

## ***Spider Summer* Activity Guide**

*Spider Summer* is a middle-grade novel by Bev Brenna (1998 ITP Nelson; c. Bev Brenna 2019)

Author of Teachers' Guide: Bev Brenna

### **Story Summary**

*Luke sees the summer he must spend in London stretching ahead of him like a dead snake. When a tarantula named Croc, and a close-to-home thief, make life more exciting, Luke becomes both a number one suspect and a first-rate detective. But will he and Croc catch the thief? And how do you look after a tarantula spider that you're hiding from your dad? Find out in this realistic fiction novel for ages 8 – 12, available as a free pdf on Bev's website [www.beverleybrenna.com](http://www.beverleybrenna.com)*

### **Author Statement: Bev Brenna**

I wrote *Spider Summer* in the early 1990s when I was living in England with my husband and young family. It was a great way for me to record some of the details of London so they'll never be forgotten. While the story itself is fiction, the setting is real, and some of the events did actually happen...either then, or in other times and places. For example, I myself had a pet tarantula many years ago, and when I went on my honeymoon, my parents had to babysit—and it shed its skin just like Croc does in *Spider Summer*!

**Activity Web** (format adapted from Charlotte Huck): these activities are designed as response activities related to the novel. A directed reading/thinking or listening/thinking format is recommended as comprehension support for classrooms (or kids at home!) planning to read the novel.

**As You Read**: stop to summarize what's already happened and then predict what might happen next. Pick some of the chapters for rehearsed re-reading/choral reading to practice reading fluency. Think about how the book's characters or events remind you of your own experiences, or things happening in the wider world, or other books, poems, or songs.

Some of the activities involve art or drama. Others are questions to think about. A reading journal could help you answer these questions and organize your thoughts about the book.

**Art Activities**

- Draw Luke’s poster version of his family and friends and compare to your own.
- Use clay or plasticine to design the tarantula and place it in a shoebox home you create for it.
- Create an informational poster for research you do on one kind of spider.
- Locate images of a London outdoor market you can find online. Compare to the scene in Chapter 6. How is shopping this way similar or different to how your family gets groceries?
- Design a comic strip about The Piranha and various things he bites.
- Design a shortened picture book or graphic novel version of this story.
- Luke’s family stays in a flat in London House, Mecklenburg Square, London, England. Locate this area online and draw a map.
- Research tarantula body parts and then do an accurate sketch with labels.

**Considering Alternatives**

- How might the story have been different if Luke hadn’t found Croc?
- What might have happened if the thief hadn’t been caught?
- What if Luke’s dad had discovered the spider under Luke’s bed?
- What if Mrs. Paylor had hired someone else to “babysit” Luke? Who might it have been?
- How might the storyline have been different if Luke had called Thomas “The Vampire” instead of “The Piranha”? When Bev Brenna wrote this book, Luke did call Thomas “The Vampire” but her publisher thought the book might not sell very well if it had vampires in it, and so Bev had to change this nickname to “The Piranha.” This happened before vampire books got super popular! Maybe *Spider Summer* would have sold even more copies if it had references to vampires in it after all!

<p><b>Creative Writing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Create the emails that Luke and his friend Marty might have written to each other that summer.</li> <li>➤ Write a short version or scene from this story in a different format (picture book; graphic novel; verse novel) or from a different point of view (third person past or present) or from a minor character’s perspective (The Piranha; Elvira; Mom; or Dad).</li> <li>➤ Write a series of text messages that might have occurred between Luke and his mom when he didn’t want to stay at Elvira’s.</li> <li>➤ Develop the backstory of the thief.</li> <li>➤ Write the want ads someone might create to find their missing tarantula spider.</li> <li>➤ Write a poem or monologue from the perspective of Croc.</li> <li>➤ Do an “open mind” portrait to explore Luke’s character—one half of his face is created artistically, the other half with describing words.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Drama</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Characters A &amp; B improvise a scene where A is Luke, and B is Thomas, after The Piranha bit Luke.</li> <li>➤ Characters A &amp; B where A is Elvira trying to convince Luke that hanging out with them won’t be so bad.</li> <li>➤ Develop the scene where someone has an unusual pet and they’re trying to get a parent’s permission to keep it.</li> <li>➤ Work in a small group to create a tableau of the scene where Luke tells his parents his tarantula has been stolen. Use Voice in the Head to highlight details from the book (saying what your tableau character might have said).</li> <li>➤ Hotseat Croc.</li> <li>➤ Develop a monologue as if you were Luke, trying to get his parents to let him stay alone without going to Elvira’s flat.</li> <li>➤ Show how Luke might win Thomas over and stop him from biting.</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Interdisciplinary Research Ideas</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Write ten questions about spiders and use safe sources to find the answers.</li> <li>➤ Compose a pamphlet about tarantulas to educate the general public.</li> <li>➤ Find some songs that you think would be Luke’s favourite.</li> <li>➤ How much would a tarantula sell for these days? Are there rules about keeping exotic pets in your area?</li> <li>➤ What are phobias and how are they different from other kinds of fears? How can people with phobias receive</li> </ul>	<p><b>Literary Awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ This story is written from first-person past tense. Try re-writing a short section in third-person past or present and compare. Why do you think the author chose the perspective and tense she did?</li> <li>➤ Consider the length of the book—do you think it’s a good length for telling this story? Why/why not?</li> <li>➤ Consider the length of chapters in this book: do the chapter lengths work for this story? Why/not?</li> </ul>
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<p>help?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Research the Russell Square area of London. What places might Luke visit in London if he were there this summer?</li> <li>➤ Is Wakaw, where Luke is from, a real place? If it is, find out what it is like: population numbers, businesses, community map. Think about what differences he would see between Wakaw and London.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Why might the author have chosen to name each chapter? Select three chapters and list titles you think would suit them even better. Do you read the chapter names when you read a novel? Why or why not?</li> <li>➤ Write a letter to the author with some guesses about what real experiences she had in London that she put into her fiction. See if you are right!</li> </ul>
<p><b>Personal Response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Have you ever experienced having a babysitter you didn't like? What have you liked/disliked about caregivers of the past?</li> <li>➤ If you could choose a pet, what pet would you select and why?</li> <li>➤ Have you ever travelled somewhere you didn't want to go? Tell about it.</li> <li>➤ What things would you want to do if you went to London for the summer?</li> <li>➤ Do you know anyone like Luke's dad? In what ways?</li> <li>➤ Do you know any younger children who are pests as Thomas was? Why do you think children act this way?</li> <li>➤ What would you do if you found yourself in the middle of a mystery like Luke did?</li> <li>➤ What did you like about this story? What did you dislike? What advice would you have for the author?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Related Literature</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Compare this story to other middle-grade books that deal with mysteries: <i>The London Eye Mystery</i> by Siobhan Dowd; <i>Max Finder</i> graphic novel mysteries by Liam O'Donnell.</li> <li>➤ Another story about a boy and a tarantula is <i>Tarantula Shoes</i> by Tom Birdseye.</li> <li>➤ A non-fiction book for young people about animal phobias is: Etta Kaner's <i>Friend or Foe: The Whole Truth About Animals that People Love to Hate</i>.</li> <li>➤ Explore the meaning of spiders and other creatures as spirit animals in Wayne Arthurson's <i>Spirit Animals: Meanings &amp; Stories</i>.</li> </ul>

<b>Values Clarification</b>	<b>Other Ideas</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Were Luke’s parents right in not listening to his complaints about going to Elvira’s flat?</li> <li>➤ Do you think Elvira was a 5 star babysitter? What was positive about her home? Negative?</li> <li>➤ Is it right or wrong to keep animals in cages? Discuss your point of view.</li> <li>➤ Were Luke’s parents right in not bringing their dog Rusty to London? Why/why not?</li> <li>➤ Was Luke being fair to Elvira? Discuss your viewpoint.</li> <li>➤ Luke’s parents seemed too busy to do things with him. What priorities had they set? Were these priorities good ones? What would you have planned if you were one of Luke’s parents in this story?</li> <li>➤ Were Luke and his dad right not to bring home any Fish &amp; Chips for Luke’s mom? Is it always necessary to share? What would a situation be where they should have shared?</li> <li>➤ Luke’s parents thought that travel would be educational for him. Were they right? Do you think families who travel with their children are helping them learn new things? Discuss.</li> </ul>	<p><u>Music</u>: Find a song that you think represents each of the following characters: Luke; Elvira; Thomas; Dad</p> <p><u>Critical Literacy</u>: Are there any characters with cultural and/or language differences in the novel? Why do you think the author included them?</p> <p><u>Comprehension</u>: Model and practice the following reading strategies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Making connections to self, text, and world</li> <li>➤ Rehearsed rereading for oral fluency and sight word development</li> <li>➤ Summarizing</li> <li>➤ Making predictions</li> <li>➤ What to do when encountering a hard word (guessing from the picture and checking to the actual letters using phonics; looking for a little known word within an unfamiliar word; looking for a familiar word part/word family; thinking about what would make sense and then checking to the actual letters using phonics, etc.)</li> </ul> <p><u>Further Questions?</u> Compose a letter to the author; locate her email on her author’s website and send it to her to invite a response.</p>