Hitchhikers in the Bathroom
by Liana Mahoney

Imagine this. You step up to the sink, wet your toothbrush, and begin cleaning your pearly whites. Out of the corner of your eye, you see something moving on the wall. Suddenly, you realize you’re not alone in the bathroom. Your heart pounding, you turn toward the tiny intruder to get a better look.

You’re horrified to see that it has eight legs, and a pair of oversized pincers on its front end. Is it some kind of miniature octopus, or a bizarre crab? Is it going to sting you?

Pseudoscorpions usually live outside in mulch, under tree bark, and in leaf litter. So how do they end up in the bathroom? They use those pincer-like claws to hitch a ride on other bugs, such as flies and beetles. When these insects come in, so do the pseudoscorpions - attached to their legs!

Actually, it’s a bug, and it’s no more harmful to you than a housefly. This tiny bathroom bug is called a pseudoscorpion (SOO-doh-SCOR-pee-uhn). But don’t be fooled by its name. It’s not really a scorpion; it’s just a relative. The pseudoscorpion is a kind of arachnid (uh-RAK-nid), which means it is closely related to spiders, scorpions, and mites. Like scorpions, pseudoscorpions have a segmented body and two enormous pincers. But pseudoscorpions lack the curved stinger that all true scorpions have.

These tiny arachnids prefer moist places. Since the bathroom tends to be humid after bathing and showering, it’s a likely place to find them. But they are easily overlooked. Most pseudoscorpions are only about two to eight millimeters long.

Pseudoscorpions don’t bite or sting humans, and they can even be helpful. These bugs feed on common household pests, such as carpet beetle larvae, ants, mites, and small flies. Welcoming this hitchhiker into your home may mean there are fewer household pests to “bug” you!

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1. If you wanted to find a pseudoscorpion outdoors, where would you look?


2. Use the Venn diagram to show how pseudoscorpions and real scorpions are alike and how they’re different.

   pseudoscorpions  real scorpions
   \[ \bigcap \]

   both

3. How can pseudoscorpions be helpful to humans?


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Match each vocabulary word from the article with the correct definition.

1. bizarre
   a. the immature forms of an insect

2. moist
   b. having a very small size

3. enormous
   c. strange, unusual

4. miniature
   d. extremely scared or shocked

5. larvae
   e. somewhat wet or damp

6. intruder
   f. divided into sections

7. segmented
   g. very large in size; huge

8. horrified
   h. invader
Unexpected Fortune
by Alizah Salario

Claire opened the blinds in her father's hospital room and watched a bar of sunlight slice across his face. She walked over to his bed and straightened the pillow behind his head. Her father smiled.

Claire hated how the nurses never paid attention to detail. When she came to visit, his blankets were often pushed to the foot of the bed, or the remote was on the floor. Sometimes Claire's father was too weak to bend down and reach it.

"No practice today?" Claire's father asked in a raspy voice.

Claire shrugged in response. It was the second time that week she had skipped swim practice to visit her father after school. Normally, she only saw him two Saturdays each month. She didn't mention these extra visits to her mother. Claire's mom hardly ever spoke to her father, especially since he married Marsha. It was strange that Claire liked her father more since he got sick. She enjoyed helping him. Sometimes she held a cup of water up to his chin while he drank from a straw. Other times she just did her homework while he slept.
"We'll head to the lake when I get better and you can show me your butterfly stroke," Claire's father said.

She knew he was just trying to be nice.

Claire always asked the nurses about his white blood cell count. They didn't tell her much. In biology she was learning how cells divide. She knew that the same DNA sequence repeated over and over in each cell. It made her think of looking in a mirror and seeing her image repeating over and over.

But in biology class, they never mentioned what happens when cells divide too quickly. Claire found that out for herself when she researched tumors on the Internet. She'd learned that her father's tumor probably happened because some cells wouldn't stop dividing. The tumor was in his brain.

Claire studied his face carefully. Everyone always said they looked alike: same chubby cheeks, same mischievous glint in their narrow green eyes. Lizard eyes, her father called them. Hers were speckled with little golden flecks. The other day her biology partner Justin, said her eyes were pretty. She smiled, but the compliment had made her feel sad.

Her father's eyes didn't have the same spark. His cheek bones stuck out prominently. He had already dozed off again. They didn't look anything alike anymore.

Claire glanced at the clock. She wanted to leave before Marsha arrived after work. Claire hated Marsha's lectures. She said Claire's father needed time alone after treatments. So why could Marsha come and visit whenever she wanted, and not her? Claire was his daughter, after all.

Marsha had told her about the cancer. She explained to Claire that her father was very sick. The doctors had to give him strong medicine. The medicine would make him feel sicker at first, but then it would make him better. Marsha spoke in a strained, high-pitched voice. Her hair was an ugly shade of orange that reminded Claire of a pumpkin. She gave Claire a fake smile that made her feel about two feet tall.

"I know what chemo is," Claire had snapped. She rolled her eyes. Marsha talked to her like she was five, not fifteen. Didn't she know her father told her everything? She knew the chemo would shrink the tumor. Claire knew it would make him lose his appetite and his hair. He might get very skinny, and not have much energy.

Claire imagined what the chemo was doing to her father's cells. She imagined a character flowing into her father's bloodstream and zapping the cells filled with disease, like lightning. There would be sparks and popping sounds as the chemo battled the cancer. Suddenly she felt silly. She was too old to imagine that sort of thing.
The doorknob turned. Claire was startled. She looked up just as Marsha entered the room.

"Hi Claire. I hoped you would be here. I brought us Chinese food," said Marsha.

"I'm not hungry," said Claire. She wondered why Marsha was being so nice.

Marsha sighed. She looked at Claire, then at her husband. Marsha took his face between her palms and kissed him gently on the forehead. He shifted, but didn't wake up. Claire felt embarrassed at the sight of her affection.

Marsha put the food on the table. She divided the fried rice and Kung Pao chicken onto two plates.

"Eat, or it will get cold," said Marsha.

Claire walked to the table reluctantly. It seemed wrong to eat in front of her father. For the past few weeks, he could only have special shakes. Claire had a sip of one, and it tasted like chalk.

"You're not mad I'm here?" Claire asked.

"No," Marsha said. "In fact, I think you should spend as much time with your father as you want."

Claire opened her eyes wide. She tried not to blink. If she did, she feared she might cry. Then she looked at Marsha. Her eyes looked wet and glassy. Was she going to cry, too?

Marsha suddenly sat up straight and smiled.

"Well, I'm starving. Dig in," said Marsha.

They both picked at their food. Afterwards, Marsha handed Claire a fortune cookie.

Claire carefully pulled the slip of paper from the cookie and read her fortune silently: "Sometimes in sorrow we find the greatest joy."

She handed it to Marsha.

"Here," said Claire, "this one should be for both of us."
1. Where does this story take place?
   A. a hospital  
   B. a pond  
   C. a school  
   D. a house

2. How does Claire respond to her father's brain cancer and hospitalization?
   A. She refuses to visit him.  
   B. She visits him more frequently.  
   C. She tries to spend more time with Marsha.  
   D. She distracts herself with homework.

3. Read the sentences below.

"Claire walked over to her father's bed and straightened the pillow behind his head. She skipped swim practice to see him. Sometimes she held a cup of water up to his chin while he drank from a straw."

Based on this evidence, what conclusion can be made?

   A. Claire is practicing to be a nurse.  
   B. Claire cares about her father and wants to help him.  
   C. Claire's mother is forcing her to care for him.  
   D. Claire's father treats her like a servant.

4. Read the sentences below.

"Normally, Claire only saw her father two Saturdays each month. She didn't mention these extra visits to her mother. Claire's mom hardly ever spoke to her father, especially since he married Marsha."

Based on this evidence, what conclusion can be made?

   A. Claire's parents are divorced; Marsha is her stepmother.  
   B. Claire's parents live far away from one another.  
   C. Claire's mother misses her friend Marsha.  
   D. Claire's mother misses talking to Claire's father.
5. What is this story mainly about?

A. A young woman reacting to her father's cancer diagnosis
B. The relationship between a mother and daughter
C. A father's wishes for his daughter
D. The process of cell division

6. Read the following sentences:

"Her father's eyes didn't have the same spark. His cheek bones stuck out prominently. He had already dozed off again. They didn't look anything alike anymore."

What is the author most likely trying to convey with the description above?

A. Claire's father doesn't like his hospital shakes.
B. Claire's father is very sick from his cancer.
C. Claire's father is angry with Claire.
D. Claire's father is ready to leave the hospital.

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Marsha explained to Claire that her father was very sick. The doctors had to give him strong medicine. ________, the medicine would make him feel sicker. But then, it would make him better.

A. However
B. Initially
C. Obviously
D. On the other hand

8. Why does Claire try to leave the hospital room before Marsha arrives?

9. Describe how the relationship between Claire and Marsha changes in the story. Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
Cause and Effect

Cause and effect is a way to describe the relationship between events. A cause is why something happens; an effect is what happens as a result.

Example: Jessica had to get a new phone because she dropped hers in a muddy puddle.
   Cause: She dropped the phone in the puddle.   Effect: She had to get a new phone.

Read each scenario and answer the questions about cause and effect.

1. Marie was excited about trying out for the school play. She had practiced her lines and even had a few friends give her tips. On the day of tryouts, Marie was very nervous, and she realized that she had stage-fright. Even though she tried to remember the lines, she couldn’t. Marie was disappointed when she did not see her name on the list for the play.
   a. What caused Marie to forget her lines?

   b. What was the effect of forgetting her lines?

2. James and Kevin decided to work together on their science fair project. They wanted to see which brand of soft drink stayed fizzy the longest after it was opened. One afternoon, the boys opened 10 different cans of soft drink at Kevin’s house and left them sitting on the table while they went outside to play. Kevin’s mom was not happy when she came home to find the cat sitting in the middle of sticky puddle of soda.
   a. What caused James and Kevin to leave 10 cans of soda on the table?

   b. List two effects that resulted from them leaving 10 cans of soda on the table.

3. Mrs. Tanner was out sick on Monday, and we had a substitute teacher. Mrs. Tanner left us notes and practice problems in math, but we did not understand what we needed to do. The substitute did not know how to work the math problems either. She said she would leave Mrs. Tanner a note to let her know that we were having trouble. When Mrs. Tanner came back on Tuesday, she decided she would postpone our quiz for a day so that she could help us with
the math problems. After Mrs. Tanner explained what to do, we realized it was actually very easy!

a. What **caused** Mrs. Tanner to be out of school?

b. What **caused** the substitute to leave Mrs. Tanner a note?

c. What was the **effect** of the note?

d. What was the **effect** of Mrs. Tanner explaining the math?
Cause and Effect

- A cause is why something happens. An effect is what happens.
- Sometimes clue words such as because, so, and since signal causes and effects. Other times you must figure out the causes and effects for yourself.

Directions Read the following passage. Then answer the questions below.

Every fall, the Stevensons celebrate a tradition they call Fall Day. Fall Day starts with yard work. Mom and Dad rake the leaves into big piles. Alicia and Paul are in charge of getting the leaves into the yard waste bags. After the leaves are picked up, they all go inside for hot apple cider.

After drinking the cider, they drive to the pumpkin farm. Alicia and Paul pick out pumpkins to take home and carve. That night, they will light candles inside the pumpkins and set them on the porch, because they like to look at the pumpkins’ glowing faces. Fall Day is tiring, but it is always fun.

1. Why do Mom and Dad rake the leaves into piles?

2. Why do the Stevensons drive to the pumpkin farm?

3. Why do Alicia and Paul light candles in their pumpkins?

4. Why do the Stevensons call this day Fall Day?

5. What is a tradition you observe every year? What is the cause of this tradition?

Home Activity Your child identified causes and effects in a short passage. Talk to your child about something your family does as a tradition. Ask your child to write down what the tradition is and why it is done.
Fact and Opinion

- A statement of fact might be proved true or false by doing research.
- A statement of opinion cannot be proved true or false. It is a belief or a judgment. It often contains a word of judgment, such as best, should, or beautiful. It may begin with the words in my opinion or I believe.

Directions  Read the following passage. Then answer the questions below.

Patrick ran to the edge of the stairs and looked at the large chalkboard next to them. It had information about the ocean’s tides and the day’s weather. Patrick loved knowing what time the tide was going to come in. He knew the tides were caused by the sun and moon pulling the water. Knowing this helped him decide when he would go swimming. The size of the waves always showed how fast the winds were blowing. Patrick knew if the winds were strong, then the waves would be high. He also knew that the winds might bring colder water to the shore. It looked like the ocean was going to be calm today.

Patrick ran down the stairs to the beach and looked around. The beach was already busy. He saw his friends and headed toward them. Patrick knew it was going to be a great day.

1. Give one example of a fact from the passage.

2. How do you know this is a fact and not an opinion?

3. Give one example of an opinion from the passage.

4. How do you know this is an opinion and not a fact?

5. On a separate sheet of paper, create a graphic organizer showing which sentences from the above passage are facts and which are opinions.

Home Activity  Your child identified facts and opinions in a short passage. Read the promotional material from a book or video to your child. Work together to identify the facts and opinions in the promotion.
DIRECTIONS: Read the poem aloud.

The Hungry Mouse

A very hungry mouse who said,  
"I'll do just what I please!"  
Snuck into a house one night  
And stole a chunk of cheese.

He scampered down the passageway  
And thinking that was that,  
Was very unprepared to see  
The shadow of a cat!

He dropped the cheese  
And turned around,  
And headed for his hole  
And didn’t even think about  
The big cheese that he stole.

When he was finally safe at home  
And telling all the mice  
He couldn’t help but add some girth to  
The abandoned slice.

The kitty, too, became a huge  
And formidable beast  
To hear the brave mouse tell it  
He had nearly been a feast.

His friends, they all believed him,  
For they did not know he lied  
And so, the not-so-brave mouse  
Was allowed to keep his pride!
1. What kind of attitude does the hungry mouse have in the beginning of the poem?
   A  That he deserves some cheese
   B  That he can do whatever he wants
   C  He is braver than the other mice

2. How did he feel when he saw “the shadow of a cat”?
   A  He felt frightened
   B  He felt like fighting
   C  He felt brave

3. Did the mouse ever actually come in contact with the cat?
   A  Yes
   B  No

4. What does the word “girth” mean?
   A  The length of something
   B  The measurement around the middle of something
   C  The weight of something

5. Why do you think the mouse exaggerates when he tells the others what happened?
   A  He wants them to admire him
   B  He wants to justify why he didn’t come back with the cheese
   C  He wants them to think he was brave
   D  All of the above