

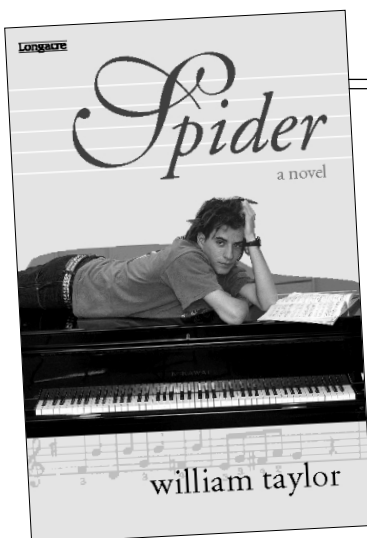
Spider

a novel

by William Taylor

Outwardly, Matthew 'Spider' Trent presents as an ordinary teenage guy: seventeen years old, enjoys rugby, the great outdoors, a beer or two with his mates ... and lusts, seemingly in vain, after the lustrous Moana MacKenzie, the girl he would like to make the love of his life. Miraculously, and quite suddenly, after a lifetime of resembling the creature of his nickname, Matthew Trent, on the threshold of adulthood, is now tall, dark and handsome.

An ordinary teenage guy? Well ... not quite! Rugby, rabbit shooting and the occasional ale, pale into insignificance in the light of one singular talent that sets him apart – his music. Spider Trent plays the piano. His music is his driving force and his relationship with the works of Beethoven, Chopin and others is as real to him as any other element in his existence. This is no light and slight interest but, rather, a red-blooded passion that drives him to succeed – less in any attempt to beat others, rather to surpass himself!



SPECIFICATIONS FOR *SPIDER*

Longacre Press NZ

Young Adult Fiction

• ISBN 1 877135 60 7

• RRP \$16.95

• 197 x 130mm • 246pp

• paperback • 13 years+

Resource Kit for use in schools

Contains:

- General Comprehension and Literary Analysis Questions
- Creative and Critical Responses
- Research Topics
- Debate Topics
- Discussion points
- Drama Exercises
- Vocabulary Exercises

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William Taylor comments...



In writing *Spider* it was my intention to show that within many, maybe most, there can be an 'extraordinary' talent, and that with commitment, very hard work and a single-minded determination, that talent can be mined in order to enrich that person's life.

It was important to me that I wrote about a young person who possesses the same hopes and uncertainties common to most 16–18 year olds. Of course 'Spider' Trent wants love, companionship and as much fun as any other guy – but he also wants more, and is willing to put in the effort in order to achieve an extraordinary goal.

The background for *Spider* is music. It could just as well have been any of the art forms, sporting, academic, or other activity. Set yourself a goal and 'go for it'. Matthew Trent realises that he could quite easily 'fall flat on his face' – but at least he has given it that 'go', and, as a person, in consequence has grown.

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General Comprehension and Literary Analysis Questions

- *Spider* is told completely from the first person point of view. What are the advantages and disadvantages for the reader of this narrative style?
- Taylor uses various elements of humour in his novel to lighten the dramatic story of Spider's discovery about his mother and the drama of his musical development. What are some of these comic techniques?
- How does the author create tension or suspense in the novel?
- Draw a graph or a timeline to show where and what the dramatic climaxes are in this narrative.
- Write a commentary on Spider's relationship to his sister Carrie, using quotations from the novel to help build up your study of it.

Chapter 4 Part 1 pages 56–60:

Bryson Browne seems preoccupied with the differences between 'real' men and 'girlie' men. Is he serious about these? Does Spider fall into either category? What, in general, does the novel seem to be saying about how men form their identities? Is it black and white?

Chapter 4 Part 2:

Does Spider have a positive self image? Explain.

Page 66: Spider asks if the killer instinct or bloodlust is the same as the competitive spirit. What do you think?

Page 66: Do you think that Spider 'owes something' to his mother and piano teacher? Explain.

Chapter Five Part 1, pages 70–73:

Spider fusses about what he has to wear as a performing pianist. Why might conventions of what musicians should wear for classical music performances have arisen in the first place? How does all the fuss about clothing relate to other ideas in the novel about self image, body image, and a changing identity?

Pages 75–77: Do you think that Spider has made significant sacrifices for his music? Explain.

Pages 77–102: In small groups, discuss whether or not Mark's, Luke's and Bryson's attitudes to Spider's virginity are typical of the attitudes of the people you know. What do you think of their treatment of Spider?

Chapter 6 Part 2, page 93:

Could the three-way partnership Spider describes at the top of this page refer to any other art form, craft, or profession apart from music? Explain. How, in particular, might this partnership relate to literature?

Chapter 7, page 100 onwards:

What do you make of Spider's attitudes to women and relationships? Are there any contradictions? Explain.

Pages 107–108: Do you believe that Spider wouldn't have recognised his mother in this scene? What does the fact that he doesn't recognise her reveal to us about his character? Do you think Spider's reaction to Annabel's appearance is extreme? Explain why or why not. What are the contradictions in his response, and where do you think they might come from?

Pages 123–124: Reread the series of questions that Spider asks himself, and debate these as a class. What do you make of Spider's evasion on page 124? What does it say about his character?

Chapter 8 Part 2, page 140:

How does the audience response to Spider seem to change, and how does this reflect on his earlier discussions about image?

Chapter 9 Part 1:

Re-read the first paragraph. Do you agree with Spider's opinion that you can learn as much from someone you dislike as from someone you like? What sorts of lessons might Spider mean, here?

Page 197: What does Spider think he has in common with Beethoven?

What is all the evidence in Chapter 9 that Spider is practising too hard?

Chapter 10 Part 1:

Spider seems to relent on the clothes issue – why might that be?

Page 173: How does Lance Capper’s style immediately appear to differ from Spider’s?

Page 181: What are the similarities between Spider’s and Annabel’s experiences which she seems to be referring to here?

Page 182: Why might some teaching staff want Spider to get a dressing down?

Page 187: Why does Spider think he becomes ‘almost anonymous’ again?

Chapter 12 Part 2:

Write a paragraph describing all the things that go wrong or add stress for Spider before his big concert.

Chapter 13 Part 1:

This section is told in the second person, a different narrative voice from the rest of the novel. Why might the author have chosen to change narrative voice here, and what effects does it have, or how does it change the reader’s relationship with the narrative? Do you think it is a powerful technique? Explain.

Page 235: Has the author foreshadowed the encounter on this page at all? Give evidence to support your answer.

Chapter 14 Part 1, page 239:

What might be some of the reasons that Spider suddenly feels uncomfortable here?

Do you feel that all of the issues or relationship difficulties that have been raised throughout the novel have been resolved at the end? Should they all be resolved? Explain your response.

How does Spider’s relationship with his mother change throughout the novel?

Was Annabel right to keep her work secret from Spider?

William Taylor has created an unusual main character in *Spider*: he is both highly talented yet realistically flawed. Discuss his capabilities and the elements that make him realistic, or even ordinary.

Creative and Critical Responses

Listen to a recording of Beethoven’s Piano Concerto No. 3 in C Major and use it as a trigger for a creative response – either a poem, a story, a song or other musical composition, or even a picture. If you choose to do a composition or a visual response, write a short piece to accompany it, such as you might find in an exhibition catalogue or concert programme notes.

- Imagine you have attended one of Spider’s concerts, and write a newspaper review of what you have heard and seen.
- Write a creative piece through the eyes of Beethoven’s page turner (re-read page 15), or through the eyes of someone attending one of his concerts.
- Write a review of *Spider* for a newspaper or magazine.
- Write a profile of Matthew/Spider in the style of the kind of teen magazine that would have voted him Number 10 on its list of ‘hunks’.
- Design a movie poster which would advertise the film version of the novel.
- Re-read Chapter 11, then write the kind of short newspaper article that might accompany the ‘scandalous’ photo published of Spider. You might also like to write a mock sample of three or four letters to the editor that might come in response to such an item.
- Write a monologue, from Annabel’s point of view, about her past and why she kept so much of it secret from her son.
- Write a short descriptive piece about how you have felt before a major test, exam, interview or performance.

Research Topics

1. Choose an historical figure you particularly admire, as Spider does Beethoven. Research their life and achievements, and write a condensed biography (perhaps 500 words) and another short piece (perhaps 300 words) which includes your own reasons for admiring their achievements.
2. Research more into the life of Ludwig Van Beethoven (or any other composer mentioned in the novel), and write a condensed biography (perhaps 500 words) of their life AND produce a creative response (poem, story, song, picture) based on what you discover about them.
3. Find out about the myth of Narcissus, and retell it, briefly, in your own words.
4. Explain briefly what the differences are between Buddhism and Christianity.

Debate Topics

Either as a class, or in small groups, debate one or more of the following issues:

1. The sex industry exploits and victimises women.
2. Solo mothers are the scourge of society.
3. A boy needs a father if he is to meet his own full potential.
4. Hunting should be banned.
5. Classical music is no longer relevant to today's youth culture.
6. A parent should do anything to protect and support their child, even if it means committing an immoral act.

Discussion points

Either as a class or in small groups, discuss –

1. The merits and disadvantages of a competition ethic.
2. The merits and disadvantages of ambition.
3. What is your school's attitude to achievement? Your family's? Your own?
4. See **Chapter 4 Part 2** pages 61–62: It's often said that young girls and women suffer from more pressure than young boys and men to conform to a

certain body type. How true do you think this is? (Extension exercise: Choose a magazine ad that uses fashion models to promote its product, and describe the messages it seems to be giving about the product through the link it makes to the physical appearance of the people in the ad. Are there any contradictions here?)

Drama Exercises

1. Choose one of the scenes from the novel which has extended dialogue, turn it into a script, and perform it for the class.

2. EITHER

Write a TV interview of Spider after his win (asking Spider about his practice, lifestyle, musical tastes, ambitions, etc.) and perform this for the class.

OR

Write a panel interview with all the finalist pianists from the Goldman competition. Perform this for the class.

(Alternatively, these exercises could be done as spontaneous role playing exercises).

Vocabulary Exercises

Write up definitions of a sonata, a concerto, a symphony, a fugue, a partita and an oratorio.

Make up a crossword – cryptic or otherwise – where at least 15 items from the following vocabulary list from the novel serve as the answers to your clues:

sublime	hormones	languid
chaotic	automaton	scrofulous
antics	indignant	neutered
reprobate	consumption	miniscule
prestigious	corporal	cannabis
indignant	hectare	embryo
babes	maestro	lobotomy
lavish	abject	aquamarine
virginal	annotated	quandary
obliterated	Mediterranean	rarefied
manse	loathsome	elegiac