

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> .....	3
<b>How to Use This Book</b> .....	4
A Custom Resource – Keeping Novel Logs – Complete Lesson Plan	
<b>Novel Information</b> .....	7
Book Summary – About the Author and Illustrator – Make It a Text Set!	
<b>Pre-Reading Activity</b> .....	8
“What Is a Friend?”	
<b>Interactive Novel Logs</b> .....	9
“Challenge Words” – “A Picture’s Worth” – “Section Summary” – “I Predict”	
<b>Sections from <i>Charlotte’s Web</i></b>	
<i>Section I: Chapters 1–3</i> .....	13
Teacher Instructions – <i>Collaborative: “Jumping into the Story”</i> – <i>Individual: “A Sense of Place”</i> – <i>Individual: “Introducing Wilbur”</i> – <i>Individual: “Section I Log-In”</i>	
<i>Section II: Chapters 4–6</i> .....	19
Teacher Instructions – <i>Collaborative: “A Lonely Day”</i> – <i>Individual: “Nature’s Helpers”</i> – <i>Individual: “New Friends”</i> – <i>Individual: “Section II Log-In”</i>	
<i>Section III: Chapters 7–9</i> .....	24
Teacher Instructions – <i>Individual: “Wilbur’s Problem”</i> – <i>Individual: “Back at the Arables”</i> – <i>Collaborative: “Charting Character Traits”</i> – <i>Individual: “My Side of the Story”</i> – <i>Individual: “Section III Log-In”</i>	
<i>Section IV: Chapters 10–12</i> .....	30
Teacher Instructions – <i>Individual: “Building Suspense”</i> – <i>Individual: “The Structure of a Scene”</i> – <i>Collaborative: “Web of Effects”</i> – <i>Collaborative: “Not So Lonely Anymore”</i> – <i>Individual: “Friendship”</i> – <i>Individual: “Section IV Log-In”</i>	
<i>Section V: Chapters 13–14</i> .....	37
Teacher Instructions – <i>Individual: “Perseverance”</i> – <i>Collaborative: “Terrific Changes”</i> – <i>Individual: “The Right Word”</i> – <i>Individual: “Why Worry?”</i> – <i>Individual: “Section V Log-In”</i>	
<i>Section VI: Chapters 15–17</i> .....	43
Teacher Instructions – <i>Individual: “The Power of Words”</i> – <i>Individual: “I Don’t Want to Go!”</i> – <i>Collaborative: “Not According to Plan”</i> – <i>Individual: “Uncle’s Web”</i> – <i>Individual: “Section VI Log-In”</i>	
<i>Section VII: Chapters 18–20</i> .....	49
Teacher Instructions – <i>Individual: Charlotte’s – Work”</i> – <i>Individual: What – Character”</i> – <i>Individual: Changes”</i> – <i>Collaborative: Talking about Changes”</i> – <i>Individual: “Wilbur’s Triumph”</i> – <i>Individual: Section VII Log-In”</i>	
<i>Section VIII: Chapters 21–22</i> .....	56
Teacher Instructions – <i>Individual: Goodbye, Old Friend”</i> – <i>Individual: Seasons of – Change”</i> – <i>Individual / Collaborative: Growing Up”</i> – <i>Individual: Section – III Log-In”</i>	

# TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONT.)

<b>Post-Reading Activities</b> .....	61
Teacher Instructions – <i>Individual: "An Important Event"</i> – <i>Individual: "What If?"</i> – <i>Collaborative: "A Novel Poster"</i> – <i>Individual: "Some Pig News"</i> – <i>Individual: "Write an Opinion Essay"</i> – <i>Individual: "Get the Facts"</i> – <i>Individual: "Talk to the Animals"</i> – <i>Individual: "My Book Rating"</i>	
<b>Words to Know</b> .....	74
Teacher Instructions – Novel Vocabulary	
<b>Answer Key</b> .....	76

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# INTRODUCTION

Read through any curricular documents, and you will find that the work expected of students is expressed using such academic terminology as *describe*, *determine*, *develop*, *support* and *cite*. Requirements such as these cannot be met via the comprehension-question worksheets and culminating quizzes that have long been the staples of literature guides designed for classroom use. The primary objective of those traditional activities was to make sure that students were keeping track of what was happening in the section of the novel that they had just read. Very little rigour and synthesis was asked of students – and usually none until the entire novel was read.

From a teacher's standpoint, this style of classroom analysis misses multiple opportunities to delve deeply into the details that make a specific piece of literature a classic. From a student's standpoint, this way to reflect on literature is monotonous and inflexible, and it fails to nurture the momentum experienced when one is invested in a compelling work of art. That is why the guides in the *Rigorous Reading* series aim to do much more: they aim to transform the reading of a great novel into a journey of discovery for students.

Instead of merely asking students what happened in any given section, this resource asks questions that require closer reading and deeper analysis – questions such as, "Why did the author choose to include this information?" and "How does this information further the plot or offer more insight into the themes, characters, settings, etc.?" And instead of waiting until the end of the novel to put the pieces of the puzzle in place, students will learn to add to and alter their understanding of the novel as they are reading it. The various activities in this resource systematically prompt students to consider and appreciate the many ingredients the author has combined to form the novel as a whole.

## A CUSTOM RESOURCE

This in-depth guide has been written specifically for E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web*. The lessons and activities have been structured and scaffolded to maximise the experience of reading and teaching this novel.

To prepare your students for their reading of *Charlotte's Web*, utilise the **novel information** and **pre-reading activity** included on pages 7–8 of this guide. Included in this section is information about the book and its author and illustrator, along with an activity designed to acclimate students to the themes present in the book they are about to read.

This resource provides activities that help foster comprehension and reinforce knowledge of literary elements as students read *Charlotte's Web*. These **section activities** allow students the opportunity to process short sections of the novel individually, laying a strong foundation for their ability to engage more deeply with the chapters to come. For each section of the novel, students will complete individual and collaborative activities that encourage close reading, referencing textual evidence and drawing their own conclusions about the text.

Additionally, this resource provides students with another avenue through which they can reflect on recurring literary elements, while also connecting personally with the novel. Each student maintains his or her own **Interactive Novel Log**, using it as a way to consider and then reconsider various aspects of the novel.

Upon completion of the entire novel, students can synthesise their ideas about the novel by completing several individual and/or collaborative **post-reading activities** (pages 61–73). This section of the resource includes such larger assignments as group projects, essay assignments and research projects.

On pages 74–75, **vocabulary** lists are provided for each section of the novel, along with suggestions for ways to teach vocabulary during reading and after completing the novel.

At the end of this guide, an **answer key** is provided for activities that require specific answers.

### Key Notes

For a description of Interactive Novel Logs and how to use them in your classroom, see page 5 of this guide.

An ideal way to use this resource would be to follow the complete lesson plan given on page 6 of this guide.

The use of multiple texts can help build and extend knowledge about a theme or topic. It can also illustrate the similarities and differences in how multiple authors approach similar content or how an individual author approaches multiple novels. See the bottom of page 7 for suggestions about using *Charlotte's Web* as part of a text set.

When teaching other novels in your classroom, consider using the specific ideas and also the general approach presented in this resource. Ask students to mine small sections of a novel for clues to theme and characterisation. Examine the craft, structure and purpose of selected passages. Explore inferences and encourage connections.

This guide is designed for use in years 3–5. This levelling has been determined through the consideration of various educational metrics. However, teacher discretion should be used to determine if the novel and guide are appropriate for lower or higher years, as well.

# KEEPING NOVEL LOGS

Great works of literature are complex texts, and complex texts are multi-layered. They enrich and reveal as they go along. Successful readers are those who “go along” with the novel, too. Interactive Novel Logs give students a place and a space to record their thoughts and observations as they journey through the book. After each section of the novel is read, students use their Interactive Novel Logs to track the introduction and development of such literary elements as plot, setting, theme, characterisation, craft and structure, while also choosing their own ways to connect the novel to their own life experiences.

### Materials needed for each student:

- ✦ a three-ring binder or presentation folder
- ✦ a blank sheet of plain paper with holes punched for the title page
- ✦ two or three sheets of blank lined paper for the Table of Contents
- ✦ several extra sheets of paper (both lined and plain) for student’s responses to the “Ideas for Your Interactive Log” prompts at the end of each section

### Key Notes

One Interactive Novel Log can be kept for multiple novels, in which case a larger three-ring binder will be needed. If it will be used only for the activities included in this guide for *Charlotte’s Web*, a smaller binder or presentation folder will be adequate.

### Assembling the Interactive Novel Log:

1. On the plain paper, allow students to design and decorate their own title page. Have them write “Interactive Novel Log” and “*Charlotte’s Web*” in the middle of the page. They should include their name and class at the bottom.
2. Add blank lined paper for the Table of Contents. Have students write “Table of Contents” at the top. They will add to this list as they create new pages.



3. Before reading each section of the novel, photocopy and distribute new copies of the Interactive Novel Log worksheets (pages 9–12). Directions for completing these activities can be found in the “Teacher Instructions” that begin Section I.
4. For the final activity in each section, photocopy and distribute the “Section Log-In” page for the section. Follow the directions given. Students select one or more of the four topics in the “Ideas for Your Interactive Novel Log” section and create an Interactive Novel Log page that responds to that topic.

5. After the class has completed the entire novel and the post-reading activities, you may have students include the “My Book Rating” worksheet (page 73) as a final entry in their Interactive Novel Logs.

## NOVEL INFORMATION

### Book Summary

Published in 1952, *Charlotte's Web* tells the story of a friendship between a young pig named Wilbur and a remarkable spider named Charlotte. The novel begins with a little farm girl, Fern, rushing out to save a newborn pig from her father's axe. This dramatic opening hints at what will become the central focus of the novel – saving Wilbur's life.

After his first blissful months in the care of Fern, Wilbur is sold to the Zuckermans and moves to the barn cellar where he feels lonely and sad. His desperation for love draws the attention of Charlotte, a wise and caring spider who will become a loyal friend. When Wilbur finds out he is destined to become bacon and ham, Charlotte promises to save his life and comes up with an ingenious way to trick the humans.

Charlotte weaves words into her web and convinces the human world that Wilbur is a special pig. The web also brings together all the animals in the barn as they offer encouragement and help with Charlotte's plans. Not only does Charlotte trick the humans, but she also helps Wilbur to develop confidence and maturity. Charlotte's final act of loyalty comes when she agrees to travel to the fair with Wilbur to make one more web before the two must say goodbye forever.

*Charlotte's Web* was named a Newbery Honour book in 1953. It touches on themes of friendship, love, growing up, perseverance, life and death, and sacrifice.

### About the Author and Illustrator

**E.B. White** was a highly influential American writer, known for his essays and articles, as well as the still-popular *Strunk and White Elements of Style*. Born on 11 July 1899, in New York, he spent most of his career writing for *The New Yorker*. *Charlotte's Web* is one of only three children's books he authored. White owned a farmhouse in Maine, where he enjoyed spending time and watching the animals, including spiders. His body of work led to his winning the 1978 Pulitzer Prize in the category of Special Awards and Citations. White died on 1 October 1985.

**Garth Williams** (1912–1996) was a prolific illustrator of children's books. He first collaborated with E.B. White in 1945 for White's first children's novel, *Stuart Little*. His memorable illustrations serve to reinforce or enhance the literary elements in the story.

### Make It a Text Set!

The following novels can form ideal text sets with *Charlotte's Web*. (**Note:** Vet books in advance to ensure they are appropriate for your students.)

Other Novels by E.B. White	Books by Other Authors
<p><i>Stuart Little</i> (1945)</p> <p><i>The Trumpet of the Swan</i> (1970)</p>	<p><i>Babe: The Gallant Pig</i> by Dick King-Smith</p> <p><i>Fantastic Mr Fox</i> by Roald Dahl</p> <p><i>The One and Only Ivan</i> by Katherine Applegate</p>