

Tea Time: Mary Howitt

post written by Wende

Mary Botham Howitt was born on March 12, 1799 in Gloucestershire, England to Samuel and Ann Botham. Mary had two sisters and one brother. She was educated at home and read everything she could get her hands on. She began writing poetry at a very young age.

On April 16, 1821 Mary married William Howitt who was a pharmacist as well as a writer. In 1823 he gave up his pharmacy business and devoted his time to writing with Mary. They had poems and other contributions published in annuals and periodicals. William and Mary knew many famous literary figures of the day, including Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Alfred Tennyson, and William Wordsworth. In 1829, Mary published one of her most famous poems, *The Spider and the Fly*, that tells the story of a cunning Spider who ensnares a naive Fly through the use of seduction and flattery. The poem is a cautionary tale against those who use flattery and charm to disguise their true evil intentions.

Mary translated, wrote or edited over 100 works, some with her husband and some on her own, winning a silver medal from the Literary Academy of Stockholm. She died of bronchitis on January 30, 1888.



An illustrated version of Mary Botham Howitt's *The Spider and the Fly* was later published and received the 2003 Caldecott Honor.

The Spider and the Fly by Mary Howitt

"Will you walk into my parlour?" said the Spider to the Fly,

"'Tis the prettiest little parlour that ever you did spy;

The way into my parlour is up a winding stair,

And I've a many curious things to shew when you are there."

"Oh no, no," said the little Fly, "to ask me is in vain,

For who goes up your winding stair can ne'er come down again."

"I'm sure you must be weary, dear, with soaring up so high;

Will you rest upon my little bed?" said the Spider to the Fly.

"There are pretty curtains drawn around; the sheets are fine and thin,

And if you like to rest awhile, I'll snugly tuck you in!"

"Oh no, no," said the little Fly, "for I've often heard it said,

They never, never wake again, who sleep upon your bed!"

Said the cunning Spider to the Fly, "Dear friend what can I do, To prove the warm affection I've always felt for you?

I have within my pantry, good store of all that's nice;

I'm sure you're very welcome -- will you please to take a slice?"

"Oh no, no," said the little Fly, "kind Sir, that cannot be,

I've heard what's in your pantry, and I do not wish to see!"

"Sweet creature!" said the Spider, "you're witty and you're wise,

How handsome are your gauzy wings, how brilliant are your eyes!

I've a little looking-glass upon my parlour shelf,
If you'll step in one moment, dear, you shall behold yourself."
"I thank you, gentle sir," she said, "for what you 're pleased to say,
And bidding you good morning now, I'll call another day."
The Spider turned him round about, and went into his den,
For well he knew the silly Fly would soon come back again:
So he wove a subtle web, in a little corner sly,
And set his table ready, to dine upon the Fly.
Then he came out to his door again, and merrily did sing,
"Come hither, hither, pretty Fly, with the pearl and silver wing;
Your robes are green and purple -- there's a crest upon your head;
Your eyes are like the diamond bright, but mine are dull as lead!"
Alas, alas! how very soon this silly little Fly,
Hearing his wily, flattering words, came slowly flitting by;
With buzzing wings she hung aloft, then near and nearer drew,
Thinking only of her brilliant eyes, and green and purple hue --
Thinking only of her crested head -- poor foolish thing! At last,
Up jumped the cunning Spider, and fiercely held her fast.
He dragged her up his winding stair, into his dismal den,
Within his little parlour -- but she ne'er came out again!
And now dear little children, who may this story read,

To idle, silly flattering words, I pray you ne'er give heed:
Unto an evil counsellor, close heart and ear and eye,
And take a lesson from this tale, of the Spider and the Fly.

Learning Activities:

Read *The Spider and the Fly* written by Mary Howitt and illustrated by Tony DiTerlizzi, (Note: Some English spelling of words are changed.)

Recite or memorize the poem, "The Spider and the Fly"

Record what you learn about Mary Howitt on the notebooking page.

Analyze "The Spider and the Fly" using the study notes.

Tea Time Treat

[Spider Cookies](#) and serve with your favorite tea.

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The Spider and the Fly by Mary Howitt

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Mary Howitt

Date of Birth: _____

Place of Birth: _____

Date of Death: _____

Place of Death: _____

What is she famous for?

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“The Spider and the Fly” by Mary Howitt

Study Notes

Define:

Parlour: _____

Ne'er: _____

Cunning: _____

Witty: _____

Gauzy: _____

Looking glass: _____

Subtle: _____

Sly: _____

Wily: _____

Flattering: _____

Idle: _____

Heed: _____

Counselor: _____

Interpret:

The main idea in a poem is called the theme. What is the theme of this poem?

Examine:

Look at the individual elements of the poem. Give examples of the following:

Repetition – when the same word(s) are used more than once in a line or poem

Personification - when the writer gives human like qualities to a non-human

Alliteration -the repetition of initial consonant sounds in neighboring words.

Compare:

Read Proverbs 26:28. How do we know when someone does not have “warm affection” for us? What ruin did Spider’s flattering mouth work? What was Fly’s mistake?

“The Spider and the Fly” by Mary Howitt

Study Notes Answers

□ Define:

Parlour:	A drawing room intended for the reception of company
Ne'er:	Contraction for never, now obsolete
Cunning:	sneaky, sly, crafty
Witty:	amusing, humorous, clever
Gauzy:	thin, delicate, see-through
Looking glass:	mirror
Subtle:	slight, faint, fine
Sly:	devious, tricky, underhanded
Wily:	scheming, sly, sneaky, tricky
Flattering:	satisfying, gratifying, smooth
Idle:	inoperative, inactive
Heed:	listen to, observe, regard
Counsellor:	someone who guides or gives advice

□ Interpret:

The main idea in a poem is called the theme. What is the theme of this poem?

Answers will vary. It is a cautionary tale of what becomes of gullible people who believe the flattering words of evil doers.

□ Examine:

Repetition – when the same word(s) are used more than once in a line or poem

“Oh no, no,” are repeated in the first, second, and third stanzas

Spider’s “parlour” is mentioned 5 times

“Said the Spider to the Fly” and “said the little Fly” are repeated throughout

Spider repeats and then Fly thinks of his flatteries regarding wings, eyes, robe, crest.

“Thinking only of” is repeated twice

Personification - when the writer gives human like qualities to a non-human

Spider and Fly talk, think, and have human-like emotions

Alliteration -the repetition of initial consonant sounds in neighboring words.

Will you walk

wily, flattering words

prettiest little parlour

How handsome

you're very welcome -- will you please

dismal den

you're witty and you're wise

□ Compare:

Read Proverbs 26:28. How do we know when someone does not have “warm affection” for us? What ruin did Spider’s flattering mouth work? What was Fly’s mistake?

Proverbs 26:28 says, “A lying tongue hateth *those that are* afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin.” We know someone does not have “warm affection” for us if he lies to us. The Spider’s flattering words led to the ruin (demise) of Fly. Fly should have known better. She should have trusted her own discernment, knowing that no good would come of her visiting with Spider. Her first mistake was listening to him. Her second mistake was believing him. Her third mistake was coming back. A better choice would have been to avoid Spider altogether.

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