Safety First

Imagine how easy it is to take a field trip just outside the classroom door, students armed with clipboards and pencils, at the ready to draw and take notes about their observations of spiders and webs. However, before rushing out the door it is important to take a few safety precautions. First, to ensure an enriching and safer experience, we walked around the buildings and schoolyard prior to taking students outside looking for webs and other evidence of spiders. We looked closely in the protected corners of the building where webs will be out of the wind. We planned out the path to guide our students along, avoiding traffic areas. We decided on the boundaries of the area that our students would explore. We got clipboards with attached worksheets or paper ready and used these tools to explain to the students what our expectations were for their behavior outside.

Before taking students outside, we explained what they would be doing, the tasks they needed to complete, and to always look at but not touch (use eyes, not fingers!) any webs or spiders they find. We reminded students of appropriate outside behavior; walking and talking quietly will give them a better chance of seeing wildlife. We cautioned students that they must always be able to see their hands—that meant no reaching into or under bushes! When the class was outside, we gathered them all together and defined their search boundaries. We also showed students how to look in the protected corners of the building and around bushes for webs. If your class can go out early enough in the day, dew may have settled on the grass and spider webs that have caught the moisture will be easier to see. Following these safety guidelines will assist you and your students explore the outdoor classroom.

Have as a reference this NSTA field trip safety list:

1. Keep clear of out-of-doors areas which may have been treated with pesticides, fungicides, and other hazardous chemicals.
2. Teachers need to survey out-of-doors areas for hazards prior to involving students.
3. When working out-of-doors, students should use appropriate personal protective equipment including safety glasses or safety goggles, gloves, close toed shoes, hat, long sleeve shirt and pants, sunglasses, and sunscreen protection.
4. Caution students relative to poisonous plants (ivy, sumac, etc.), insects (bees, wasps, ticks, mosquitoes, poisonous spiders, etc.) and hazardous debris (broken glass, other sharps, etc.)
5. Caution students about trip/fall hazards like rocks, rope, etc. when walking out-of-doors.
6. Teachers need to inform parents/guardians in writing of on-site or off-site field trips relative to potential health and safety precautions being taken.
7. Teachers need to check with the school nurse relative to students medical issues; e.g., allergies, asthma, etc. Be prepared for medical emergencies.
8. Teachers need to have a form of communications available such as a cell phone or two-way radio in case of emergencies.
9. Wash hands with soap and water after doing activities out-of-doors.
10. Be certain to contact the main office prior to brining classes out of the building for science activities.

Remember that insects and arachnids like spiders and ticks are capable of carrying disease. Spiders in the wild should be observed only. Spider specimens for in the classroom use should only be secured from commercial sources.