University of Wisconsin – La Crosse
Department of Theatre Arts

Charlotte’s Web
By Joseph Robinette
Based on the book by E. B. White

Resource Guide
April 4-6, 2018

Frederick Theatre, 100 Morris Hall
Located on the Corner of 16th & Vine Streets
How to Be a Good Audience Member

The UW-La Crosse Department of Theatre Arts encourages active participation during the children’s show performance of Charlotte’s Web. Children, teachers and chaperones are often seated on the stage to be close to the action. Don’t be surprised if we ask the children to yell or shout during the performance. However, we do ask that you prepare your students for the theatrical experience by teaching them to be good audience members.

- Do not play with or move the props that are on the stage. Having the props in their appropriate location allows for a successful production.
- Respect the actors and other audience members by listening quietly during the performance.
- Laugh (like crazy) when something funny happens. It’s okay to respond to the show.
- Show your appreciation to the actors and crew by applauding at the end of songs, scenes and especially at the end of the show.
- Stay in your seat until the play is over. Wait for your teacher to tell you where to go.
- Food, drinks, and candy are not allowed in the theatre.
- Most importantly, have fun and enjoy the show!
The Story

Wilbur is a newborn piglet. He may be the runt, but he has a BIG problem: how to avoid winding up on the butcher's block. Enter eight-year-old Fern Arable, who loves this funny-looking little fellow more than anything else in the world and can't bear the thought of losing him—or even worse, having him fried up crisp for breakfast one morning. So Fern decides to rescue Wilbur by selling him to her Uncle Homer for six dollars. Wilbur’s new home in Zuckerman’s barn is nice enough, but he’s homesick and lonely until he meets a beautiful gray spider named Charlotte, who wants to be his friend. When they learn that Wilbur is about to be slaughtered, Charlotte springs into action by weaving a series of miraculous words into her silky web. Charlotte’s astonishing feat transforms Wilbur into a TERRIFIC, RADIANT and HUMBLE pig whose newfound fame ensures that he will live out the rest of his days in the safety and comfort of his cozy old barn. But Charlotte’s own days are dwindling; she dies knowing that her life may have been short, but it was meaningful. In memory of his loyal and loving friend, Wilbur safeguards Charlotte's egg sac—her magnum opus—until 514 baby spiders emerge in the spring and the cycle of life on Zuckerman's farm begins anew.

The Characters

Fern Arable, a young girl
Mr. Arable, her father
Mrs. Arable, her mother
Avery Arable, her brother
Wilbur, a pig
Homer Zuckerman, Fern’s uncle
Edith Zuckerman, Fern’s aunt
Lurvy, a hired hand
Templeton, a rat
Goose, a farm animal
Gander, a farm animal
Sheep, a farm animal
Charlotte, a spider
Carter, chief reporter for the Weekly Chronicle
Uncle, a large pig
1st & 2nd Spectator, people at the County Fair
Fair President, County Fair President
Spider #1, #2 and #3, baby spiders
In 1939, author E.B. White moved his family from Manhattan to Maine, where he first encountered the barnyard animals he would later personify to perfection in Charlotte’s Web. White wrote the story to explain the harsh duality of life and death on a farm. “The tragedy of animal death by murder, which always haunts a farm, haunted me, and I guess I was trying to write my way out of the dilemma in the story of Charlotte, and with her able assistance.” White’s attempt to make peace with what he believed was a betrayal of the animal by the human results in the creation of an enduring classic work that was named by the Children’s Literature Association as one of the best American children’s books of the past 200 years.

Meet the Author

E.B. White, the author of such beloved children’s classics as Charlotte’s Web, Stuart Little and The Trumpet of the Swan, was born in Mount Vernon, New York on July 11, 1899. White had two brothers and three sisters, and his father was a piano manufacturer. He graduated from Cornell University in 1921 and, five or six years later, joined the staff of The New Yorker magazine. White authored more than 17 books of prose and poetry and was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1973. In addition to writing children’s books, White wrote books for adults, as well as writing poems and essays, and drawing sketches for The New Yorker magazine. Some of his other books include: One Man’s Meat, The Second Tree from the Corner, Letters of E.B. White, The Essays of E.B. White and Poems and Sketches of E.B. White.

Funnily enough for such a famous writer, he always said that he found writing difficult and bad for one’s disposition, but he kept at it!

White received 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.”

Source: http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/contributor/e-b-white
Before the Show—Discussion Questions

These introductory exercises are designed to prepare students for their visit to UW-La Crosse’s production of Charlotte’s Web. Try to complete as many as possible before seeing the production. The more they learn about what they’re going to see, the more benefit they are sure to derive from the experience.

1. Introduce E.B. White’s novel Charlotte’s Web to the class by either reading aloud, or asking students to read aloud.

2. Ask students to:
   a. Identify the main events of the plot, their causes, and their effects on future actions.
   b. Discuss the traits of major characters, their motivations and contributions to the dramatic action.
   c. Identify speakers or narrators.
   d. Talk about the story’s underlying themes or message.

3. Discuss the differences between realism and fantasy. Could any of these events really happen? Ask students to name other types of fantasy writing such as fairy tales, legends, fables and myths. Have them talk about what they like and dislike about this literary genre, identifying universal themes, character types, and actions.

4. Allow students to retell or dramatize this story by employing different vocal tones and attitudes to explore multiple possibilities in a live performance. (What will Wilbur and Charlotte sound like? How will they and the farm animals move? How might this differ from the human characters in the story?)

5. Ask students to make predictions about the play they’re going to see based upon their knowledge of the source text and its film adaptations, as well as other works by E. B. White they may have read or seen on film. For example, not every character in the book appears in the play. Which ones do you expect to see onstage? How do you imagine the Zuckerman’s farm and the County Fair will be recreated onstage? What will the animals look like? How do you imagine the scenery, costumes, and props? Will there be music? If so, how will it sound?

6. Listen for these vocabulary words in the play: runt, weakling, injustice, slops, surroundings, resident, charitable, commotion, trifle, glutton, goslings, Sulphur, salutations, restore, brutal, bloodthirsty, gamble, conspiracy, hysterics, exhausting, miracle, racket, satisfying, radiant, competition, personality, confident, humble, trough, rafters and medal.

7. FROM THE BOOK: “It is not often that someone comes along who is a true friend and a good writer.” What does this sentence mean to you?

8. Charlotte’s Web is set on a farm. Discuss farms and farm life with students especially ways in which a child’s life on a farm would be very different from living in a house or apartment.
After the Show—Discussion Questions

1. Discuss ways in which the play differed from students’ predictions, paying special attention to the difference between the book, stage and film versions.

2. Ask students to use the vocabulary of theatre to describe the performance.
   a. How did the actors look (costumes, makeup, movement)?
   b. How did the actors prepare to play animal roles?
   c. How did the stage look (scenery, lighting, props)?
   d. How did the play sound (music, singing, special effects)?

3. What does Fern learn about life and caring for animals from saving Wilbur as a runt?

4. What do Wilbur and Charlotte learn from each other about friendship?

5. Talk to students about adapting the book for the stage. What plot points did they recognize from the book? Were there any plot points or characters they missed? How different was the stage play from what they read and imagined?

ACTIVITIES

1. Give students an opportunity to create their own variations of the play:
   a. Tell the story from the point of view of another character.
   b. Choose another ending by rewriting the last scene.
   c. Add a brand new character and see what happens.
   d. Image a continuation: what happens after the last scene?

2. Ask students to recall the words that Charlotte wove into her web, and the order in which they appeared. Discuss the reasons why she might have chosen each word. Have student select words to describe Charlotte, Templeton, Fern and the other characters.

3. Dramatize original stories featuring other characters from the animal kingdom. Personify the objects by giving them names and human characteristics. Plan and present to the class as dramatic interpretations.

4. Have students imagine that they are reporters interviewing one of the human characters in the play about the amazing happenings on Zuckerman’s farm and at the County Fair. Write and present orally to the class a brief newspaper article containing descriptions of concrete sensory details to present and support their impressions of people, places, things or experiences.
Words, Words, Words!

Vocabulary Definitions

Below is a list of words used in the play that might be unfamiliar to your students. It is not essential that students know these words to comprehend the play, but understanding the words can enhance the experience for them. Have students work on their dictionary skills by looking up these words and using them in sentences.

ails   introduced   scheme
ceremony   lonesome   slop
commotion   paradise   spinneret
desperate   miserable   terrific
envy   raid   trifle
gander   radiant   weakling
hog house   runt   salutations
humble

Matching Words & Definitions

1. _______ Runt  a. a male goose
2. _______ Weakling  b. a greeting
3. _______ Injustice  c. unfair treatment or a situation in which the rights
4. _______ Salutations  of a person are ignored
5. _______ Gander  d. an organ of a spider for producing threads of silk
6. _______ Spinnerets  e. a decorative piece of cloth that is given to the winner
7. _______ Terrific  in a contest or competition
8. _______ Blue Ribbon  f. an animal that is smaller than average
9. _______ Schemer  g. a person who is involved in making a secret or
10. _______ Radiant  underhanded plan
11. _______ Slops  h. sending out light; shining or glowing brightly
                i. a person or animal that is physically weak or frail
                j. food fed to animals.
                k. extremely good
Word Search

T E M P L E T O N P G R L M T
A S J K L M N T Q S W A R Y Z
F R I E N D S H I P U T O P B
C X N M L Z I P H I Q A W A R
E F B V Y F O I P D L K M B T
G R Y S X A F K L E A Z G R U
A U N K W I L B U R Q I O P A
N S D F J R H G X Z K B V L M
D Y I O P Y W Q A F F E R N B
E Z P S H E E P T F D E A M L
R U N T J T K R L E S H D I S
E U T A L K A L S U J O I L E
L I G O O S E N D E V F A R M
S I E Y J O C A R E Y L N D S
R O L L M Z C H A R L O T T E

WILBUR  SPIDER  FERN
CHARLOTTE  FAIR  RAT
GANDER  RUNT  RADIANT
SHEEP  FARM  GOOSE
TEMPLETON  FRIENDSHIP

Vocabulary Word Unscramble

Rearrange the letters to form a word. Use the words in the text boxes to help you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Some pig</th>
<th>Terrific</th>
<th>Wilbur</th>
<th>Ribbon</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Glutton</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pig</td>
<td>Weakling</td>
<td>Runt</td>
<td>Humble</td>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>Friends</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. rfcietri ___________________  7. emhubl ___________________
2. bnbirn ___________________  8. tlrcaehlo ___________________
3. lgtlnout ___________________  9. utrn ___________________
4. rafi ___________________  10. igp ___________________
5. eoms gpi ___________________  11. rlwuib ___________________
6. gklwaien ___________________  12. dsifren ___________________
Activity: Friendship

“But I can face anything with friends like you. Friendship is one of the most satisfying things in the world.” – Wilbur

In *Charlotte’s Web*, Wilbur and Charlotte have a special and unusual friendship. Think about a friend of yours and answer these questions.

Friend’s Name__________________________________________

When did you meet?_______________________________________

How long have you been friends? ____________________________

What things do you and your friend have in common?
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

What interests do you have that are different?
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________

What does your friendship with this person mean to you?
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________
Activity: Understanding

Review the quotes below from the book, Charlotte’s Web. Have students choose one of the quotes and discuss what was happening in the story and what it means to them.

“I’ve got a new friend, all right. But what a gamble friendship is!”
— E.B. White, Charlotte’s Web

“By helping you, perhaps I was trying to lift up my life a trifle. Heaven knows anyone’s life can stand a little of that.”
— E.B. White, Charlotte’s Web

“With the right words, you can change the world.”
— E.B. White, Charlotte’s Web

“When your stomach is empty and your mind is full, it’s always hard to sleep.”
— E.B. White, Charlotte’s Web

“No one had ever had such a friend — so affectionate, so loyal, and so skillful.”
— E.B. White, Charlotte’s Web

“I don’t understand it, and I don’t like what I don’t understand.”
— E.B. White, Charlotte’s Web

“It is deeply satisfying to win a prize in front of a lot of people.”
— E.B. White, Charlotte’s Web

“Wilbur didn’t want food, he wanted love. He wanted a friend—someone who would play with him.”
— E.B. White, Charlotte’s Web

“Children almost always hang onto things tighter than their parents think they will.”
— E.B. White, Charlotte’s Web
Pig Facts

A male pig is called a boar. A female pig is called a gilt if she hasn’t had piglets yet and a sow if she has.

Pigs are very intelligent and learn quickly. They pick up tricks faster than dogs. Pigs rank #4 in animal intelligence behind chimpanzees, dolphins and elephants.

A sow can give birth to a litter containing 7 to 12 piglets, about twice a year. Weaning occurs at three months of age, but young pigs continue to live with their mothers. Two or more sows usually join together in an extended family.

Pigs are much more tolerant of cold than heat. Pigs have no sweat glands, so they can’t sweat. They roll around in the mud to cool their skin. The layer of dried mud protects their skin from the sun. If available, pigs, who are great swimmers, prefer water to mud.

Some pigs have straight and some have curly tails.

Pigs have a great sense of smell. Their powerful but sensitive snout is a highly developed sense organ. Pigs also have a great field of vision, because their eyes are on the sides of their heads.

A pig can run a 7 minute mile.
Spider Facts

Spiders are not insects. Insects have three body parts and six legs. Spiders have eight legs and two body parts, the abdomen and the thorax. Spiders have exoskeletons, or skeletons on the outside of their bodies (like skin).

Spiders have silk spinning glands called spinnerets, at the tip of their abdomen. Not all spiders spin webs.

There are more than 30,000 species of spiders. Spiders belong to the Arachnid family.

Most spiders have either six or eight eyes and fangs through which venom is ejected.

Fear of spiders is called Arachnophobia. It is one of the most common fears among humans.

Tarantulas shed their furry skin as they grow, leaving behind what looks just like another tarantula.

Spiders eat many types of harmful insects, helping to keep your garden free of pests.

Most spiders are very nearsighted. To make up for this, they use the hair on their body to feel their way around and to sense when other animals are near.

Webs get dirty and torn, so lots of spiders make a new one every day. They don’t waste the old one, though-- they roll it up into a ball and eat it!

Male spiders are usually smaller than female spiders.
Activity: Barnyard Math

Solve these farm puzzles. Remember to show your work in the space provided!

1. The goose lays eight eggs, but one does not hatch. How many goslings are born?

2. Lots of animals have come to the County Fair. There are twice as many horses as cows. There are twice as many cows as sheep. There are three times as many sheep as pigs. If there are two pigs, Wilbur and Uncle, how many horses are there?

3. Charlotte’s egg sac contains five hundred fourteen eggs. If three young spiders stay on the farm, how many spiders hatch and fly away?

4. Wilbur’s brothers and sisters come to visit with their families. If Wilbur has eight brothers and sisters and they each have seven piglets, how many pigs come to visit the farm?

5. Wilbur is a little slower than some pigs, so it takes him eight minutes to run a mile. If Wilbur runs for an hour, how far will he run? (Hint: there are sixty minutes in an hour).
Activity: Coloring Pages

[Image of a pig in a farmyard with a spider in the background]
Activity: Fly Maze

Help the spider get to the fly.
Activity: Dot to Dot
Activity: Color by Letter

W = Black  E = Gray  B = Red  S = Purple
Word Search Answer Key

WILBUR
CHARLOTTE
GANDER
SHEEP
TEMPLETON
SPIDER
FAIR

RUNT
FARM
FRIENDSHIP
FERN
RAT
RADIANT
GOOSE