

DIARY OF A SPIDER

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by Doreen Cronin, illustrated by Harry Bliss

Ages: 5-9

Themes: Spiders, Families, Friends, Humor, Empathy

Running time: 9 minutes

SUMMARY

In this witty and entertaining story, students will discover that the life of a spider isn't very much different from their own. The spider goes to school, says the Pledge of Allegiance, and plays with his friends, Fly and Worm (of *Diary of a Worm*). He also spins sticky webs, molts, and takes Vacuum Safety classes. This hilarious movie will appeal to both children and adults as they gain insight into Spider's humorous escapades. As students begin to imagine a spider's life, they may even find some empathy for a creature of which most people are scared!

OBJECTIVES

- Students will compare and contrast spiders and insects.
- Students will compare and contrast their own lives with the spider's life.
- Students will learn about the life cycle of a spider.
- Students will write a daily diary.

BEFORE VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Discuss the differences between spiders (arachnids) and insects with students. Guiding questions:

- How many legs do spiders have?
- How many legs do insects have?
- How many parts does an insect's body have? (3) What are they called? (Head, thorax, abdomen)
- How many parts does a spider's body have? (2) What are they called? (Prosoma, abdomen)
- What can spiders do that insects can't do? (spin webs)
- What can some insects do that spiders can't do? (fly)

Show students large photos of spiders and insects to help them as they answer. Encourage students to make educated guesses based on what they see in the pictures and what they have observed in their lives. As students generate answers, refine them as necessary (such as providing the scientific names for the body parts). Record the differences on a graphic organizer such

as a T-chart or Venn Diagram. Older students can follow along and fill in their own graphic organizer as you model. Bring in examples of fictional or real diaries to read aloud to students. They can range from light and humorous (*Diary of a Worm*, *Diary of a Wombat*) to more mature and serious (*Diary of Anne Frank*, *Elizabeth's Jamestown Diary*, *Virginia's Civil War Diary*). Discuss with students the purpose of keeping a diary. Record the students' ideas on chart paper. Discuss the differences in tone and voice between different diaries. Finally, give students an assignment to keep their own daily diaries for at least one week. Encourage them to write honestly and thoughtfully. Young children can keep a pictorial diary and/or have parents or guardians scribe for them. At the end of the week, set aside a time for students to share entries from their diaries, if they wish.

AFTER VIEWING ACTIVITIES

Focus on the part of the movie where the spider molts. Replay that section or read it to the students from the book. Ask students to look closely at the visual images and to make an educated guess of the definition of "molt." Show the students pictures of different animals, such as snakes, crayfish, crabs, and spiders, in the process of molting. Come up with a class definition of the word, *molt*. Then, use picture cards to depict the life cycle of a spider from egg to adulthood. You can make several sets of these for students to use to practice putting them in order. Additionally, you can work as a class, or older students can work on their own, to write one sentence for each card, describing what part of the life cycle the spider is in.

Discuss with students how the spider's life parallels their own lives in many ways. A Venn Diagram would be a useful graphic organizer for this discussion. Alternatively, the students' thoughts can be organized in lists entitled, "My life is like Spider's life because..." and "My life is not like Spider's life because..."

Guiding questions:

- What parts of Spider's school are like your school? What parts are different?
- Do any of Spider's friends or family remind you of your friends or family? Why or why not?
- What kinds of problems or concerns does Spider have in his life that you also have? What does Spider worry about that

you don't? What do you worry about that Spider doesn't?

- Is there a Daddy Longlegs in your life? How do you deal with him/her?
- Is anyone in your life scared of you? Why? How can you change how they feel? How can you help them understand you better?

Spider webs are beautiful works of nature. Take an early morning nature walk with your class in a nature preserve or park near your school. Talk with students about walking quietly, so as to not disturb the animals that live in the area. Silently look for signs of animal life, such as spider webs, tracks, nests, cocoons, or scat (animal droppings). Devise a silent hand signal that the class can use to alert others to what they observe. Give students a quiet time to sit and sketch or write about what they see. When you return to the classroom, discuss the outing with the students, giving them time to share their words or drawings.

Using *Diary of a Spider* as inspiration, create a class book, "Diary of a _____". The class will vote on the animal for whom the imaginary diary will be written. First, spend several days reading aloud to the class and showing them pictures of the animal and its habitat. Then, have each child think of and create a diary page to add to the book. The page should have 1-3 sentences and a picture on it. Put the pages together and bind them as a book. Keep the "diary" in your classroom as a text that students will enjoy reading on their own and sharing with their friends and parents.

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