CHARLOTTE'S WEB

TOOLKIT

EXPERIENCE THE a.r.t.

2017/18 Season

Welcome!

We are so excited to meet you on the farm for **Charlotte's Web** at the American Repertory Theater! We have put together this Toolkit for students and teachers of all ages to learn more about the story of **Charlotte's Web**, including: Author E.B. White and his inspiration, the characters and themes of the story, adapting books into plays, life on the farm, and more!

In **Charlotte's Web**, we follow the journey of Wilbur, a friendly pig learning do deal with his fears and make connections with his peers. Surrounded by a colorful stable of creatures with different personalities at the Zuckerman Farm, Wilbur meets Charlotte and learns the importance of friendship, teamwork, and coping with loss.

Through a combination of articles and activities, we hope this Toolkit helps integrate deeper learning and conversation in your classroom with students, over dinner with your children, or just for yourself!

See you at the theater!

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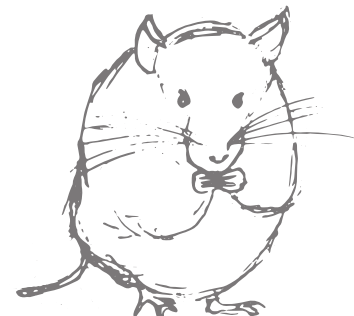
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Thank you for participating in the A.R.T. Education Experience!

If you have questions about using this Toolkit in your class, or to schedule an A.R.T. teaching artist to visit your classroom, contact A.R.T. Education and Community Programs at:

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617.496.2000x8891

Charlotte's Web: The A.R.T. Production

A.R.T. Kids Company students at a rehearsal for the A.R.T. Institute production of *Charlotte's Web.*

Photo: Evgenia Eliseeva

This section of the Toolkit looks at the many pieces that make-up the A.R.T. production of **Charlotte's Web**. First, a summary of E.B. White's classic story (pages 5–6), before a quick glance at the colorful characters in the book and play (pages 7–8). Next, Director Dmitry Troyanovsky talks about his inspirations as a director of family theater (pages 9–10). Finally, explore the concept of adaptation and the challenges of transferring a book to the stage (pages 12–13).

The Story of *Charlotte's Web*

Summary by David Lynch

Reading Level: 3rd grade+*

A litter of pigs are born at the Arable farm. One pig is the **runt** of the litter. To save him from being slaughtered, a **nurturing** young girl named Fern adopts him and names him Wilbur. However, as Wilbur grows he gets too big for Fern's home and Fern has to give him up. Wilbur is then moved to a new farm owned by Fern's uncle Homer Zuckerman, filled with a whole new bunch of animals. There, the animals tell him that he will probably get slaughtered because he's a runt.

To save him, a spider named Charlotte befriends Wilbur and begins to weave interesting words describing Wilbur into her webs. Because these webs were so surprising and **magnificent**, everyone begins to think that Wilbur is a "miracle pig." The owner of the farm, Mr. Zuckerman, **vows** not to kill Wilbur.

VOCAB!*

runt
   the smallest animal in a litter
nurturing
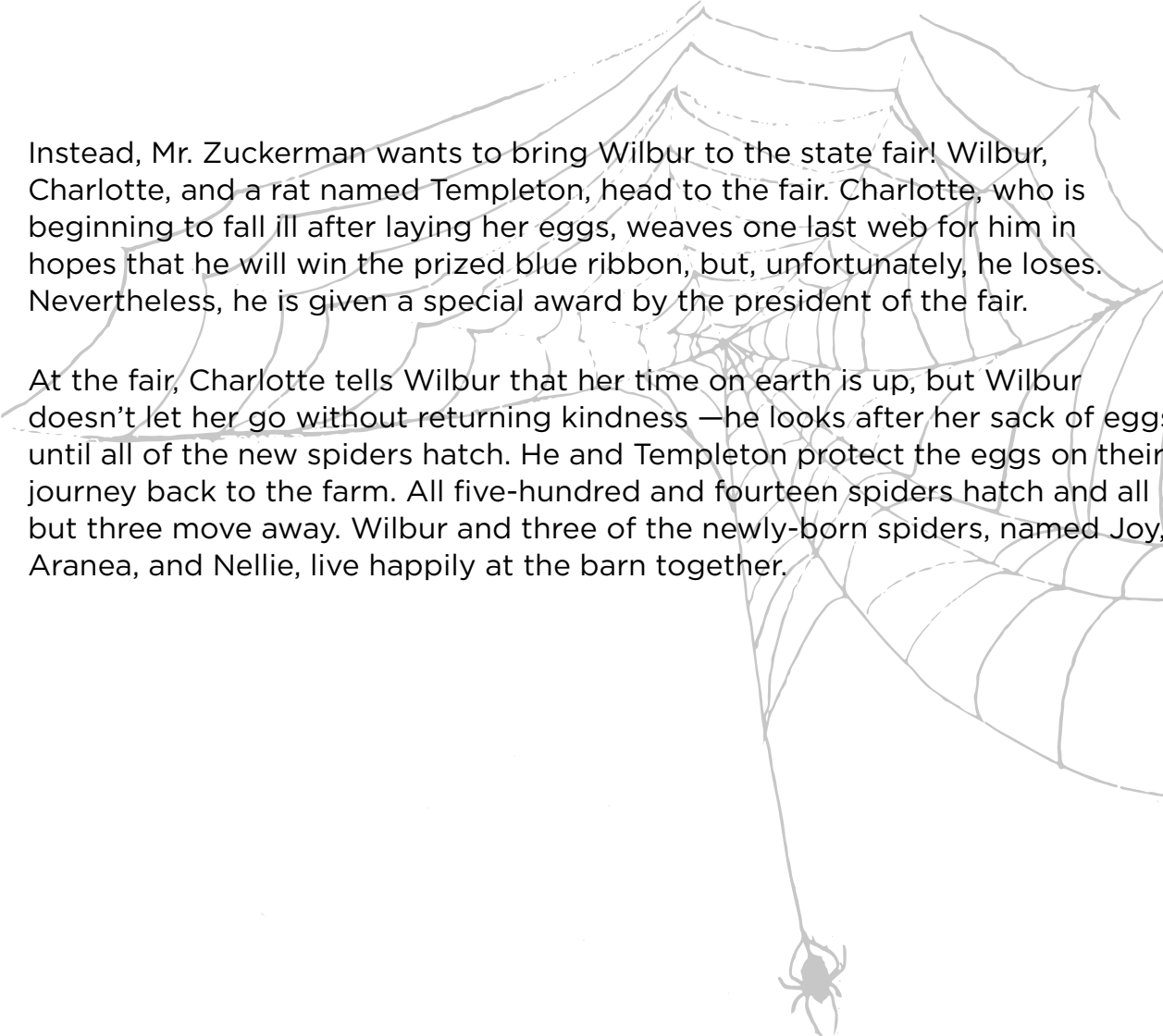   to be caring and affectionate
magnificent
   very good; amazing
vows
   promises

THE A.R.T. PRODUCTION

Reading level-appropriate vocabulary words are bolded within the text and defined in the yellow "VOCAB" fields.

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Instead, Mr. Zuckerman wants to bring Wilbur to the state fair! Wilbur, Charlotte, and a rat named Templeton, head to the fair. Charlotte, who is beginning to fall ill after laying her eggs, weaves one last web for him in hopes that he will win the prized blue ribbon, but, unfortunately, he loses. Nevertheless, he is given a special award by the president of the fair.

At the fair, Charlotte tells Wilbur that her time on earth is up, but Wilbur doesn't let her go without returning kindness —he looks after her sack of eggs until all of the new spiders hatch. He and Templeton protect the eggs on their journey back to the farm. All five-hundred and fourteen spiders hatch and all but three move away. Wilbur and three of the newly-born spiders, named Joy, Aranea, and Nellie, live happily at the barn together.
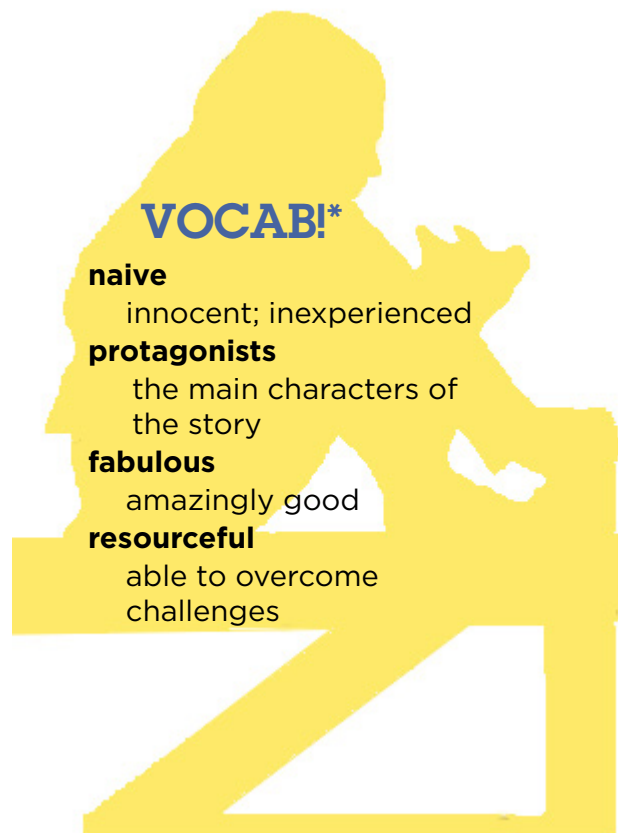
Who's Who in *Charlotte's Web*

Reading Level: 3rd grade+*

FERN ARABLE: A kind young girl who saves Wilbur from being slaughtered. She looks after Wilbur until she's forced to give him up to her uncle, Homer Zuckerman.

WILBUR: A small, **naive** pig. Wilbur is curious about the world and becomes great friends with the spider, Charlotte. Wilbur is one of the **protagonists** of the story.

VOCAB!*

naive
   innocent; inexperienced
protagonists
   the main characters of the story
fabulous
   amazingly good
resourceful
   able to overcome challenges

JOHN ARABLE: Fern's father. He lets Fern save and look after Wilbur.

AVERY ARABLE: Fern's pesky younger brother. Avery always tries to cause trouble!

HOMER ZUCKERMAN: Fern's uncle. He owns the barn that Wilbur moves into and believes that Wilbur is a "miracle pig."

LURVY: A helper at the Zuckerman farm. He discovers the **fabulous** webs that Charlotte makes on the farm.

TEMPLETON: A troublesome rat who lives in the barn. He is always on the lookout for food and can be rude most of the time. In the end, he helps Charlotte save Wilbur's life by being very **resourceful**.
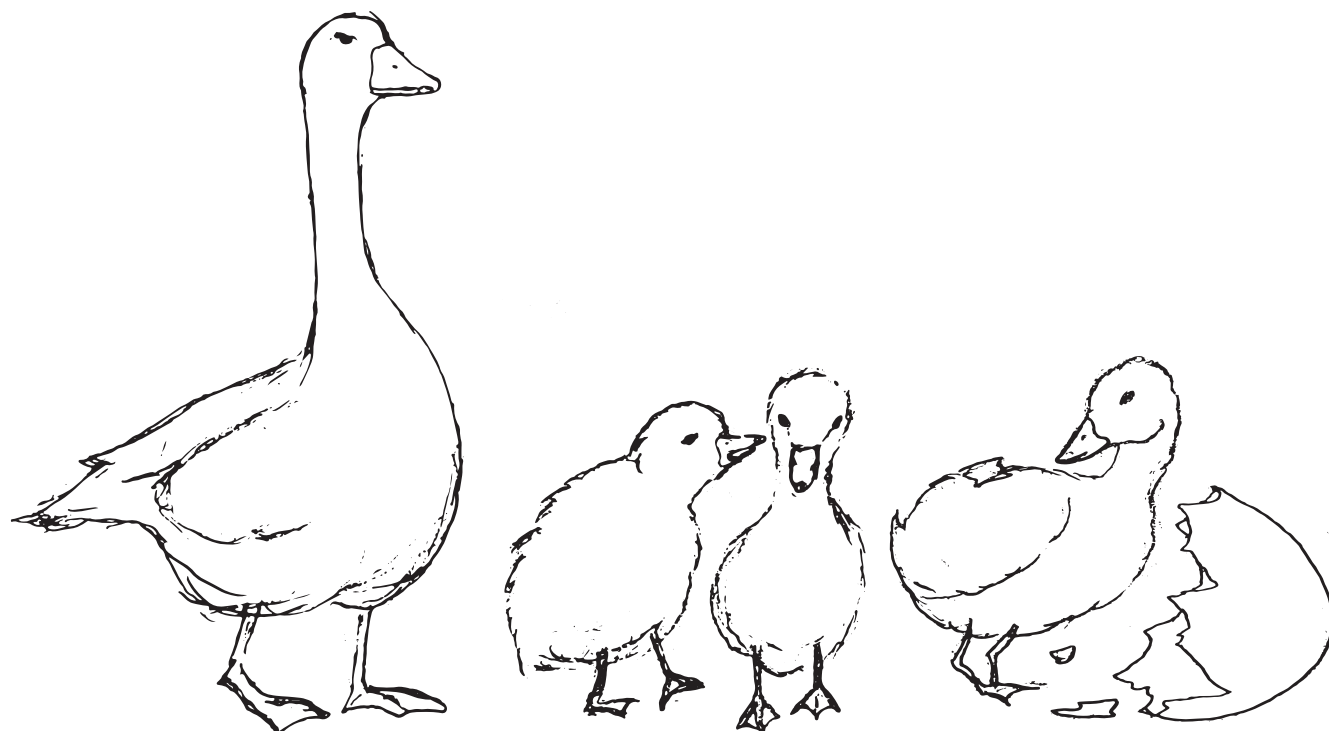
Reading level-appropriate vocabulary words are bolded within the text and defined in the yellow "VOCAB" fields.

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SHEEP: A very **snarky** farm animal. He doesn't have much patience for Wilbur.

CHARLOTTE: A very **clever** spider that lives inside Zuckerman's barn. She's caring and sensitive, weaving amazing webs in order to save Wilbur.

VOCAB!*

clever
    smart; talented
tend
    to take care of
snarky
    cranky; rude

GOOSE and GANDER: A married goose couple who **tend** after their goslings in the barn.

Reading level-appropriate vocabulary words are bolded within the text and defined in the yellow "VOCAB" fields.

The 2016 A.R.T. production of *James and the Giant Peach* directed by Dmitry Troyanovsky

*Joey Donnelly in **James in the Giant Peach**. Photo: Evgenia Eliseeva*

Growing Up in the Theater

By *Charlotte's Web* Director Dmitry Troyanovsky

Reading Level: 5th grade+*

Director Dmitry Troyanovsky discusses his theatrical experiences around the world that inspire his work on **Charlotte's Web** *at A.R.T.*

As a child growing up in the former Soviet Union, I watched a lot of theater. The state invested generous funding into specialized theaters that staged productions for young people. Much of what these theaters presented toed the official party line, resulting in **puerile**, safe material. Yet, a group of forward-looking artists, who did not consider children's theater to be a separate art form or an isolated **subgenre**, pushed the boundaries of form and content.

Legendary Russian directors Anatoly Efros, Oleg Efremov, Lev Dodin, Adolf Shapiro, and Kama Ginkas, just to name a few, got their start in theaters that focused on productions for children and youth. They believed that young people deserve to see daring theater of the highest quality. Also, they may have felt that the ubiquitous Soviet censors scrutinized children's theater with less zeal, making it possible to sneak in non-conformist meanings under the guise of allegory, fantasy, fairy tale, and myth.

VOCAB!*

puerile
    childishly silly
subgenre
    a more specific style within a larger genre, or category of art, music, literature, etc.

THE A.R.T. PRODUCTION

*Reading level-appropriate vocabulary words are bolded within the text and defined in the yellow "VOCAB" fields.

In the late 1980s, when the *glasnost* era finally permitted unprecedented freedom of expression, youth theaters heralded inventive and relevant productions that addressed young people and adults alike. At the age of twelve, I saw Adolf Shapiro's adaptation of *Tomorrow Was War*, based on a popular novel by Boris Vasiliev. Set on the eve of World War II, it dealt with the lives of high school students caught in the grip of Stalinist ideology and paranoia. The stage looked like a **precarious** construction out of a child's building block set, on which characters played decidedly un-childish games.

Around the same time, I attended a brilliant adaptation of Mikhail Bulgakov's *Heart of a Dog*, which tackled very problematic chapters of Soviet history in visually dazzling and darkly funny ways. The image of black snow falling on people, who howled like abused dogs, haunted my imagination for years to come. These theatrical gems were created as family fare, with both adult and teenage audiences in mind. The ability to see heady pieces with my parents and discuss them at home afterwards made it all the more satisfying. No doubt I chose to become a professional director thanks to such eye-opening experiences.

Today, Germany leads the way in innovation. Recently, I witnessed the work of Berlin's GRIPS Theater. Combining up-to-date social critique with humor, music, clowning, and other forms of popular entertainment, GRIPS tells stories about the lives of children and young people in contemporary Germany. In the past few years, the theater has confronted immigration, racism, extremism, poverty, cyber bullying, and sexual identity. Discussions and workshops accompany most performances. When I attended a morning matinee of a play about tensions between native Germans and their Turkish immigrant neighbors, a house full of ethnically diverse ten-year-olds raptly watched for two intermission-less hours. In a healthy society, theater is not only entertainment but a civic conversation about weighty issues. The theater's mission states that GRIPS "is and always will be a theater which wants to give its audience the courage to know that the world around them, large or small, is changeable." Like their Russian colleagues a generation ago, GRIPS theatermakers and educators do not compromise their values as citizens or artists.

VOCAB!*

glasnost
a Russian word that means "openness; publicity"

precarious
not secure; dangerous

Reading level-appropriate vocabulary words are bolded within the text and defined in the yellow "VOCAB" fields.

Theater for children and young people can address controversial social issues and explore the human condition. Last year, I directed my first family production, an adaptation of **James and the Giant Peach**. Enormous insects, rampaging rhinos, sadistic relatives, and ravenous sharks populate Roald Dahl's topsy-turvy world. While working on the show, I often thought of Bruno Bettelheim's notion that fairy tales help children come to terms with the most **incomprehensible**, unsolvable, and menacing aspects of existence. Of course, our production did not dwell only on darkness and anxiety. In Dahl's story, violence and pain live side by side with friendship, pleasure, and adventure.

Another children's classic that perfectly balances heartbreak and joy is E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web*. As I write this, I am preparing to direct an adaptation of the book. I am struck by White's honest and unsentimental approach to existential problems. "After all, what's a life, anyway? We're born, we live a little while, we die," says Charlotte to Wilbur. Despite these harsh facts, the story's living creatures perform acts of astonishing generosity and kindness. White seems to tell us that yes, we are all vulnerable in the face of physical frailty, pain, loneliness, and inequity. But we can strive to make something beautiful out of the time given to us and learn to share this earth with those who do not resemble us.

In my experiences as a spectator and, now, a maker of children's theater, imagination seems to be key. The productions I saw growing up communicated **metaphorically** and gave me a glimpse beyond realism and **literalness**. While it may be tempting to sugarcoat family theater with kitschy **bromides** and aggressively cheerful stagecraft, young people will find intellectual and aesthetic complexity far more rewarding as they mature. We can tell stories that do not shy away from the challenges of life and upend the limitations of form, genre, and style.

Director Dmitry Troyanovsky

*Dmitry Troyanovsky (A.R.T. Institute '00, Director of **James and the Giant Peach**) is an Assistant Professor of Theater Arts at Brandeis University and director of **Charlotte's Web**.*

This article first appeared in the 2017/18 A.R.T. Winter guide.

THE A.R.T. PRODUCTION
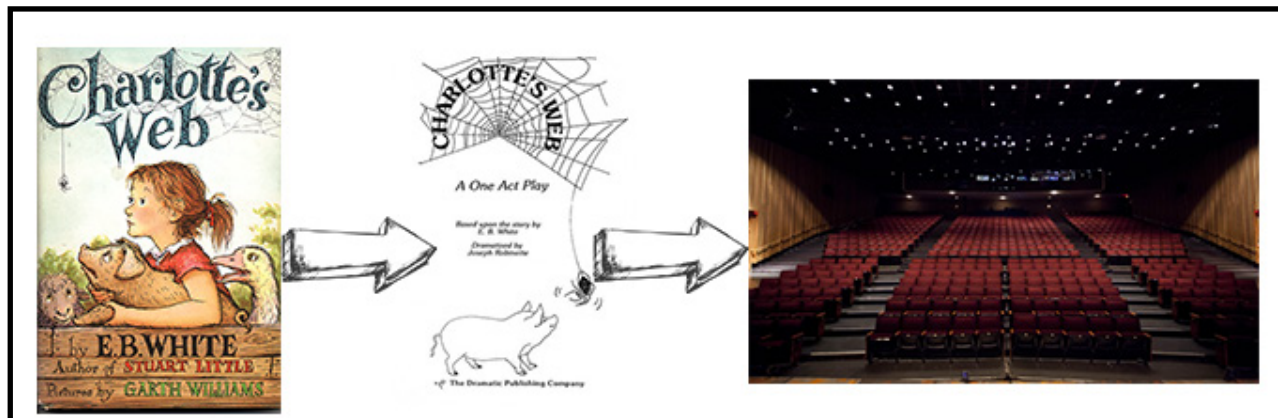
E.B. White's novel, with cover illustration by Garth Williams/ Stage adaptation by Joseph Robinette/ The Loeb Theater

Adapting a Classic
by James Montaño

Reading Level: 4th grade+*

*Many plays, movies, and television shows are based on pre-existing stories, novels, and comic books. At A.R.T., this season, two of our winter shows are based on very popular books—**Bedlam's Sense & Sensibility** and **Charlotte's Web.** We examine what an adaptation is and how it works on a stage.*

The play, **Charlotte's Web**, is an *adaptation* of the book by E.B. White. But what does that mean?

Adaptation is the process of taking a story in one form, such as a book or a poem or a comic strip, and remaking it into something else, like a movie or a play. Even though the form of the story changes, the content of story itself doesn't actually change that much. The main characters, setting, and plot mostly stay the same!

Charlotte's Web was originally published as a book in 1952. However, since its publication, it has been transformed into a variety of forms, like movies, plays, and even a video game! If you read the book *Charlotte's Web* before you see the play, you might ask yourself: how do you take a book and make it into a play, especially when the book has creatures like pigs and spiders in it?

Many things help a theater do this!

First, the actors are dressed in costumes that help them pretend they are the characters. In this case, some actors may dress a little like animals, but the audience has to use their imagination to pretend that they are actually

*Reading level-appropriate vocabulary words are bolded within the text and defined in the yellow "VOCAB" fields.

animals. Secondly, the theater may build a set or use props to resemble a location described in the books. The set may look a lot like a barn or be a **vague** version of a barn. Either way, the audience still has to use their imagination.

Lights can tell us if the play is happening in the daytime or the nighttime, when a book would simply say, "The sun came up" or "Then the night fell." In theater, a character might sing or dance in a moment, saying how they feel through their song and movement. Books usually directly explain a character's feelings.

We have talked about actors, sets, lights, and music. All of those pieces require different people in the theater: a lighting designer who decides which colors work best on the stage and how light or dark those colors should be; a **composer** who creates music that fits the mood or style of the story; an actor who takes the words on the page, called the *script*, and turns them into a living, breathing character. A playwright takes the original book and turns it into a script. Finally, a director oversees all of the designers, composers, and actors and turns it into a play on the stage.

That is a lot of people working on one play! A book is usually one person's creation, with an editor and printer helping to bring it to the reader. One author's story is given to one reader at a time.

In the end, that is also what makes adaptations from books to the stage exciting. Theater is a **participatory** experience; a story unfolds in front of a group of people. **Audiences**, together, are involved in the journey of the play and the play cannot occur without the audience.

THE A.R.T. PRODUCTION

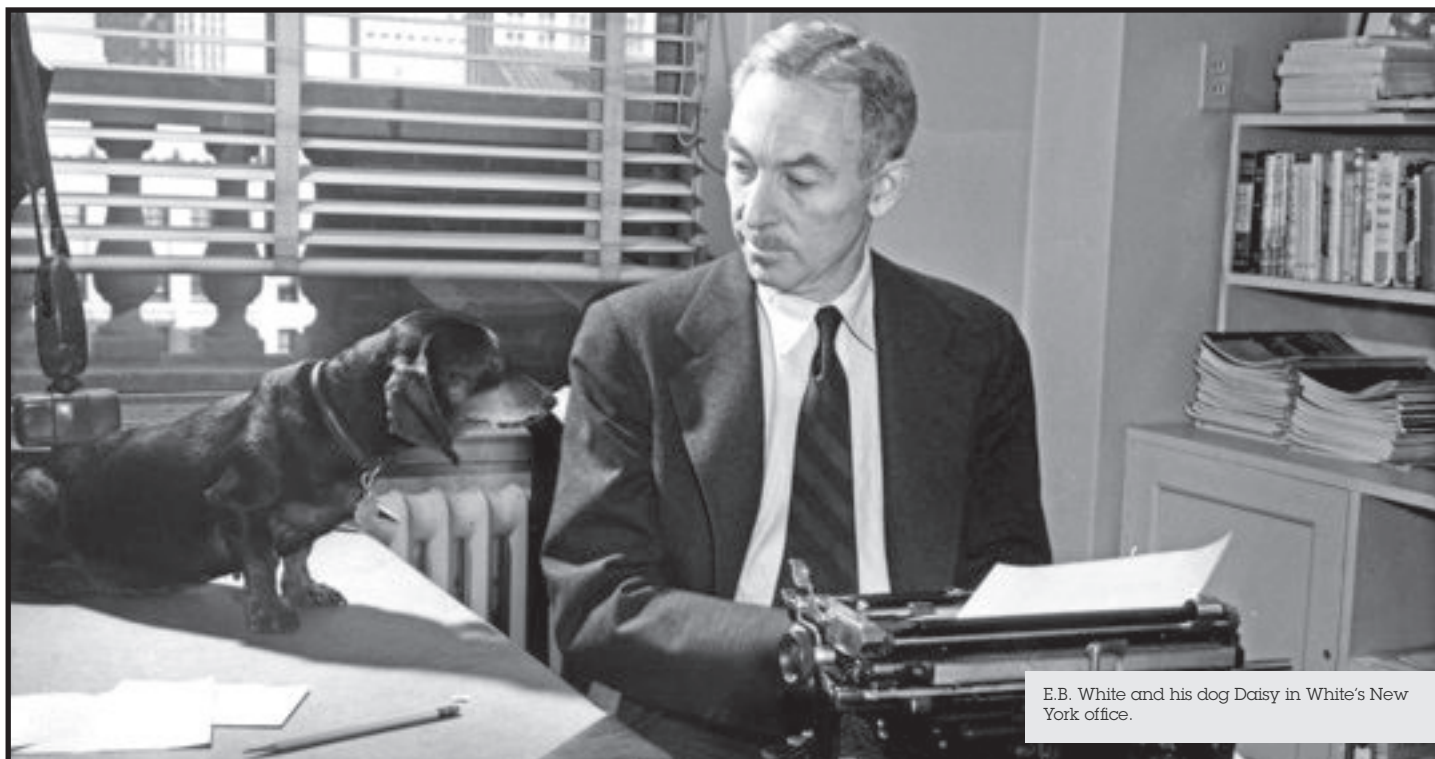**DISCUSSION**
- Do you know of any adaptations that you have seen from a book to a play, movie or T.V. show?
- What changed in the adaptation from the original? What stayed the same?
- What makes a good adaptation?

Reading level-appropriate vocabulary words are bolded within the text and defined in the yellow "VOCAB" fields.

E.B. White and the Creation of *Charlotte's Web*

E.B. White and his dog Daisy in White's New York office.

Image from brainpickings.org

This section of the Toolkit introduces author E.B. White and his inspirations for *Charlotte's Web*. Looking at his life and his singular style (pages 15–16), discover the artist who admired kindness in all creatures and had a great love for the written word. Next, read a letter from E.B. White to his young readers (pages 17–18). Then, meet the boy E.B. White, who grew-up on a farm of his own, laying the foundation for some of his most memorable characters (pages 19–21).

A Biography of E.B. White

by James Montaño

Reading Level: 5th Grade+*

E.B. White was born in Mount Vernon, New York in 1899 to a family with a small farm. For much of his childhood he was very quiet and private, finding much of his joy in the few animals his family owned and in the books on their shelves. Eventually, he attended Cornell University and began to edit the school's newspaper, *The Cornell Daily Sun*. This led to a job writing for the *New York Times*, then *The New Yorker*, where he wrote stories and drew sketches, mostly for adult readers.

Image by Hugh Thomson/ austenonly.com

White was fascinated with the magic of the written word. In fact, in 1958 he co-wrote a book specifically on the construction of grammar and the English language, called *The Elements of Style*. But his fascination was not just in the mechanics of language; E.B. White believed that there was genuine power in words and, because of that power, a responsibility on the part of the storyteller, saying, "[Writers] should tend to lift people up, not lower them down. Writers do not merely reflect and interpret life, they inform and shape life." (Paris Review, 1965).

When looking at his most famous children's books, *Stuart Little* (1945), *Charlotte's Web* (1952), and *The Trumpet of the Swan* (1970), it is not hard to see White's desire to "lift people up." Each of these stories contain a character at the center—usually an animal—expressing kindness and graciousness to another being. And that kindness is always repaid with even more kindness. In *Stuart Little*, Margalo, the Little family's new bird, is saved from a cat attack by the courageous mouse, Stuart. Later, when Stuart is in danger of being trapped in a trash can, Margalo saves him in return. In *Charlotte's Web*, the piglet Wilbur is protected by clever compliments, sewn into a web by the spider
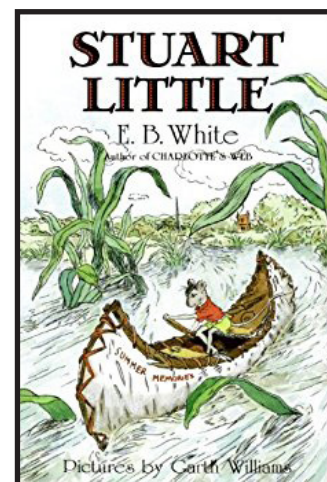
Image by Harper Collins

THE AUTHOR

*Reading level-appropriate vocabulary words are bolded within the text and defined in the yellow "VOCAB" fields.

Charlotte. By the story's end, Wilbur is protecting Charlotte's **offspring**. Similarly, in The *Trumpet of the Swan*, the mute swan, Louis, is given a stolen trumpet by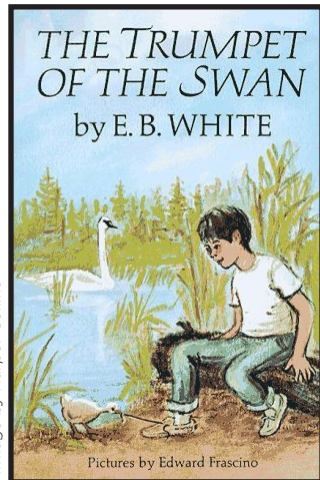 his father, so that he can eventually call a mate. When Louis becomes a famous musician, he earns enough money to repay the store owners, whose trumpet was stolen those many years ago.

Iimage by Harper Collins

VOCAB!*

offspring
the child
outcast
someone not accepted by society
perceived
seen as

E.B. White is also compelled to spotlight the **outcast**, outsider, or those who are seen as the "weakest" at the center of his stories: Stuart is born a tiny mouse in an otherwise large human world; Wilbur is the runt of the litter; Louis is a mute swan. These characters make-up the foundation of each of their stories, instructing young readers that heroes come in all sizes and in all ages, and that one's **perceived** weakness can be their strength.

Finally, words themselves also become a powerful tool for many of E.B. White's characters. Charlotte's ability to spell glowing adjectives saves Wilbur's life and Louis the swan's life is changed when his human friend, Sam, teaches him how to read and write on a chalkboard. It is E.B. White's way of saying that powerful, clever, and encouraging words can change the world. He certainly tried to change the world himself, constructing beautiful tales with many clever, well-placed, and uplifting words. As White once said, "All that I hope to say in books, all that I ever hope to say, is that I love the world."

The beloved author passed away on October 1, 1985. He was survived by his son, three grandsons, and a legacy of work that is still bringing joy to readers the world over.

THE AUTHOR

DISCUSSION
- E.B. White is not the only author who believes that heroes come in all shapes and sizes. Can you name other books that have similar themes?
- What does E.B. White mean when he says that writers, "inform and shape life"?

Reading level-appropriate vocabulary words are bolded within the text and defined in the yellow "VOCAB" fields.

Iimage from leapinghare.org

A Letter from E.B. White to Young Readers

E.B. White received numerous letters from young readers, asking about his inspiration for his characters and questions about his life as an author. Sometimes White would respond individually but eventually his publisher, Harper published a letter to young readers, addressing many of their questions.

Reading Level: 4th grade+*

Dear Reader:

I receive many letters from children and can't answer them all -- there wouldn't be time enough in a day. That is why I am sending you this printed reply to your letter. I'll try to answer some of the questions that are commonly asked.

Where did I get the idea for *Stuart Little* and for *Charlotte's Web*? Well, many years ago I went to bed one night in a railway **sleeping car**, and during the night I dreamed about a tiny boy who acted rather like a mouse. That's how the story of Stuart Little got started.

As for *Charlotte's Web*, I like animals and my barn is a very pleasant place to be, at all hours. One day when I was on my way to feed the pig, I began feeling sorry for the pig because, like most pigs, he was doomed to die. This made me sad. So I started thinking of ways to save a pig's

VOCAB!*

sleeping car
a train car with beds

THE AUTHOR

*Reading level-appropriate vocabulary words are bolded within the text and defined in the yellow "VOCAB" fields.

life. I had been watching a big grey spider at her work and was impressed by how clever she was at weaving. Gradually I worked the spider into the story that you know, a story of friendship and **salvation** on a farm. Three years after I started writing it, it was published. (I am not a fast worker, as you can see.)

Sometimes I'm asked how old I was when I started to write, and what made me want to write. I started early -- as soon as I could spell. In fact, I can't remember any time in my life when I wasn't busy writing. I don't know what caused me to do it, or why I enjoyed it, but I think children often find pleasure and satisfaction is trying to set their thoughts down on paper, either in words or in pictures. I was no good at drawing, so I used words instead. As I grew older, I found that writing can be a way of earning a living.

Some of my readers want me to visit their school. Some want me to send a picture, or an autograph, or a book. And some ask questions about my family and my animals and my pets. Much as I'd like to, I can't go visiting. I can't send books, either -- you can find them in a bookstore or a library. Many children assume that a writer owns (or even makes) his own books. This is not true -- books are made by the publisher. If a writer wants a copy, he must buy it. That's why I can't send books. And I do not send autographs -- I leave that to the movie stars. I live most of the year in the country, in New England. From our windows we can look out at the sea and the mountains. I live near my married son and three grandchildren.

Are my stories true, you ask? No, they are imaginary tales, containing fantastic characters and events. In real life, a family doesn't have a child who looks like a mouse; in real life, a spider doesn't spin words in her web. In real life, a swan doesn't blow a trumpet. But real life is only one kind of life -- there is also the life of the imagination. And although my stories are imaginary, I like to think that there is some truth in them, too -- truth about the way people and animals feel and think and act.

Yours sincerely,

E.B. White

DISCUSSION

- What does E.B. White mean when he says that his imaginary world has truth in them?

THE AUTHOR

Reading level-appropriate vocabulary words are bolded within the text and defined in the yellow "VOCAB" fields.

Image from Portland Press Herald

The interior of E.B. White's barn in Maine.

Weaving the World of *Charlotte's Web*: On E.B. White's Farm

by James Montaño

Reading Level: 4th grade+*

In a 1940 article entitled, "A Boy I Knew," author E.B. White described his younger self, writing, "This boy felt for animals a **kinship** he never felt for people" (Sims, 4). Elwyn Brooks "E.B." White was a very shy boy, who would spend long hours watching the small animals scurry about his neighborhood and stare up into the starry night sky for many nights, watching comets blaze short paths across the dark. When his family would summer in the woods of Maine, he would hurry out to nearby farms to feed the animals, swing in the haylofts, and watch the farmer work.

As an adult, White's kinship grew to include more people, such as his wife, his children, and a small group of friends, but his closeness to animals never lessened. He and his young wife eventually settled their life in rural Maine,

THE AUTHOR

Reading level-appropriate vocabulary words are bolded within the text and defined in the yellow "VOCAB" fields.

replete
    filled; well-supplied
eulogize
    strongly praise
accounting
    retelling
anatomy
    the study of an object's structure

building for themselves a small farm, **replete** with pigs, horses, and chickens. This farm was where E.B. White drew much of his inspiration for many of his stories and especially for *Charlotte's Web*.

He began to pull stories from his farm life first in articles for magazines. In a heartbreaking article, titled "Death of a Pig," published in *The Atlantic* in 1948, E.B. White wrote about the illness and death of one of the pigs on his farm and his need to **eulogize** its passing, "I spent several days and nights in m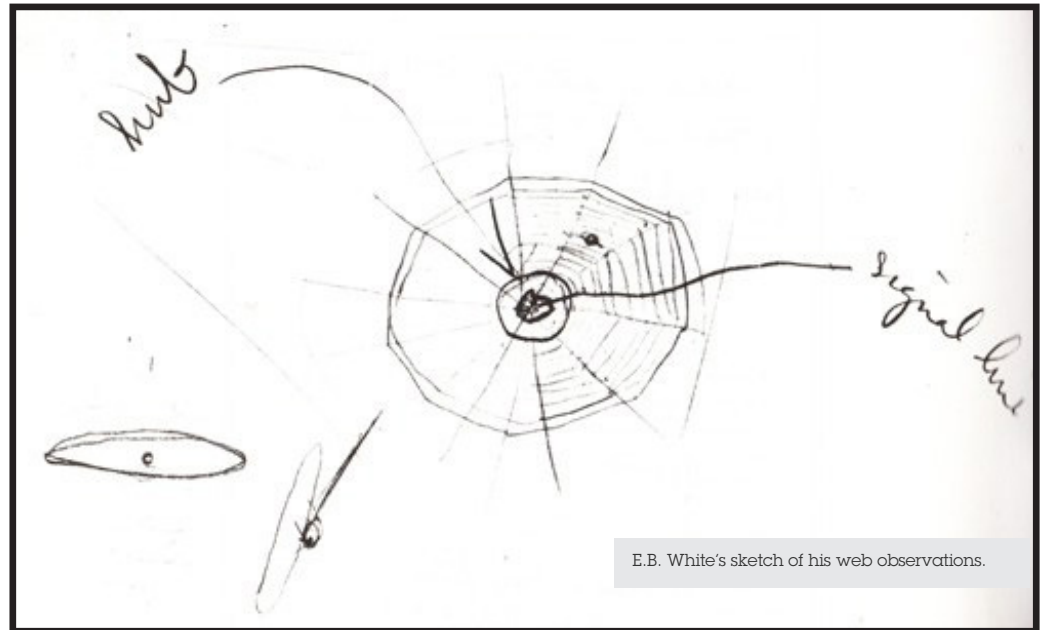id-September with an ailing pig and I feel driven to account for this stretch of time, more particularly since the pig died at last, and I lived, and things might easily have gone the other way round and none left to do the **accounting**" (White).

That same year, while doing his required farm chores, E.B. White noticed a spider busily working in the corner of a shed on his farm. Upon closer inspection, he realized that the spider was forming an egg sac. Being both a writer and farmer required White to hustle between New York, where his publishers were located and, not wanting to miss the hatching of the egg, White took a razor and carefully removed the sac, depositing it in a candy box to join him on his journey to New York. While in the city, he left the sac on the dresser of his hotel room until it hatched. He was fascinated as the many tiny spiders left strands of webbing from his dresser to his mirror to his hairbrush and to the doorknob. He would have allowed this to continue, had the hotel's housecleaning not complained. Three of the spiders joined him back home in Maine and he later dubbed them "Charlotte's granddaughters."

E.B. White began work on *Charlotte's Web* in 1949, researching the **anatomy** and lifecycle of spiders at the Natural History Museum of New York. He drew detailed pictures of spiders and spiderwebs for reference, wanting the character of Charlotte to be realistic while also containing relatable human emotions. In letters to his editors and to the illustrator of Charlotte's Web, Garth Williams, White emphasized the need for Charlotte to contain all of the realistic elements of a spider. When an editor suggested that perhaps illustrations of Charlotte should give her a calm, relaxed face, E.B. White responded with, "Spiders don't have much of face—in fact they hardly have any head, or at least the head is relatively inconspicuous. But they have eight wonderfully articulated legs (arms), which offer a great chance for ballet treatment" (Neumeyer, 214).

THE AUTHOR

*Reading level-appropriate vocabulary words are bolded within the text and defined in the yellow "VOCAB" fields.

The attention to detail and focus on realism in Charlotte's Web came from the kinship E.B. White always felt with animals. He populated Zuckerman's farm with animals that lived and breathed on his own farm and even ended Charlotte's Web with the same three spiderlings he carried from New York City back to his farm. But that pig, who died on his very real farm, seems to have been the spark. In a note to his publishers, he said, "the theme of 'Charlotte's Web' is that a pig shall be saved, and I have an idea that somewhere deep inside me there was a wish to that effect" (Letters). And Wilbur, E.B. White's fictional pig of Charlotte's Web, certainly lives on, on the page, in the hearts of readers the world over, and now on our stage.
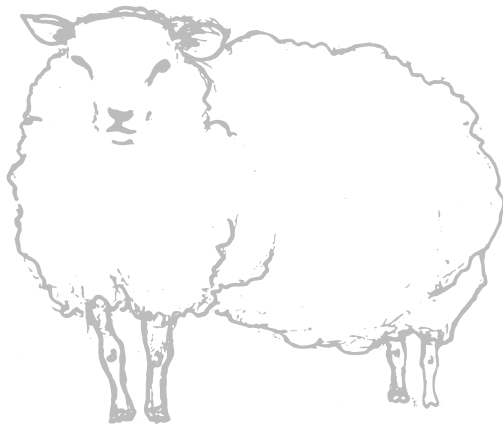
E.B. White's sketch of his web observations.

THE AUTHOR

Educational Activities
Lesson Plan Index

THE FOOD CHAIN
Page 23–24

This is an interactive group activity that introduces concepts of the "food chain" and the interdependence of all living things. This game requires some critical and metaphorical thinking, which may be supported by research and additional preparation depending on the age of the group. This game also requires some fine motor skills, including tossing and holding on tightly.

*This activity can either precede or follow a viewing of **Charlotte's Web***

ON ZUCKERMAN'S FARM
Page 25–26

This multi-disciplinary group environment-building exercise challenges students to think critically and creatively about the needs and wants of animals living on a farm.

Sequentially, we recommend this lesson follow the "Food Chain" lesson.

*This activity can either precede or follow a viewing of **Charlotte's Web***

SOME SYNONYM!
Page 27–29

*In this activity, students will explore the characters that populate **Charlotte's Web**, describing their traits, their feelings, and their challenges in the story. Building on existing vocabulary, students will then explore synonyms that further identify the characters.*

*This activity can either precede or follow a viewing of **Charlotte's Web***

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Lesson Plan: The Food Chain

OBJECTIVES

This is an interactive group activity that introduces concepts of the "food chain" and the interdependence of all living things. This game requires some critical and metaphorical thinking, which may be supported by research and additional preparation depending on the age of the group. This game also requires some fine motor skills, including tossing and holding on tightly.

STUDENT'S WILL
- Construct a food chain and explain how energy flows through the chain.
- Explain how all living things depend directly or indirectly on green plants for food.
- Use pictures and arrows to create a food web that includes the sun, green plants, herbivores, omnivores, and carnivores.

SUGGESTED STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

2006 Science and Technology/Engineering Framework

Strand: Life Science (preK-8)

Topic: Characteristics of Living Things

1 (PK-2) Recognize that animals (including humans) and plants are living things that grow, reproduce, and need food, air, and water.

Topic: Energy and Living Things

11 (3-5) Describe how energy derived from the sun is used by plants to produce sugars (photosynthesis) and is transferred within a food chain from producers (plants) to consumers to decomposers.

Topic: Living Things and Their Environment

8 (PK-2) Identify the ways in which an organism's habitat provides for its basic needs (plants require air, water, nutrients, and light; animals require food, water, air, and shelter).

MATERIALS

Pictures of the sun, plants, and animals
Yarn

PROCEDURE

Setup

Print and cut out photos of the sun, plants & animals. If studying Charlotte's Web, you may focus on plants and animals found on a farm or in the book. The teacher may provide these examples, or students could brainstorm a list in an earlier class. Students may study specific animals or plants ahead of time.

Process

1. Have students tape one picture to their shirts (or you may create necklaces after laminating the pictures, using yarn). You may have students select their own, assign them to students, and/or have students draw their own animals. It's also fun for the teacher(s) to participate in this game!
2. Introduce and discuss the exchange of energy from **producers** to **consumers** in the food web (E.g. The sun gives energy to plants, plants provide energy to mice, mice provide energy to owls). Visual aids and/or videos can be very helpful for this. The group might also consider different ways energy is passed along outside of consuming food (i.e. using fertilizer to grow plants, a horse pulling a cart, etc.).
3. Tell students they will be creating their own food web. Have them stand in a large circle.

The Food Chain (cont.)

The students should look around and ask themselves:
- Who in this circle could I give my energy to? (Who might eat me? Who benefits from the work that I do?)
- Who in the circle could give me energy? (Who might I eat? Whose work do I benefit from?)

4. Explain to the students that the ball of yarn represents the energy in the environment. Ask the student who represents the sun to hold the end of the yarn tightly and toss the ball to someone who can use that energy. When that student catches the yarn, they should pass the yarn to someone else who could use the energy. (Example: Sun->green plant->rabbit->fox). The ball of yarn should be tossed to someone new until every student is part of the food web.

    VARIATION: If tossing will not work for your group, stand outside of the circle and help to pass the ball of yarn among the group.

5. Address students in-character, for example:
   - Question: "Hello, horse! Where are you getting energy from? Who gets energy from you?"
   - Possible response: "I get my energy from eating hay/grass. The farmer gets energy from me when I pull her cart."

6. After the yarn has made the rounds, ask a student to gently tug on the string they are holding. Ask any students who feel the tug to begin tugging on their string, very quickly, all of the students begin feeling their string being pulled.

7. Ask one student to drop their yarn. Ask another student what happens when one plant or animal leaves the food chain.

STARTING POINTS FOR REFLECTION
- What was challenging about this game?
- What happens when even one plant or animal leaves the food chain?
- What are some of the things in our environment that we all rely on for energy?
- How does this game relate to what happens in *Charlotte's Web*?

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES
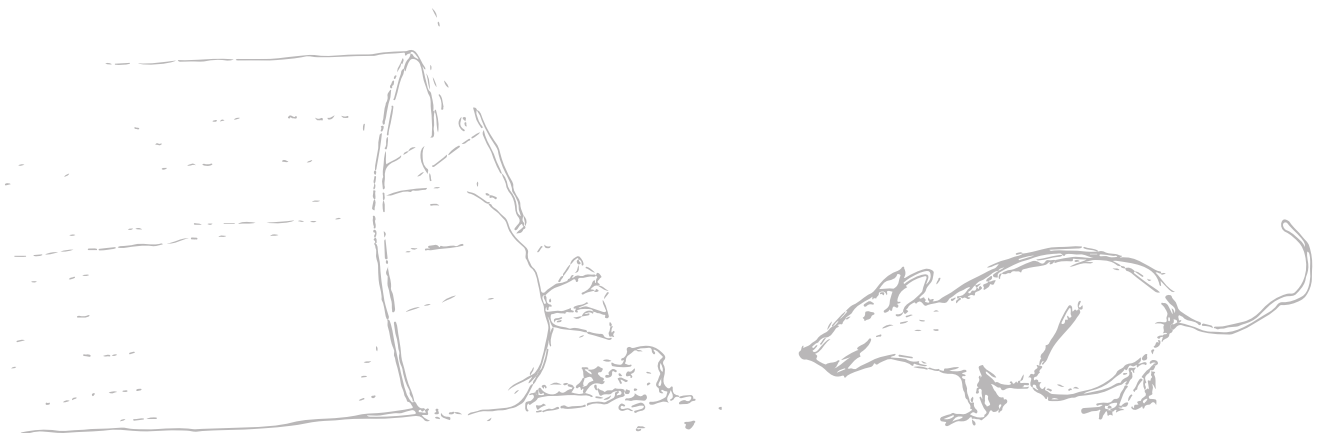
Lesson Plan: On Zuckerman's Farm

OBJECTIVES

This multi-disciplinary group environment-building exercise challenges students to think critically and creatively about the needs and wants of animals living on a farm.

Sequentially, we recommend this lesson follow the "Food Chain" lesson on the previous page.

STUDENT'S WILL
- Identify the environmental needs and wants of a farm animal.
- Show their knowledge through drawing, presenting to a group, and embodying their animal.

SUGGESTED STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

K-LS1-1. Observe and communicate that animals (including humans) and plants need food, water, and air to survive. Animals get food from plants or other animals. Plants make their own food and need light to live and grow.

2-LS2-3(MA). Develop and use models to compare how plants and animals depend on their surroundings and other living things to meet their needs in the places they live. Clarification Statement: • Animals need food, water, air, shelter, and favorable temperature; plants need sufficient light, water, minerals, favorable temperature, and animals or other mechanisms to disperse seeds.

MATERIALS

Whiteboard & marker
Paper & drawing materials
Tape

PROCEDURE

Setup

- Label the whiteboard with a title like "Our Farm"
- Draw a "fence" around the perimeter of the whiteboard.
- If a longer unit on farm animals is desired, students may research or explore their character/animal more in-depth before or after this activity.

Process

1. Explain to the students that you will be working together to create our own imaginary farm based on *Charlotte's Web* to learn about what different animals need.
2. One student at a time, the whole class brainstorms characters from *Charlotte's Web* or other living things that live on a farm. Take note of each students' choice on a whiteboard or piece of paper.
3. Ask everyone to close their eyes and imagine where their character/animal lives on a farm. What are three important things your animal needs in their environment? As a fun extension, you can also think of one silly thing that an animal might want (though try to distinguish between the needs and the wants).
   VARIATION: If your students are practicing writing, note-taking, handwriting, and/or spelling, they can write down their three ideas.
4. Explain that each student is going to draw their own part of the farm, which will all be put together to create our collective farm on the whiteboard. Everyone will talk about their piece of the farm as a group.
5. Allow students 10-15 minutes to draw their environment.
6. One at a time, students present their part of the farm to the group. They should each explain what is in their drawing, and how it helps the needs and wants of their animal. After each student presents, they choose a place on "Our Farm" to place their animal's environment.

On Zuckerman's Farm (cont.)

7. Once all students have presented, you may look at "Our Farm" and brainstorm about any other important parts of a farm the group would want to include, which you can label or draw onto the board. If the group is talkative, you may limit each student to one response.
8. Once the farm has all of the details, explain to the students that you will now turn the classroom into the farm that you have drawn on the board. Without moving feet or using voices, ask students to imagine all of the space on the white board as if they are in the classroom. You may want to establish a boundary such as a circle of chairs.
9. One at a time, prompt students to find a place in the classroom (or within the boundaries) to be in their animal environment. They should act like their animal, without using their voices. Add students one by one until the whole class is acting out their animals.
10. With their voices off, students will join in to create their pantomimed version of the farm that they created on the whiteboard. Encourage students to:
    • Use their body movements to be their animal instead of their voices.
    • Be aware of the other animals in the space around them.

VARIATION OPTIONS FOR CREATIVE PLAY:
• Students may make one sound on repeat
• Students may remain silent in the environment until called on by the facilitator.

STARTING POINTS FOR REFLECTION
• What part did you play in the environment of the farm?
• What did you need to survive within this environment?
• Are you an important part of this farm? Why?
• How did you relate to the other living things within this environment?
• Why is it important for the animals to be kept separated?

Lesson Plan: Some Synonym

OBJECTIVES

In this activity, students will explore the characters in **Charlotte's Web** *and examine the details of each character found in the book and play. Building upon the traits of their characters, students will develop a vocabulary to describe each character.*

STUDENTS WILL
• Reinforce awareness and knowledge of characters and story in Charlotte's Web.
• Present details about their character to one another.
• Find appropriate adjectives to describe their character.
• Collaborate with one another to create synonyms and expand vocabulary.

SUGGESTED STANDARDS ALIGNMENT
Domain: Reading Standards for Literature
          Cluster: Key Ideas and Details
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.1 Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.3 Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.
          Cluster: Craft and Structure
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.6 Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud.

Domain: Standards for Speaking and Listening
          Cluster: Comprehension and Collaboration
CCSS.ELA– Literacy.SL2.1a Follow agreed-upon rules for discussion (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under the discussion).
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.2.2 Recount or describe key ideas or details from a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

MATERIALS

Character Worksheet (see below)
Whiteboard/Chalkboard

PROCEDURE

1. Hand out character worksheet to students.
2. Randomly assign characters (or have your students pick their favorite character from the story). Ideally, there will be a diversity of characters from the story. Possible characters to include: Fern, Wilbur, Charlotte, Lurvy, Farmer Zuckerman, Templeton, Fern's Father, Goose, Gander, and Sheep. Characters can be doubled amongst the students.
3. Students fill-out the character worksheet.
4. Students will present some of the characteristics from the worksheet to their peers, ending with the adjective that most describes their character.
5. Students write the adjective on the board.
6. Ask your students for other synonyms to that adjective.
7. BONUS: Make small webs between the main word and it's synonyms on the board.

SUGGESTED REFLECTIONS
• What other traits could further explain the character?
• Charlotte only writes complematary adjectives to describe Wilbur. What kind adjectives would Charlotte write about the other characters?

Some Synonym (cont.)

Name: James

Character Name: Wilbur

What does my character do in the story?

He moves to the Zuckerman farm and makes friends with Charlotte. He also goes to the fair and wins a special award.

How does my character feel?

Lonely sometimes. Happy that he has a friend like Charlotte.

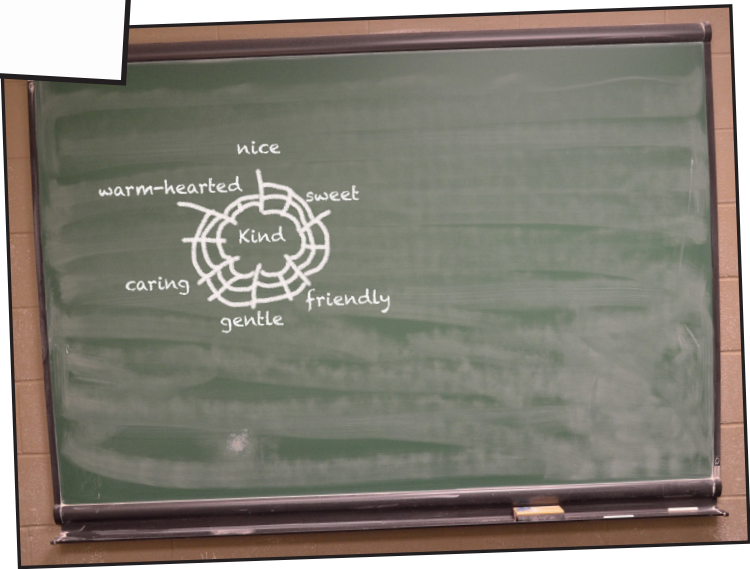**Adjective that describes my character:**

Kind

How does my character look?

Pink, curly tail, too small when he is born.

What does my character say in the story?

I'm so happy you'll be my friend!

nice
warm-hearted
sweet
Kind
caring
friendly
gentle

Some Synonym (cont.)

Name: _____

Character Name:_____

What does my character do in the story?

How does my character feel?

Adjective that describes my character:

How does my character feel?

What does my character say in the story?

Charlotte's Web Puppet Crafts

At A.R.T. we love participation from our audiences! Below are two puppet crafts that our audiences will be making in our lobby before the performances of **Charlotte's Web**. These puppets will be used during the performance by the audience but we welcome you to make these in your own class.

PUPPET CRAFT 1: SPIDERLINGS

SUPPLIES
- black construction paper
- gray construction paper
- scissors
- coffee stirrers
- glue (stick or Elmer's)
- googly eyes
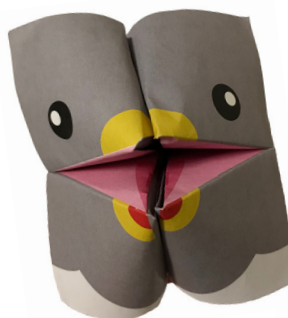
PROCEDURE
1. Cut out two black 2.5" circles
2. Cut out one gray 1.5" circle
3. Cut out four 8.5" strips of black paper; fold edges of the strips accordion-style. These are the legs!
4. Put glue on one side of a black circle.
5. Place coffee stirrer in the center of the black circle.
6. Layer the four strips across the coffee stirrer, gluing as you go along.
7. Place other black circle on top of the stirrer and strips.
8. Glue gray circle towards the top of black circle. This is the head.
9. Draw eyes or attach googly eyes on the gray circle.

Puppet Craft 2: Gosling Puppet

SUPPLIES
Gosling template (below) & scissors.

PROCEDURE
This puppet folds like a "fortune teller" or "cootie catcher"

1. Cut out the square where the puppets are printed.
2. Place your puppet colorful side down.
3. Fold each corner into the center.
4. Flip your puppet over.
5. Fold each corner into the center.
6. Insert fingers under the tabs to open up the puppet (this is tricky!)
7. Bring your puppets to the show!
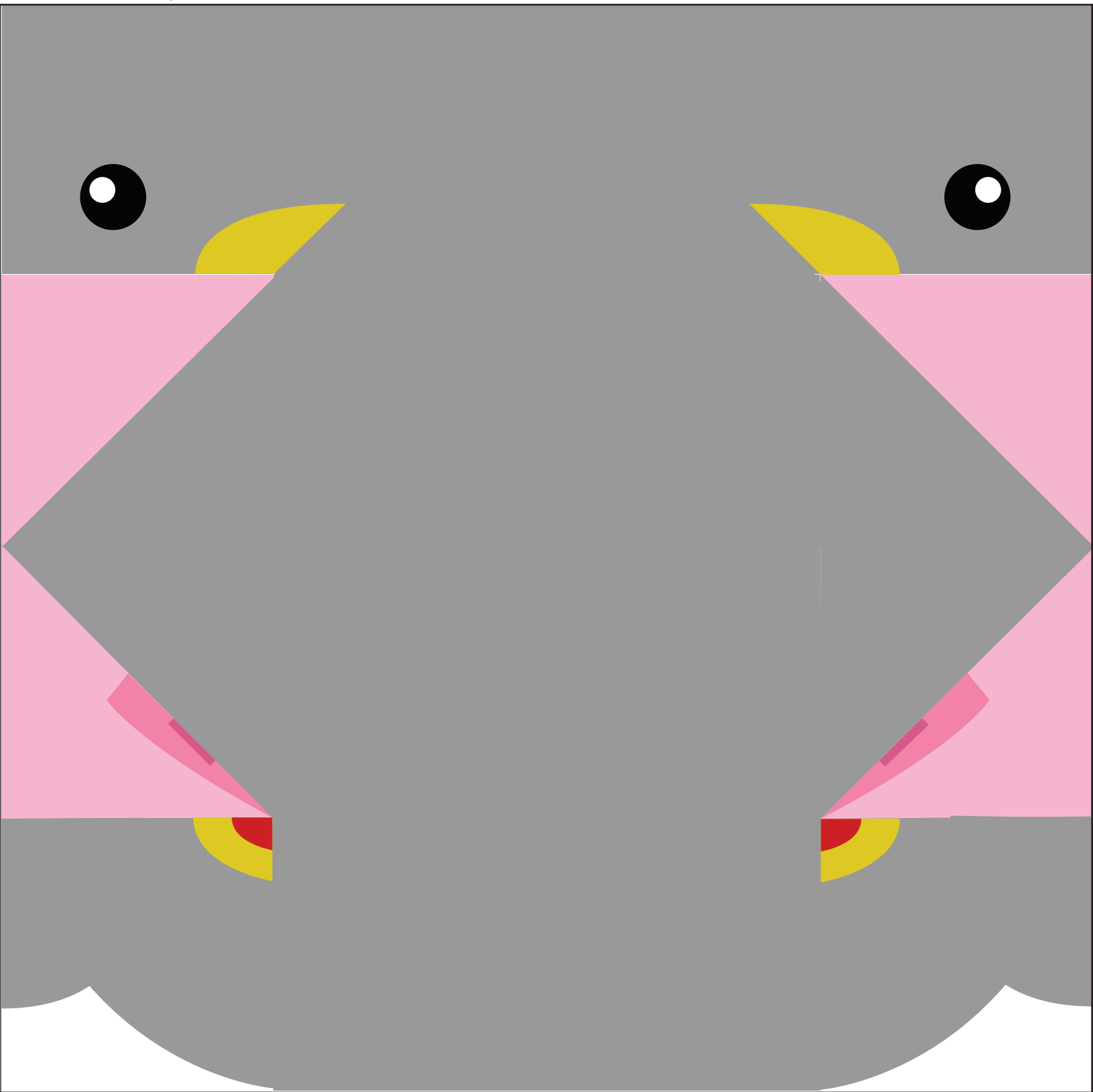
Resources

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E.B. White, "Death of a Pig," The Atlantic, January, 1948, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1948/01/death-pig/309203/

Peter F. Neumeyer, *The Annotated Charlotte's Web* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1994), 214

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