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▶ **INTERACTIVE READERS**

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WHAT ARE YOU  
AFRAID OF?  
FEARS AND PHOBIAS



Diane Naughton



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# Contents

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Before You Read: Get Ready! ..... 4

## CHAPTER 1

What Is Fear? ..... 6

## CHAPTER 2

Fear: Real or Imagined? ..... 12

## CHAPTER 3

The Fun of Fear ..... 16

## CHAPTER 4

The Business of Fear ..... 20

## CHAPTER 5

What Would You Do? ..... 24

After You Read ..... 26

Answer Key ..... 28

Glossary

# Before You Read:

## Get Ready!

Think about these things: long, dangerous snakes and big, black rats, high bridges and small elevators, traveling by plane in a storm, and doing important exams. How do you feel? Are you afraid?

### Words to Know

Look at the pictures. Then complete the definitions below with the correct words.



spider



shark



vampire



ghost

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ : a dead person in stories who bites people and drinks their blood
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_ : a small animal, often black or brown. It has eight legs
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_ : a very large fish with big teeth
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_ : a dead person who is in the world of the living

## Words to Know

Read the paragraph. Then complete the sentences below with the correct **highlighted** words.

Sally has a terrible **phobia** of snakes. She hates seeing pictures of them, she doesn't like talking about them, and some nights she has a **nightmare** about them. If she sees a snake on TV, she **screams** loudly and immediately turns it off. She has never actually seen a snake, but just the idea makes her feel **panic**. Fortunately, she lives in the middle of London, so there isn't really much **risk** of her seeing a snake there. Living in the desert would be a nightmare, though, because there are a lot of dangerous snakes there. But her fear of snakes might also help her. In the desert, a phobia of snakes can help you **survive** because it makes you stay away from them!

- 1 When someone \_\_\_\_\_, he or she makes a high noise with their voice.
- 2 If you \_\_\_\_\_, you continue living after being in danger.
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_ is a terrible fear you feel suddenly. Often, you can't think or act clearly.
- 4 A \_\_\_\_\_ is a terrible fear of one thing. It's always there, and it's difficult to explain.
- 5 \_\_\_\_\_ is the possibility of something bad or dangerous happening to you.
- 6 A \_\_\_\_\_ is a frightening dream or something very bad that happens to you.





## CHAPTER 1

# What Is Fear?

**THERE IS PANIC IN THE STREETS. PEOPLE ARE SCREAMING FOR HELP AND RUNNING FROM THEIR HOMES IN FEAR. WHAT IS HAPPENING? IS THE WORLD COMING TO AN END?**

On October 30, 1938, people in the United States and Canada turned on the radio and heard some terrible news.

*Aliens have landed in New Jersey. The army fought bravely but lost the battle. Now, the aliens are moving across the country, destroying roads and bridges and taking control of towns and cities. There is black smoke everywhere, and in New York, people are throwing themselves into the river. Is everybody going to die?*

On that night, about three million people believed that aliens were actually attacking Earth. Some people called the police for help while others ran away from the cities where they lived. But in fact, what they had heard was simply a radio play, *The War of the Worlds*, with the actor Orson Welles. There was no real danger at all. So why were people so afraid?

In 1938, the radio was quite a new invention, and many people believed everything they heard on it. At that time, stories and movies about aliens were becoming very popular, and many people thought it was really possible for aliens to come to Earth from other planets. Also, this happened not long before World War II. There was a general feeling of worry at that time because of the risk of war. When people are already nervous, panic can easily take control of them.



Orson Welles leading a radio play.



Why do we feel fear? It's a natural **emotion** that helps us and animals survive. When we think there is danger, the brain makes special hormones<sup>1</sup> that send messages to the rest of the body. The heart **beats** faster and blood moves around the body more quickly. We also make a kind of sugar called glucose. These changes make the body stronger and make us pay more attention to the things around us. Then we are ready to find the best way to survive: fight, hide, or run away.

<sup>1</sup>**hormone:** a chemical that helps the body to grow and change



#### APPLY

Would you fight, hide, or run away if you saw a ghost? A lion? A person with a gun?





So, are we born with fear or do we learn it? In the early 20th century, the American scientist John Watson did a very famous experiment with an 11-month-old baby named Albert. A white rat was put near Albert many times and, each time, Watson made a very loud, frightening noise. This made the baby cry. Eventually, the baby learned to cry every time he saw the rat, even when there was no noise. Watson believed that Baby Albert had learned to fear rats.

Fortunately, experiments have gotten better and less cruel since then. By studying animals, scientists have shown that the fear hormone is made in a part of the brain called the amygdala.

When the danger that causes the feeling of fear disappears, the memory of that danger is kept for some time in the amygdala. So, if you are attacked and robbed in the street one night, you will probably feel nervous about walking in the street for some time after. This may be true even if you know there is no real risk. Your brain simply remembers to be afraid.



The amygdala in the brain



A tarantula

Recently, Dr. Dean Mobbs from Cambridge University has shown that the emotion of fear is experienced in two ways. Twenty people were asked to put their foot in a special box with six different parts. Then, a tarantula was put in a different part of the box from the person's foot. The people watched on video as the different parts of the box were opened, allowing the tarantula to move closer to their foot.

Mobbs found that when the spider was farther away from a person's foot, there was more activity in the part of the brain that controls emotion and worry. When the spider got nearer, the part of the brain connected with panic was more active. So, we act in different ways depending on how near danger is.

But sometimes the amygdala doesn't work in the right way. This often happens when people have had a terrible experience, for example, during a war. In this case, they think danger is always present, and they feel afraid all the time. It can cause serious health problems. Life can become a nightmare.

Fear can be a good thing. People can sometimes do amazing things when they're afraid. In 2006, for example, American Tom Boyle saw a car hit an 18-year-old boy. Tom saw that he was caught under the wheels of the car. He ran over and lifted the car up, saving the young man's life!



Fear can make people super strong.

There are also times when we feel no fear. A mother might enter a burning house to save her child, for example. Scientist Joseph Jordania calls this lack of fear *aphobia*. It can be important to help humans survive.



Parents sometimes experience aphobia when their child is in danger.