Seven Spiders Spinning
by Gregory Maguire

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 Húbada 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-folktales of creation, and compare with the local legends mentioned (p.2, Preface).

SESE – SCIENCE


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.

SESE – ARTS

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Detailed plot synopsis reviews of Seven Spiders Spinning. Seven baby “Siberian snow spiders” -- highly poisonous tarantulas which have been frozen since the last Ice Age -- are discovered and transported to Harvard for study, but the truck crashes and its precious cargo escapes near the quiet Vermont town of Hamlet. The spiders imprint on seven girls who attend Josiah Fawcett Elementary School and call themselves the Tattletales Club, at first adoring the girls, then turning to vengeful hate. Seven Spiders Spinning. Description. Kiss of the Siberian Snow Spider. It's the discovery of the century: seven baby Siberian snow spiders frozen in a glacier. But as the spectacular chunk of ice is being trucked for analysis, the tiny tarantulas defrost -- and escape. But love begins to sour when one of the spiders captured by the Tattletales' classmate, Pearl. Six alarmed arachnids set off one by one to rescue the sibling. Each spider picks a girl and falls instantly in love. But love begins to sour when one of the spiders is captured by the Tattletales' classmate, Pearl. Six alarmed arachnids set off one by one to rescue their sibling. It's the discovery of the century: seven baby Siberian snow spiders frozen in a glacier. But as the spectacular chunk of ice is being trucked for analysis, the tiny tarantulas defrost -- and escape. And when their beady spider eyes open for the very first time, they spy the seven members of a girls' club, the Tattletales.