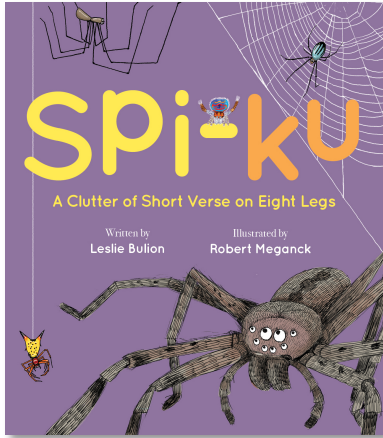


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PEACHTREE

Educator's Guide



Spi-ku: A Clutter of Short Verse on Eight Legs

Written by Leslie Bulion | Illustrated by Robert Meganck

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Ages 8–12

Lexile • F&P • GRL U; Gr 5

ABOUT THE BOOK

Leslie Bulion, award-winning educator favorite and master of science poetry, is back with a humorous exploration of the silk-spinning, bungee-jumping, hunting, trapping, trick-filled world of spiders!

Welcome to the realm of Araneae! Meet spiders that spit silk, roll like wheels, scuba dive, strum tunes, and more as they find mates, find prey...or find mates that become prey! Enjoy the extras in the back matter: a glossary of science terms, a description of short poetic forms, a spider-hunt adventure, resources for further study, and a relative-size chart round out the back matter.

THEMES:

spiders | arachnids | ecology | animal behavior
science poetry

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Grades 1 and up:

Spiders, Spiders Everywhere!

- Before reading *Spi-ku*, ask students what they know about spiders and what is interesting about spiders.
- Students may not know the names of the spiders they have seen. Ask them what they've seen spiders doing, and where they have seen spiders. Where might spiders live? (Hint: think about what most spiders eat).

- Discuss why the only continent spiders don't live on is Antarctica, and also why they don't live in the ocean.
- Read the poem "Araneae All Around" on page 6. Introduce the following Spider vocabulary words: *cocoon*, *predator*, *sensitive*, *venom*, *spinnerets*, *molting*, *ballooning*, and the play on the word *luncheonette*.
- Read page 9 ("The World of Spiders") and discuss why a daddy longlegs is not truly a spider.
- Often the subject of spider bites comes up in a discussion of spiders. Refer to page 14 for information about what spiders *want* to bite, *can* bite, and how much energy it will cost the *few that can bite humans* to waste venom on something they can't eat.

Science WordPLAY!

- Writers play with their words—especially when they're using humor! Poet Leslie Bulion likes to play with her words by using words in her poems that can have two different meanings. Discuss **homonyms**—words that sound the same but have different meanings, such as "like" (feel affection for) and "like" (similar to), or "way" and "weigh"—and ask students to list more examples.
 - Some homonyms sound the same, are spelled the same, but have different meanings. (**homographs** such as "like" and "like")

- Some homonyms sound the same, are spelled differently, and have different meanings. (**homophones** such as “way” and “weigh”)
- Ask students, working with partners, to read and discuss the poems on page 9 (“The World of Spiders”), page 34 (“Spiny Orbweaver”), and page 22 (“Tiger Wandering Spider”). Can any of the words in these poems have more than one meaning? What are the different meanings? Do any of these double-meaning words also have different spellings? Older students could check out the word “liquidating” on page 14.
- Discuss **onomatopoeia**: words that are spelled to sound like the thing/action they are naming. Inventing the spelling for word sounds is another way writers play with words!
 - Ask students for some examples: (Crash, boom, shush, tweet, brrrr...)
 - Ask students to find the onomatopoeia in “Spider Munchtime” on page 14: (SLURRP, blergh, B-i-i-i-i-i-i-te)
 - Ask students: If you were a spider, which way would you choose to eat a fly? Would you choose a different way to eat a bee? Why or why not?

Spiders by the Numbers

There are many counting opportunities in *Spi-ku*.

- Have students research spider bodies. How many main parts is a spider’s central body divided into? How many legs does it have? How many eyes? How many different body parts come in twos? Which ones?
- Assign each student (working in partners or on their own) a double-page spread to examine closely. Have them ask the following questions:
 - How many spiders are pictured on your spread?
 - How many different species of spiders are pictured on your spread?
 - How many non-spider species are pictured?
 - How many poems are on your spread?
 - Which poem has the least number of lines? How many?
 - Which poem has the least number of words? How many?

Songs are Poems!

Write a poem using a song as a mentor text.

- Leslie Bulion loves to use the rhythm and rhyme pattern of a familiar song she knows to create a

poem-song about a critter. Read the poem “Fishing Spider” on page 12 with students and ask if they recognize the well-known song Leslie used as a mentor text. Clap out the rhythm and rhyme pattern in this four-line poem:

four beats: (**ROW, ROW, ROW** my **LEGS**)
 three beats: (pairs **TWO** and **THREE** are **OARS**)
 four beats: (my **FIRST** legs **FEEL** the **WAY AHEAD**)
 three beats: (which **DO** no **WORK**? My **FOURS!**)

Remind students that the second and fourth lines in this pattern rhyme.

- Ask the class for a suggestion of another critter to write about using this pattern. (eg: dog)
- Brainstorm and make a list of actions a dog (or whatever animal they chose) might take (scratch, run, drool, pant, bark, etc.) and other pieces of information students think are interesting, meaningful, exciting, or fun (fetch a ball, sleep all day, dig a hole, gobble their food, snuggle, etc.)
- Brainstorm a first line using one of the suggestions.
- Once students settle on a first line and a second line, brainstorm a list of rhymes for the last word in line 2 and use this list to help complete line 4.
- Sing your class poem together!
- Ask students (working with partners or on their own) to follow the steps in this activity to write another poem using this mentor text pattern. More advanced students may be able to choose another mentor song pattern.

Grades 3 and up

Text Features and Organization

- *Spi-ku* is organized into sections that highlight spider traits or characteristics.
 - Ask students to name four section titles. (Table of Contents: Araneae All Around, Spectacular Silk, Worldwide Webbers, On the Prowl, Spider Mamas, etc.)
 - Ask students to describe the subject, often a trait or characteristic of spider biology and behavior discussed in each section. (For example, how spiders make and use silk, different types of webs, hunting, caring for eggs/young, etc.)
- Most of the book’s sections highlight three different spider species to give examples of a particular trait or characteristic of spider biology and behavior.

Ask students to find sections that *don't* follow this three-spider pattern (introduction: “Araneae All Around”; anatomy diagram and taxonomy: “The World of Spiders”; “Food Prep, Mealtime, Leftovers”; conclusion: “Our Spiderful World”).

- Ask students to examine the illustrations on pages 6–7, 14–15, and 38–39. How can readers identify the spiders in these three “group” illustrations? Example: direction, page 7 (see page 42 “Araneae All Around” for spider identification)
- Ask students to examine the cover of *Spi-ku*. What do they notice about spiders from this illustration? Which spiders seem most interesting? Why?
- Which text features help readers look up and discover the identities of the cover’s spiders? (Table of Contents, back matter diagram on page 48)

Visual Literacy: Find This Spider!

- There is only *one* spider in *Spi-ku* that is not featured in a poem. Ask students to use what they’ve discovered about the book’s sections and organization in the Text Features Activity A to narrow down where they might look for this mystery spider. [Check spreads with group illustrations.]
- Ask students to read this species description on iNaturalist: <https://www.inaturalist.org/taxa/209810-Frontinella-pyramitela> and look at the photos there and below to learn more about this



PHOTOS: Leslie Bulion

beautiful and interesting web-weaving spider, then answer the following questions:

- What is the spider’s common name?
- How big/small is this spider?
- Describe the shape of this spider’s web.
- Make a list of fun, interesting, or powerful words that describe this spider, its web, and its behavior.

Poetry-Writing Activity: Create a *Spi-ku* Haiku!

- Ask students (with partners or on their own) to read aloud the page 41 description of the ancient Japanese poem form, the haiku.
- Ask students to take turns reading aloud each of the five haiku included in *Spi-ku*.
- After reading or listening to each poem, ask students to consider these questions:
 - Does this poem fit the given description of a haiku?
 - Does this poem describe a “moment in nature”?
 - Discuss with a partner or with the class why, or why not?
- Ask students to choose one haiku from *Spi-ku* and make a list of fun, interesting, or powerful (juicy!) words they find in the poem.
- Using their bowl and doily spider information and their own juicy word lists, ask students to write a haiku about this spider. Or allow them to collect information about another spider they’re interested in and write about that one.
- Ask students to illustrate their poem.

Endpaper Stories: class discussion and visual art activity

- Ask students to compare and contrast endpapers from several books in your classroom collection and discuss some of the different ways authors and illustrators use the endpapers. (to highlight favorite parts of the book, to show patterns, to add humor, to tell a story, to give more information, etc.)
- Ask students to examine the front endpaper of *Spi-ku* and discuss what they notice there. (orbweaver spider, fly, fly flight trail, web, silk, pattern, spiral, spokes, etc.)
- Ask students to examine the book’s back endpaper and discuss how it is different from the front endpaper. (orbweaver spider, web, spider has moved, no fly, white packages, pattern, spiral, spokes, etc.)

- How do the author and illustrator use the endpapers in *Spi-ku*? (show how a spider weaves a web in a pattern, tell a story of the spider trapping flying insects)
- Ask students to design and create their own endpapers for a book about spiders.

RELATED READING

- Pringle, Laurence. *Spiders: Strange and Wonderful!* Honesdale, PA: Boyds Mills Press. 2017.
- Levi, Herbert W. *Spiders and Their Kin*. New York: St. Martin's Press. 2002.
- Gibbons, Gail. *Spiders*. New York: Holiday House. 2020.
- Marsh, Laura. *Spiders*. Washington, D.C. National Geographic. 2011

REVIEWS

“Cheerfully illustrated... As always, Bulion uses both evocative vocabulary and a variety of poetic forms; these are chosen with care and defined in the backmatter... Engaging and information rich, this is wonderfully well woven.” —***Kirkus Reviews*, STARRED REVIEW**

“Abundant scientific information, poetry, and colorful cartoon illustrations...scientific concepts are clearly conveyed, incorporating lively, sometimes icky touches...the enthusiastic tone will help readers find plenty to engage, inform, and intrigue.”
—***Booklist***

“Readers will want to devour the pages... The approachable and accessible verse will make adults and children want to explore the natural world and discover a clutter of spiders.... A fun collection of factual poetry to add to shelves.”
—***School Library Journal***

“Notes on poetic form are on hand for readers who gravitate to the ‘A’ in their STEAM curriculum, but the verses are also effective as mnemonic devices...teasing wordplay...and wry Gorey-esque bait for the spider grossout fans... Meganck’s digital artwork balances light-hearted cartooning with reliably detailed anatomical drawing.”
—***Bulletin of the Center for Children’s Book***

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leslie Bulion has written many books for young readers. She and her husband Rubin live in Connecticut, where she likes to pull on her boots, strap on her headlamp, and find her next critter adventure.

www.lesliebulion.com

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Robert Meganck is professor emeritus of Communication Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University. He has received more than 300 regional, national, and international awards for his illustration and graphic design work. He lives in Virginia.

www.meganck.com

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prepared by Leslie Bulion

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