

## Tarantula Fact and Activity Sheet



Image: [www.animals.net](http://www.animals.net)

In *The Star-Spun Web*, the central character (Tess de Sousa) has a pet tarantula named **Violet Agatha Christabel de Sousa** (though usually she goes by ‘Violet’ or ‘Vi’). Here are some facts about tarantulas! They’re not as scary as you might think...

### Tantalising Tarantulas

There are **1,000 species** of tarantula.

They are found in the Americas, Africa, Asia, Australia and some parts of Europe, including Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Italy, and Cyprus. **Keeping this information in mind: what sort of habitat do you think tarantulas prefer?**

Many species of tarantula are brown, but you can also find tarantulas which are cobalt blue, metallic blue, orange, green, and stripy.

All tarantulas can produce **silk**; however, most **do not spin webs** to catch their prey.

A tarantula’s **cephalothorax** contains its brain, jaws, eyes, and stomach; its **abdomen** contains its guts, heart, reproductive organs, and silk glands. A tarantula’s mouth is only able to suck up liquid food, so anything not liquid must be pre-digested (accomplished by secreting digestive fluid over the food before eating it).

All tarantulas have two sets of **book lungs** – these are specialised lungs found in arachnids, which resemble the pages of a closed book. They are not related to the lungs found in mammals.

Tarantulas **moult** – like many other spiders, they periodically shed their skin as they grow.

A tarantula’s blood is called **haemolymph**; it is not true blood, as it does not have blood cells like mammalian blood. If a tarantula’s **exoskeleton** is breached, it will die from loss of

haemolymph unless the wound is small enough for the haemolymph to dry, and for the wound to seal.

And, despite their reputation, tarantulas are more likely to be preyed upon than to be a predator! They have **urticating hairs**, which are hairs that can be shed if the animal is threatened; the hairs are sharp and irritating, and can cause damage to delicate tissues and eyes. All tarantulas are **venomous** but their bites rarely cause death – they can cause pain and immobility, allergic reactions, and infection in humans.

### **Activities:**

**Violet is an unusual companion for Tess to have, but in many ways they are well suited. Can you think of any other unusual animal companions? If you were going on an adventure, what sort of animal companion would you like to bring with you?**

**Write a story where you bring your unusual animal companion to school with you. Describe what happens, what your friends and your teachers think of your animal friend, and the mischief you both might cause!**

**Draw a picture of a tarantula – you can base it on actual diagrams that are available on the internet. Label all the bits.**

**Design your own tarantula! They're awesome enough just as they are, but if you could build one from scratch, what features would you put on it? If you like, you can design a tarantula-shaped car, plane, rocket, or other vehicle. What sort of super-hero (or super-villain!) would use a tarantula as their sidekick? Write the story!**

**Can you think of any other books or stories where the central character has an animal companion? Why do you think authors often give characters animal friends to accompany them on their adventures?**