

TEACHER'S GUIDE



Sister Spider Knows All

Written by Adrian Fogelin

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Ages 8–12 | Realistic Fiction

AR • RC • Lexile • F&P • GRL W; Gr 6

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
- Socio-economic issues
- Friendship and loyalty
- Coming of age / Finding your own identity
- Importance of school and working hard
- Responsibility



BEFORE YOU READ

- Ask readers to think about and discuss the following questions and issues.
 - 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?
 - Can you imagine what it feels like not to know your mother or father? How would that change your everyday life?
 - Do have a friend whose family or background is completely different from yours? Do you ever judge others differently because of their upbringing or class?
 - Can you imagine being in the middle of a tornado?
 - Create a problematic situation for students to discuss. You may use the following questions or come up with your own. "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.
 - 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.
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AS YOU READ

- Ask readers to consider the following questions:
 - Which characters seem the most real or dynamic?
 - 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?
 - Have you ever been embarrassed by your looks or of your family's lack of money? Can you imagine what that might feel like?
 - How are Mimi, John Martin, and Lucy important in Roxanne's life? How do their personalities mesh to help each other?
- 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 their 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:
 - 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?

- 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?
- Do you think Roxanne should try to find her mom? If she does find her, what do you think she might say to her?
- How does Roxanne's personality change over the course of the story?
- 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."

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

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 page 9 and page 114 of the book.)
- Use vocabulary from page 19 of the book. Have children use the worksheet included with this guide to match definitions and use words in sentences. (Answer Key: 1. K; 2. I; 3. J; 4. A; 5. B; 6. H; 7. E; 8. C; 9. F; 10. D) As an extension, have students play Pictionary 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.

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.

MATH

- 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?
- Bake bread or dumplings with students, discussing how these food items relate to the story. Tie in measurements (teaspoon, quart, gallon) that are used in food preparation with those that are used in mathematics lessons (fractions, etc.).
- 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.
- Conduct 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 phenomena. Discuss tornadoes and their impact.

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 with the 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.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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.

RELATED READING

Crossing Jordan, The Big Nothing, and
other books by Adrian Fogelin

***The Boy With the Thorn in His Side:
A Memoir***, Keith Fleming

The Family Under the Bridge,
Natalie Savage Carlson

A Family Apart, Joan Lowery Nixon

Are You There God, It's Me, Margaret,
Judy Blume

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,
Mark Twain



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Adrian Fogelin is the author of nine titles for middle grade and young adult readers. Open one of her books, and you'll meet the kids in her home neighborhood in Tallahassee, Florida, where she and a band of trusty volunteers maintain the Front Porch Library—where local patrons usually arrive by bike or on foot. Adrian is also a songwriter and half of the musical duo “Hot Tamale.”

www.adrianfogelin.com

REVIEWS

“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*

AWARDS

- Parent's Choice Award
- Young Adult Top Forty List (PA)
- Best Books for Young Readers

—*The Washington Post*

Peachtree Teacher's Guide for
SISTER SPIDER KNOWS ALL

prepared by Carey Bailey, Stacie Kucalaba, and
Kenya Kilpatrick

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Sister Spider Knows All **Vocabulary Worksheet**

Name: _____

Date: _____

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

1. _____ ballerina

A. A weasel-like, usually albino mammal

2. _____ diorama

B. Repulsive, ugly

3. _____ edible

C. Tending or having the power to persuade

4. _____ ferret

D. To sing so that the voice fluctuates rapidly between the normal chest voice and a falsetto

5. _____ hideous

E. Very talkative

6. _____ justify

F. A difficult or precarious situation, a predicament

7. _____ loquacious

G. The future of the planet

8. _____ persuasive

H. To demonstrate or prove to be right or valid

9. _____ quagmire

I. A three-dimensional miniature or life-size scene in which figures or other objects are arranged in a naturalistic setting or painted background

10. _____ yodel

J. Something to be eaten, food

K. A woman ballet dancer