

TEACHING GUIDE

Charlotte's Web



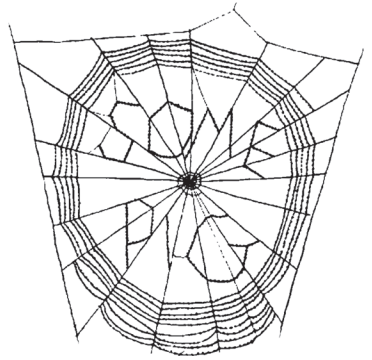
E. B. White
PICTURES BY
Garth Williams



ALIGNS WITH COMMON CORE
STATE STANDARDS FOR GRADE 4

ABOUT THE BOOK

“Some pig.” These are the words in Charlotte’s web, high in the barn. Her spiderweb tells of her feelings for a little pig named Wilbur, as well as the feelings of a little girl named Fern . . . who loves Wilbur, too. Their love has been shared by millions of readers.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

E. B. White, the author of such beloved classics as *Charlotte’s Web*, *Stuart Little*, and *The Trumpet of the Swan*, was born in Mount Vernon, New York. He graduated from Cornell University in 1921 and, several years later, joined the staff of *The New Yorker* magazine, then in its infancy. He died on October 1, 1985, and was survived by his son and three grandchildren.

Mr. White’s essays have appeared in *Harper’s* magazine, and some of his other books are: *One Man’s Meat*, *The Second Tree from the Corner*, *Letters of E. B. White*, *Essays of E. B. White*, and *Poems and Sketches of E. B. White*. He won countless awards, including the 1971 National Medal for Literature and the Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal, which commended him

for making a “substantial and lasting contribution to literature for children.”

During his lifetime, many young readers asked Mr. White if his stories were true. In a letter written to his fans, he answered, “No, they are imaginary tales . . . But real life is only one kind of life—there is also the life of the imagination.”



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following questions align with the Common Core State Standards for Reading Literature and Speaking and Listening as follows: *RL.4.1, RL.4.2, RL.4.3, RL.4.4, RL.4.10, RL.4.11; SL.4.1, SL.4.3, SL.4.4.*

1. In chapter 1, Fern is very upset that her father is going to destroy Wilbur because he is a runt. She argues until he agrees to spare the pig. Her father says that Fern is “trying to rid the world of injustice.” What does he mean by this?
2. How does Fern show her parents that she is responsible enough to care for Wilbur?
3. In chapter 3, Wilbur escapes from his pen. How does he feel when he frees himself? How do Wilbur’s feelings change as the chapter progresses?
4. *Charlotte’s Web* takes place on Mr. Zuckerman’s farm. Describe the setting of this story. What animals live on the farm? What does the farm look like?
5. In chapter 5, Wilbur reflects upon his new friendship with Charlotte. He is happy to have a new friend, but he is worried about some of her qualities. He says, “I’ve got a new friend, all right. But what a gamble friendship is!” What worries Wilbur about Charlotte? Which of her traits does he admire?
6. In chapter 5, Charlotte explains that she must “live by my wits.” What does she mean by this? Think of examples of people living by their wits. In what ways do you live by your wits?
7. In chapter 9, Charlotte compares her life to the lives of others. She says people “rush, rush, rush, every minute . . . I stay put and wait for what comes. Gives me a chance to think.” Think about your own lifestyle. Do you rush



from one activity to the next, or do you have time at home to relax and think? Which do you enjoy more, going from place to place or spending time relaxing and thinking? Which do you think is more important? Why?

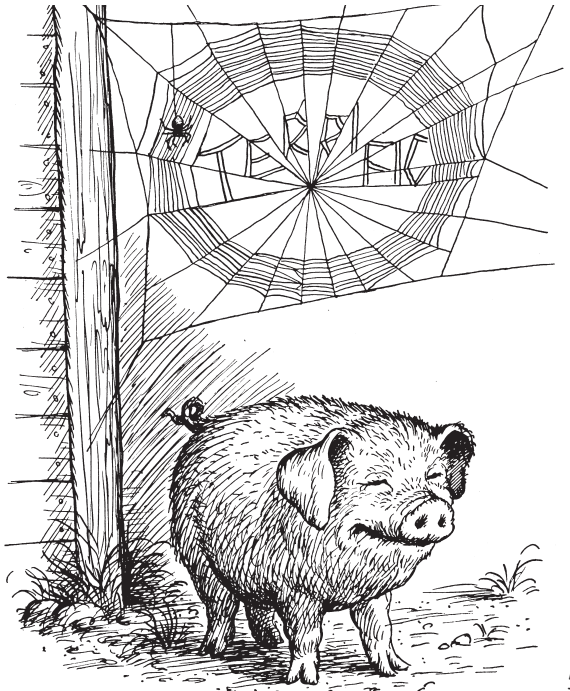


8. Fern and her brother Avery spend their days on the farm swinging on a rope swing, building a tree house, catching frogs, and picking raspberries. Do you think these activities are similar to or different from what a lot of kids do for fun today? What activities do you like to do?
9. Charlotte is desperate to save her friend Wilbur's life, and she's determined to come up with a plan. What are the disadvantages Charlotte faces as a spider trying to save a pig's life? When Charlotte was planning, were you able to predict what she would do? If you were in Charlotte's place, what would your plan have been? Do you think it would have worked?
10. When Charlotte puts her plan into action (chapter 11), how does Mr. Zuckerman react?
11. Mr. Zuckerman tells his wife, "Our pig is completely out of the ordinary" (chapter 11). What other characters in this story are extraordinary? Why?
12. When Charlotte's plan starts to work, Wilbur becomes a famous pig. Fern is happy that Wilbur will be saved, but finds that things on the farm have changed. In what way do things change? How does Fern feel about these changes?
13. In chapter 12, Charlotte says, "People believe almost anything they see in print." Do you think that's true? Why or why not? How does that statement relate to Charlotte's plan?
14. In chapter 13, Charlotte decides to weave "TERRIFIC" into her web. What does she do to help herself complete this difficult task? What facts do you learn about spiders in this chapter?

15. At first Wilbur is embarrassed that Charlotte is going to write “TERRIFIC” in her web, but eventually he begins to feel that he really is terrific. Why do you think Wilbur’s feelings about himself change?
16. In chapter 14, Fern says that her “best friends are in the barn cellar,” but by chapter 20, Fern is excited about spending time with her friend Henry Fussy. How has Fern changed from the beginning of the book to the end?
17. Read chapter 15. How has fame affected Wilbur? What is the most important thing in his life?
18. In chapter 16, after the old sheep tells Templeton about the food at the Fair Grounds, why does Charlotte wink at the sheep?
19. In chapter 18, when Wilbur asks Charlotte if she thinks that Mr. Zuckerman will let him live, how does Charlotte reassure him?
20. In chapter 19, Charlotte describes the egg sac she has created. How does the sac protect the eggs inside?
21. In chapter 19, Charlotte writes “humble” in her web. What does humble mean? Is this an appropriate word to describe Wilbur? How does Wilbur respond when he wins the prize at the fair?

22. In chapter 21, Wilbur recalls how he first felt about Charlotte. How have his feelings about Charlotte changed?

23. Charlotte saves Wilbur’s future, and Wilbur saves Charlotte’s future. How does each character accomplish this?

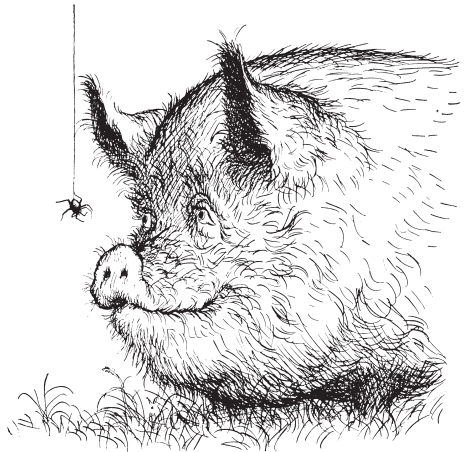


EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Based on the descriptions of Mr. Zuckerman's farm, have students create a map of the farm and label the areas (barn, apple orchard, woods, etc.).
CCSS RL.4.3, W.4.11
2. At the beginning of chapter 4, Wilbur plans out a schedule for the day. His activities include napping, eating, scratching, and standing still. Prompt students to think about what activities they would choose if they could plan a perfect day. Have them create timelines or schedules of their ideal days, planning out activities starting with when they wake up and ending with when they go to sleep. *CCSS W.4.11*
3. Charlotte is often introducing new words to Wilbur. Have students keep a running dictionary of "Charlotte's Words." In it they can record new vocabulary words, define them, and use them in sentences. Include such words as "salutations" (chapter 5), "untenable" (chapter 6), "gratified" (chapter 8), "sedentary" (chapter 9), "gullible" (chapter 10), "radiant" (chapter 13), and "versatile" (chapter 15). *CCSS RL.4.4, L.4.4*

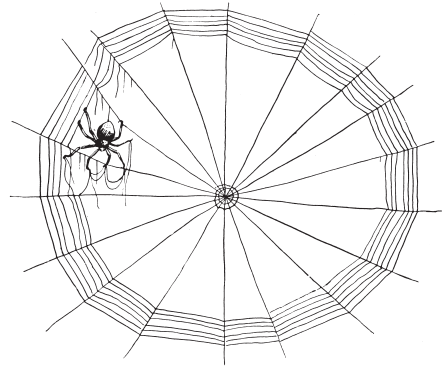


4. In *Charlotte's Web*, each season is briefly described as a year passes. Discuss the characteristics of each season. Then have students choose their favorite season and write an opinion piece describing why this is their favorite. Have students introduce the topic, provide detailed reasons for their opinion, and provide a concluding statement. Students should also use linking words, such as “for instance” and “in order to,” when listing their reasons. Students can type their final piece on the computer. Then the printed pieces can be compiled into an anthology for the class to read and discuss. *CCSS W.4.1, W.4.6, W.4.11, L.4.1, L.4.2*



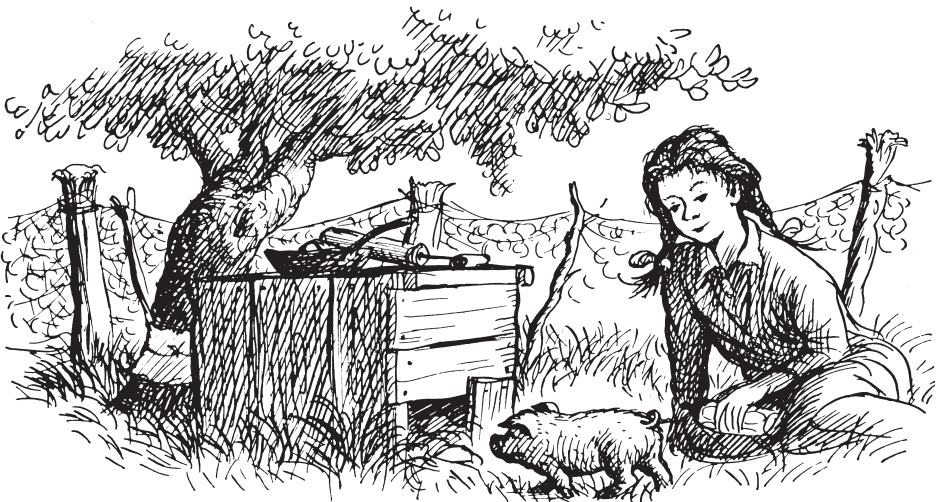
5. In chapter 7, Wilbur learns the sad fact that pigs are slaughtered for bacon and ham. Discuss how farmers make a living by raising livestock, growing crops, or producing milk or eggs. List the products generated on a farm and place them in the context of their nutritional food group by referring to www.choosemyplate.gov. *CCSS RL.4.11, W.4.7, W.4.8*
6. Charlotte describes how she spins a web in chapter 9. Show students photographs of spider webs (National Geographic's website has useful photos). Have students describe the patterns they see in the webs. Then have them draw their own spider webs. *CCSS W.4.8, W.4.11*
7. Have students create a character chart that includes the main characters (Fern, Charlotte, Wilbur, Templeton) from the story. Students should write the characters' names, add an illustration of each character, and list several traits that describe each character. *CCSS RL.4.3, W.4.11*
8. Ask each student to choose a farm animal to research. Students can use books or the Internet to conduct their research. Then have individuals or pairs of students design PowerPoint slides that include facts about their animals—what they eat, where and when they sleep, how they're born, etc. Collate the slides to create a class presentation about farm animals. Have students present to another class or invite their parents in to hear the presentation. *CCSS W.4.2, W.4.6, W.4.7, W.4.8, SL.4.4, SL.4.5*

9. Templeton finds bits of magazine pages to inspire Charlotte. Bring a collection of magazines into the classroom (or ask students to bring some magazines into school). Then have each student create a collage that represents himself or herself using bits and pieces from the magazine pages.
CCSS W.4.11

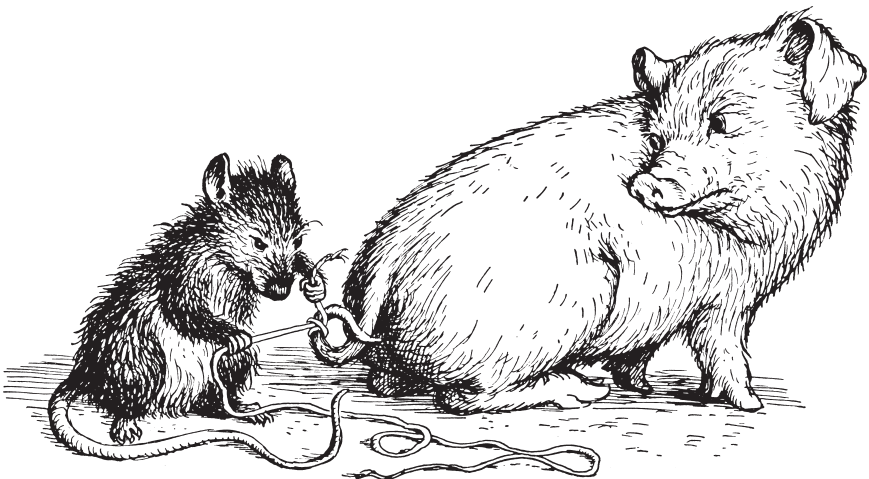


10. Wilbur calls Charlotte his “true friend.” Ask students to write a narrative describing an experience(s) they have had with one of their own true friends. Students should use a clear sequence of events, descriptive details, dialogue, transitional words, and sensory details to bring their story to life. Students should share their story with a partner to receive feedback and suggestions for editing and revising. Final pieces can be typed up, printed out, and illustrated, and then displayed in the classroom.
CCSS W.4.3, W.4.4, W.4.5, W.4.6

11. Charlotte’s children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren live in the barn with Wilbur. Discuss these family relationships and have students think about their own parents, grandparents, and great grandparents. Have each student design a family tree, on which he/she records the names of his/her relatives and delineates their relationships to him/herself.
CCSS W.4.11



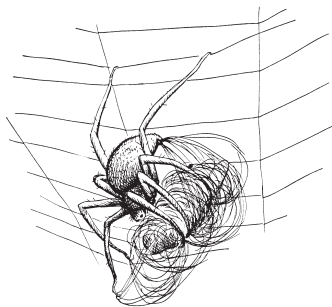
12. Have each student construct a puppet of one of the characters from *Charlotte's Web*. They can use materials such as socks, paper bags, pipe cleaners, fabric, or felt to create their puppets. Then, in small groups, have students use their puppets to act out one of the chapters from the book. After the groups have rehearsed, have them present their puppet shows to the rest of the class. *CCSS W.4.11, SL.4.1, SL.4.4*
13. Have students imagine that Charlotte is going to write about them in her web. Ask them to choose five words that describe themselves. Then have each student create a word web poster by writing his/her name in a center circle and drawing spokes and connecting lines radiating out from the center. Encourage students to weave their five words into the “webs” in creative ways. *CCSS W.4.11*
14. Visit a local farm to observe the animals and how the farm operates. After the field trip, have students use clay, craft sticks and other materials to create a model of the farm and the animals they saw there. *CCSS W.4.11*
15. Ask small groups of students to choose their favorite chapter. Then the group should divide their chapter into sections so that each student can practice reading aloud one section. When all students in the group are prepared to read their part aloud fluently and expressively, make an audio or video recording. (An iPad or other digital tablet is ideal for this activity.) Then you can share the recordings with other classes; younger students can follow along with the text as they listen to the recording. *CCSS SL.4.1, SL.4.5*



CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

SCIENCE

- Charlotte’s life cycle is depicted in this story. Have students study other animals’ life cycles and create posters to show the life cycles of the animals they’ve chosen. Students can compare and contrast the life cycles of their animals with Charlotte’s spider life cycle. *CCSS W.4.7, W.4.8, W.4.11*
- As a group or individually, have students compile a list of spider facts. Each student should choose a fact to record and illustrate on an individual page. Then collate the pages into an “All About Spiders” class book. *CCSS W.4.7, W.4.8*
- In chapter 5, Charlotte describes how she captures her prey and eats it. Have students research other animals’ hunting and eating habits using books and Internet resources. Then they should write an informative piece conveying what they learned through their research. Students should introduce and develop the topic, use linking words to connect ideas and phrases, and provide a concluding statement. *CCSS W.4.2, W.4.4, W.4.7, W.4.8*
- In chapter 6, we read about the summer birds that live on the farm (white-throated sparrow, phoebe, song sparrow, swallow). Have each student research one type of bird (not limited to those in the book) and create a fact card. On the front, students should draw their birds in detail. On the back, they should record between one and five facts (depending on the age of your students) about their birds. Collate the fact cards into a deck (hole-punch the cards and place them on a metal ring) for students to read and study. *CCSS W.4.7, W.4.8, W.4.11*



MATH

- Have students write and illustrate math story problems about animals on the farm. For example, “The goose laid six eggs. Two eggs rolled away. How many eggs were left?” Students can break into pairs and solve each other’s math story problems. *CCSS W.4.11*

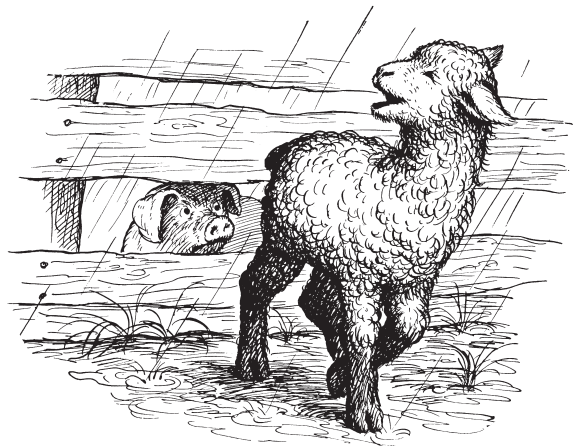
- In chapter 17, Mr. Arable gave Fern two quarters and two dimes, while he gave Avery five dimes and four nickels. Is this fair? (Have students do the math, compare the amounts, and discuss.) What other coin combinations can be used to make 70 cents? Have students share combinations with the class. *CCSS SL.4.1*

LANGUAGE ARTS

- In chapter 6, seven goslings are born. Create a two-column chart entitled “Baby Animals.” On the left side, list a variety of animals. On the right side, have students use Internet resources to research and fill in the name of each animal’s offspring (goose/gosling, kangaroo/joey, etc.). *CCSS W.4.7, W.4.8, W.4.11*

SOCIAL STUDIES

- Fern is learning the state capitals in school. Challenge your students to learn the 50 state capitals. Websites like <http://quizlet.com> and iPad applications such as *U.S. State Capitals! FREE States and Capital Quiz for Kids* can provide students with practice and reinforcement. Create a class poster map depicting the states and their capital cities. Then hold a team competition to see how quickly the students can recall them. *CCSS W.4.8, W.4.11*
- Discuss the setting of *Charlotte’s Web* and introduce the terms *rural*, *urban*, and *suburban* to describe different types of communities. Discuss the differences between farm/country life, city life, and suburban life. Have students create a large mural depicting all three types of communities. Assign some students to draw the backgrounds while others create cut-out characters and details to glue onto the background. As an extension, students can think about what jobs they might have if they were adults living in these communities. *CCSS W.4.11*



“E. B. White said, ‘All that I hope to say in books, all that I ever hope to say, is that I love the world.’

White loved barns and pastures, dumps and fair grounds, ponds and kitchens. He loved pigs and sheep and geese and spiders. He loved rain, harnesses, pitchforks, springtime, fall. He loved spider webs, monkey wrenches, Ferris wheels.

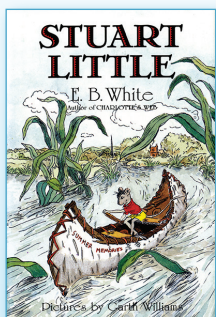
Every word of *Charlotte’s Web* bears the full weight of White’s love for the people, seasons, animals, and arachnids of this world. And every word of the book shows us how we can bear the triumphs and despairs, the wonders and the heartbreaks, the small and large glories and tragedies of being here.

We can bear it all by loving it all.”

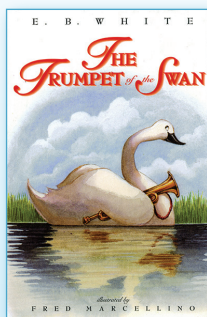
—Kate DiCamillo, from the foreword to the
60th Anniversary Edition of *Charlotte’s Web*

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Teaching guide prepared by Sue Ornstein, a teacher in the Byram Hills School District in Armonk, New York.