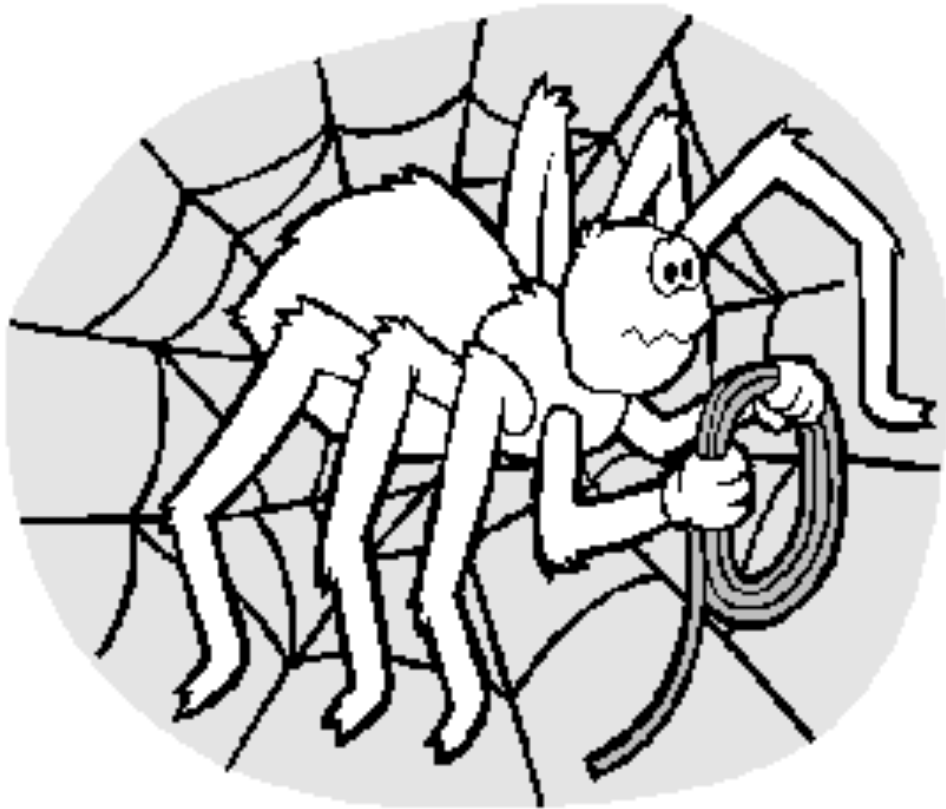




SPIDERS SAVE THE DAY

*Spiders in world cultures
Literature connection*



BY Rebecca K. Fraker



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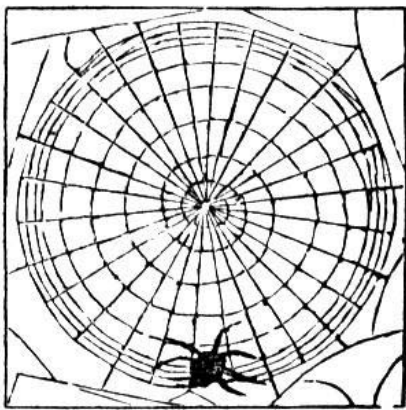
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In Human Cultures

Spiders have always appeared in our cultural history. From African folk tales to Greek myths, spiders have represented many things. The spider has symbolized patience, mischief, malice, and cunning.

Numerous cultures have credited the spider with the beginnings of spinning, weaving, basket and net making, and knot work. Web spinning by the spider is also associated with many creation myths. Spider emblems have been found as far back as 2000 BC.

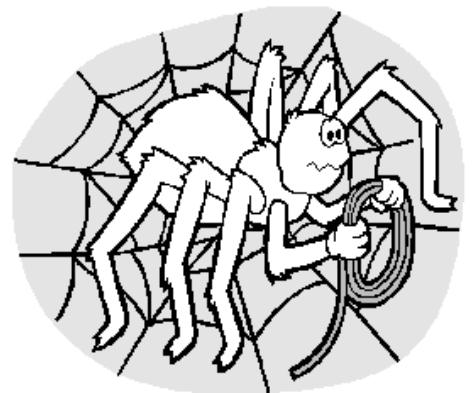


One well-known ancient legend from Greece explains the origins of the spider. In it the princess Arachne and the Greek goddess Athena got into a weaving contest. Both created fabulous tapestries. But while Athena acknowledged that Arachne's weaving was flawless, she was furious at the human's pride. In a fit of anger, Athena destroyed Arachne's loom and tapestry and cursed her with extreme sadness. Arachne died soon after.

Athena felt bad about her anger, and so she brought Arachne back to life as a spider that still kept Arachne's weaving abilities. The Greek word "Arachne" means "spider." Today we still call spiders "arachnids."

In African folk tales, there are many stories that feature the trickster Anansi, a clever spider. He is also known as Kwaku Ananse (West Africa), Aunt Nancy (West Indies), and is popular in South America and Jamaica.

The Native American Lakota have a spider deity called Iktomi. Spiders are also seen as responsible for the birth of the constellation Ursa Major. Seven men are transformed into stars, and they use spider webs to climb into the sky.





The Navajo have a Spider Grandmother in a creation myth. In this story, the Spider Grandmother makes all things from the shimmering silk threads that come out of her.

Among the Hopi of Arizona, USA, Spider Woman's web connects all things in the Universe together. The Hopi believe we are all connected to every animate and inanimate object. A spider can sense vibrations on its web when even one strand is disturbed. So we also are connected, and a disturbance in the Universe affects us all.



Historians are unsure if the legend of King Robert the Bruce of Scotland is true or not, but there is a spider in the story. While fighting the English for freedom, Bruce suffered a series of military failures. He took refuge in a cave. While hiding there, he watched a spider. The spider kept trying to climb its silken thread to its web, but it failed again and again.

Despite these failures, the spider persevered. Eventually, it made it to the web. Bruce took this as a symbol of hope and perseverance, as if the spider was saying "Try, try again."

Bruce came out of hiding and eventually won Scotland's independence.



Besides all the spider legends and myths, many authors have also put spiders in their stories. Most children know the story of Charlotte, the kindly spider who helps the pig Wilbur in Charlotte's Web by E.B. White.

Large spiders show up in several of J.R.R. Tolkien's books. In The Hobbit, the hero Bilbo encounters a group of large spiders in the forest Mirkwood. A horrible monstrous spider called Shelob attacks Frodo and Samwise in one of the adventures in The Lord of the Rings.



In graphic novels, spiders frequently show up as either the symbol or alter ego of villains and superheroes. The most famous is the Marvel comic book hero *Spider-Man*. In this story, Peter Parker is accidentally bitten by a radioactive spider. This allows him to shoot webs from his wrists, climb tall buildings and swing from a silk line, use super "spidey senses," and have instant reflexes. Like real spiders, Spider-Man is often misunderstood and feared by people.

After WWII, America's fear of atomic radiation led to many giant monsters appearing in films. Japan introduced us to Godzilla, a giant mutated lizard. Spiders did not escape this giant effect. In 1955 Tarantula scared audiences with a huge rampaging spider, and quite a few movies followed.



This mechanical spider has lately been making the rounds in England. As you can see, it is very large.

Spiders and their webs are featured at Halloween. The connection seems to be the "creepy" factor.





People have also used spiders and their webs as objects of sculpture and art work. Some of the sculptures are quite large!



Last but not least, a lot of the research for this spider unit was done on www, the Internet. What does www stand for?

Why, “World Wide Web,” of course! The connections and pathways are the web, the spider’s food is the websites of info and pictures, and the spiders are the search engines we send out to find our information.

What is YOUR favorite spider story?



Compare and Contrast Essay

The following two stories have trickster heroes.

One of the stories features Anansi, a famous West African spider, and the other story involves the Native American trickster, Coyote.

These stories were traditionally oral. **Find a partner and take turns reading the two stories to each other.**

Now write an essay and compare and contrast the two heroes, the problems, and the solution. Your essay should be three to five paragraphs.

The following words and phrases can help you write an essay:

Similarities:

- ✚ Both
- ✚ Also
- ✚ Too
- ✚ As well
- ✚ Is similar to

Differences

- ✚ However
- ✚ On the other hand
- ✚ In contrast
- ✚ But
- ✚ While
- ✚ Unlike
- ✚ Differs from

This is a great site to use to work on your essay.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/compcontrast/map/>



Name: _____ Date: _____

Planning Sheet

	Anansi Story	Coyote Story
Hero		
Situation/problem in story		
Who is the hero trying to benefit?		
How is the problem solved?		



Other Ideas:

- ❖ Research Anansi and find more stories about him.
- ❖ Record an Anansi story for lower grades.
- ❖ Make simple costumes and act out a story.
- ❖ Make puppets to tell an Anansi story.
- ❖ Read the story of Ariadne and Theseus.

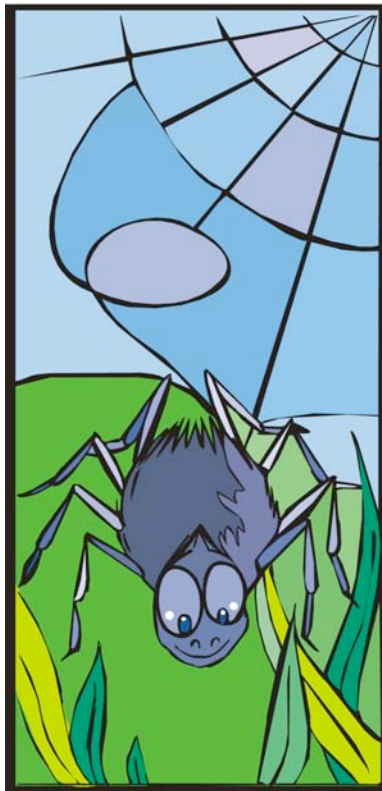
A few places to find more Anansi stories:

<http://anansistories.com/>

<http://www.everythingjamaican.com/tag/anansi-stories/>

<http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/africa/literature/anansi.htm>

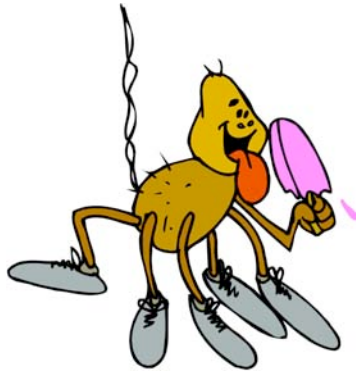
<http://www.anansi.org/webwalker/story1.htm>





Why Anansi Has Eight Thin Legs

A West African Anansi the Spider Myth



Anansi is the name of a famous spider originally from West Africa. There are many Anansi stories, some dating back at least a thousand years. Anansi stories are so good that they are still told today in many cultures, including Jamaican.

Legend says that many years ago Anansi the Spider visited the Sky God. The Sky God liked Anansi so much that He gave Anansi the gift of storytelling.

Spider Anansi had a wife who was a great cook. He loved the food she made. But he also loved to taste the food that the others in his village had cooked.

One day Spider Anansi stopped by his friend Rabbit's house. There was a delicious smell of greens cooking. "You are cooking greens," Anansi cried.

"They will soon be cooked," said Rabbit. "Wait, and stay and eat with me."

"Hmmm," thought Anansi. "If I wait, Rabbit will find jobs for me to do."



So Spider Anansi said to Rabbit, "I have some things I need to do. But I will spin a web. One end will be attached to your pot, and the other one to your leg. When those tasty greens are cooked, tug on the web, and I'll know they are done, and I will come running!"

Rabbit agreed to this plan, and the web was spun.



But as Anansi walked along, he stopped and sniffed the air. "I smell delicious beans!" Anansi cried excitedly. Looking around, he saw some monkeys stirring a large pot of beans. The monkeys invited Anansi to join them. "The beans will soon be done!"

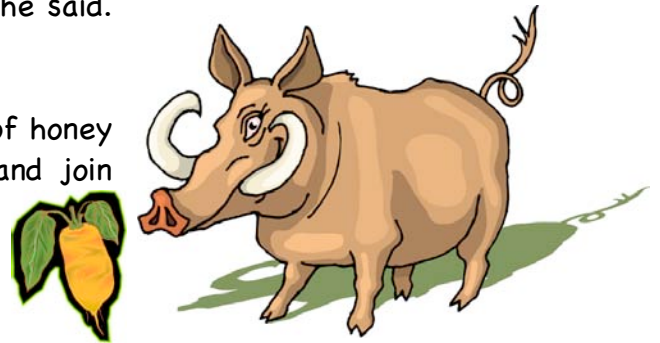
"I would love to come when they are cooked," said Anansi. Then Anansi spun another web, with one end tied to his leg and one to the monkeys' bean pot.



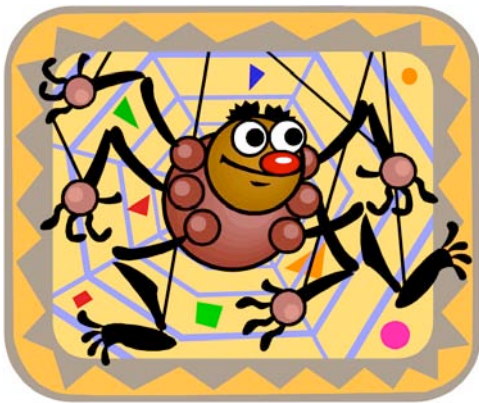
Anansi ambled along the path. Sniffing the air, he smelled something else tantalizing.

"I do believe I smell honey and sweet potatoes," he said.
"Delicious!"

"Anansi, my friend!" called Hog. "My pot is full of honey and sweet potatoes, plenty for sharing. Come and join me!"



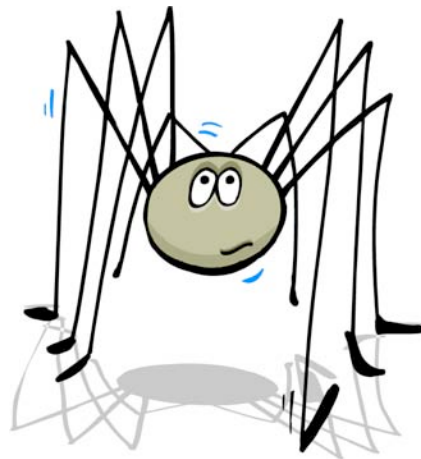
And again, Anansi suggested that he spin a web, with one end tied around his leg, and one end tied to the sweet potato pot. Hog thought it was a clever idea, and so it was done.



By the time Anansi completed his walk, each of his eight legs had a web attached. Anansi was quite proud of his idea. "I wonder whose pot will be ready first," he mused.

Just then he felt a tug at his leg. "Ah, ha!" he cried. "That is Rabbit's web. His greens must be done!" But then he felt another tug. And then another. And then a fourth! Anansi was pulled one way and then another as the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth webs were pulled at once. His legs were pulled thinner and thinner!

Anansi quickly threw himself into the river, and the water washed his webs away. When all were gone, and he was free, Anansi pulled himself painfully up on shore. "Perhaps," said Anansi, "This was not such a good idea after all." He never did get any food that day.



And ever since, spiders have had long, thin legs.



Background for the Native American Coyote

At night, Native Americans frequently heard the howl of coyotes. Coyotes are nocturnal, and very able to remain away from the sight and weapons of humans.

The North American coyote is present in a lot of Native American folklore and is often cast in a variety of roles. A few of these are deceiver, realist, goofball and survivor.

With traits characteristic of humans, the coyote stars in a number of these stories and teachings. These Native American coyote tales are passed down through the generations and used to illustrate the foibles of the human race.

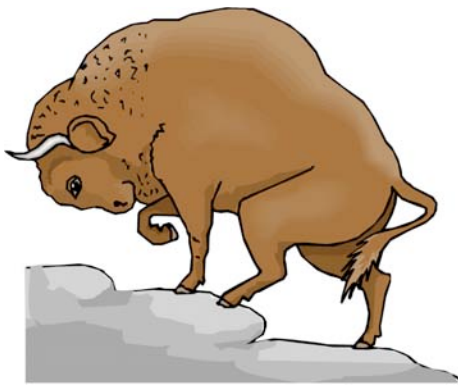




Coyote Saves the Buffalo

A Comanche Coyote Myth

A long time ago, a hungry, horrible Monster looked out over the plains. "If I take all the buffalo from the plains," he decided, "I will have enough food to last forever."



And so Monster stole all the buffalo and put them in his hideout in the mountains.

But soon the People were hungry. The animals and the People came together in a great meeting to figure out what they could do. But every one was too afraid of the Monster to think at all. There were no ideas.

Finally, Coyote, a wild dog, spoke. "I have seen this Monster. He lives in the mountains with a small boy."

But the People would not hurt a child, even to get back the buffalo.



Coyote agreed. "But the small boy is living with no one to love except a horrible Monster. I think we should send him a pet to love. Then, when the chance arises, the pet can set the buffalo free."

Everyone thought that was a great idea. So, first they sent Mouse to the boy. The boy liked Mouse, and took him home. But Monster made the boy send Mouse away. Next, the People sent Killdeer the bird. But again, Monster made the boy send Killdeer home.

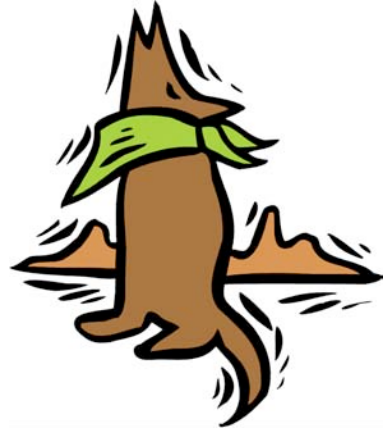
Finally, Coyote decided to go himself. He set out for the mountains. The boy liked Coyote even more than Mouse and Killdeer. He loved Coyote and took him home.



But Monster was angry. "I don't want a nasty, hairy beast in here! Get rid of him!"

Coyote and the boy ran. The boy tried not to cry, but tears ran down his cheeks. Coyote looked up and licked the tears away.

"I bet you are hungry," The boy petted Coyote. Coyote wanted to comfort the boy, and so he put back his head and howled. That is how Coyote tries to comfort you.



But the buffalo did not know that Coyote was trying to comfort the boy. They were frightened of the howling. They began to nervously stamp and shuffle their feet.



The more the boy cried, the more Coyote howled. Finally one buffalo became so afraid he bolted. Other buffalo followed him until all the buffalo were stampeding. Over the plains they ran, until they were scattered everywhere. Monster ran after them, but no matter how hard and long he hunted, the buffalo had scattered too far.

Late that night, Monster returned to his hideout on the mountain. Young warriors from the People were waiting. They killed Monster.

Coyote brought the small boy to live with the People.

That is why the elders say we owe the buffalo to Coyote. The People still give thanks today to clever Coyote, and his smart head and warm heart.

