

Sample Paper 20**Score for Sentence Fluency** _____**Spiders**

Remember the old nursery rhyme about Little Miss Muffet—the one who leaped from her tuffet and took off on a run because a spider “sat down beside her”? Well, Muffet wasn’t the only one to react that way. The average human yells or jumps anytime a spider suddenly wiggles up a nearby wall or dangles from an invisible dragline just inches from his or her nose. Our first instinct is to put as much distance as possible between ourselves and spiders, but it turns out that’s harder than we thought. Some scientists suggest that as we go about our lives, we are never more than twelve feet from a spider! Even though the majority of spiders are very small, their eight fast moving legs, their bulbous shape, and their sticky webs all work together to strike fear into human hearts.

Many people kill spiders on sight—or call upon a brave friend or family member to dispatch the “intruder.” Are we overreacting? Almost certainly. Most spider species are harmless to humans and, in fact, many are actually beneficial.

The domestic funnel weavers, like many of their spider relatives, should be honored for their work as exterminators. When these spiders are around, other kinds of creepy crawlies seem to disappear. On average, a spider consumes more than a hundred insects per year. They don’t want to bother people; they just go where the food is—and that happens to be where people hang out. Face it: people attract insects.

Spider webs have been put to great use, too. Many years ago, healers discovered that webs could stop wounds from bleeding. (Specialists in wilderness survival still use this technique.) Webs are stronger, ounce for ounce, than steel, and are sometimes used in fishing nets. But the most useful thing of all may surprise you. It’s the spiders’ venom.

The Chilean tarantula is not only venomous; it's also particularly scary looking—large and hairy. When you're hoping to be rescued, this isn't the face you want to see. You might be more welcoming if you knew this spider could save your life. Here's how it works. When the cells in the heart stretch, it can cause the heart's rhythm to become irregular. The venom of the Chilean tarantula contains a protein that seems to prevent this swelling. Though more research is needed before people routinely take poison as a medicine, it's encouraging (and pretty amazing) to think that a spider's venom could actually save lives.

If humans are going to live in such close contact with spiders, we need to overcome our fear. We could start by having a little appreciation for all the pesky insects they eat—and the human lives they could save. Think about this the next time you are tempted to step on a spider—or just run away like Little Miss Muffet. Sit on your tuffet, relax, and say, “Another hundred down—keep up the good work! And hey, could I borrow part of that web . . . ”

Sources

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