

Keep Texas Wild



BLOODSUCKERS

Blood provides a nutritious meal for these creepy critters.



» BLOOD FOR BREAKFAST

A MEAL OF BLOOD SOUNDS GROSS TO US, but to a bloodsucker it sounds really yummy. Blood has lots of nutrients to support a bloodsucker's needs. Many female bloodsuckers need the proteins and fats in blood so their eggs can develop. That's why often only the females of a species consider it a tasty meal. Most bloodsuckers have flat bodies that fill up with blood as they eat, just like a water balloon. Not all bloodsuckers actually suck blood. Some, like this female horsefly, make a small cut in their host (the animal they get blood from) and lap up the blood with a sponge-like tongue.

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THEY WANT TO SUCK YOUR BLOOD

These animals don't suck blood to be mean. They depend on it to keep their species going.

HORSEFLIES look like huge, supercharged flies. You can guess where they get their name, but ... hold those reins ... horseflies actually dine on cattle more than horses. And brown and black cows, beware! Moving and dark objects make favorite targets. Only females about to lay eggs dine on blood.

THE MOST COMMON FLEAS IN TEXAS are cat fleas, but they'll gladly suck the blood of dogs and people, too. Fleas are such expert jumpers that they can leap the length of a cat's tail! Their flat bodies allow them to move easily through a host's hair. Adult fleas eat blood, but the babies' first meal is their parents' poop.

HOW DO BLOODSUCKERS GET THE BLOOD OUT?

POKE AND SUCK. Some poke with a needle like proboscis, then use it like a straw to suck up supper. **SLASH AND LAP.** Others make a slash and lap it up.

DO BLOODSUCKERS LIVE ON THEIR HOSTS?

Most just stay until they finish feeding, but a few, like lice, call the host "home," so we call them "parasites."

EACH TINY LOUSE IS about as big as the period in this sentence. That makes lice tough to find. Some types of lice live only on humans (in our hair), while others live on different animals. That's why you can't get lice from your dog or cat. A louse cannot hop or fly from one host to another; it must crawl.

TICKS don't have true heads, just barbed mouthparts that they stick into the host. Ticks create a cement-like substance to glue themselves on and can't leave until their tummies fill up.

HOW DO BLOODSUCKERS CHOOSE THEIR VICTIMS?

Different kinds of bloodsuckers need the blood of different sorts of animals, and they choose a victim, um, host, based on its blood.

WITH DEERFLIES, only females chomp on hosts and only when the time comes to lay eggs—up to 1,000 at a time! They get their name from their favorite host: deer.

THE NEXT TIME A MOSQUITO MAKES YOU ITCH, you can say, "Ouch, she poked me!" because, like many other bloodsuckers, the females need a blood meal before they can lay their eggs. Males live only about a week, while the ladies last four to eight weeks.

HOW DO THOSE ANNOYING MOSQUITOES FIND YOU?

Mosquitoes and other bloodsuckers detect the carbon dioxide that hosts exhale and zoom to it!

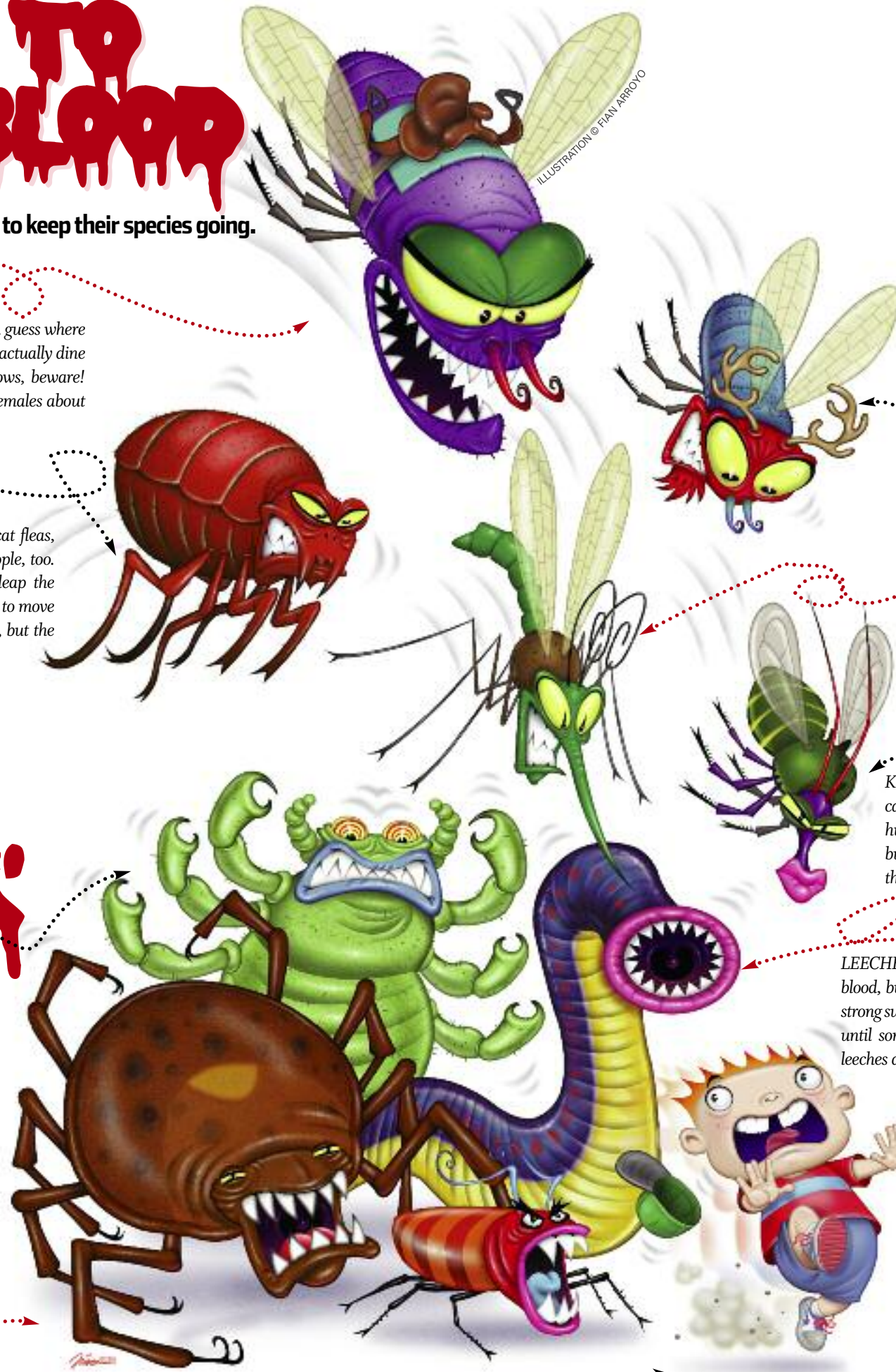
KISSING BUGS don't really want you to pucker up—they're just called that because they often bite near the lips. At night, while human hosts make zzzzz's, exhaled carbon dioxide attracts the bugs to the mouth. But don't pull the covers over your head; these insects usually prefer other types of hosts.

LEECHES live in water and look like slugs. Not all leeches suck blood, but those that do favor fish and turtles. They use super-strong suckers to attach themselves to a host and suck on its skin until some blood comes through. As painful as that sounds, leeches don't really harm skin, and you can easily pull them off.

EVER HEARD "SLEEP TIGHT AND DON'T LET THE BEDBUGS BITE?" These bugs come out at night while we're sleeping. It takes a bedbug about 10 minutes to fill up, and it won't need to eat again for days. Females lay three or four eggs every day near where we sleep, since our blood is their favorite.

WHY DO BITES ITCH?

When bloodsuckers take a taste of you, they leave behind a little saliva (spit). The itch that drives you crazy is your body reacting to their saliva.





Spike's Activity Page



>> WILD MATH

WRITE THE ALPHABET IN ORDER.

• Give each letter a number starting with A=1 all the way to Z=26.

$$\begin{array}{r} 1 \times 35 \\ + 2 \div 4 \end{array}$$



• Use the code to discover the secret message.

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5 14 7 15 18 7 5 4

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13 5 1 14 19

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1

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2 12 15 15 4 19 21 3 11 5 18

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9 19

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6 21 12 12

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15 6

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2 12 15 15 4

ANSWERS: Engorged means a bloodsucker is full of blood.

>> WILD SOCIAL STUDIES

LONG BEFORE you could buy insect repellent at the store, Texas Indians found ways to repel bloodsuckers with plants. Use the word bank to find out what they used.



WORD BANK

LANTANA

CEDAR

ALLIGATOR GREASE

HORSEMINT

1. The Atakapa Indians rubbed oily _____ on themselves to keep flying bloodsuckers from landing on them.
2. Indians burned dry _____ leaves to repel mosquitoes.
3. Oil from _____ trees helped Texas Indians repel fleas.
4. In spite of its name, the plant _____ was not just popular with horses. The Apache crushed the leaves and rubbed them on their skin to ward off buzzing bloodsuckers.

ANSWERS: 1) alligator grease; 2) lantana; 3) cedar; 4) horsemint

>> KEEPING IT WILD

TICKS SOMETIMES CARRY LYME DISEASE OR ROCKY MOUNTAIN SPOTTED FEVER. STAY HEALTHY BY KEEPING THESE TIPS IN MIND:



- Before you head out to the woods, brush or grassy areas where ticks live, ask an adult to help you put on bug repellent with DEET in it.
- Stop often to check for ticks. Wearing light colors makes them easier to spot.
- Check your pets for ticks, especially during hot weather.
- If a tick has attached itself to you, tell an adult as soon as you notice it. Don't squish it or try to remove it yourself! There's a special way to remove ticks, and you don't want goo from its guts to get on you.

• If you get a rash that looks like a bull's eye or feel as if you've got the flu, tell an adult.

[PARENTS: See Texas Dept. of State Health Services website for more information.]

>> NEXT MONTH: Leaves



TEACHER RESOURCE

Visit www.tpwmagazine.com to download a printable PDF, access lesson plans, find additional resources or order copies.

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