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SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS AND LIBRARIANS

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Sister Spider Knows All

By Adrian Fogelin

ISBN: 1-56145-290-4/ \$14.95 Hardcover

6x9 inches / 224 pages

Middle Reader / Ages 8-12 / Fiction



ABOUT THE BOOK

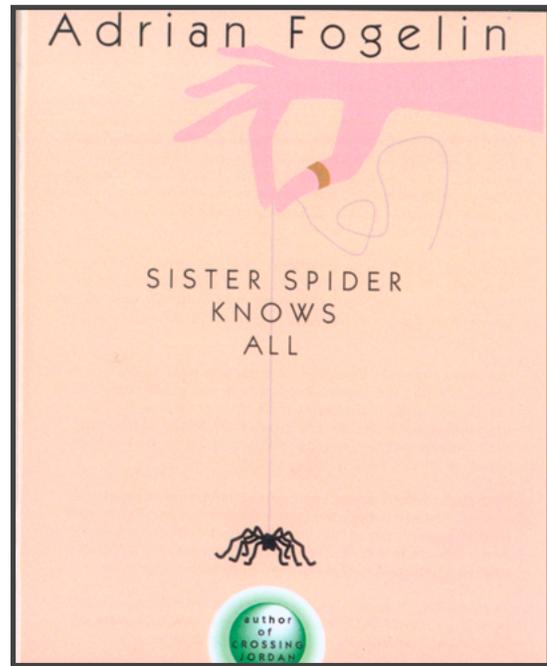
Twelve-year-old Roxanne depends on her family—grandmother Mimi and cousin John Martin—and they depend on her too. She helps out with the bills by selling produce and other items in her grandmother's booth at the local flea market. Roxanne yearns to know more about the parents she never knew, but Mimi won't answer her questions. When Roxanne forms a friendship with Lucy, John Martin's new girlfriend, the two girls embark on a quest for clues about Roxanne's mom and dad. An easy read about a young girl's search for her own identity.

THEMES

- ❑ Non-traditional families
- ❑ Socioeconomic issues
- ❑ Friendship and loyalty
- ❑ Coming of age/ finding your own identity
- ❑ Importance of school and working hard
- ❑ Responsibility

AWARDS

- 📖 2003 Parent's Choice Award
- 📖 2003 Young Adult Top Forty List (PA)
- 📖 2003 Best Books for Young Readers
--*The Washington Post*



PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

"Fogelin captures the fragility of this unique family with a lot of humor and great characters... the story has universal themes of coming of age and searching for one's identity. Reluctant readers will like the short, fast-paced chapters." —*School Library Journal*

"Delivered in a wry voice that swings from laugh-out-loud funny to wrenching sadness, Rox's narrative is neither sentimental nor condescending, and details of place, people, and class conflict emerge in plain poetic imagery..." —*Booklist*

"A Best of 2003 for Young Readers: Dead-on dialogue and strong, complex characters." —*The Washington Post*

"...a richly drawn story of human dynamics, offering both support for people as they are and hope for their growth." —*Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*



BEFORE YOU READ

Ask readers to think about and discuss the following questions and issues:

1. Have you ever had to work to help your family pay the bills? What can a kid do to help out in a family with very little income?
2. Can you imagine what it feels like not to know your mother or father? How would that change your everyday life?
3. Do you have a friend whose family or background is completely different from yours? Do you ever judge others differently because of their upbringing or class?
4. Can you imagine being in the middle of a tornado?

To encourage interest and enthusiasm for understanding the story, guide students in one or more of the following activities:

- Create a problematic situation for students to discuss. You may use the following questions or you may want to come up with your own.
- Sample questions for discussion: “What would you do if you found a diary that didn’t belong to you? Would you read it? Why or why not? Under what circumstances would it be okay to read the contents of another person’s diary?” Have students write their own responses, then place them in cooperative groups to discuss what they wrote. After reading the text, students can revisit this scenario.
- Use the first part of the Plan, Locate, Add, Note (PLAN) model as a pre-reading activity. Have students use the major headings and subheadings, as well as bold-faced terms, to predict the content and the structure of the text.
- Discuss career choices and have students talk about what they would like to do when they grow up. Let the students know that the main character, Rox, thinks she wants to work at a flea market the rest of her life. Continue the discussion with predictions about what Rox will decide for her future.

- Bring in scuppernongs (A cultivated variety of the muscadine grape with sweet yellowish fruit) for children to eat. Let children predict what role these grapes may play in the story. Another idea would be to ask the children to create their own story about the grapes. After reading *Sister Spider Knows All*, they could compare and contrast their own story with the plot of the book.



AS YOU READ

Ask readers to consider the following questions:

1. Which characters seem the most real or dynamic?
2. Roxanne, Annarose, and Charles sit in the back of the room in class and don’t want any attention. Why do you think they do this? Have you ever felt this way?
3. Have you ever been embarrassed by your looks or of your family’s lack of money? Can you imagine what that might feel like?
4. How are Mimi, John Martin, and Lucy important in Roxanne’s life? How do their personalities mesh to help each other?

Increase student reading comprehension by using one or more of the following activities:

- Show students how to find predicting moments and ask predicting questions. For example, have students stop at the end of each chapter and predict what will happen in the next chapter. Other possibilities for prediction might include questions like “Will Rox read the diary? “What effect will the tornado have on Rox and the flea market?” or “Will Lucy and John Martin get back together?”
- After reading a chapter or so from the book, ask students to make text-to-self connections. As a class group or in cooperative groups, have students write their connections on sticky notes and place them on a chart. Arrange the sticky notes according to different categories. These connections will help

students relate to the characters and the plot of the story.

- Have students make text-to-text connections (books or movies that students have previously read) or text-to-world connections (newspapers, magazines, or media).
- Have students create their own diary by journaling to peers or teacher about the book to discuss points of interest. This is a tool that can also help clarify any misunderstandings about the reading.
- Discuss with students about best friends. Have students write down or discuss the characteristics that make Lucy a good friend to Rox. Ask students to free write about a best friend or about the characteristics they find unique or good about their friends.
- Make dumplings with the students, like Rox's grandma did for her. Discuss why Rox's family ate different foods than Lucy's. Discuss types of food eaten in different parts of the country.



AFTER YOU READ

Discuss the following questions with the class:

1. Do you think Roxanne is happy about what she finds out about her mom and dad? Do you think it helps her grow up a little bit because she understands what her mom went through?
2. Do you think there is an exact definition of family? What qualities need to be present before you can call a group of people a family?
3. Do you think Roxanne should try to find her mom? If she does find her, what do you think she might say to her?
4. How does Roxanne's personality change over the course of the story?

To reinforce understanding of the story, use one or more of the following activities:

- Bring in other books for children to read and compare family life with that of the characters in *Sister Spider Knows All*. Ask students to make text-to-text

connections between *Sister Spider* and the other stories.

- Have students act out different scenes from the story in cooperative groups. First, write out various scenarios from the book on slips of paper and put them in a box. Divide the class into groups, then have each group choose a slip of paper with a scenario to act out. Assign each student in the group a different character to perform.
- Have kids do a "freeze-frame" game. Each student will draw a slip of paper with a character's name and a scene listed. Instead of acting out the scene, the student must freeze in a position so that their classmates can guess what part of the book they are "freeze-framing."



INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

(Classroom Activities)

Language Arts

- Discuss similes and metaphors. Have students find as many examples of each in the book as they can. This can be done individually or in cooperative groups. (You can begin with passages from p. 9 and p. 114 of the book.)
- Use vocabulary from page 19 of the book. Have children use worksheet included with this guide to match definitions and use words in sentences. As an extension, have students play Pictionary (Win, Lose, or Draw) by drawing a picture that illustrates a vocabulary word and having other students guess. Note: You will need to add more vocabulary to play this game effectively.
- Following Miss Llewelyn's instructions on page 42, show students how to write stories using "story starters." Ask them to help you come up with unique story starters for the class to write essays about individually or in small groups.

Writing

- What does the diary mean to Roxanne? How does the writing in it give her clues about her mom? Have students keep a journal for a month. Tell them to talk about whatever they want but to be creative and write in complete sentences.
- Have students write an essay comparing and contrasting Rox's life to their own.

Math

Business

Create a classroom (or possibly a grade level) flea market using items that children have created or brought in. Have students set up their own booths and ask them to decide on prices for each of their items and keep track of how much they sell. (You will probably want to use play money for this.) Use the flea market as an occasion for a simple discussion of money, currency, capitalism, and economics. Talk about ways the vendors might agree to negotiate at the sale in order to move certain items. How does Roxanne use marketing to move items at the flea market? Does Roxanne sometimes have to negotiate to sell an item? What does it mean to negotiate?

Measurements

Bake bread or dumplings with students, discussing how these food items relate to the story. Tie in measurements (teaspoon, gallon, quart) that are used in food preparation with those that are used in mathematics lessons (fractions, etc.).

Word Problems

Rox had trouble with word problems in school. Discuss the ways John Martin helps her figure them out. Ask the class to think of some examples of why a student may not understand word problems. Have them come up with other ways to approach word problems. Give students a variety of word problems. Let them work in pairs and try to solve the problems from the same perspective that John Martin used in the story.

Science

- Ask students to research extreme weather conditions and write a short paper on one well-known example of a severe weather disaster and the effects it had on the area where it occurred.
- Have students research tornadoes in small groups. Have them find out how one is created, where they happen the most and the characteristics and dangers of one.
- Ask students to research the various ways people can protect themselves when a tornado is approaching.
- Do a lesson about different types of weather. Tie this discussion into the plotline from page 105. Ask students to write about their experience with severe weather.
- Show a video about tornadoes. Talk about weather-related phenomenon. Discuss tornadoes and their impact. (page 105)

Social Studies

- Conduct a classroom discussion on lineage and ancestry. Tie this in to Rox's family and how she went about finding information about her mother. Discuss ways people find out about relatives they have never met, or wish to know more about.
- Discuss with students the impact of economics on social status. Tie in the parts of the story that describe Rox's family as being in a lower socio-economic status. Have students write down specific examples from the text that show the family's status.

Art

- Have students draw a picture of a part of the story. Check for details in each student's drawing that show understanding of the plot.
- Make spiders with pipe cleaners. Students can write a narrative about the significance of the spider in the story that they can share in cooperative groups or whole class. (See page 52 for reference to spiders in the book.)

- Make wreaths and other decorations that might be sold at a flea market. (See page 47.) Have a discussion or write about what crafts the students might choose to sell at a flea market and why.

Music

Break students into cooperative groups to create their own original songs about the story or about one scene. Encourage students to be as creative as possible, allowing them to use instrumental accompaniment and dancing.

P.E.

Discuss the part of the story where the students ran the “Smile Mile.” Talk about the importance of exercise in staying healthy and discuss the value of encouraging your peers. Plan a class walkathon or go for a long walk together; have students practice using encouraging words.



HIGHER ORDER THINKING ACTIVITIES

1. Lead a class discussion about symbolism in the story. One example is the tornado. How can one compare the tornado in the story to events in Rox’s life? Ask student to come up with other possible symbols in the story and discuss what they could mean.
2. Have students use the Internet to research the author and other books she has written.
3. Ask student to write an essay about the connections this story has to another story already read for class.
4. Have a class debate about the pros and cons of children working.



RELATED READING

CROSSING JORDAN, THE BIG NOTHING,
and other books by Adrian Fogelin
THE BOY WITH THE THORN IN HIS SIDE:
MEMOIR by Keith Fleming
THE FAMILY UNDER THE BRIDGE by
Natalie Savage Carlson
A FAMILY APART by Joan Lowery Nixon
ARE YOU THERE GOD, IT’S ME MARGARET
by Judy Blume
THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER by
Mark Twain

Notes



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Adrian Fogelin was born in Pearl River, New York, and is the daughter of fiction writer Maria B. Fogelin. After growing up in a home littered with manuscripts in various stages of production, she felt that writing was a very normal occupation. Fogelin earned a BFA in stone carving and bronze casting sculpture from the Rhode Island School of Design. She enjoys writing, gardening, tagging migrating monarch butterflies, and birding. Fogelin's novels, [*Anna Casey's Place in the World*](#), [*Crossing Jordan*](#), [*Sister Spider Knows All*](#), [*My Brother's Hero*](#), [*The Big Nothing*](#) and [*The Real Question*](#) have received outstanding reviews and numerous awards. They are written with honesty, warmth, and a kid-brand of humor, guaranteed to captivate young readers. Fogelin offers two programs for schools. "Think Like an Author" is an interactive creative writing workshop for students and teachers; it uses unusual writing prompts such as smells, objects, photos, and mysterious wrapped boxes. The objective of the exercises is to get participants excited about the process of writing. "The Art of Writing" involves a discussion about the process of writing and includes a Q & A session and a book signing. Fogelin brings a manuscript and galley to show the stages a book goes through from idea to finished product. A couple of exercises from "Think Like an Author" are also included. For additional information on Adrian Fogelin, please visit her website at www.adrianfogelin.com. (Intended audience: Grades 4-9)



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Carey Bailey, Stacie Kucalaba, and Kenya Kilpatrick

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Vocabulary Worksheet

Directions: In Sister Spider Knows All, Rox's mother had to learn these vocabulary words. See how many you have learned! Write the letter of the definition that matches each word in the space provided.

1. _____ ballerina
 2. _____ diorama
 3. _____ edible
 4. _____ ferret
 5. _____ hideous
 6. _____ justify
 7. _____ loquacious
 8. _____ persuasive
 9. _____ quagmire
 10. _____ yodel
- a. A weasel-like, usually albino mammal.
 - b. Repulsive, ugly.
 - c. Tending or having the power to persuade.
 - d. To sing so that the voice fluctuates rapidly between the normal chest voice and a falsetto.
 - e. Very talkative.
 - f. A difficult or precarious situation, a predicament.
 - g. The future of the planet.
 - h. To demonstrate or prove to be right or valid.
 - i. A three-dimensional miniature or life-size scene in which figures or other objects are arranged in a naturalistic setting or painted background.
 - j. Something to be eaten, food.
 - k. A woman ballet dancer.

Directions: On the back on this sheet, please use each word in a sentence to show you understand the words' meanings.