



READING GUIDE

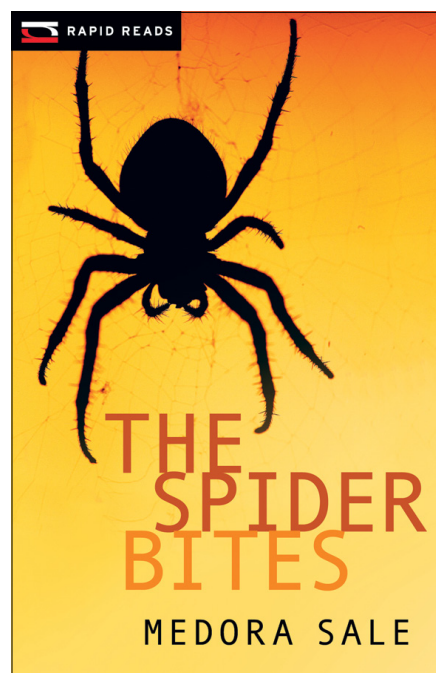
THE SPIDER BITES MEDORA SALE

Reading level: 2.0

Interest level: Adult

Themes: mystery, suspense, literacy

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Summary

After being suspended from the force on suspicion of corruption, Detective Rick “The Spider” Montoya knows his career as a police officer is over. It doesn’t matter that he was framed. Even if Rick can prove it was a setup, the mark is still on his name, like a stain. Not only that, but Rick’s drinking has driven away Angela, his wife and best friend. Their marriage is in shambles.

Rick returns home from five months away working on a farm. He discovers someone living in his basement apartment. But before he can find out who it is, the house goes up in flames. Two people die in the fire. One is Rick’s landlord, Cheryl. The identity of the other victim isn’t so clear. At first many people believe it’s Rick who has died. After all, it was his suite.

The night of the fire, Rick goes over to the house to check things out. He’s attacked and knocked unconscious. When he comes to, he’s really interested in figuring out who set the fire and killed two people. He’s pretty sure he was supposed to be one of them.

As Cheryl’s daughter, Susanna, grieves the loss of her mother, the number of suspects mounts. A young electrician; an insurance guy; Rick’s own wife (an ex-cop turned insurance investigator); one of his colleagues; even Rick himself.

Independent of the investigating officers, Rick weaves a thoughtful web of possibilities as he sorts through different people’s connections to the people who died in the fire. The conclusion? Susanna arranged to have her mother killed so she could collect on her sizable insurance policy. Rick is offered a job as an insurance investigator, and he and Angela take one more crack at making their marriage work.





Questions for Discussion

1. Rick Montoya leaves the city to go and work on a farm. For what reasons does he decide to leave his city life behind? When is running away a good solution? When is it not?
2. How does the reporter in chapter three fit our stereotype of media personalities? How are stereotypes sometimes true? Can they be misleading?
3. Rick takes Susanna out for pizza. At one point, she gets angry and says, “God—men can be so stupid.” What do you think she means? What would make her say that?
4. At the beginning of chapter eight, Angela uses words that tell the reader she thinks the arsonist is a man. For what reasons does she suspect a male?
5. In chapter ten, Rick visits the scene of the fire at night. Do you agree with the risk he takes in doing this? Why or why not?
6. At the end of chapter thirteen, Rick draws a series of webs. They represent possible connections between persons and events. How does this trick help him to sort through his ideas? When have you used drawing or writing to help you get organized, or to sort things out?
7. How has Rick come by his nickname “The Spider”? For what reasons do people give each other nicknames?
8. Think about what a CSI team (Crime Scene Investigation) does. What would be the benefits of this kind of job? What would be the downsides?
9. Using what you know from *The Spider Bites*, write as complete a description as you can of Detective Rick Montoya. Compare yours with others.
10. Susanna erased Angela’s phone messages. When Rick figures this out, he becomes angry. His anger grows when he realizes how important those messages were. Susanna caused great pain and misunderstanding between Rick and his wife. Can you think of another story or movie where communication problems have complicated things for the characters?
11. Think back to the beginning of *The Spider Bites*. How many possible suspects are there for the fire? Who did you think did it? Did your ideas change as you read the book?
12. How many suspects did the author create in the reader’s mind?
13. Explain what happened to Rick that cast suspicion on him in the first place as one of the arsonists.
14. What do you think will happen to Rick and Angela? Discuss the possibilities. How does the author “set the scene” for their future at the end of the book?

