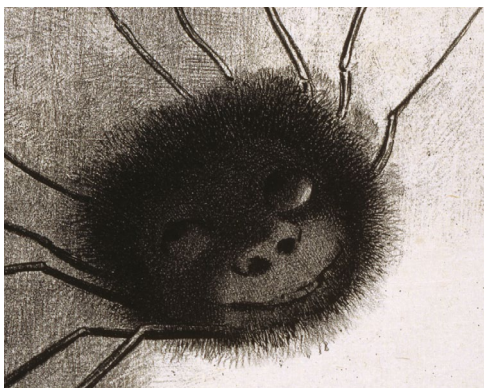




OCTOBER 2010

Getting Up Close to a Spider

Odilon Redon | *Spider (Araignée)*



VISIT THE BMA
and hunt for animals
both real and imagi-
nary.

Odilon Redon (French, 1840-1916). Detail, *Spider (Araignée)*. 1887. Crayon lithograph on chine collé. 11 x 9 1/2 inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Nelson and Juanita Greif Gutman Collection, BMA 1971.27

You're not especially fond of spiders? Better look the other way. This spider might be too close for comfort. For one thing, he's enormous! Most house spiders crawling across a floor or up a wall appear hardly bigger than a speck. But this spider, longer than six floor tiles, might send you running. What's more, he has no head! His upturned eyeballs, flared nostrils, and toothy smile appear smack in the middle of his furry round body.

If you study an actual spider through a strong magnifying glass, you won't see anything like this. First of all, real spiders don't grin. Their mouths are like tubes, and they have a pair of fangs instead of teeth. Also, real spiders have about eight eyes on the top and sides of their head. But even with all those eyes, most spiders can't see very well. They get most of their information through their legs, which are highly sensitive to vibrations. The legs are the first part of the spider to realize that a delicious fly has gotten stuck in his sticky web.

Redon's *Spider* has ten elegantly thin legs, most of them bent at the joints and spread out in a spiky semicircular pattern against the wall. Why ten legs? Surely Redon knew that eight was the correct number of legs for spiders. After all, he had studied exhibits in natural history museums and made painstakingly accurate drawings. But Redon was happiest when he was creating pictures of "improbable beings" that combined careful observation with a generous dose of creepiness. At this time of year, when we all enjoy a good scare, Redon's *Spider* is the perfect picture.

CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS

Study photographs or scientific drawings of an actual animal, insect, bird, or fish. Then create a hybrid creature — part reality and part imagination. Remember that you can make your creature look bigger or smaller than expected by changing the size or scale of its background.

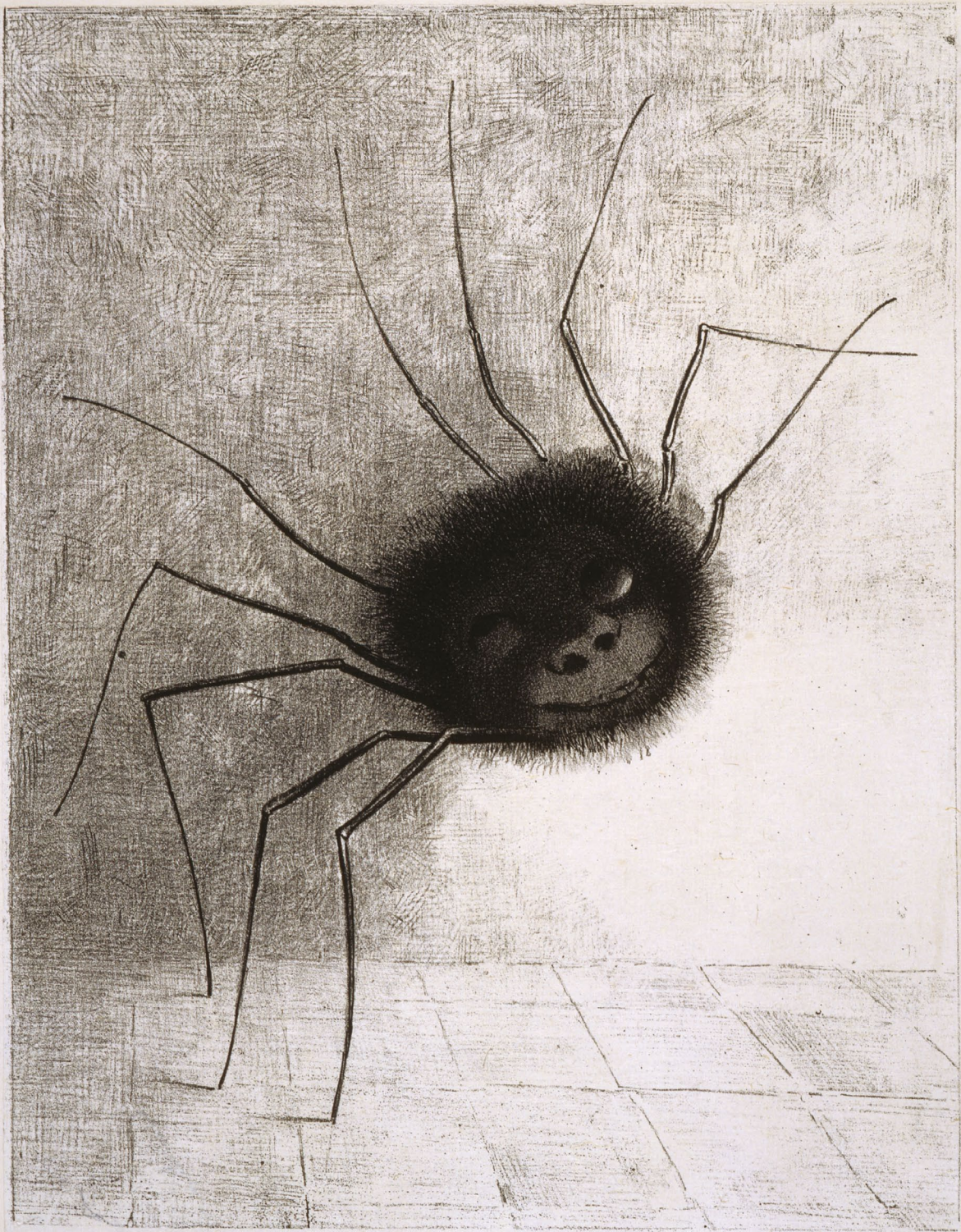
Compare and contrast Redon's *Spider* with a photo or diagram of an actual spider. For a huge array of spider images, simply Google "spider" and click on the "Images" tab.

PRINT THE IMAGE ON PAGE 2 FOR YOUR STUDENTS.



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Odilon Redon

Odilon Redon. *Spider (Araignée)*.

(French, 1840-1916). 1887. Crayon lithograph on chine collée. 11 x 9 1/2 inches. The Baltimore Museum of Art: Nelson and Juanita Greif Gutman Collection, BMA 1971.27