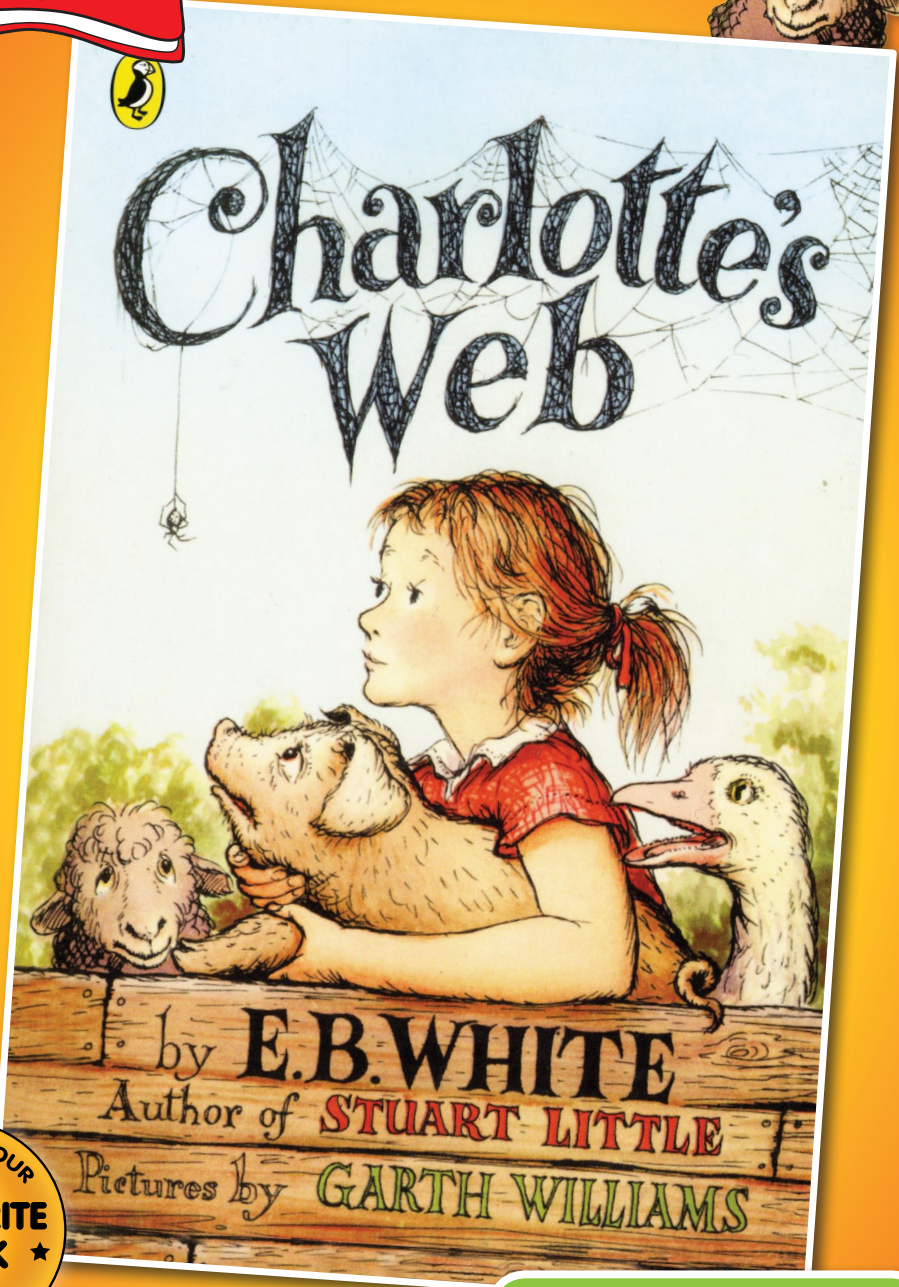




SCHOLASTIC

Book Talk

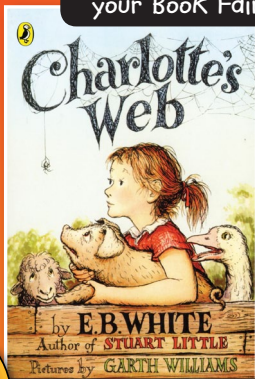


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Price	£5.99
Case	Read Alone
Author	E. B. White
Illustrator	Garth Williams
Publisher	Puffin

Using this book in your classroom

Themes

This delightful and moving story has deservedly won its place as a classic of children's literature. The themes in the story include **trust**, **friendship** and the **relationships between people and animals**.

Summary

If the farmer, John Arable, had had his way, Wilbur would have been killed as a piglet. Wilbur was the runt of the litter, and a weakling always makes trouble... But Fern, the farmer's daughter, persuades her parents to let her have Wilbur as a pet. Eventually Wilbur goes to live at the Zuckermans' farm, and Fern tries to visit him as often as she can. But Wilbur still feels lonely – until one day he hears the small voice of a grey spider, Charlotte A. Cavatica, telling him, "I'll be a friend to you." Charlotte proves to be the very best friend a pig could possibly have. With her guidance, Wilbur begins to make friends with the other farm animals – and when Wilbur hears the terrible news that he is likely to be killed and eaten at Christmas, Charlotte hatches a plan to save him. She spins a web above Wilbur's pen in which she writes messages about Wilbur – 'some pig', 'terrific', 'radiant', and finally 'humble'. She hopes that this will make Wilbur famous and dissuade the farmer from killing him.

Charlotte's plan works brilliantly, and Wilbur does indeed become a famous pig. He even ends up going to the County Fair and winning a prize – and Charlotte stows away with him and goes along for the ride. But although Wilbur escapes death, Charlotte does not – she knows that the end of her life is approaching, and she dies while they are at the fair. However, the end of Charlotte's life marks the beginning of life for her children, who hatch out from the egg sac which Wilbur carefully brings back to the barn with him. Most of Charlotte's children leave to set up their own webs and lives elsewhere, but three of Charlotte daughters (Joy, Aranea and Nelly) stay on to keep Wilbur company.

Did you know?

- The germ of the idea for *Charlotte's Web* came to E. B. White when he was feeding his own pig, in the barn on his farm in Maine, New England, USA. He started to feel sorry for the pig, because like all farm pigs, it was doomed to die. That made him wonder about how the pig could be saved. He had also been watching a big grey spider spinning her web in the barn, and he gradually worked the spider into the story too...

The Story Session

1. Introducing the book

- If any of the children have read the book already, or seen one of the film adaptations, briefly share their impressions of the story.
- Read the back cover blurb to the children. What do they think might be 'the usual fate of nice fat little pigs'? How do they think a little girl and a spider might save a pig from being killed and eaten? Share the children's initial ideas about what might happen in the story.

2. Reading the story

- Read Chapter 1 out loud. At the end of the chapter, ask the children: "Do you agree with Fern that it was unfair that Mr Arable wanted to kill Wilbur just because he was the runt of the litter? What would you have done, in Fern's place?" Why do the children think Fern (who lived on a farm with lots of animals) was so excited to have Wilbur as her pet?
- At the end of Chapter 1, briefly share children's predictions about the story again. Have they changed their minds about what will happen in the story, or picked up any new information to add to their predictions?
- Encourage the children to read the rest of the story independently, or continue to read it to the class. Pause during the reading to talk about the story – for example, after Chapter 2, ask how the children think Wilbur will feel about going to live at the Zuckermans'. After Chapter 4, ask why the children think Wilbur is so lonely, and who they think the friendly little voice might be coming from. After Chapter 7, share children's reactions to the bad news that Wilbur hears. How do they think Charlotte will save Wilbur?
- At the end of the book, talk about friendship. Ask: "How did Charlotte show that she was a good friend to Wilbur? What did Wilbur do to show his friendship to Charlotte?" Compare Charlotte with Templeton the rat, who is willing to help others – but only if there's something in it for him (usually food!).

3. Follow-up

- Challenge the children to think of a good word or phrase to describe a family member or friend, and then to design their own spider's web with this word or phrase in it. The children could draw or make their spider's web using wool, and then use it as the basis of a card to give to the person they thought of.
- Encourage the children to think of words, phrases and short sentences to describe Charlotte or Wilbur. They could arrange their sentences to make a short poem. If they wish, it could be a shape poem with the words arranged in the shape of a spider, pig or web.
- The website www.kidsfarm.com has pictures, simple information and activities related to a range of different farm animals, for children. A similar website with slightly more in-depth information is www.animalcorner.co.uk. You could encourage the children to use websites like these to research and write about their favourite farm animals.

YOU TELL US

- Did you use these notes to have a Book Talk in class?
- Were they helpful?
- Are there any changes you'd like to see to make them more useful?

We're always happy to hear your comments, so please email us at bookfairs@scholastic.co.uk