

Charlotte's Web

Recommended for Grades 2-5

Book Summary: Charlotte's Web

Fern is a young girl who lives on a farm. One morning she sees her father heading outside with an axe. When she finds out he means to kill a runt pig, she is horrified. She begs him to let her keep the pig. He relents and she takes care of the little pig and names him Wilbur. Wilbur survives and becomes a healthy pig. Fern's father says they must sell the pig. Fern is devastated because she loves him. Finally, it is agreed they will sell the pig to her uncle who lives just up the road. Fern visits Wilbur every day after school. Things seem perfect until one of the geese tells Wilbur that the farmer is fattening him up so that they can eat him for Christmas. Wilbur is horrified. Things seem hopeless until a spider named Charlotte steps in.

[SPOILER] Charlotte is a very intelligent spider. She decides she will write a word in her web about how great Wilbur is. When she does, people come from all over to see. She writes another word in her web. People are so amazed that they decide Wilbur should be in the local fair. Wilbur begs Charlotte, who is now his best friend, to go with him. She agrees. Charlotte writes one more word in her web at the fair. Wilbur doesn't win, but instead gets a special prize. It seems certain that he will never be butchered by the farmer now. While they are at the fairgrounds, Charlotte lays her egg sac. She tells Wilbur she is too tired to go back to the farm with him. She is dying. Wilbur is so sad, but he decides to bring her egg sac with him so he can be with her babies.

Author Biography: E. B. White

E. B. White stands for Elwyn Brooks White. He never liked the name Elwyn. When he was in college, his friends started calling him Andy, which is what he went by for the rest of his life. He was born in New York on July 11, 1899. His father was a piano maker. He had two brothers and three sisters. His family was comfortable, but not wealthy. White attended Cornell University, where he worked on the school newspaper. After graduating he worked for several newspapers before getting a job as a writer and editor with the New Yorker Magazine.

E. B. White married Katherine, one of his coworkers at the magazine, and they bought a farmhouse in Maine. It is there that he gained most of his inspiration for his books. He wrote for both children and adults, but it is his children's books that he gained most of his fame from. His most notable titles are Charlotte's Web, The Trumpet of the Swan, and Stuart Little.

White died on October 1, 1985 at his home in Maine. He suffered from Alzheimer's.



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Discussion Questions: Charlotte's Web

1. Fern's father planned to kill Wilbur because he was a runt. What do you think about this? Can you see his point-of-view? Can you see Fern's?
2. Wilbur becomes very sad on a rainy day when Fern doesn't come. He asks all the animals to play, but they are all busy. He really just wants a friend. He is so upset he can't eat. Have you felt that way? Do you think having friends is that important? Why?
3. Wilbur the pig and Charlotte the spider become friends even though they are very different. Do you think people who are very different can become good friends? What do you think makes a good friendship?
4. The old sheep tells Wilbur that the farmer plans to fatten him up to kill and eat him. Wilbur becomes hysterical. If you were going to die, would you want to know ahead of time or would it be better not to know? Why?
5. When Charlotte writes 'Some Pig' in her web, everyone is amazed by Wilbur. Why does no one think Charlotte is amazing for writing in her web? Do you think this makes sense? Why or why not?
6. Mrs. Arable is worried about Fern spending so much time in the barn with the animals. She goes to a doctor who says that it is entirely possible an animal has spoken to him, but he didn't hear it because he wasn't paying attention. Do you think it is possible that animals talk but we don't hear them because we don't pay attention? Why or why not?
7. Charlotte goes to the fair with Wilbur even though she knows she needs to lay her eggs. Do you think she does the right thing? Why or why not?
8. Templeton is often very selfish and greedy. Yet without him, Wilbur's life would not have been saved, and Charlotte's egg sac couldn't have come back to the farm. What is more important, the kind of person you are or the things you do? Why do you think so?
9. At the end of this story Charlotte dies all alone. Do you think her death makes it a sad story? Why or why not?
10. Each year the spiders die and their babies come. Some of them stay in the barn & Wilbur is friends with them. Would it be hard to be friends if you know your friendship could only last a year before they were gone? Why?



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