

Photo Description



This black and white photograph shows a spider web covered with tiny water droplets that make the web visible and sparkly. The web is stretched between green leaves and plants in a garden. You can see the web's delicate, geometric pattern with lines radiating from the center, like spokes on a wheel.

Scientific Phenomena

Anchoring Phenomenon: A spider web becomes visible when covered with morning dew or water droplets.

Why This Happens: Spiders spin webs using silk threads they produce from their bodies. The web itself is nearly invisible—we usually can't see it! When water droplets (from dew, rain, or fog) stick to the silk strands, they catch light and reflect it back to our eyes, making the entire web suddenly visible. This is an excellent example of how organisms interact with their environment and how water changes what we can observe in nature.

Core Science Concepts

1. Animals Build Structures for Survival
 - Spiders construct webs to catch food (insects) for survival
 - The web is a tool the spider makes using its own body's silk
2. Observable Properties Change
 - Water droplets make invisible things visible
 - The web appears and disappears depending on whether water is present
3. Patterns in Nature
 - Spider webs show geometric, symmetrical patterns
 - These patterns help the web function effectively to catch prey
4. Organisms and Their Habitats
 - Spiders live in gardens, plants, and outdoor spaces
 - Plants provide anchor points for webs

Pedagogical Tip:

Begin this lesson by asking students if they've ever seen a spider web on a dewy morning. Many first graders will have observed this phenomenon without understanding what they were seeing! Start with their observations before introducing the science. This activates prior knowledge and increases engagement and relevance.

UDL Suggestions:

Multiple Means of Engagement: Provide a real spider web (safely preserved in a clear container) alongside the photograph so students can examine both visual and tactile features. For students who may be uncomfortable with spiders, offer illustrated diagrams or close-up photos instead. **Multiple Means of Representation:** Use actual water droplets on string (create a model web with yarn and water droplets) so students can see how water makes structures visible. This kinesthetic and visual approach supports diverse learners.

Zoom In / Zoom Out

Zoom In: Spider Silk at the Microscopic Level

If we could look at a single thread of spider silk under a powerful microscope, we would see it is made of tiny protein molecules linked together in a chain. These molecules are created inside the spider's body through special organs called spinnerets. The silk is so thin that we cannot see it with our eyes alone—it's about 100 times thinner than a human hair! When water droplets land on these microscopic strands, they stick because of a special attraction between water molecules and the silk material. This is why the droplets don't slide off—they're "glued" by invisible forces!

Zoom Out: The Garden Ecosystem

A spider web is just one small part of a much larger garden system. The web depends on many other organisms: plants provide anchor points for the web, insects fly through the air and get caught in it, and the spider uses the web to survive. When it rains or when morning dew forms, water moves through the entire ecosystem—it falls from clouds, lands on leaves and webs, is absorbed by plant roots, and is drunk by animals. The spider web is like a tiny window into this bigger cycle where plants, animals, water, and air all work together. Without the garden habitat and its plants, the spider would have no place to build its web!

Discussion Questions

1. What do you notice about the web in this picture? What makes it easy to see?
(Bloom's: Observe | DOK: 1)
2. Why do you think a spider builds a web? What does it help the spider do?
(Bloom's: Infer | DOK: 2)
3. If this web didn't have water droplets on it, do you think we could still see it? Why or why not?
(Bloom's: Analyze | DOK: 2)
4. Where else in nature do you think spider webs might be hiding that we can't see?
(Bloom's: Synthesize | DOK: 3)

Potential Student Misconceptions

Misconception 1: "Spiders make webs to catch people or be scary."

Clarification: Spiders build webs only to catch tiny insects like flies and mosquitoes for food. Spiders are not interested in people—they want insects! The web is a tool for survival, just like a fisherman uses a net to catch fish. Spiders help us by eating bugs we don't want around.

Misconception 2: "The water droplets are part of the web itself."

Clarification: The web is made of silk that the spider spins. The water droplets are separate—they stick to the web but are not part of it. The web exists even without water droplets; we just can't see it until the water makes it visible. It's like looking at a clear glass window—the window is there whether we see it or not!

Misconception 3: "All spider webs look the same."

Clarification: Different types of spiders make different shaped webs. Some are round and geometric (like the one in the photo), some look messy and tangled, and some are shaped like funnels or sheets. Each spider species builds its own special web pattern that helps it catch insects in its own habitat.

Extension Activities

1. Spider Web Art Project

Students use black construction paper, white yarn or string, and glue to create their own spider web designs. After the glue dries, spray the web lightly with water and observe how water droplets make the web more visible. This hands-on activity reinforces the concept that water reveals hidden structures.

2. Dew Walk Observation

On a dewy morning (or after watering the garden), take students on a short nature walk to look for spider webs covered with water droplets. Have them draw or describe what they see. This connects classroom learning to real-world phenomena and builds observational skills.

3. Water Droplet Experiment

Provide students with white string, tape, and spray bottles of water. Have them tape string in different patterns and spray them with water to see how droplets cling to and make the string visible. This kinesthetic activity helps students understand the water-visibility relationship.

Cross-Curricular Ideas

Math Connection: Patterns and Symmetry

Have students examine the geometric pattern of the spider web in the photograph. Ask them to count the "spokes" radiating from the center and notice how the circular rings repeat. Students can draw their own spider web patterns using rulers and circles, reinforcing concepts of symmetry and repeating patterns. This connects to K.G.A.1 (describing shapes in the environment) and K.G.A.3 (analyzing and comparing shapes).

ELA Connection: Descriptive Writing and Vocabulary

Read *The Very Busy Spider* by Eric Carle, then have students dictate or write simple sentences describing what they see in the photograph. Use sensory words: "The web feels sticky," "The water droplets look shiny," "The leaves are green and smooth." Create a class word wall with spider web vocabulary and have students practice using these words in short oral presentations or picture descriptions.

Art Connection: Mixed Media Web Art

Students create spider webs using white glue on black construction paper, yarn, or string, then sprinkle them with glitter or add watercolor painted droplets to represent dew. This kinesthetic activity reinforces the concept that water makes webs visible while allowing creative expression. Display webs in the classroom and discuss how different materials and techniques create different visual effects.

Social Studies Connection: Homes and Habitats

Connect the spider's web-home to where students live. Discuss: "A spider builds a home (web) in the garden. What kind of home do you live in? How is your home built to help you survive, just like a web helps a spider survive?" This introduces the concept that animals and people both need shelter and build structures suited to their environments and needs.

STEM Career Connection

Entomologist (Bug Scientist)

An entomologist is a scientist who studies insects and spiders. They observe spiders in nature, learn about different web types, and discover why spiders build webs the way they do. Entomologists might work outside in gardens and forests, or in laboratories looking at spiders and insects under microscopes. They help us understand how insects and spiders help our world. Average annual salary: \$65,000 USD

Biomimicry Engineer

A biomimicry engineer is a person who studies how nature solves problems and then uses those ideas to create new things. Engineers study spider webs to learn how they are so strong and stretchy, then use these ideas to create stronger fabrics, better ropes, or stronger materials for buildings and bridges. By learning from spiders, engineers can design things that are stronger and work better! Average annual salary: \$72,000 USD

Photographer / Nature Documentarian

A nature photographer takes beautiful pictures of animals, plants, and habitats like the spider web photograph shown here. They use special cameras and equipment to capture close-up images of things in nature that most people never see. Their photos help teach children and adults about the natural world and why it's important to protect it. Some photographers also create videos for nature shows and websites. Average annual salary: \$58,000 USD

NGSS Connections

Performance Expectation:

K-LS1-1: Use observations to describe patterns of what plants and animals (including humans) need to survive.

Disciplinary Core Ideas:

- K-LS1.A (How do organisms get the energy they need to live and grow?)
- K-LS1.D (Organization for matter and energy flow in organisms)

Crosscutting Concepts:

- Patterns (The geometric, repeating pattern of the web)
- Structure and Function (The web's structure allows it to catch insects—its function)

Science Vocabulary

- * Spider web: A sticky net that a spider spins to catch insects for food.
- * Silk: The strong, thin material that spiders make inside their bodies to build webs.
- * Dew: Tiny water droplets that form on plants and objects early in the morning.
- * Pattern: A repeated design or arrangement of things (like the spider web's geometric design).
- * Survive: To stay alive by getting food, water, and shelter.
- * Habitat: The place where an animal lives, like a garden or forest.

External Resources

Children's Books:

- The Very Busy Spider by Eric Carle (explores spider webs in a tactile, engaging way)
- Spinning Spiders by Melvin Berger (informational text about spider web construction)

- Are You a Spider? by Judy Allen (narrative exploration of spider life and behavior)

Teacher Note: This lesson naturally connects to First Grade life science standards by grounding abstract concepts like "animal structures" and "survival needs" in an observable, visible phenomenon that many students will recognize. The progression from observation !' explanation !' hands-on exploration supports constructivist learning principles and maintains student engagement through wonder and discovery.