

The white spider, Montessori, and you

Yesterday I saw a white spider. I saw him climb up his web to the gardenia. He couldn't have picked a more fragrant or a better place to call home. And the white gardenia matched his outfit completely. How does the white spider fit into Montessori?

In seven plus decades I've never seen a white spider. Most spiders I've seen have usually wound up flat, (obviously, not a fan of spiders,) ever since "Little Miss Muffet." Maybe it is the stories of black widows and brown recluses that have given me the willies about spiders. Usually, spiders don't inspire wonder in me. However, the only spider that inspired wonder I recall (from a distance) was the golden orb spider, about the size of a half-dollar, who made tremendously large webs of three or four feet across which is fascinating as you watch the large spider in the middle of his web. I left him alone. And Daddy long-legs are also safe with me too.

Living in San Antonio we had our share of non-spider fear mongers among them scorpions and centipedes. Even the little scorpions give big bites – but not enough to kill you. However, I was not ready for God's creation of a Texas centipede. These were not little one inch brown squiggly things. These were a good six to seven inches long, blackish with yellow legs and some red coloring – and fast.

One house guest was bitten by one – and we went to emergency care, the pain was so intense. What does that have to do with spiders? Well, the centipede produced a lot of wonder about God's creation. I'm still wondering what God was thinking when He made the centipede. Observing the centipede is a great exercise in wonder which now brings us back to the white spider.

The white spider confirmed my ability to still wonder. I overcame my spider-phobia and looked for him camouflaged in the white gardenia. I even went back the next day, and he was still there. I took his picture (as best I could with the phone.) I had never seen a white spider.

Fascination and wonder are two things in short supply in traditional education. We need to be careful that we make room and time for wonder in our Montessori journey. Am I still the child that is fascinated by everything? (My wife says I'm still a child. Or did my Montessori years help me be aware of wonder and the world around me? We need to be careful that we don't let the Montessori academics drive us to drive the children to complete the "curriculum," without allowing ample time for wonder and mystery. Is the Montessori curriculum really about stacking the Pink Tower correctly or is there place for wonder in the order and in the aesthetics it offers us.

The white spider created a concern that in encouraging and training Christian Montessori teachers that we do not lose the primary virtue of a real education - wonder and mystery, and to remember that education is "not the filling of a bucket but the lighting of a fire." W.B. Yates

Not sure if the next generation even knows the nursery rhymes of our culture.

Little Miss Muffet
Sat on a tuffet,
Eating her curds and whey;
There came a big spider,
Who sat down beside her
And frightened Miss Muffet away.