
Charlotte's Web

Written by E. B. White

STORY SUMMARY

Eight-year-old Fern Arable is frantic when she learns that her father plans to kill the runt of the litter of pigs born the previous night. She strongly argues the unfairness of this act and finally succeeds in convincing her father to spare the pig's life. In return, she promises to care for the animal. As the weeks go by, Fern keeps to her word and is deeply attentive to her charge. She showers him with love and special treatment.

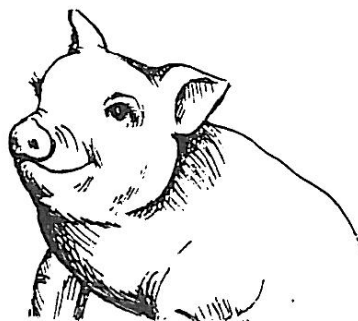
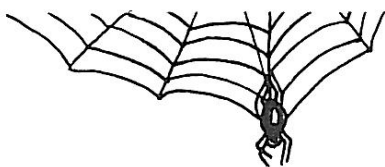
When Wilbur reaches the age of five weeks, Mr Arable firmly insists that the pig is to be sold. Fern's uncle, Mr Zuckerman, agrees to buy the pig and to keep him in his barn. Because her uncle's farm is nearby, Fern is able to visit Wilbur frequently. Wilbur welcomes the visits from Fern, but when she is not there, he is lonely. He wishes that some of the barnyard animals would befriend him. One day he meets a beautiful and clever spider named Charlotte A. Cavatica, who also resides in the barnyard. Wilbur begins a special friendship with Charlotte.

Charlotte becomes aware that Mr Zuckerman intends to fatten Wilbur for the kill. She enlists the help of Templeton, the rat, and devises an ingenious plan to save Wilbur's life. Working with great effort and skill, Charlotte weaves words that describe Wilbur in the web over his pen. First "Some Pig" appears—then "Terrific", followed by "Radiant". Wilbur becomes an instant celebrity!

As the day of the County Fair approaches, Wilbur is delighted. He hopes to win a prize and to prove to Mr Zuckerman that he is worthy of having a long life. Although Charlotte's health is failing, she accompanies Wilbur to the fair. When Wilbur is out-classed by Uncle, a larger pig, Charlotte works her magic one more time. She weaves the word "Humble" over Wilbur's pen. The visitors to the fair are impressed by Wilbur, and Wilbur finds himself the recipient of a special award.

Although assured that his future will be long, Wilbur is saddened by the decline in Charlotte's health. She reveals to him that she will not be able to return to the farm with him. Wilbur quickly acts to repay Charlotte's friendship. He brings her egg sac to the farm so that her children can be safely hatched in the spring.

In the spring, Charlotte's children finally hatch. Wilbur becomes frantic as he watches most of the babies fly away; however, three decide to stay in the barn, and Wilbur is happy to have them nearby. Although Wilbur is now more independent and has many friends, he is delighted every spring to have some of Charlotte's descendants remain with him in the barnyard. They provide him with a living remembrance of Charlotte, his special and true friend.



Meet the Author

E(lwyn) B(rooks) White



E. B. White was born in Mount Vernon, New York, U.S.A. on 11 July, 1899. He was the son of a manufacturer and as a youth enjoyed a pleasant, suburban lifestyle. After graduating from Cornell University in 1921, he worked as a reporter and free-lance writer.

In 1927 E. B. White joined the staff of *The New Yorker* magazine. He remained an essayist for that magazine for the rest of his life. From 1938 to 1943 he also wrote a monthly column for *Harper's* magazine.

Some of E. B. White's adult works include *Points of My Compass*, *One Man's Meat*, *The Second Tree from the Corner* and *Poems and Stories from E. B. White*. One of his most important works was done in collaboration with William Strunk, Jr. Their *Elements of Style* became a standard work on American English usage.

First published in 1935, it has been revised many times.

Several of E. B. White's children's books are now considered classics. In 1945 *Stuart Little* was published. It is the story of a mouse born to a human family. White had gotten the idea several years earlier while daydreaming on a train. The idea grew into the finished story over a period of twelve years! *Charlotte's Web*, a Newbery Honour Book, was published in 1952. It is the story of Wilbur, a loveable pig, who is saved from slaughter by his loyal friend Charlotte, a spider. Another popular children's book by White is *The Trumpet of the Swan*, published in 1970. It is about a swan who compensates for his lack of a voice by playing the trumpet.

E. B. White always loved animals and felt especially at peace in a barn. He had many pleasant memories and wanted to bring his impressions to life. Many of the characters in his books were based on those memories. For example, although he believed the deliberate killing of animals to be necessary, it always bothered him. It was this feeling that prompted him to write *Charlotte's Web*.

In 1978 E. B. White was awarded a special Pulitzer Prize. It was presented to him in recognition of the body of his work. He died on 1 October, 1985.

Pre-Reading Activities

Spiders

Spiders belong to a class of arthropods called arachnids. Arthropods are animals without backbones that have a segmented body, jointed limbs and a shell that is shed from time to time as the animal grows. Insects are also arthropods, but they differ from spiders and other arachnids—scorpions, ticks and mites—in several ways. Spiders have eight legs; insects have six. Spiders' bodies are divided into two parts, insects' bodies are divided into three parts. Spiders have no antennae; insects do.

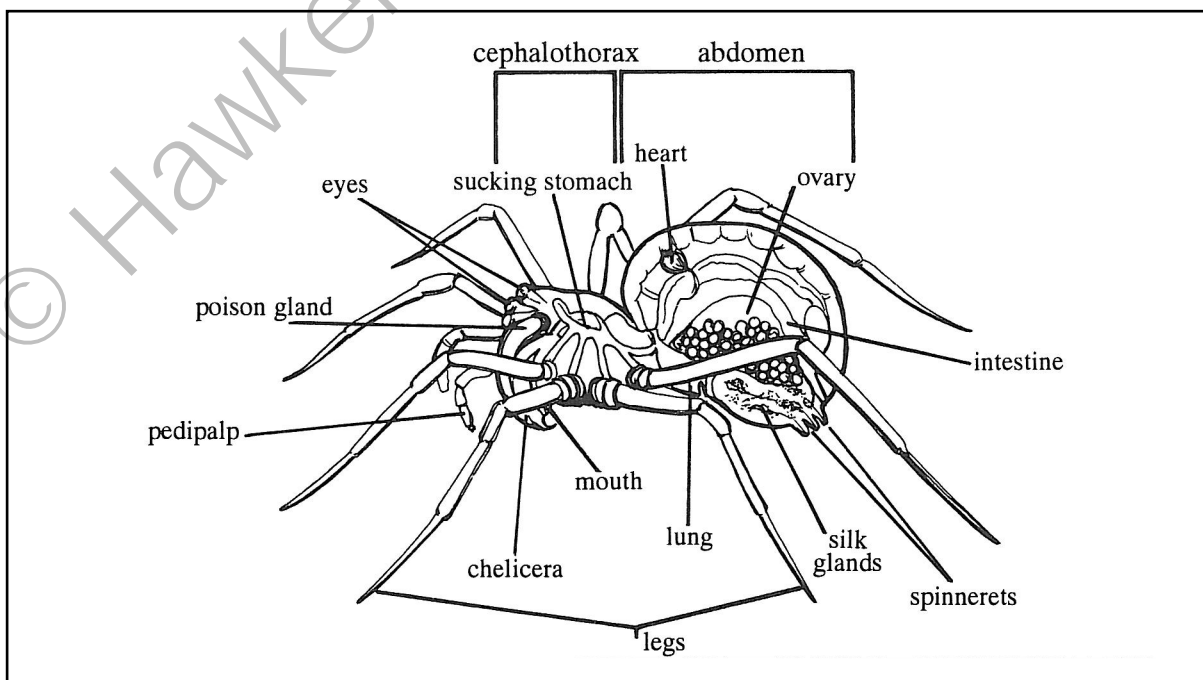
Spiders prey mostly upon other arthropods, especially insects. Some have excellent eyesight and are active hunters who overpower their prey. Many others build silk snares, or webs, to capture their prey. They make the silk from special glands in their bodies. Spiders' spinnerets work like fingers to weave silken threads.

Orb webs can be very beautiful. These round webs are woven in open places, between flower stems or between the branches of trees. Threads of dry silk are stretched from the centre to the outside, like the spokes of a wheel. Sticky silk connects the threads and traps the insect that is unlucky enough to land on it. When this happens, the spider can feel the vibration of the sticky thread. The spider runs out on a dry line and wraps the prey in silk. Some spiders inject venom into their prey to kill it before eating it.

There are many thousands of different kinds of spiders. They have been found on all continents, in all kinds of habitats. Their sizes range from as tiny as 1 millimetre to about 9 centimetres.

The life spans of spiders vary greatly. Many live only one year. Others, like the tarantula, may live for twenty years! Most female spiders carry their eggs in a protective egg sac made of silk. The young usually number from 20 to 100, but it can be less or even much more.

Spider Anatomy



Vocabulary

Chapters Seventeen and Eighteen: *Uncle and The Cool of the Evening*

Match the vocabulary words on the left to the definitions on the right. Place the correct letter.

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| ___ 1. blatting | A. vigour |
| ___ 2. caution | B. not proud; modest |
| ___ 3. core | C. seating at an athletic event |
| ___ 4. energy | D. sharp; vivid |
| ___ 5. enormous | E. indifferent; lacking energy |
| ___ 6. fiercely | F. to warn about great danger |
| ___ 7. grandstand | G. bred from members of same recognised breed |
| ___ 8. humble | H. qualities and traits of an individual |
| ___ 9. keen | I. ferociously; severely |
| ___ 10. listless | J. to smile with an expression of scorn |
| ___ 11. masterpiece | K. crying like a sheep |
| ___ 12. midway | L. person who forms plans |
| ___ 13. personality | M. centre of some fruits |
| ___ 14. purebred | N. place for amusements at a fair |
| ___ 15. schemer | O. the greatest work of an artist or craftsman |
| ___ 16. sneer | P. huge |

At the Fair

Have you ever visited a fair or a carnival? Describe the sights and sounds that you recall. Use vocabulary words from the first part of this activity in your story.

— Cooperative-Learning Activity —

Friendship

Near the end of the story, Charlotte said to Wilbur, “You have been my friend. That in itself is a tremendous thing.” Most people feel that friends are a very valuable part of their lives. With your cooperative-learning group, discuss the following aspects of friendship. Remember the responses should represent the consensus of the group.

What are the most important things you consider in choosing friends?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Do you think that these things might change in the future? Why? How?

What are some reasons that people lose friends?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Why are friends important?
