Novel Notes
5th Class

Charlotte's Web
E. B. White
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Fern Arable is sitting down for breakfast when she realises her father is on his way to kill a runt pig. She pleads for the runt’s life and her father agrees to save him. Fern bonds with the piglet immediately and names him ‘Wilbur’. Wilbur and Fern play together every day and he follows her everywhere.

When Wilbur grows bigger, Mr Arable sends him to live on Uncle Zuckerman’s farm. Fern visits him regularly. Wilbur feels lonely in the barn and longs for a friend but the other animals are not interested in making friends, they are all too busy with their own lives.

One night Wilbur hears a voice telling him that she will be his friend. He sets out to discover who spoke to him and meets Charlotte, a grey spider.

At first, Wilbur is not sure he can be friends with Charlotte because he thinks her eating habits are cruel. Over time, the pig and the spider become best friends. Fern visits often and listens to their conversations. One day, an old sheep warns Wilbur that he will be killed by the Zuckermans. Charlotte vows to save him.

Charlotte works hard on coming up with a plan to save Wilbur and when all the animals are asleep, she begins spinning a web. The next day, the people on Zuckerman’s farm see the words ‘Some Pig’ written in Charlotte’s web. They decide that this is a miracle and that there must be something very special about Wilbur. News spreads and more people begin to visit the farm.

Charlotte’s plan is working and so a few days later, she writes the word ‘terrific’ in her web. There is great excitement on the farm and the Zuckermans decide they will take Wilbur to the county fair in September.

As the county fair draws nearer, Wilbur is nervous and Charlotte is unsure whether she will be able to go. She is about to lay eggs, but Wilbur begs her to go with him. At the fair, everyone has a very nice time, and Charlotte writes another word, ‘humble’ into her web.

The next morning, at the fair, Charlotte lays her eggs. She tells Wilbur that they will hatch from the egg sac the following spring, but that she will not live to see it. Wilbur is very sad.

The Zuckermans read the word ‘humble’ on the web but are shocked to discover the prize has been given to another pig. However, at the end of the day, the fair management call the Zuckermans to the grandstand. They give Wilbur a special award and the Zuckermans are given a cash prize. After the ceremony, Charlotte tells Wilbur she will not be returning to the barn. Wilbur is heartbroken but vows to bring her children home.

Wilbur and Templeton return to the farm with Charlotte’s egg sac. Wilbur misses his friend but waits patiently for her eggs to hatch. Finally, the spiders appear. Wilbur introduces himself and tells them about their mother. After a few days, they decide to go out and explore the world. Three spiders stay behind and make friends with Wilbur.

Themes and issues addressed in this novel include friendship, loyalty, kindness, life and death, loneliness and determination.
E.B. White was born in New York in 1899. He studied Arts in college where he began writing for a college newspaper. After graduation, he worked as a reporter. In 1927 he worked as a writer for a magazine called *The New Yorker* and became very well known. White began writing children’s stories, originally at the requests of his nieces and nephews. His first book *Stuart Little* was published in 1945, followed by *Charlotte’s Web* in 1952. His three books, *Stuart Little, Charlotte’s Web* and *The Trumpet of the Swan* were very successful and are today considered classics for children. White continued writing until his death in 1985.

### Curriculum Objectives

The child should be enabled to engage with books in group or in whole-class settings, use comprehension skills such as analysing; confirming, evaluating, synthesising and correlating to aid deduction, problem-solving and prediction, respond to poetry or fiction through discussion, writing, drama, the visual arts and dance.

### Learning Outcomes

- Write an original poem about a main character in the book.
- Write an interview with a main character in the book.
- Write a creative advertisement.
- Rewrite a scene from the book from a different viewpoint.
- Create a class dictionary of new words from the book.
- Write a book review.
- Participate in a class debate about the book.
- Research animals from the book.
Cross-curricular Links

**Visual Arts**
Children can draw, paint or colour an alternative book cover for *Charlotte’s Web*. Children can make a diorama of a scene from the book.

**History**
Children can research the life of E.B. White.

**Geography**
Children can learn about the food and farming industry, in particular pig farming.

**Science**
Children could research the plants and animals featured in the book, e.g. geese, pigs, sheep, spiders and rats.

Suggestions for Classroom Work

- Write an acrostic poem about Charlotte.
- Interview Templeton the rat about his life. Write questions and answers for the interview.
- Write an advert for the paper to attract people to the Zuckerman’s farm.
- Rewrite a scene in the book from the point of view of a main character.
- Write a book review of *Charlotte’s Web*.
- Have a class debate to decide who the hero/heroine of the story is.
- Carry out a class research project on spiders or pigs.

Web Links

**A letter from E.B. White:**
http://www.lettersofnote.com/2012/01/wind-clock-for-tomorrow-is-another-day.html

**Charlotte’s Web resources from Teachervision:**

**Charlotte’s Web lesson plans:**
http://www.webenglishteacher.com/white.html

**Useful resources for Charlotte’s Web:**
http://www2.lhric.org/pocantico/charlotte/index.htm
Pre-reading Activities

Oral Pre-reading Questions

Chapter 1
Look at the front cover of the book. What kind of setting do you think this story takes place in?

Chapter 2
What do you think will happen to Wilber next?

Chapter 3
This chapter is called ‘Escape’. What do you think it is about?

Chapter 4
Do you think Wilbur is going to be happy in the barn from now on? Why?

Chapter 5
Who do you think the ‘little voice’ belongs to?

Chapter 6
What do you think Charlotte will do to prove she has a kind heart?

Chapter 7
What do you think will become of Templeton’s egg?

Chapter 8
What do you think Charlotte can do to help Wilbur?

Chapter 9
What do you think Mr Arable means when he says Fern may have sharper ears?

Chapter 10
This chapter is called ‘An Explosion’. What do you think will happen?

Chapter 11
What do you think Charlotte is doing with the web?

Chapter 12
What do you think the meeting will be about?

Chapter 13
What do you think the Zuckermans will say when they find the word ‘terrific’?

Chapter 14
What do you think Dr Dorian will say about Fern?

Chapter 15
Do you think Dr Dorian’s predictions about Fern will come true?

Chapter 16
What do you think, will happen if Charlotte is not able to go to the fair with Wilbur?

Chapter 17
Who do you think ‘Uncle’ might be?

Chapter 18
Do you think Wilbur is going to win the competition? Why?

Chapter 19
What do you think Charlotte’s masterpiece is going to be?

Chapter 20
What do you think the special award will be?

Chapter 21
What kind of effect, do you think, the special award will have on Wilbur’s fate?

Chapter 22
How do you think, will Wilbur’s life be without Charlotte?
Vocabulary

Create a class dictionary for new words from the story. Include the many words Charlotte teaches to Wilbur. Ask children to use new words in sentences and to find synonyms for them.

Comprehension Activity Sheets

Presented on the following pages are a selection of both lower and higher order questions for each section of this novel, which the teacher may choose from.
Chapter 1
‘Before Breakfast’

1. Where is Mr Arable going with the axe?

2. Who is Avery?

3. What does Fern feed to the pig?

4. What does Fern say is the capital city of Pennsylvania?

5. Why, do you think, does Mr Arable change his mind?

6. How does Avery feel about pigs? Why do you think so?
1. Where does Wilbur live?

2. How does Wilbur keep warm at night?

3. What does Wilbur do each time Fern goes upstairs?

4. How many brothers and sisters does Wilbur have?

5. Who is Homer Zuckerman?

6. How much does it cost to buy Wilbur?

7. How, do you think, does Fern feel when Wilbur is sold? Why do you think so?
1. What bird builds its nest in the barn?

2. Who gives Wilbur the idea to escape?

3. How does Wilbur escape from the pail?

4. Why does Wilbur go back inside the pail?

5. How, do you think, does Wilbur feel when everyone is chasing him and all the animals are telling him to run in different directions?

6. What do you think would have happened to Wilbur if he had run into the woods? Write a short story called ‘Wilbur’s adventures in the woods’.
1. What disrupts Wilbur's plans?

2. Name three items Wilbur eats for breakfast.

3. How does Templeton travel from the barn to the pig trough?

4. What medicine does Lurvy give to Wilbur?

5. Why, do you think, does Wilbur make so many plans?

6. Do you think the other animals should play with Wilbur? Why do you think so?

7. Why, do you think, would someone want to make friends with Wilbur? What do you look for in a friend?
1. Why is Wilbur unable to get to sleep?

2. How does the goose cheat while waiting for her eggs to hatch?

3. What does the word ‘salutations’ mean?

4. Why is Charlotte unable to see Wilbur clearly?

5. Name four things that spiders eat.

6. What are Wilbur’s doubts and fears about making friends with Charlotte?

7. Do you think Wilbur is an innocent little pig? Why?
1. How does Avery carry the fish?

2. How many baby goslings are hatched?

3. Why does Templeton want the dud egg?

4. Write a short description of Templeton.

5. What kind of character do you think Mr Zuckerman is? Why?
Chapter 7  ‘Bad News’

1. What act of kindness does Charlotte show her victims?

2. How does Wilbur hear the bad news?

3. How does Wilbur react to the news? What does he do?

4. What do you think the word ‘hysterics’ means?

5. Do you think Charlotte handles Wilbur’s reaction in a good or a bad way? Why?

6. How do you think Wilbur feels at the end of the chapter?
1. What is Avery doing when Fern tells her parents about the barn animals?

2. How does Fern describe Charlotte?

3. How does Mrs Arable feel about her daughter spending lots of time in the barn?

4. If you were Fern, would you tell people about the talking animals or would you keep it a secret? Why?

5. How do you think Mr Arable feels about what Fern is saying? Why?
1. Why, do you think, does Wilbur want to spin his own web?

2. What makes Charlotte decide that Wilbur is not a quitter?

3. Write a description of a spider’s body and explain how it spins a web.

4. What does the word ‘sedentary’ mean?

5. How does Wilbur feel, do you think, when the lamb calls him smelly?

6. Which character do you think is most caring? Why?

7. Charlotte tells Wilbur never to hurry or worry. Do you think this is good advice? Why?
1. What does ‘gullible’ mean? Put the word into a sentence.

2. Where does Avery keep his frog?

3. What causes Avery to run away from the barn?

4. Why is Templeton boasting?

5. Why does Wilbur decide to leave a whole noodle for Templeton?

6. What, do you think, is Charlotte doing with her web?
1. What does Lurvy notice about the web?

2. Why do Mr Zuckerman and Lurvy tremble?

3. What is Mr Zuckerman’s first name?

4. How do Mr Zuckerman and Lurvy feel about Wilbur? Do you think this has anything to do with Charlotte’s web?

5. Why is Avery sent to bed without supper?

6. How does Charlotte feel about all the visitors at the farm? How would you feel if you were in this situation?

7. If you heard a rumour about a wondrous pig, would you go to visit it? Why?
1. Which of the animals is missing during roll call?

2. Charlotte says that her message has been ‘well received’. What does this mean, do you think?

3. What is Templeton’s attitude towards the meeting?

4. Do you think Templeton really cares about Wilbur? Why?

5. What slogan would you write on Charlotte’s web? Why?

6. Charlotte says that Wilbur is ‘terrific’ and ‘sensational’. What nice words would you use to describe your friends?
1. What kind of thread does Charlotte use to write the letters?

2. What is the first word that Templeton gives to Charlotte?

3. What special skill does Charlotte's cousin have?

4. Charlotte sings Wilbur a lullaby at the end of this chapter. Compose a second verse for the lullaby.

5. Write a newspaper report for the *Weekly Chronicle* about the recent events at Zuckerman's farm.
1. What does Charlotte’s cousin catch in her web?

2. Do you think the Zuckerman’s barn is a sociable place like Fern says?

3. Do you think Dr Dorian takes Mrs Arable seriously? Why?

4. What kind of a boy is Avery, do you think? Why?

5. Mrs Arable feels relieved after speaking to the doctor. Write about a time you heard some news which made you feel relieved.
1. What does Wilbur do to try and look radiant?

2. Why does Wilbur have bad dreams?

3. What kind of work does Charlotte have to do at home?

4. What does the word ‘versatile’ mean?

5. Do you think it is fair of Wilbur to beg Charlotte to go with him? Why?
1. What does Avery dream about the night before the fair?

2. What is written on Wilbur's crate?

3. What does Mrs Zuckerman use to bathe Wilbur?

4. Why does Wilbur struggle when walking into the crate?

5. What causes Wilbur to faint?

6. What do you think of Avery's treatment of Wilbur? Is he kind to animals? Why do you think so?
1. What does Charlotte see in the pen next to Wilbur's?

2. What does Charlotte think of Uncle's personality?

3. Explain what the word ‘listless’ means?

4. What does Lurvy do with the blanket?

5. Describe Wilbur's mood when he hears that Charlotte is unwell.

6. Charlotte goes to the fair because she knows Wilbur needs her. Do you think people should support their friends when they are in trouble? Why?
Chapter 18

Activity sheet

‘The Cool of the Evening’

1. What is the name of Fern’s friend?

2. Why does Templeton decide to ‘make a night of it’?

3. What word does Charlotte spin on her web?

4. Does Charlotte do a good job of easing Wilbur’s worries? Why do you think so?

5. Have you ever been to a fair? Write a paragraph about a day you had, or what you think it would be like to spend a day at a fair.
1. How does Charlotte keep her eggs warm and dry?

2. How many eggs does Charlotte lay?

3. Why does Mrs Zuckerman start to cry?

4. What announcement is made on the loud speaker?

5. How, do you think, does everyone feel on the way to the judge’s booth?
1. What prize is given to Mr Zuckerman?

2. How do people explain the writing on Charlotte's web?

3. How does Templeton revive Wilbur after he faints?

4. What kind of a job do you think Avery might like to do when he is older? Give reasons for your answer.

5. Do you agree that the award ceremony is Charlotte's moment of triumph? Why?
1. Why does Charlotte feel peaceful, do you think?

2. How does Wilbur show his appreciation for Charlotte's help?

3. What deal does Wilbur make with Templeton?

4. How does Wilbur carry the egg sac home?

5. How do you feel at the end of this chapter? Why?

6. How, do you think, does Charlotte feel about death? Do you think she is brave? Why?
1. Where does Mr Zuckerman hang Wilbur’s medal?

2. How often does Templeton visit Wilbur?

3. How, do you think, does Wilbur feel when the baby spiders arrive?

4. What are the names of the spiders that stay behind?

5. Why, do you think, will none of the spiders ever take Charlotte’s place in Wilbur’s heart?

6. Which character do you think has changed most throughout the book? Why?
Book Report Sheet

If you don’t have enough space to write your answers, use the notes section on the following pages.

Pupil’s name: ___________________________ Class: ___________ Date: ___________________________

Title of book: ___________________________ Author: ___________ Illustrator: ___________________________

Setting (where the story took place):

List the main characters:

1. ___________________________ 2. ___________________________
3. ___________________________ 4. ___________________________

Write about each of the following:

Your favourite character: ___________________________

The plot: ___________________________

The climax: ___________________________

The ending: ___________________________

Write four adjectives to describe this book:

1. ___________ 2. ___________ 3. ___________ 4. ___________

Did you like the book? Why? Why not?

Grade the book (.Tick one)

Easy to read ☐ Just right ☐ A little difficult ☐ Difficult ☐

Rate the book out of ten: ___________ /10