you’re on a spider safari. Why?”

“This summer my goal is to photograph one hundred spiders. I’ve always loved folktales about Anansi, a true spider-man. Spiders are cool.”

I don’t think before I say, “No, they aren’t. Spiders are disgusting.”

At that, Ashanti stalks away.

That afternoon Mom drives me to a park. “Never mind the heat,” she says. “There’ll be boys your age.”

There’s a decent playground, but a sign reads: BEWARE OF SNAKES! Where there are snakes, there must be spiders. Ashanti would be in heaven. As for me . . .

There are no boys my age. Two little girls sweat it out on the slide. Mom wilts on a bench. We drive home.

As we turn onto our street, we see Ashanti crouching by a flower pot in her front yard. A woman kneels beside her.

To my horror, Mom stops the car and gets out. Mom and Mrs. Smith,

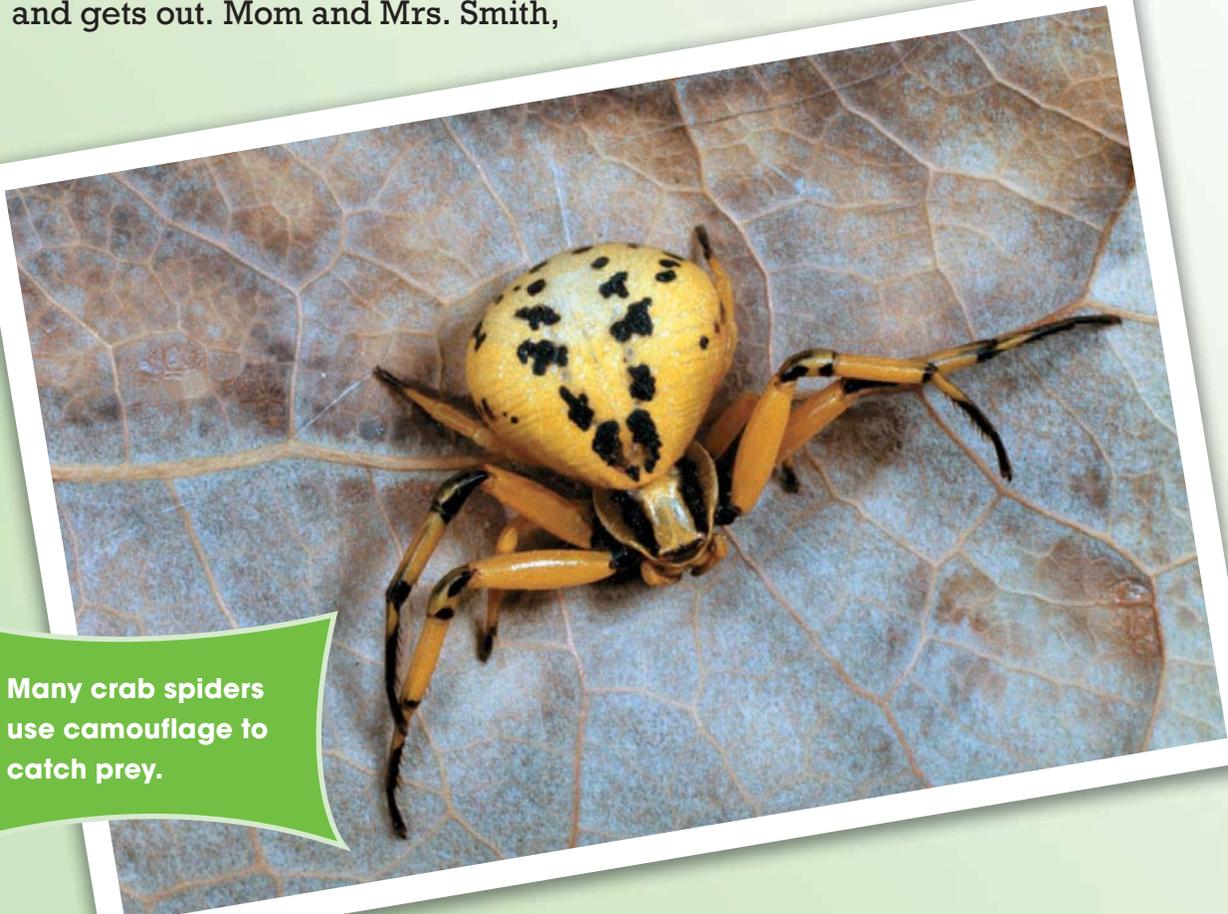
Ashanti’s mom, hit it off. Mrs. Smith teaches at the university, too. Mr. Smith works for the alumni office. Ashanti and I might be in the same fifth-grade class!

“Ashanti just found her first colorful crab spider,” Mrs. Smith says. “It’s the fiftieth spider she’s photographed for her collection.”

Mom and Mrs. Smith keep talking. Ashanti photographs her spider. I trace circles in the dirt. Then Mrs. Smith asks Mom and me over for dinner. Mom agrees.

Yippee.

Ashanti rolls her eyes. She’s not exactly thrilled, either.



Many crab spiders use camouflage to catch prey.



At six o'clock we're standing on the Smiths' front porch. Ashanti opens the door, and soon we sit down to dinner. The Smiths and Mom talk and laugh; Ashanti and I dig into our lasagna. Soon my plate is empty; so is Ashanti's.

She gives me a cautious look. "Want to see Anansi?" she asks quietly, so as not to interrupt the grownups.

I shrug. "I guess."

Ashanti smiles a little.

"Come on."

We go into the family room. African artifacts cover three of the walls: masks, instruments, weavings, and paintings. A large bulletin board hangs on the fourth wall. About fifty photographs of spiders are mounted there. I take a deep breath and go over to the board.

I've got to admit, some of the spiders look pretty cool.



Ashanti points at a painting and says, “That’s Anansi.” I move closer to see a powerful-looking spider, standing upright, flexing six of its eight legs. The spider has a man’s face . . . and eight eyes.

“Some legends say that Anansi created the sun, stars, and moon. Nice guy, huh?” Ashanti smiles. “He

also could be tricky and greedy. In one story, he tries to keep all wisdom for himself.”

Suddenly, Mrs. Smith calls from the kitchen, “Ashanti! Quick! You’ve got to see this!”

Ashanti turns and runs from the room with me at her heels.

Mr. and Mrs. Smith are peering at a baseboard. Ashanti presses close.

“Brown recluse!” Mrs. Smith whispers.

Ashanti gasps in excitement. She grabs her camera and adjusts the settings. Mom holds me back, although Mrs. Smith reassures her that the spider won’t hurt you if you don’t hurt the spider. Just don’t brush up against it.

“Ashanti knows what to do, Mom,” I say.

Ashanti glances at me, surprised, and smiles. Then she adjusts the zoom on her camera and snaps the picture. “Fifty-one!” she exclaims.

Later, after Mr. Smith has caught the venomous spider on a glue

trap, Ashanti tells me that there’s an interesting-looking web woven through my trampoline’s net.

“I spotted it today on one of my safaris,” she says, grinning. “I want to photograph it.”

“Stop by tomorrow, if you want,” I say.

“It’ll be early in the morning. That’s the best time.”

“I’ll probably be awake.”

“Just don’t be bouncing, OK? You might wreck it.”

“I don’t want to do that,” I say. “I want to know which spiders live in *my* yard.”

Boy, won’t Billy be surprised. I’ll be able to teach him a thing or two about spiders when he comes to visit!



The brown recluse spider has six eyes.

# WEB WISE

**Part of what makes spiders fascinating is that they weave amazing webs. Here are a few facts to make you web wise.**



## Web Shots

Although it can be difficult to photograph a spider web, scientists and photographers know a few tricks to make it easier.

Some use cornstarch. The white powder coats the strands of the web and makes them easier to see. However, scientists know that this can sometimes damage the web. They always remove the spider before dusting the web.

Another method doesn't harm the web at all. Photographers spray a mist of water onto a web. Drops of water cling to the web's strands. Then sunshine turns an ordinary web into a sparkling jewel!



## A Sticky Situation

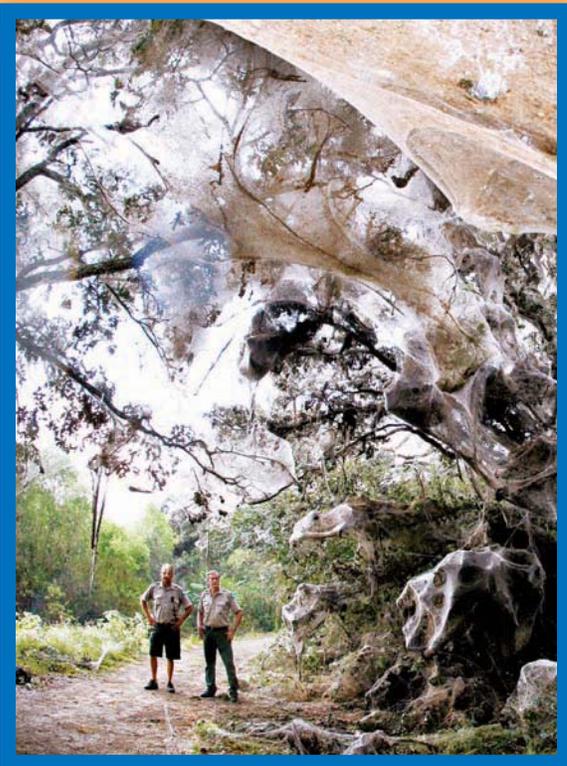
Have you ever wondered why spiders don't get stuck in their own webs? The answer is simple: They know where they're going.

Most webs are made from two kinds of silk. An orb spider's web, for example, has long, straight strands that start at the middle and go out to the edges, like the spokes of a wheel. Then the web has a network of spiral strands in the center. The spiral strands are sticky, but the straight strands are not.

When an insect flies or crawls into the web, it gets stuck in the sticky strands. Then the spider hurries across the long, straight strands to enjoy its next meal!



An orb spider's web is made of straight strands and spiral strands. The spiral strands are sticky.



## Strange, but True!

More than 3,000 people visited a Texas state park during the 2007 Labor Day weekend. They didn't come to see parades or listen to speeches. They came to see a spider web!

It was no ordinary sight. The enormous web was draped over trees and shrubs along nearly 600 feet of a nature trail!

Scientists think millions of baby spiders, called *spiderlings*, built the web. The spiderlings may all have floated in on an air current and landed in the same area.

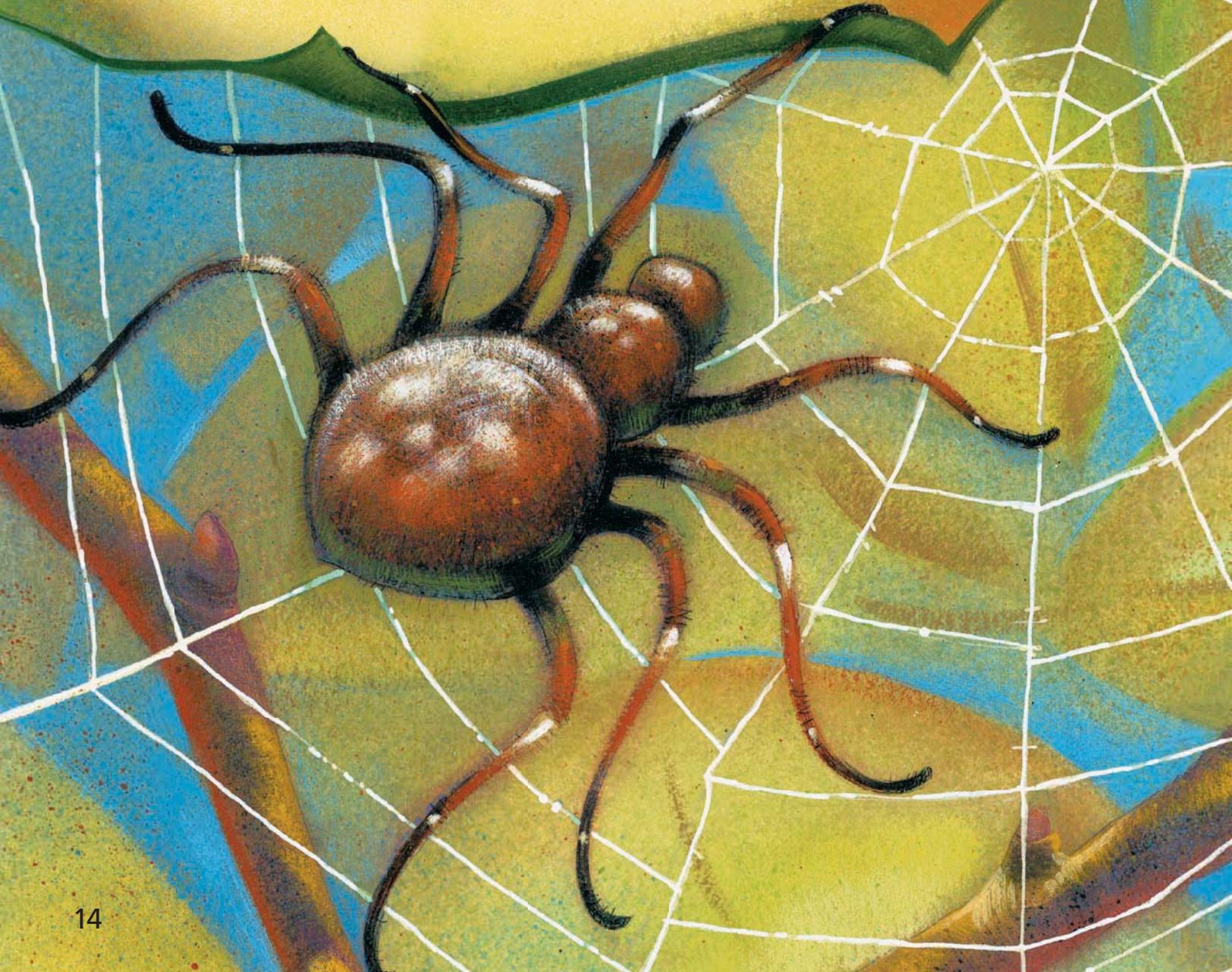
A few days later, heavy rain ruined the web.

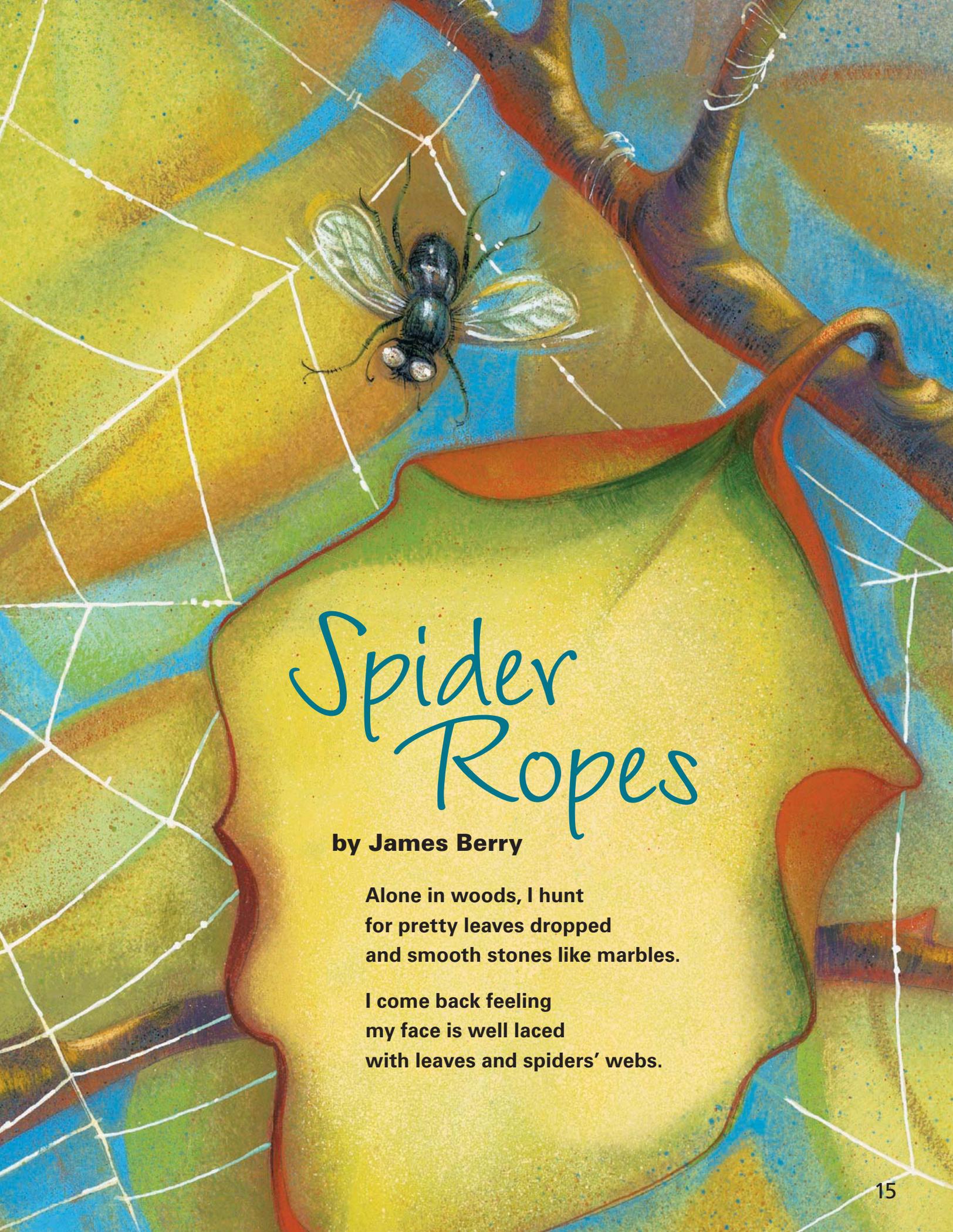


# The Spider

by Jack Prelutsky

The spider, sly and talented,  
weaves silver webs of silken thread,  
then waits for unobservant flies  
... to whom she'll not apologize!



A vibrant, textured illustration of a spider web. The web is white and intricate, set against a background of warm, abstract colors in shades of yellow, green, and blue. A dark fly with translucent wings is caught in the center of the web. The web is attached to a thick, brown tree branch that curves across the top right of the frame. The overall style is painterly and expressive.

# Spider Ropes

**by James Berry**

**Alone in woods, I hunt  
for pretty leaves dropped  
and smooth stones like marbles.**

**I come back feeling  
my face is well laced  
with leaves and spiders' webs.**

# Design a Web!

**I**f you were a spider, what kind of web would you weave? Look at the spider webs shown on this page, and then create your own design for a spider web.

Where would you make your web?  
What kinds of food would you hope to catch?

Write two or more sentences explaining how your web design would help you catch your lunch.

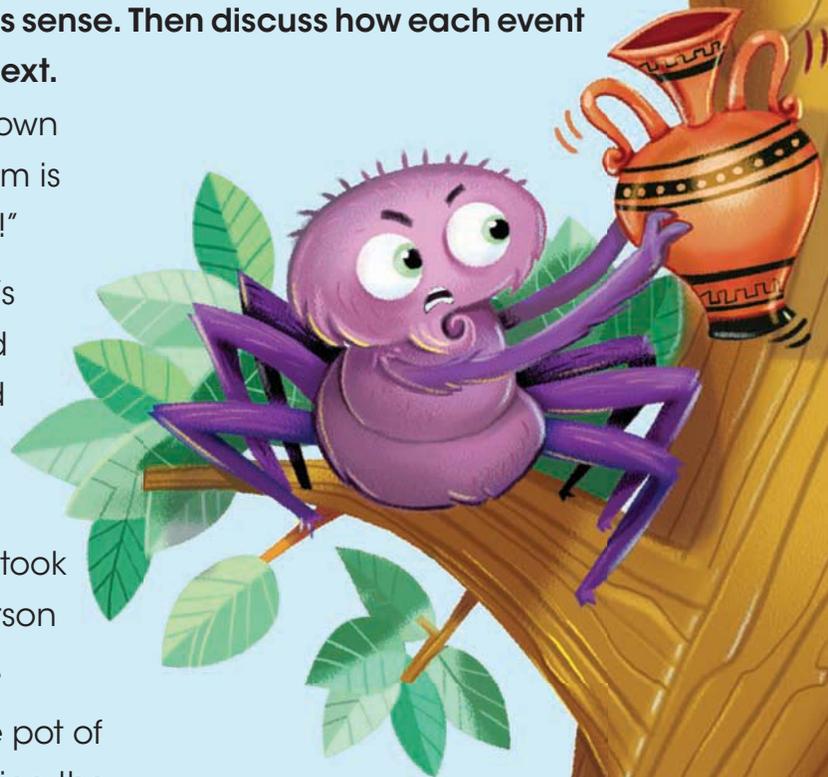


# Story Scramble

Stories have a structure with a beginning, middle, and end. Events happen in an order that makes sense.

The story events below are scrambled. Put the letters in order so that the story makes sense. Then discuss how each event influences what happens next.

- A.** Despite the advice, Anansi threw down the pot, shouting, "The pot of wisdom is mine! I should know more than you!"
- B.** Anansi the spider had all the world's wisdom stored in a pot. The sky god Nyame had given it to him and told him to share it.
- C.** The pot broke. People found bits of wisdom scattered everywhere and took them home. That is why no one person today has all of the world's wisdom.
- D.** Greedy Anansi decided to hide the pot of wisdom at the top of a tree. Balancing the pot at the same time was tricky, though.
- E.** Anansi's young son told Anansi it would be easier to climb the tree with the pot tied to his back.



## Two Tricksters

Compare and contrast Anansi's actions with those of Coyote in "The Sticky Coyote," Lesson 17, Student Book page 442.



Answers: B, D, E, A, C

# Cool or

In "The Girl Who Loved Spiders," Luis thinks spiders are creepy until he meets Ashanti. Then he discovers that spiders are cool. Think about an animal that you really like or dislike. What is it about the animal that makes you feel the way you do? What details about the animal come to mind?

Write a poem about the animal you chose, or about an animal shown on these pages. Your poem may rhyme or use rhythm, like the poems on pages 14 and 15.



# Creepy?

Use descriptive details that create a vivid picture.

Think about the following:

- the animal's appearance
- the animal's movements
- how the animal sounds
- how the animal feels to the touch

