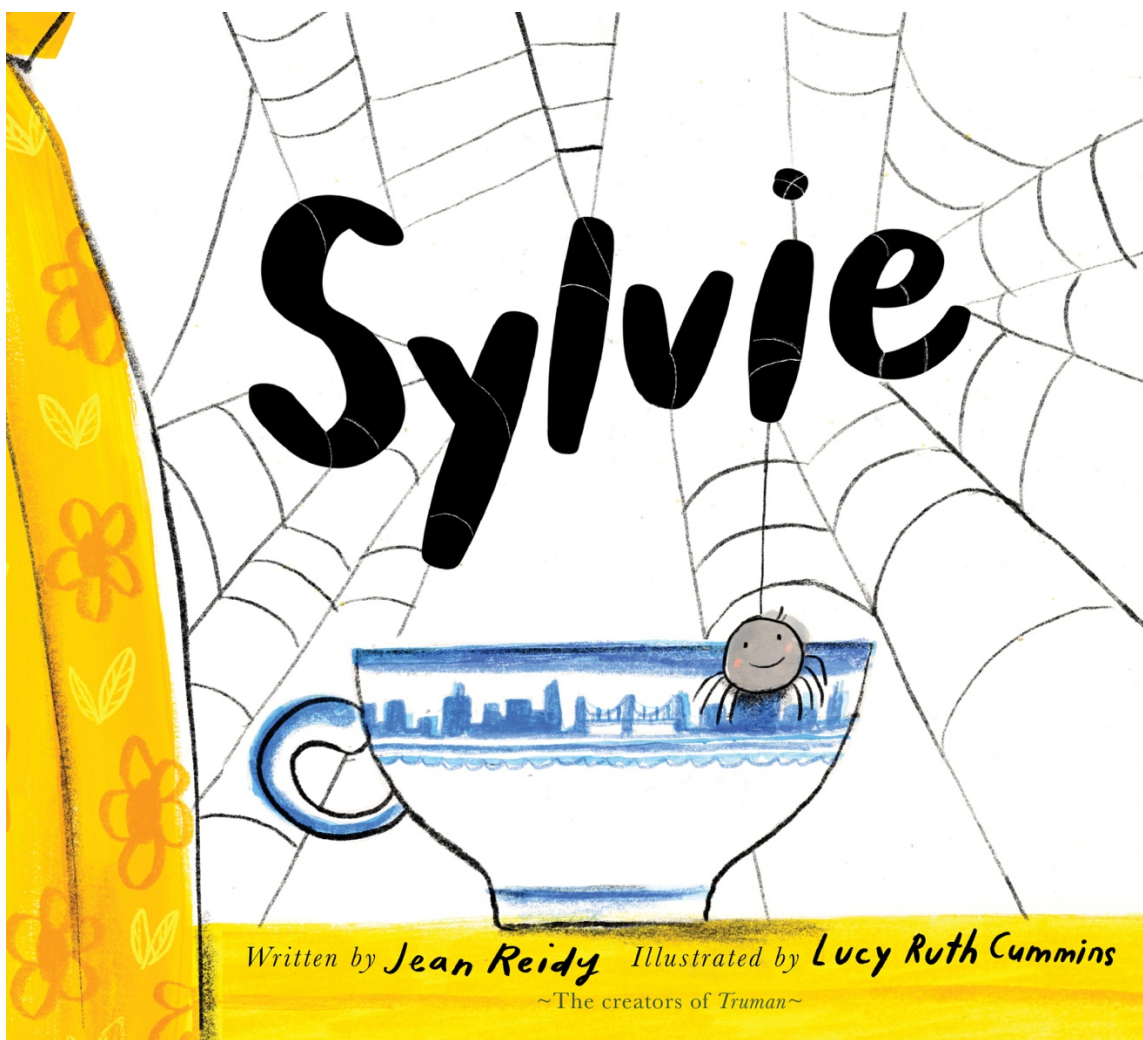


# Sylvie

A teacher's guide created by Marcie Colleen  
based upon the picture book  
written by Jean Reidy and illustrated by Lucy Ruth Cummins

★ Including Storytime Activities! ★



Published by  
Atheneum Books for Young Readers  
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## **Jean Reidy**

### **Author, *Sylvie***

Jean Reidy's bestselling and award-winning picture books have earned their spots as favorites among readers and listeners of all ages and from all over the world. She is honored to be a three-time winner of the Colorado Book Award, a Parent's Choice Gold Award Winner, a Charlotte Zolotow Honor winner and recognized on "Best of" lists by School Library Journal, the New York Times, NPR and Amazon. Jean writes from her home and lives just a short walk from her neighborhood library ... which she visits nearly every day.



## **Lucy Ruth Cummins**

### **Illustrator, *Sylvie***

Lucy Ruth Cummins is an author, an illustrator, and art director of children's books. She has been happily paired with Jean Reidy for *Truman*, which was named a *New York Times* Best Children's Book of 2019, and *Sylvie*. She also is the author-illustrator of *A Hungry Lion, or A Dwindling Assortment of Animals*, *Stumpkin*, and *Vampenguin*. When she was little, she had a pet spider in the shed where her dad kept the lawnmower. Every day little Lucy caught flies and placed them in her spider's web at mealtimes. Lucy was born in Montreal, raised in upstate New York, and lives with her little family in Brooklyn, New York.

## **Marcie Colleen**

### **Curriculum Writer**

This guide was created by Marcie Colleen, a former teacher with a BA in English Education from Oswego State and a MA in Educational Theater from NYU. In addition to creating curriculum guides, Marcie can often be found writing books of her own at home in San Diego, California. Visit her at [www.thisismarciecolleen.com](http://www.thisismarciecolleen.com).

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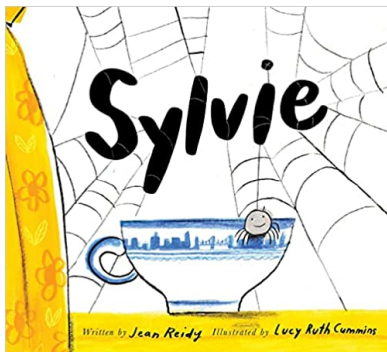
## How to Use This Guide

This classroom guide for *Sylvie* is designed for students in kindergarten through second grade. It is assumed that teachers will adapt each activity to fit the needs and abilities of their own students.

It offers activities to help teachers integrate *Sylvie* into English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies curricula. Art and drama are used as teaching tools throughout the guide.

All activities were created in conjunction with relevant content standards in ELA, math, science, social studies, art, and drama.

## Book Information



### **Sylvie**

**Age Range: 4 – 8 years**

**Grade Level: Preschool – 3**

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Sylvie hangs on a silvery thread, safely hidden under her damp, dark fire escape. Sure, it's a little too close to the dumpster below, but if she stays carefully out of sight, she can watch over her people in the apartment building above—a painter, a proper little lady, a young man with a plan, and a girl with an exceptionally brave tortoise.

Day and night, night and day, Sylvie watches over them making sure everything is *just so*. Lately though, her people seem to be missing...something. Sylvie wants to help, but she's always stayed out of view. After all, not everyone appreciates a spider who calls attention to herself. When a most audacious idea comes to her though, one that might make everything *more* than *just so*, maybe even *just right*, can Sylvie muster her moxie and risk stepping into the spotlight?

"Reidy records Sylvie's qualms and enthusiasms with a breathless, enthusiastic voice...while

Cummins's digitally finished multimedia art combines reportorial immediacy with a kind of sketchbook impressionism that takes readers inside Sylvie's head. Read with or without pandemic-era context in mind, it's a warming story about the necessity of connection and community." --

*Publishers Weekly*

"Young readers will enjoy meeting a new small-but-mighty (and spidery) protagonist in this welcome return to the world of *Truman*, featuring a cameo from the tortoise himself. Laced with lovely alliteration and internal rhyme, the text introduces young listeners to the whimsy of language at storytime...*Sylvie's* bubbly effervescence shows readers that it is well worth the courage it takes to be seen." -- *BCCB*

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# **English Language Arts**

## **Reading Comprehension**

Before reading *Sylvie*, help students identify the basic parts of a picture book: front cover, back cover, title page, etc.

- ★ • Look at the cover illustration. Describe what you see.
- ★ • How would you describe the spider?
- ★ • Mimic what the spider is doing. How does it make you feel?
- ★ • Can you guess what the story might be about?

Now read or listen to the book. Then help students summarize the following in their own words:

- Describe Sylvie's home.
- Explain "not everyone appreciates a spider who calls attention to herself" in your own words.
- Who are Sylvie's people?
- Sylvie makes sure that her people are "just so." What do you think is meant by that?
- Why does Sylvie think her people need something more?
- Why does Sylvie find the sunbeam to be distressing and double-crossing?
- How does the sun give Sylvie an idea?
- What did the four people find on the rooftop?
- How do her people treat Sylvie?
- Each of Sylvie's four people come together to create something "just right." What does each person contribute?
- Sylvie is finally "seen." What does it mean to be seen?

Now look at the two names on the cover.

- Who is the author? What does an author do?
- Who is the illustrator? What does an illustrator do?



## Who is Sylvie? ~ Character Study

How a character acts and what a character says can tell readers a lot about who the character is.

Read *Sylvie* paying close attention to the character of Sylvie. Scene by scene, record your thoughts, in a chart like the one below.

What does she do?	Why do you think she does what she does?	How would you describe her?	What might she say?
Example: Sylvie hung on a silvery thread from the rusty underside of a fire escape.	It's a place where she can hide and not disturb anyone who might not like spiders.	Courteous, quiet, respectful, caring.	"Shhhh. Nothing to see here."
While well hidden, Sylvie could watch over—her people!	She feels a special kinship to these people. But she doesn't want to bring attention to herself because she doesn't want to upset them.		

After gathering information regarding Sylvie's character, use the scenarios below to write a new scene for *Sylvie*. What would she do and say in one of the following situations?

- It's almost one of her people's birthday and she wants to throw a party for them.
- Another spider decides to make a home under the fire escape and that spider isn't very nice to Sylvie.
- It's a really rainy and windy day and Sylvie needs to seek indoor shelter.

## Critical Thinking

In fiction stories, a character usually changes in some way. Do you think Sylvie changed in the story? How? (*analyzing, inferring, giving support to an idea*)

How would the story be different if Sylvie had never had the idea? (*predicting, cause and effect*)

What do you think is the message of this story? (*empathy, kindness, friendship, compassion, inclusion*)

## Writing Activities

### Writing Narrative and Dialogue

*Sylvie* is written almost completely in narration. All the text is from an outside narrator telling us the story. This provides a great springboard to discuss narrative and dialogue in a story.

Narrative ~ An account of the connected events. Often through a narrator who gives information on the feelings and actions of the story.

Speech/Dialogue ~ The written conversational exchange between two or more characters.

Rewrite *Sylvie* using the following:

- Write a version of the story using only dialogue. For each page, write the story through only speech, things that Sylvie or her people would say.
- Combine the two versions into a new version of *Sylvie*, in which Sylvie and her people speak and a narrator carries the action of the story.

How do the new versions compare with the original version of *Sylvie*? Which do you prefer? Why?

## Write the Scene

Choose one of the people in *Sylvie* and expand on their story. For example, what is the promising painter with the perfect palette painting? How do they feel? What else do they do and say? Why do they stop painting? Be sure to include a beginning, middle, and end.

## Just So vs. Something More

"Sylvie made sure that everything and everyone on every floor were—just so." What do you think it means to be "just so"?

What does Sylvie see that makes her wonder if "the four need something...more"? What do you think is meant by "something more"?

Think of the following situations. What would they look like or feel like if these situations were "just so"? What about "just right"? What about "something more"?

- A birthday party
- The room you sleep in
- A garden
- Your classroom

## Language Activities

### Vocabulary Detectives

*Sylvie* contains a few words that may be new to students. Encourage the students to use context clues from both the text and illustrations to infer the meanings of any unfamiliar words.

underside	disturbingly	appreciates	attention	promising
palette	proper	mindful	exceptional	longing
brimming	bland	untested	seldom	linger
determined	distressing	double-crossing	perspective	audacious
magnanimous	skirted	basking	moxie	sashayed

Additional Exploration:

- While they read, ask students to look carefully for words they do not know. As soon as they come across a new vocabulary word, they should write it down.



- Look up the unknown word in the dictionary. (Depending on the level of your students, a student volunteer can do this or the teacher can.) Read the definition.
- Use the new word in a sentence.
- Come up with a way to remember what the word means. Using Total Physical Response, students can create an action that symbolizes the word and helps them remember it.



## Speaking and Listening Activities

Picture books are written to be read aloud. Here are some other ways to bring *Sylvie* to life in your classroom and have fun with speaking and listening skills!

### Listen and Share ★

Sometimes understanding someone simply comes from listening to them and allowing them a chance to express themselves.

With students sitting in a circle, hand one student a small item that will represent Sylvie. Explain that only the person who is holding Sylvie can talk. Everyone else's job is to listen. When Sylvie is put down again, the teacher/classmates respond to that student, then Sylvie moves to the next person to talk (a volunteer or the former talker can pull a name from a basket).

Use the Listen and Share method for sharing sentences or personal stories about feelings that students notice in Sylvie's story such as fear, worry, courage, love, etc.

## Mime ★

Mime a feeling with gestures and facial expressions. Then have others try to guess that feeling. For a variation, have children draw the feeling from a “hat”—a basket/box/bag.

## Drama

Create a TV commercial to encourage people to read *Sylvie*. Write a script! Act it out or use puppets! Record it! Get creative!

## Math

### Word Problems

*For younger students, the use of pictures or props can be helpful in figuring out word problems. Note to teachers: Use the word problems below as inspiration to write your own, based on the illustrations in Sylvie or any other book of study.*

The “and though it was dark...” illustration:

- 1) How many bottlecaps do you see?

On a piece of paper, draw 3 bottlecaps.

Draw 6 more bottlecaps.

How many bottlecaps are there now?

Write the equation:  $\underline{\quad} + \underline{\quad} = \underline{\quad}$

What if two bottlecaps rolled away? How many bottlecaps would you see?

Write the equation:  $\underline{\quad} - \underline{\quad} = \underline{\quad}$

The “and everyone came together...just right” illustration:

- 2) How many sunflowers do you see?

On a piece of paper, draw 6 sunflowers.

Draw 2 more sunflowers.

How many sunflowers do you have?

Write the equation:  $\underline{\quad} + \underline{\quad} = \underline{\quad}$

What if someone picked 4 sunflowers for a bouquet? How many sunflowers would be left?

Write the equation:  $\underline{\quad} - \underline{\quad} = \underline{\quad}$

## Under Where? Spatial Sense ★

Look at the “she was warmly welcomed” illustration in *Sylvie*.

Describe where Sylvie is.

[examples: on top of the turtle, in the girl’s hand, on the rooftop, in between the people.]

Describe where the turtle is.

[examples: underneath Sylvie, in his girl’s hand, in front of the girl with the teacup.]

Describe where the teacup is.

[examples: on the ledge of the roof, in between the two girls, below the pointing finger and arm.]

Have students choose another illustration in *Sylvie* and discuss where things are spatially within that illustration.

Now look around your classroom.

- Describe where your desk sits.
- Describe where your teacher is sitting or standing.
- Describe where the chalkboard/whiteboard is.
- Describe where the clock is.
- Describe where the door is.
- Can you describe where anything else is?



# **Science**

## **Spiders Research Project**

Spiders are found all over the world and can be good or bad. Most people think spiders are bad, but spiders can be very good or beneficial!

Spiders are an important part of the food web. They are food for birds, wasps, lizards, and many other animals. Without spiders, those animals would be hungry!

Spiders love to eat insects, and therefore they are so beneficial. Without spiders eating insects there would be too many harmful insects in the world. Spiders are good to have in the garden, yard and even in the house because they eat many other insects.

Spiders are also good because of the silk that they spin. Spider silk is very strong and humans use it for fishing nets, lures, bags, and even cross hairs in telescopes. We also use spider cobwebs as bandages for wounds. Some people believe cobwebs and silk can clot blood and stop wounds from bleeding.

How much do you know about spiders? It's time to research them.

Information to be gathered must include:

- What spiders eat.
- Where spiders live.
- Draw a picture of a spider.
- Write 3 words that describe a spider.
- Interesting fact #1
- Interesting fact #2
- Interesting fact #3

Students may use the internet or the library to complete their research. Once all the needed research is done, students must create a poster visual with all the necessary information and present their findings to the class.

## Spiders: Fiction vs. Non-fiction

Compare the facts researched about spiders above (non-fiction) to Sylvie (fiction).

As a class, create a T-chart of comparisons.

Non-fiction	Fiction
Spiders spin webs	Spiders spin webs to communicate with people
Spiders live in the dark	

## Observation Journal

Being in a city can be a wonderful experience. So many people and things going on. Especially if you take time to really be aware of your surroundings and observe closely, like Sylvie does. You might even find a friend or four!

Create an Observation Journal:

- Gather 6-8 pieces of paper (some can be lined for writing; others blank for drawing).
- Add on top a piece of blank or colored paper for the cover.
- Punch three holes through the pieces of paper and the cover sheet.
- Cut a piece of cardboard just a bit larger than your paper to act as a sturdy back cover.
- Punch three corresponding holes in the cardboard.
- Place the papers on top of the cardboard and top everything with the cover sheet.
- Line up the paper and cardboard holes. Then tie together with yarn or string.
- Decorate the cover, using *Sylvie* as inspiration.
- You are now ready to head outside and observe your surroundings.

Observing.

- Find a spot to sit outside where you can be quiet and observe. Be sure to have your Observation Journal and something to write with. You may use colored pencils, crayons or markers.

- Sit for at least fifteen minutes. You may set an alarm.
- Look all around you. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? What do you feel?
- Find something you want to write about or draw. Record it in your Observation Journal.
- Continue to observe in the same spot, fifteen minutes at a time, for a whole week. Every day, take care to notice something different to write about or draw.

Share your journal with the class.

- What did you find when you paid attention?
- What did you feel? What did you smell? What did you hear? What did you see?
- Did the weather ever change? How was it different?
- What astonished you?
- If you were to continue observing, what spot would you choose? Why?



## **Social Studies**

### **A Public Mural**

Throughout history, art has been used to transform public spaces into places of beauty and reflection. Most importantly, these pieces of public art are used to bring about tighter communities.

Look up examples of public art on the Internet: examples in subways, under bridges and in parks. Be sure to find examples of traditional murals painted on walls, but also sculptures and knit-bombing.



How can art be used to foster community?

- Bring people together to create it.
- Reflect all people in the community in the artwork.
- Create a space that people will want to visit and hang out in.

Students can make their own piece of public art for their school community or library. ★

1. Choose a space within the school that could use some brightening or some inspiration.
2. Brainstorm a mural or other piece of temporary art called "Something More" that can be created in this space.
3. Brainstorm how this mural can build community.
4. Create the mural involving as many people as possible.

Additional Challenge: In addition to examples of traditional murals painted on walls, learn about a kind of public art that Sylvie would love—yarnstorming! (For a fun introduction and lots of photos of yarnstorming check out <https://wonderopolis.org/wonder/what-is-yarnstorming> and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yarn\\_bombing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yarn_bombing))

Students can engage in actual knitting with the aid of an adult. Perhaps a parent or grandparent could be invited into the class for a simple knitting lesson.

Or "finger knitting" is a possibility. For more on finger knitting, visit <http://www.montessoriworksblog.com/2013/04/12/finger-knitting/> or [http://www.maggiesrags.com/tips\\_fingerknit.htm](http://www.maggiesrags.com/tips_fingerknit.htm).



## **What Makes a Good Friend?** ★

Discuss what makes a good friend. Draw upon examples from their own friendships and create a list describing what makes a good friend.

Example: Good friends...

- are reliable.
- do kind things for one another and use kind language.
- help out when a friend is sad or has a problem.
- like to spend time together.
- have fun with one another.

Look closely at *Sylvie*. How does Sylvie act like a friend or not? How do her people act like friends to each other and Sylvie? Explain using your own words.

As a class, create an action plan on how to be a good friend.

## **Better Together**

Sylvie's people have varied interests: tea, painting, taking care of a pet, planning something big.

What is something that you like to do?

Create a class list of everyone's favorite hobbies and activities. And then brainstorm a way to utilize everyone's interests and abilities to create "something more," just like Sylvie's people brought their interests and skills to beautify the rooftop.

## **More Than My Outside** ★

Being afraid of spiders is called arachnophobia. Many people are afraid of spiders, but if they got to know spiders, they would see how beneficial they can be.

No one wants to be judged based on how they look on the outside. Just like Sylvie there are more things about us than just what we look like.

The Project:

- Have each student lay down on a large piece of paper while someone traces their body with a pencil.
- Once the student has the silhouette of their own body, they will write words that describe what they look like on the outside.



- On the inside of the outline, they can write what they are like on the inside; the things that make them special. Examples can be likes and dislikes, what they want to be when they grow up, what makes them feel happy, etc.
- Finished silhouettes can be displayed with the title "Something More."

### **Building Community with a Spider Cider Tea Party** ★

You may have noticed throughout *Sylvie* that a tea set plays a very important role in the story.

There's a teacup on the cover and a tea set in several of the book's illustrations. Can you find them all? And if you turn to the very last page and look closely, you'll see that Sylvie is holding an itty-bitty teacup.

What is a tea set for? What does it symbolize?

- Socializing
- Friendship
- Gathering
- Community
- Taking a break

What do you think Sylvie is drinking from her teacup? Could it be Spider Cider Tea?

Consider holding a Spider Tea Party and Storytime for parents, grandparents, with another class or just as a way to socialize within your own classroom. Decorate the classroom or library with webs and spiders and sunflowers and serve Spider Cider Tea. Here's how to make it.

All you need is:

- 1 C. of boiling hot apple juice (requires parent or teacher help)
- An apple cinnamon tea bag
- A cinnamon stick
- A teaspoon
- Your favorite teacup

Just pour the apple juice into the teacup, add your tea bag and let it steep for 3-4 minutes. After it steeps, using your teaspoon, take your tea bag out and stir your tea using your cinnamon stick. That's all there is to it. Delicious! But where's the spider, you ask? Well, she's right there in the book. And maybe the next time you read SYLVIE you'll enjoy the story with a cup of Spider Cider Tea.

Watch author Jean Reidy make Cider Spider Tea on the *Sylvie* page of her website at <https://jeanreidy.com/books/sylvie/>.

## Make a Paper Cup Sylvie (plus Hide 'n Peek game) ★

You can make your own Sylvie spider with only a few craft supplies.

You will need:

- A paper cup
- Craft paint, markers, or construction paper
- Pipe cleaners
- Scissors
- Glue
- Googly eyes

Start by painting or coloring the paper cup. If you are painting the cup, you will need to make sure it is completely dry before continuing. Or you can use markers to color the paper cup or cover the paper cup in construction paper. You can also use a colorful paper cup instead and skip this step.

Glue or draw googly eyes on the side of the paper cup.

Use a pencil to poke four small holes on each side of the cup where the legs will go.

Slide pipe cleaners through the holes on the sides of the cup.

Fold the end of the pipe cleaners into an L shape. Fold the pipe cleaners in half to make knees.

Once your spiders are complete, you can play Hide 'n Peek!

Hide your spiders around the classroom.

Then, help others find where your Sylvie is hidden by giving hints as to why you hid Sylvie where you did. Examples include so that she'd be hidden in the dark; so that she'd be close to water; because it's a great place to build a web; because she can spy on people, etc.

