



Spider Spins a Story
Fourteen Legends from Native America

Edited by Jill Max

Illustrated by Robert Annesley, Benjamin Harjo, Michael Lacapa,
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About the book:

The spider is a common character in numerous Native American oral traditions. In this collection of stories, some of which are appearing in print for the first time, Spider represents many things: a mentor, a trickster, a helpful ally, a worker of miracles. Illustrated with the exceptional artwork of six Native American illustrators and endorsed by tribal authorities, this book will help young readers appreciate the power of myth and legend in the lives of all people. A portion of the profits benefit the American Indian Theater Company, a nonprofit organization for Native American young people.

Jill Max is a pseudonym for the writing team of Ronnie Davidson and Kelly Bennett. They compiled the book while living in Oklahoma, which enabled them to do extensive research on Native American customs and lore. The team traveled all over the country meeting with storytellers and tribal leaders, collecting stories and learning about the different Native American tribes in North America. Ronnie Davidson lives in Tulsa, Oklahoma; Kelly Bennett divides her time between Texas and Jakarta, Indonesia.

“Jill Max” talks about *Spider Spins A Story*:

1. How did you become interested in collecting spider stories?

We were at Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, researching carved, stone animals figures called “fetishes,” when we met a Navajo weaver named Sarah Natani. Sarah shared the “Legend of the Loom” with us. We were captivated by Sarah’s storytelling style, and with Spider Woman. After that, everywhere we listened, we heard new and different stories featuring the spider character.

2. What do you hope readers take away from the anthology?

Depending on where in North America their ancestors lived, Native American Peoples have different customs, traditions and history—traditions that are still alive today. When enjoying these legends, we hope readers will come to understand more about the nation’s first people.

3. Which spider is your favorite? Why?

Wow! That’s a tough question. They are all so wonderful! Little Water Spider is a favorite because she is so brave—and because she had a plan! Trickster Tarantula isn’t really a spider, but he’s fun because he is so sneaky and mean.

4. What was the most fascinating thing you learned while creating this book?

That everywhere there is a spider, there is a story about a spider. And that many tribes tell similar stories. I imagine them sitting together around a fire, taking turns telling stories the same way my friends and family do when we are together. And, every Navajo rug has a spirit line, just as every story has a spirit.

Discussion Guide

The Great Flood (Kiowa)

What event caused Grandmother Spider and Grandfather Snake to marry? What helped them to survive?

How the Tewas Found Their True Home (Tewa)

Which direction was the Tewas encouraged to travel? What would happen in the other directions? What were the signs that they had found the right place?

Swift Runner and Trickster Tarantula (Zuni)

Describe how Tarantula tricked Swift Runner out of his regalia. Who tried to help him get it back? Who succeeded? How? What was his last trick?

How the Spider Got Its Web (Wiyat)

What did spider do with the string the Old Man Above gave him? Why was he scared? What did it provide?

Osage Spider Story (Osage)

What did spider teach the wu-zha-she? How did she make a good life symbol? What does the narrator mean by "... when we, the Wa-zhaa-zhe, the Osage, knew how to listen."

The Hunter and the Spider (Muskogee)

What did the hunter learn from spider? What other lessons did he learn? What did the Old Ones believe about spiders? How could they make you wealthy or healthy?

The Legend of the Loom (Navajo)

List three facts you learned about Navajo weaving. How did spider teach them? What do the different parts of the loom stand for? Why can't weavers ever give up?

Rainbow Makers (Achomawi)

Summarize what the animals and the Achomawi must do to bring the sun back. Why did Old Man Above do as they asked? What can this teach us about cooperating with our own enemies? What could bring people together like this?

Spider the Fire Bringer (Cherokee)

Which other animals tried to bring fire? Why did they fail? What type of spider is described? How does fire both serve and hurt nature?

Spider Woman Creates the Burro (Hopi)

Why did Spider Woman create the burro for her namesake's clan? Describe how she accomplished her task. What other animals serve man in their labor? Which do you think is most important? Why?

How the Half-Boys Came to Be (Kiowa)

Three times people do not do as they are told in this story. How do they disobey? What are the results? Why were the boys magical?

Wihio Meets One of the Little People (Cheyenne)

How does the introduction of the story inform your understanding of it? In your own words, what happened between the Wihio and the Little Man.

Iktomi and Buzzard (Lakota)

What mistake did Iktomi make? How did buzzard punish him? What can we learn from Iktomi's story?

Dreamcatcher Story (Muskogee)

What did the boy want? How did he get it? What does the dreamcatcher do? Who makes them?

Questions after reading the entire anthology:

1. Which spider was your favorite? Why?
2. Why do you think so many Native American tribes feature the spider? What qualities of the spider do you admire?
3. What can we learn about a culture by studying their stories?
4. Which stories featured the spider as a trickster character?
5. Which stories did man learn from the spider?
6. What was the most interesting fact you learned while reading this anthology? Does it make you want to explore other stories from other tribes or cultures?
7. What is a myth or legend? Why do you think they exist?
8. Which illustration is your favorite? Why?
9. How are written stories different from oral ones? What can hearing a story aloud add to its meaning? Would you rather read or hear a story?

Projects:

Language Arts:

Create your own spider character. Will she be a trickster? A helpmate to man? Will she create something useful or teach us a lesson? Write a short story once you have developed this most important character.

Math:

Take one of your favorite stories and turn it into a timeline of the major events (try to use eight events if you can, the same number as spider's legs). Illustrate the events.

Social Studies:

Research one of the tribes from the book. Where are they located? What did they grow or hunt? What is their traditional lodging? How were they affected by the western expansion of America? What type of clothing did they wear? Create a poster about what you learned

to share with the class.

Science:

Study the arachnid family. What features are common among all spiders? How are they different from insects? Gather facts about one variety of spider and create a pamphlet, PowerPoint or poster about what you learned.

For Fun:

Using crayons or markers, create your own paper rug design. Don't forget the spirit line!

Make A Dreamcatcher:

You will need:

- Grapevine or wire you can bend into a circle shape
- Tape
- Yarn
- Beads and feathers for decoration

Directions:

Bend vine or wire into a hoop shape and wrap it with tape so it will hold its shape. If using wire, wrap yarn around the wire until it is completely covered. If using grape vine, wrap yarn around the tape to hide it. Tie the two ends of the yarn in a knot to keep it from unraveling. Tie the two yarn ends together to form a loop. You will use this to hang your Dream Catcher. Cut a piece of yarn about as long as your arm. Tie one end of the yarn to the hoop, close to the knot. Now, weave the free end of the yarn back and forth across the hoop to form the spider's web. If your yarn gets too short to use, but you need more "web," tie the yarn to the hoop, cut another piece of yarn and keep weaving. When you are finished making your web, decorate your Dream Catcher. Use the ends of the yarn to tie the feathers in place. String the beads on the yarn and tie knots to hold them on. Your Dream Catcher is ready to hang!

Edible Spiders:

You will need:

- Jumbo Marshmallows
- Black shoestring licorice
- Red shoestring licorice or some small, red candy

Directions:

One jumbo marshmallow will be the body of your spider. Using clean scissors cut the shoestring licorice into 8 short pieces. These will be your spider's legs. Poke the "licorice legs" into the marshmallow body, four on each side. To make spider eyes, cut tiny pieces of red licorice, or use red candy for spider eyes. Poke the "eyes" into one flat end of the marshmallow spider. Leave just the tip poking out. Your spider can have as many eyes as you like. Eat your marshmallow spider—if you dare!

How many eyes does a real spider have?

Spider Spins a Story

Fill out the chart as you read

	Problem:	Spider's Role	Solution
The Great Flood (Kiowa)			
How the Tewas Found Their True Home (Tewa)			
Swift Runner and Trickster Tarantula (Zuni)			
How the Spider Got Its Web (Wiyat)			
Osage Spider Story (Osage)			
The Hunter and the Spider (Muskogee)			
The Legend of the Loom (Navajo)			
Rainbow Makers (Achomawi)			
Spider, the Fire Bringer (Cherokee)			
Spider Woman Creates the Burro (Hopi)			
How the Half-Boys Came to Be (Kiowa)			
Wihio Meets One of the Little People (Cheyenne)			
Iktomi and Buzzard (Lakota)			
Dreamcatcher Story (Muskogee)			

This guide created by [Tracie Vaughn Zimmer](#), visit her website to find other guides to children's literature.