



# charlotte's web

Based on the book by E.B. White  
Adapted by Joseph Robinette

## Synopsis

Recommended for  
everyone age 4  
and older

Life on a farm can be a fragile thing. Young Fern saves Wilbur, the runt of the new litter of pigs on her father's farm, from an untimely death. Growing big and strong, Wilbur is bought by Fern's relatives, the Zuckermans. The Zuckerman farm is a strange and unfamiliar place where Wilbur searches for a friend. The sheep, the goose, and the rat all have their own business to attend to, and just when Wilbur begins to feel very sad and alone, he meets Charlotte, a spider who lives up in the rafters of the barn.

When Wilbur learns that his fate as a pig is to be fattened and killed, he panics. Charlotte, however, has a plan to save him. She will make Wilbur appear too special to kill. She'll help others see what she has seen: that the world is a better place with Wilbur in it.

Charlotte devises a system of writing words of praise for Wilbur in her web. As word gets out, he is transformed into "Zuckerman's Famous Pig," winning a special prize at the county fair. Wilbur's life no longer in danger, Charlotte can now take the time to produce her "masterpiece:" an egg sac containing 514 eggs. This great feat signals the end of her life. Wilbur rewards Charlotte's love and friendship by sheltering and protecting her egg sac until the eggs can hatch, spreading new life and new possibilities.

## Resource List

### FOR CHILDREN

#### Country Fair

Gail Gibbons

#### Ace: The Very Important Pig

Dick King-Smith

Illustrations by Lynette Hemmant

#### Animal Stories

Dick King-Smith

Illustrated by Michael Terry

#### The Trumpet of the Swan

E. B. White

Pictures by Edward Frascino

### SPOTLIGHT

#### Spiders Have Fangs

Claire Llewellyn

Illustrated by Myke Taylor and Jo Moore

Did you know? Spiders must spin a new web every day? Some spiders live underwater? Some spiders can change color? Discover fascinating facts and hands-on fun in this book about spiders and other arachnids.

### FOR EDUCATORS

#### SPOTLIGHT

#### One Man's Meat

E.B. White

This delightful collection of essays takes its name from the monthly *Harper's Magazine* column White wrote for many years. It charms readers with its witty observations on everyday life on a saltwater farm in Maine—the same farm where White first encounters the barnyard characters who appear in *Charlotte's Web*.

### AUDIO VISUAL RESOURCES

#### See How They Grow: Insects and Spiders

Video distributed by Dorling Kindersley Vision

#### Babe

A film by Chris Noonan, Universal Pictures

### WEBSITES

<http://falcon.jmu.edu/~ramseyil/white.htm>

A site for educators containing biographical information about E.B. White, bibliographies, and lesson plans for *Charlotte's Web*.

<http://www.cyberspaceag.com/>

Take a Cyberspace Farm Tour.

<http://www.aif.org/guide.html>

Animal Industry Foundation Teacher Resource Guide.



# E. B. White



I have heard it said that rats collect trinkets, that if you expose a rat's nest, you may find bright bits of glass and other small desirable objects. A child's mind is such a repository—full of gems of questionable merit, paste and real, held in storage. What shining jewel shall we contribute this morning, sir, to this amazing collection? Educators and psychologists are full of theory about the young: they profess to know what a child should be taught and how he should be taught it, and they are

often quite positive and surly about the matter...

Much of our adult morality, in books and out of them, has a stuffiness unworthy of childhood. Our grown-up conclusions often rest on perilously soft bottom. Try to tell a child even the simplest truths about planetary, cosmical, or spiritual things, and you hear strange echoes in your own head.

"Can this be me?" a voice keeps asking, "Can this be me?" Dozens of times in the course of trying to act like a parent I have caught myself telling my boy things I didn't thoroughly comprehend myself, urging him toward conventional attitudes of mind and spirit I only half believed in and would myself gladly chuck overboard.



A large amount of the published material [for children] is dull, prosy stuff by writers who mistake oddity for fantasy and whose wildly beating wings never get them an inch off the ground. (Incidentally, one of the few books that struck me as being in the true spirit of nonsense is one called *The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*, by Dr. Seuss.) Some of the books are patronizing, some are mushy, some are grand. Almost all are beautifully illustrated. From them you can discover how to build everything from

a Chippewa water drum to a pair of undersea goggles. The exciting thing about them is that, whatever else they are, they are free to be read, untainted by anything but the rigors and joys of pure creation...

The gamut of life must seem splendidly wide to children whose books these are....

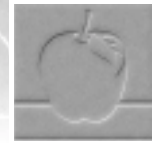
## Activity

- Tell your own tale.

Come up with a sentence, such as: In the river sat an otter. Then go around the room having each child add a sentence to the story. For example, the first sentence is, "In the river sat an otter." Then the first child might add, "He was brown." Followed by, "This otter could not swim." and so on.

After all the children have added their sentences, you add one finishing sentence to bring the story to a close. Now, have your kids draw an illustration for their sentence. Bind these together to make a picture book of your class' story.

Excerpted from E.B. White's essay entitled "Children's Books." Written in November, 1938 for *Harper's Magazine*, this piece appears in a collection of White's monthly musings for *Harper's* entitled *One Man's Meat*.



# What's a Life Anyway?

"What's a life, anyway?" asks Charlotte, the spider in E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web*. In the story, the characters answer that question differently, through their words and actions. Some of the things that motivate the characters are the same things that inspire real people. On this page are some examples of different things that inspired E.B. White's world and some real historical figures who were similarly inspired.

## To Fight Injustice

When we first see Fern, an eight-year-old girl, she finds a reason for her existence in fighting injustice. She cannot bear that her father is going to kill a baby pig just because he is small.

"But it's unfair," cried Fern. "The pig couldn't help being born small, could it? If I had been born small, would you have killed me?" Mr. Arable smiled . . . "But this is different. A little girl is one thing, a little runty pig is another." "I see no difference," replied Fern, still hanging on to the ax. "This is the most terrible case of injustice I ever heard of."

EXAMPLE: REV. DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

He spent much of his life fighting the injustice of racial discrimination, and facing violence and imprisonment for his beliefs.

## To Have New Experiences and Make New Friends

Wilbur, the pig, wants to enjoy life. Before meeting Charlotte, loneliness and boredom drive him close to despair. He comes to cherish his friendship with Charlotte above everything else, because she inspires him to try different things—like spinning a web. He fears death, because it means losing all those experiences.

. . . [Wilbur] was not a quitter and was willing to try again to spin a web. While the rat and the spider and the little girl watched, Wilbur climbed again to the manure pile, full of energy and hope. "Everybody watch!" he cried. And summoning all his strength, he threw himself into the air, headfirst.

EXAMPLE: AMELIA EARHART

Ms. Earhart was a famous pilot who spent her life showing the new things that airplanes could do. She was the first woman to cross the Atlantic Ocean in a plane. She disappeared in 1938 over the Pacific Ocean, while trying to fly around the world.

## To Give Life

Charlotte, the spider, works hard to accomplish two things before she dies. She saves Wilbur's life by weaving words into her web, and she creates her "magnum opus" (Latin for "great work")—her egg sac. While she relishes the pleasures of her own life, it is the thought of the life that she has given to others that comforts her as she dies.

"I feel peaceful . . . You will live, secure and safe, Wilbur. Nothing can harm you now . . . By helping you, perhaps I was trying to lift up my life a trifle."

EXAMPLE: DR. ALEXANDER FLEMING

While serving as a doctor in World War I, he saw many people die from infections. In 1928 he discovered penicillin, a mold that could kill harmful bacteria. His research has extended the lives of billions of people.



## Discussion/Activity

- What examples can you think of, from history or from the world today, where people have made sacrifices to fight injustice? Is it important to you to fight injustice? If so, how do you think you could do that?

Can you think of examples of people who have saved the lives of others? Do these examples inspire you?

- In *Charlotte's Web*, Wilbur wins a special prize at the fair. Have teams of students adopt one of the values outlined above and develop a campaign for it, which could involve posters, speeches and debates. Take a vote to determine who has been most persuasive and give a prize to the winner.



EALRs

WRITING—write for a purpose

SOCIAL STUDIES—investigate

ARTS—reason and problem solve, communicate, connect



# FARMS AND FAIRS



Farming began more than 10,000 years ago in the Middle East. It started with the discovery that certain grasses growing in the region produced edible seeds, which could also be planted to produce a new crop. People

began to cultivate the ground for annual plantings of the grasses. They learned, too, to tame cattle, goats, and sheep that roamed wild across the land. Herds were kept for their meat, milk and skins, and tame animals were bred from them. Over time farmers began to stay in one place and form settlements.

We have come a long way since the early days of farming. Farmers in the early 1900s had no electricity or running water. They relied on horses to pull farm equipment, such as iron plows and seed drills. Since the 1920s farmers have used tractors and modern plows to break up the soil and prepare it for the sowing of a crop. But the daily life of a farmer is still very demanding, including long hours spent in the field.

Animals are an important aspect of farm life. Like Fern, in *Charlotte's Web*, many children help in the raising of animals and make sure they stay healthy and clean. Pigs, for example, are usually bought at about nine weeks old. Like Wilbur, they are fed with a baby bottle, and then once they mature they are fed corn, soybeans, and a mix of minerals and vitamins. Fresh water and clean pigpens are also necessary for them to stay healthy. While all animals are valuable commodities in farm life, they can also play a significant role outside the farm: at fairs.

Raising animals is a key aspect for state fairs where livestock shows are a regular event. Preparing for a fair is a lot of work. In addition to feeding and keeping their pens clean every day, children work with the animals to help them get used to being around humans. During a livestock show, pigs are



## *Central Washington State Fair*

September 28 – October 7, 2001  
Yakima, WA

## *Western Washington State Fair*

September 8 – 24, 2001  
Puyallup, WA

For a complete list of  
State and County fairs in Washington go to  
<http://www.travel-in-wa.com/DISTINCTLY/fairs.html>

judged for their behavior, showmanship, and their daily average weight.

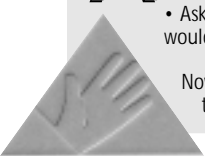
Also, many children participate in the *4-H Project*, a youth development program where young people can learn about raising animals, arts and crafts, showmanship, leadership and more. The program's mission is to provide fun, educational activities that build strong, healthy youth who are proactive in a complex and challenging world.

Raising animals teaches children about relationships and responsibilities. Visits to local farms allow children to interact with animals they don't normally see. There are several local farms to visit in King County, in addition to the various local and state fairs. You can find out more about Washington State fairs at <http://www.wastatefairs.org/Frames.html>.

## Activity

- Ask your students to draw a picture of their pet, or the pet they would like to have.

Now, have them write down (or draw) all of the things they do to take care of their pet: feeding, walking, brushing, etc.



EALRs

SOCIAL STUDIES—analyze and synthesize, investigate  
SCIENCE—analyze



# HUMANS AND ANIMALS TOGETHER ON EARTH

People connect with animals in many ways. In the book *Charlotte's Web* eight-year-old Fern saves the smallest pig in the litter from the ax. She talks her father into letting her keep the pig, comparing it to a tiny baby, and calls his plan to kill the pig "...the most terrible case of injustice I have ever heard of."

When Fern returns to the house after saving her pig she goes to the kitchen for breakfast and, "...the room smelled of coffee, bacon, damp plaster, and wood smoke from the stove." But the smell of bacon doesn't seem odd or unjust to Fern, perhaps because humans have used animals for food for hundreds of thousands of years.

Today there aren't as many family farms, like the Zuckermans', as there were when *Charlotte's Web* was written. And few people depend on hunting for



food. So, many people these days may think that meat comes from a grocery store, forgetting about the animals involved.

Today most people who live in cities or suburbs may only interact with animals as pets. Pets are often loved and treated like members of the family. There have even been times when these animals have saved a person's life by warning them of a fire or pulling them from a lake. Also, animals have long been trusted as workers. Dogs can

be trained to safely lead blind people as they walk. Some animals can even find lost people. Also, horses and mules still work on many farms and ranches.

Humans and animals have always lived together on earth. We are connected in a fragile web of life. We are probably more useful to each other than we imagine, just like the animals on Zuckermans' farm come to find out.



*Animals are often used as workers and some, like this dog, are even trained to save human lives.*

## Activity

- Charlotte saves Wilbur's life by writing words in her web. If you could use only one word to describe your favorite animal what would it be? Try drawing a picture of a spider's web using your words in the center of it.

### DEFINITIONS

Litter—group of animals all born at the same time to the same mother



EALRs

SCIENCE—understand the nature of science  
 WRITING—understand writing process, analyze and evaluate  
 ARTS—apply creative process, communicate, understand connect to other areas

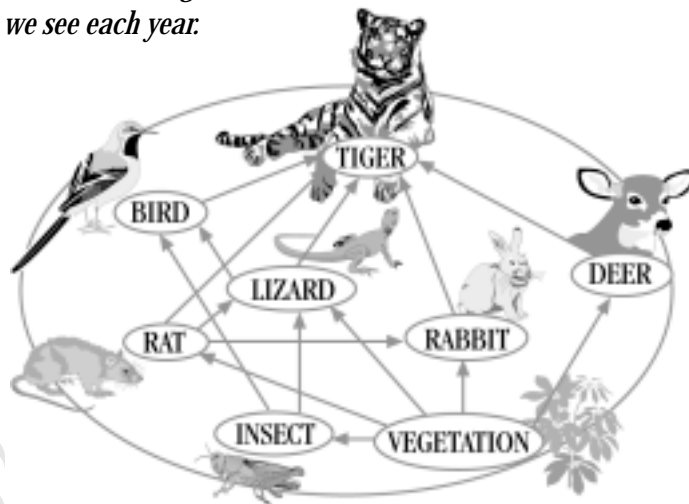


# Cycles of Life

*There are all sorts of living creatures in the world, and each plays a special role in nature's cycles of life. As seasons change, living things also change. Even in our own backyards, there are many things that happen to plants and animals each season. Flowers bloom, birds migrate, and leaves fall. These events, along with birth and death, are all part of the cycles we see each year.*

Just as it would be on a real farm, different seasons have an effect on the animals in *Charlotte's Web*. During springtime, the goose lays her eggs. She sits on them for 30 days to keep them warm, and then her babies hatch. Charlotte lays 514 eggs in her sac; they also hatch in the spring.

Along with seasonal events, an important part of the cycles of life is that all *species*, a group of living things, depend on one another for survival. They need each other for food, protection, and shelter.



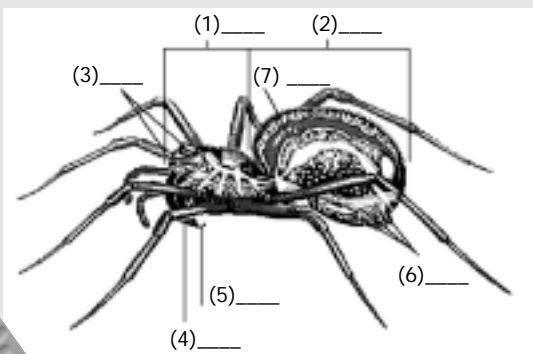
*A food web, like the one seen here, is one of the many cycles of life.*

## Activity

### LABEL THE SPIDER:

With the numbers and blanks provided on the spider diagram, label where you think each spider part should go (answers are at the bottom of the page).

- Abdomen:** the spider's belly.
- Heart:** located in the abdomen. Large spiders have a heartbeat of around 30 to 70 beats a minute; small spiders have a heartbeat of up to 200 beats per minute.
- Spinnerets:** where the silk is released, near the end of the abdomen. Spider silk is an extremely strong material and, on basis of weight, is stronger than steel. Spiders use silk to spin webs, wrap their eggs in cocoons, catch insects for food, and lower themselves to the ground.
- Cephalothorax:** the head and the chest of the spider fused together.
- Eyes:** located at the front of the body. Most spiders have eight eyes, and the middle two are the main pair.
- Chelicera:** the jaws, located below the eyes.
- Fang:** the piercing part of the jaws. Most spiders deliver poison from a small hole at the tip of the fang to capture their food.



Key: 1) d, 2) a, 3) e, 4) f, 5) g, 6) c, 7) b

On the farm, Templeton relies on Wilbur's leftover food for his meals. In the forest, some animals eat plants, others make plants their home, and some animals eat other animals.

And with all living things there comes an end. No plant or animal lives forever. Some species of tree can live for thousands of years though. People rarely live to be 100 and most only live into their 70s. Most of the cats and dogs that we keep as pets live to be around 12 years old, and spiders, like Charlotte, only live between 3–6 months.

### So, what is life like for a spider?

Spiders are born just like they are in *Charlotte's Web*. The mother lays her eggs in one or more silky ball-shaped sacs. She either hides them in her web, or carries them with her. There may be as many as 1,000 eggs in a sac the size of a pea, and one female may produce as many as 3,000 eggs in her lifetime!

At the end of the play, Charlotte's babies float off to different areas. This really happens with newborn spiders. They climb to a high point and release silk strands until the wind catches them, and then sail away to start their own lives. Because of their short lives, spiders rely on their eggs to carry on from year to year.



### EALRs

READING—analyze  
 SOCIAL STUDIES—analyze and synthesize, investigate  
 ARTS—solve problems, communicate  
 SCIENCE—analyze, investigate