Background Did you know there are 37,000 different species of spiders in the world? One thousand of those are found in North America. Spiders, like scorpions, are arachnids. They have eight legs and their body is divided into two segments. Though some spiders are poisonous, most are helpful because they eat insect pests.

Setting a Purpose Read the text to discover how one boy changes his mind about spiders.

The Girl Who Loved Spiders

Realistic Fiction by Karen Halvorsen Schreck

CLOSE READ Notes

1 Read As you read, collect and cite text evidence.

- Circle text that explains why Luis is afraid of spiders.
- Underline text that describes what Luis does that shows he is afraid of spiders.

I hate spiders. That's the first thing you should know about me.

My mom and I just moved from New York to Florida. That's the second thing you should know
5 about me. We moved because my mom got a new teaching job at a university here.

Before we moved, my best friend, Billy, told me all kinds of creepy stories about spiders that live in Florida.

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"My brother knows a guy from there who got bitten by a brown **recluse** spider," Billy said. "This guy was *smart* about spiders, too. He shook out his shoes. He watched his step. His bite healed, but it was the *worst.*"

Mom has told me it takes three weeks to make a habit. It's only been a week since we moved, but I've already made one.

First thing every morning, I shake out my sneakers. Second thing, I put on my sneakers, though I'm still wearing pajamas. Third thing, I always watch my step.

Hey! Not one, but three new habits.

I blame them all on Billy.

I find Mom in the kitchen, drinking a glass of orange juice.

"You're awake, Luis? It's the crack of dawn!"

"Too hot."

Mom laughs. "It's summer. Aren't those winter pajamas?"

I don't tell her that flannel is better protection from spiders.

CLOSE READ Notes

recluse:

2 Reread Reread lines 14–29. Summarize what Luis does to avoid being bitten by a spider.

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CLOSE READ Notes

3 Read As you read, collect and cite text evidence.

- Circle what Luis sees as he jumps on the trampoline.
- Underline details that describe what the girl is doing in her backyard.
- Circle details that explain what happens when Luis surprises the girl.

Over breakfast, Mom discusses her plan for the day. It's the same as yesterday's: unpack and settle in.

"Oh!" Mom sits up straight in her chair. "I found a dead scorpion yesterday. It was in perfect shape—not a leg missing. Fascinating, really. I saved it in case you wanted to see."

I gulp. "No thanks."

Great. **Venomous** spiders *and* scorpions.

venomous:

Mom shrugs. "Okay. So what are you up to?"

"TV?"

Mom frowns.

"There's always the trampoline," I mutter.

Mom bought the trampoline the day after we arrived. It's as big and bouncy as can be—something I always wanted that Billy had. I just wish Billy were here now to teach me how to do a flip.

Not even 8:30 in the morning, and I'm on the trampoline again. Every jump takes me higher and higher.

In mid-air, I see her—two yards over—a girl about my age. I keep jumping. The girl kneels before a bush, in tall grass where all kinds of biting and stinging things might be. She stays very still.

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Next jump, I see something in her hands . . . a pink ball? Jump higher!

The girl claps the ball. Poof! A white cloud explodes from between her fingers.

I collapse onto the trampoline and scramble down. This I have to see. As I enter her yard, where the grass is taller, I freeze.

The ball in the girl's hands is a rolled-up sock. A camera dangles from a strap around her neck. She carefully settles the sock on the grass. Then she raises the camera and **peers** through it. I look where she's looking, at a delicate shape against the bush's leaves, like lace against green velvet.

The shape is a gigantic spider web, whitened by whatever the girl clapped from the sock.

"Yikes!" I yell at the sight of the web.

The girl cries out, surprised, and falls into the web. She springs up, web clinging to her. "What's the big idea?" she shouts.

"Um . . . I was warning you! Guess you don't know about brown recluse spiders?"

"Of course I do. I've been trying to find one. They're shy, like most arachnids. I've found rarer breeds, even the **burrowing** wolf spider. Still haven't tracked down a brown recluse." She points at the bush. "That was a common orb weaver. I've been watching her for days, until she got her web just right." The girl glares. "It sure was pretty—until you came along. Who are you, anyway?"

"Luis. I just moved here."

CLOSE READ Notes

peers:

Not all spiders make their homes in webs. Some dig burrows.

burrowing:

4 Reread and Discuss Reread lines 55–80. Discuss how Luis and the girl differ on their feelings about spiders. Cite details from the text to support your ideas.

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CLOSE READ Notes

5 Read As you read, collect and cite text evidence.

- Underline text that explains Ashanti's goal.
- Circle why Luis and his mom go to Ashanti's house.
- Underline details that show Ashanti's interest in spiders.

"My name is Ashanti. Welcome to the neighborhood." She still sounds mad.

I cross my arms over my chest. "So you're on a spider **safari.** Why?"

safari:

"This summer my goal is to photograph one hundred spiders. I've always loved folktales about Anansi, a true spider-man. Spiders are cool."

I don't think before I say, "No, they aren't. Spiders are disgusting."

At that, Ashanti stalks away.

That afternoon Mom drives me to a park. "Never mind the heat," she says. "There'll be boys your age."

There's a decent playground, but a sign reads: BEWARE OF SNAKES! Where there are snakes, there must be spiders. Ashanti would be in heaven. As for me . . .

There are no boys my age. Two little girls sweat it out on the slide. Mom **wilts** on a bench. We drive home.

wilts:

As we turn onto our street, we see Ashanti crouching by a flower pot in her front yard. A woman kneels beside her.

To my horror, Mom stops the car and gets out. Mom and Mrs. Smith, Ashanti's mom, hit it off. Mrs. Smith teaches at the university, too. Mr. Smith works for the **alumni** office. Ashanti and I might be in the same fifth-grade class!

alumni:

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"Ashanti just found her first colorful crab spider," Mrs. Smith says. "It's the fiftieth spider she's photographed for her collection."

Mom and Mrs. Smith keep talking. Ashanti photographs her spider. I trace circles in the dirt. Then Mrs. Smith asks Mom and me over for dinner. Mom agrees.

Yippee.

Ashanti rolls her eyes. She's not exactly thrilled, either.

At six o'clock we're standing on the Smiths' front porch. Ashanti opens the door, and soon we sit down to dinner. The Smiths and Mom talk and laugh; Ashanti and I dig into our lasagna. Soon my plate is empty; so is Ashanti's.

She gives me a **cautious** look. "Want to see Anansi?" she asks quietly, so as not to interrupt the grownups.

I shrug. "I guess."

Ashanti smiles a little. "Come on."

We go into the family room. African **artifacts** cover three of the walls: masks, instruments, weavings, and paintings. A large bulletin board hangs on the fourth wall. About fifty photographs of spiders are mounted there. I take a deep breath and go over to the board.

CLOSE READ Notes

Many crab spiders use camouflage to catch prey.

cautious:

artifacts:

6 Reread Reread lines 107–129. How is Ashanti teaching Luis about spiders? Cite evidence from the text in your answer.

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CLOSE READ Notes

7 Read As you read, collect and cite text evidence.

- Underline details that show how Luis feels about spiders now.
- Circle text that shows that Luis's feelings about Ashanti have changed.

I've got to admit, some of the spiders look pretty cool.

Ashanti points at a painting and says, "That's Anansi." I move closer to see a powerful-looking spider, standing upright, **flexing** six of its eight legs. The spider has a man's face . . . and eight eyes.

flexing:

"Some legends say that Anansi created the sun, stars, and moon. Nice guy, huh?" Ashanti smiles. "He also could be tricky and greedy. In one story, he tries to keep all wisdom for himself."

Suddenly, Mrs. Smith calls from the kitchen, "Ashanti! Quick! You've got to see this!"

Ashanti turns and runs from the room with me at her heels.

Mr. and Mrs. Smith are peering at a baseboard. Ashanti presses close.

"Brown recluse!" Mrs. Smith whispers.

Ashanti gasps in excitement. She grabs her camera and adjusts the settings. Mom holds me back, although Mrs. Smith reassures her that the spider won't hurt you if you don't hurt the spider. Just don't brush up against it.

"Ashanti knows what to do, Mom," I say.

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Ashanti **glances** at me, surprised, and smiles. Then she adjusts the zoom on her camera and snaps the picture. "Fifty-one!" she exclaims.

Later, after Mr. Smith has caught the venomous spider on a glue trap, Ashanti tells me that there's an interesting-looking web woven through my trampoline's net.

"I spotted it today on one of my safaris," she says, grinning. "I want to photograph it."

"Stop by tomorrow, if you want," I say.
"It'll be early in the morning. That's the best time."
"I'll probably be awake."

"Just don't be bouncing, OK? You might wreck it."
"I don't want to do that," I say. "I want to know which spiders live in *my* yard."

Boy, won't Billy be surprised. I'll be able to teach him a thing or two about spiders when he comes to visit!

CLOSE READ Notes

glances:

8 Reread and Discuss Reread lines 150–166. Discuss how Luis's opinions about spiders and about Ashanti have changed. Do you think they will be friends? Cite evidence from the text in your discussion.

SHORT RESPONSE

Cite Text Evidence What are some of Ashanti's characteristics? Cite details from the text in your response.

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