STUDY GUIDE

Charlotte's Web

SEPT 21 - OCT 21, 2018

THE MOST MAGNIFICENT Season

TICKETS: STAGESTHEATRE.ORG
ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

The possibilities are numerous for using both the book and the play of *Charlotte’s Web* as a jumping off point for cross-curriculum and interdisciplinary study in your classroom. From lessons on character traits and character movement to activities involving spiders and farm life this classic book and the play it is based on offer many chances to reach any number of curriculum goals.

Below are a few suggestions for curriculum that incorporates both the book and the play of *Charlotte’s Web* into your classroom studies.
PLAY SYNOPSIS

There is something amazing happening at the Zuckerman Farm. It has to do with a young pig named Wilbur and an extremely literate spider named Charlotte. After being saved by the spirited girl Fern, the innocent pig Wilbur arrives at the Zuckerman Farm only to learn he is being “fattened up” for the dinner plate. Finding an unlikely friend in the spider Charlotte, Wilbur learns not only about life on the farm but about life beyond it too. Determined to save Wilbur, Charlotte begins her campaign with the "miracle" of her web in which she writes, "Some Pig." It's the beginning of a victorious campaign, which ultimately ends with the now-safe Wilbur doing what is most important to Charlotte. This heartwarming tale of friendship is as enduring as the book it is based on.

THE PLAY’S HISTORY

The Children's Literature Association named Charlotte’s Web "the best American children's book of the past two hundred years," and Joseph Robinette’s adaptation, working with the advice of E.B. White, is one of the most produced children’s plays in the world.

All the enchanting characters of this wonderful, endearing adaptation of E.B. White’s classic Newbery Honor winner are here—Wilbur, the irresistible young pig who desperately wants to avoid the butcher; Fern, the girl who understands what animals say to each other; Templeton, the gluttonous rat who can occasionally be talked into a good deed; the triple speaking Goose and Gander; the know-it-all Old Sheep; Homer Zuckerman, the farmer who is most excited to see a “miracle” take place on his farm and; most of all, the extraordinary spider, Charlotte, who proves to be "a true friend and a good writer."

--(Taken in part from www.dramaticpublishing.com)
The ideas and questions in this section are designed as a springboard for student discussion after attending the play.

**BIG IDEAS**

Friendship  
Loyalty  
Love  
Kindness  
Cycles of Nature

**WHO? WHAT? WHERE? WHEN?**

1. Who wins the first prize blue ribbon at the county fair?  
   *(The pig named Uncle)*

2. What is the first message Charlotte writes in her web about Wilbur?  
   *(Some Pig)*

3. Where does Templeton eat the remains of thirty lunches?  
   *(At the county fair)*

4. When are Charlotte’s children born?  
   *(In the spring)*

**WHY?**

1. Wilbur and Charlotte have a special and unusual friendship. Think about a friend that you have. What is your friend’s name? Where did you meet? How long have you been friends? List five things that you and your friend have in common. List five things where you and your friend differ, such as interests, hobbies, personality, likes, dislikes. What does this friendship mean to you? How is it special? Describe something in your life that would be different if you did not have this friend.

2. After Fern leaves him in the Zuckerman barn and before he meets Charlotte, Wilbur is so lonely that he doesn’t even feel like eating. Think about a time when you felt lonely. Why were you feeling this way? How did you act? What did you do about it? Did someone else make you feel better just as Charlotte befriends Wilbur in the story? What other emotions does Wilbur feel in the story? Why? When did you ever feel the way Wilbur does? Why?

3. The story takes place over the course of one year—spring, summer, fall, and winter and then spring again. Wilbur is born in the first spring; lives through the summer and into fall; and then Charlotte’s children are born in the second spring. On the farm, different things are done or happen during each season. Identify what these different things or events are. What are some of the different things that you do in each season? Why do they differ?
RESOURCES TO ENHANCE THE BOOK EXPERIENCE

READING GUIDES

- [https://www.superteacherworksheets.com/charlottes-web.html](https://www.superteacherworksheets.com/charlottes-web.html) (Grades 2-5) - Includes comprehension questions, word search, writing prompts and vocabulary activities.

EXTENSION TOPICS

LEARNING ABOUT SPIDERS

- Nonfiction materials on spiders
  - *National Geographic Readers: Spiders* by Laura Marsh
  - *Spiders: 101 Fun Facts & Amazing Pictures* by Janet Evans
  - *Spider’s Lunch: All About Garden Spiders* *(Penguin Young Readers)*
- Web resources on spiders
  - [http://www.sciencekids.co.nz/sciencefacts/animals/spider.html](http://www.sciencekids.co.nz/sciencefacts/animals/spider.html)
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ty-tZ7-TzSM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ty-tZ7-TzSM)

LEARNING ABOUT FARM LIFE

- Web resources on farm life
  - [https://www.sites.ext.vt.edu/virtualfarm/main.html](https://www.sites.ext.vt.edu/virtualfarm/main.html)
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hoMMe_kRK0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hoMMe_kRK0)
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqvXVd4jixk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqvXVd4jixk)
- Nonfiction materials on farm life
  - *Barnyard Kids: A Family Guide to Raising Animals* by Dina Rudick
  - *A Kids Guide to Keeping Chickens* by Melissa Caughey
  - *Farming* by Gail Gibbons
FURTHER DISCUSSION POINTS

CHARACTERS' FEELINGS ABOUT EVENTS:
As the action continues throughout the book, we can follow each character to see how he or she feels about what is happening. Such feelings can be shown by making a flow chart of the main events in the book and then discussing or charting how Wilbur, Charlotte, Fern or Templeton feel at that point and why.

HOW CHARACTERS GROW AND CHANGE:
As in most good stories, some characters grow and change as a result of the action. Other characters remain pretty much as they were from the beginning. Charlotte doesn't really change much in the story. She was a pretty wise creature at the beginning of the action and remains so throughout. Wilbur changes thanks to his friendship with Charlotte. Fern changes from a little girl who can understand what animals say to one who cares much more about Henry than the goings on in the barn. A discussion about who changes, how much, and why can be appropriate.

THE EFFECTS OF ADVERTISING:
We laugh at the gullibility of the public who take Charlotte's advertising campaign at face value, admiring the pig instead of the spider, and usually some students spot that phenomenon during the reading of the book. It's an easy step from there to a look at our own susceptibility to advertising campaigns. Devising a way to survey the effect of advertising on the purchases made by class members and their families can involve some careful problem solving and the results can be displayed in a variety of ways.
THEATRE ARTS ACTIVITIES

BEFORE AND AFTER (GRADES 2-6)

BEFORE THE PLAY:
Read Charlotte’s Web. With student input, establish the expectations for the upcoming play. What actions or events might be seen on stage? What characters might the play include from the book? Students may draw or write about what they anticipate seeing.

AFTER THE PLAY:
Revisit the expectations to see how many were realized. Discuss the similarities and differences from the book to the play, in terms of plot, characters, and action. Were the characters as portrayed on the stage faithful to the characters in the book? How or why? How would you describe the main “message” of the play? How was it similar or different from the book?

MONOLOGUE WRITING
(Grades 3-5)
Read Charlotte’s Web. Then have each student choose a character from book and write a short first-person monologue from the point of view of the character, retelling an event from the book. Such as, Wilbur’s first meeting with Charlotte. The students could then draw their version of the character and have the monologue written out with the picture to display. Or take it one step further and have the students perform the monologue as the character.

ROLE PLAYING
(Grades 1-4)
CHARLOTTE’S CHILDREN INTERVIEW WILBUR
After reading the book and seeing the play, test student understanding of character traits and story events by Charlotte’s Children interviewing Wilbur. Have one student pretend to be Wilbur (students can take turns playing this role.) Then, have the rest of the class represent Charlotte’s children who ask questions of Wilbur about their mother, Charlotte. Wilbur’s answers should be based on what the students learn about Charlotte through the play and the book. Charlotte’s children should remember that they are curious about their mother because they have not met her. Wilbur is their connection.
CHARACTER MOVEMENT

(Grades K-3)

There are many different farm animals in both the play and the book of Charlotte’s Web – Wilbur the pig, Uncle the pig, Templeton the rat, Goose, Gander, Sheep and of course, Charlotte the spider. Humans playing these roles as actors must take into consideration how to move on stage like their character, including how to move like an animal without losing their ability to move on stage safely and sustainably. Discuss with your students how these different characters and animals may move – fast, slow, angular, circular, small steps, big steps, etc. How may the actor form their body to fit more like a pig, sheep, rat, etc. Have students try creating frozen poses that show the different characters in the book. Challenge them to not just “get down on all fours” to create the animal. (This is not a sustainable position for an actor moving through a play and it is the first choice always made by young students.) Instead, get them to think about how much space each character takes up. Is their body round? Or is it angular? What is the most important part of the body moving through space? (A rat for example may lead their head or nose through space, while a pig may lead with his belly. Or the goose and gander are more upright and may waddle through space.) How is Uncle the pig and Wilbur the pig different? How can we show that with our bodies? Once students have created frozen poses with their bodies for a character see if they can move around the space as that character using the pose as a guide. How does their speed vary? Then, add a line or two to what the character might say as they walk through the space. The students have just created a character much the way an actor would do while working on a play.
CREATE A STATE FAIR BROCHURE
(GRADES 3-5)

Part of both the book and play of Charlotte’s Web is set at the County Fair. In this activity, students visit websites of different state fairs around the country and then create their own tri-fold brochure advertising a specific event or activity at the state fair.

**STEP ONE:** After students see the play and/or after reading Chapter 16 of the book, discuss the activities and events of a state fair. Also, you can discuss the history and reasons for having a state fair.

**STEP TWO:** Have students research different state fairs using the following websites:
- [http://www.nysfair.org/](http://www.nysfair.org/)
- [http://www.mnstatefair.org/](http://www.mnstatefair.org/)

**STEP THREE:** From these websites, have students choose one event from one state fair about which to create their own brochure. It may be useful to have examples of tri-fold brochures and to discuss the attributes of writing advertisements. The purpose is for students to create something that is exciting both in the writing and the illustration.

**STEP FOUR:** Have students plan and create a tri-fold brochure. It is useful to start with a piece of white paper that is folded into three parts.

**VARIATION:**
Instead of creating a tri-fold brochure, have the students create a billboard ad for the state fair. They could also create a "billboard ad" for the County Fair in Charlotte’s Web. In the ad, they should feature Zuckerman's pig.

**MORE INFORMATION ON THE HISTORY OF COUNTY & STATE FAIRS:**
- [http://content.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1916488,00.html](http://content.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,1916488,00.html)
CHARACTER TRAIT LESSONS

CHARLOTTE IS WISE, PATIENT, AND CARING

(Grades 3-5)

Overview

Students explore adjectives through a read-aloud and develop a working definition of the term. They list as many adjectives as they can, then combine them with "to be" verbs to create simple sentences. Next, they are introduced to character traits by putting the adjectives from their list in the context of a character from a shared reading. They then use an online chart to equate the character traits with specific actions the character takes. Finally, students "become" one of the major characters in a book and describe themselves and other characters, using Internet reference tools to compile lists of accurate, powerful adjectives supported with details from the reading. Students read each other's lists of adjectives and try to identify who is being described.

Full lesson plan:


Silhouette my character

Children can make silhouettes of the different characters in the book then, on those creations, put words to describe them. Model the activity with a silhouette of Wilbur and ask the class for some words to describe him. Place those words on the silhouette but then ask the children to find evidence in the story to support each one. Attach those explanations to the words. Their own silhouettes should bear similar words and defenses.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CURRICULUM & ACTIVITY LINKS

(Please review all links below before sharing with students)

- [http://www.abcteach.com/directory/basics/reading/charlottes_web/#7122](http://www.abcteach.com/directory/basics/reading/charlottes_web/#7122) includes template for students to create their own pig book and many other activities based on the Charlotte’s Web that have an emphasis on early reading skills (Grades K-2)

- [http://www.emints.org/ethemes/resources/S00000159.shtml](http://www.emints.org/ethemes/resources/S00000159.shtml) - website with links to sites about farm animals, kid friendly. (Grades 1-4)

- [http://www.emints.org/ethemes/resources/S00000358.shtml](http://www.emints.org/ethemes/resources/S00000358.shtml) - website with links to sites about spiders, kid friendly. (Grades 2-7)

- [http://www.emints.org/ethemes/resources/S00001277.shtml](http://www.emints.org/ethemes/resources/S00001277.shtml) - website with links to sites on friendship, kid friendly. (Grades 1-7)

- [http://www.enchantedlearning.com/classroom](http://www.enchantedlearning.com/classroom) - website with a lot of resources for lesson ideas and activities on farms, animals, spiders and pigs. (Elementary grades.)

- [http://olc.spsd.sk.ca/teachers/teacherresources.html](http://olc.spsd.sk.ca/teachers/teacherresources.html) - website with a lot of resources for teaching a friendship unit. (Elementary & Middle School grades)

- [http://edhelper.com/books/Charlottes_Web.htm](http://edhelper.com/books/Charlottes_Web.htm) - resources and lesson plans for unit on Charlotte’s Web. (Grades 4-6)

- [http://www.teachnet.com/lesson/langarts/charlotte061799.html](http://www.teachnet.com/lesson/langarts/charlotte061799.html) - lists a lot of creative ideas for lesson plans that use the book and/or play. (Grades vary.)

- [http://www.sedl.org/scimath/pasopartners/spiders/overview.html](http://www.sedl.org/scimath/pasopartners/spiders/overview.html) - a lesson plan (includes seven lessons) about spiders that integrates math, science and language arts. (Grade K-1)

- [http://www.cape.k12.mo.us/blanchard/hicks/Internet%20Pages/charlotteswebproj.htm](http://www.cape.k12.mo.us/blanchard/hicks/Internet%20Pages/charlotteswebproj.htm) - a website dedicated to a school-wide project based on Charlotte’s Web. It contains a lot of ideas for writing prompts and projects surrounding the reading of the book. (Elementary grades)

- [http://www.lessonplanspage.com/LAScienceArtCharlottePredictingWith45.htm](http://www.lessonplanspage.com/LAScienceArtCharlottePredictingWith45.htm) - contains many, many lesson plans using Charlotte’s Web. (Grades 4-5)

- [https://www.teachervision.com/charlottes-web](https://www.teachervision.com/charlottes-web) - links to lesson plans, extension ideas, printables, reading guides (Grades 2-6)
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

FURTHER READING

OTHER CHILDREN’S FICTION BY E.B. WHITE

- STUART LITTLE, 1945
- THE TRUMPET OF THE SWAN, 1970

CHAPTER BOOKS ABOUT ANIMALS, FARMS OR FRIENDSHIP
(Grades 4th-7th)

- Misty of Chincoteague by Wesley Dennis Henry
- Babe: The Gallant Pig by Dick King-Smith
- The Incredible Journey by Sheila Burnford
- The Cricket in Times Square by George Selden, Pictures by Garth Williams
- Because of Winn-Dixie by Kate DiCamillo
- The Sign of the Beaver by Elizabeth George Speare
- The View from Saturday by E.L. Konigsburg
- Anne of Green Gables by Lucy Maud Montgomery
- Strawberry Girl by Lois Lenski
- Sarah, Plain and Tall by Patricia MacLachlan
- Skylark by Patricia MacLachlan

EARLY CHAPTER BOOKS ABOUT FARMS, ANIMALS OR FRIENDSHIP
(Grades K-3rd)

- The Mercy Watson Series by Kate DiCamillo, Illustrated by Chris Van Dusen (A series of early chapter books starring a pig.)
- Frog And Toad Are Friends by Arnold Lobel
- Little Bear by Else Holmelund Minarik
- Billy and Blaze by C.W. Anderson
- Amanda Pig and Her Big Brother Oliver by Jean Van Leeuwen
- George and Martha by James Marshall
- The Animal Family by Randall Jarrell, Illustrated by Maurice Sendak
- Henry & Mudge by Cynthia Rylant