

An Educator's Guide to: Charlotte's Web



Based on E.B. White's best-selling children's paperback book of all time, *Charlotte's Web* tells the story of a pig named Wilbur and his friendship with an extraordinary barn spider named Charlotte. When Wilbur is in danger of a trip to the butcher, Charlotte is determined to save him. She begins her campaign with the "miracle" of her web in which she writes, "Some Pig" to persuade the farmer to let him live. It's the beginning of a victorious plot which ultimately ends with the now-safe Wilbur doing what is most important to Charlotte. This beautiful, knowing play about friendship, sacrifice, compassion and bravery will weave its way into your heart and leave your audiences totally enchanted.

 Throughout the study guide, this symbol means that specific NGSSS or Florida Standards are being addressed. As new standards are created and approved by the Florida Department of Education, this may change. Please visit www.cpalms.org for more information and to customize this guide to your specific grade level.

THE THEATRE IS A SPECIAL TREAT

Let us concentrate for a moment on a vital part of youth theatre: the young people. Millions of youngsters attend plays every season, and for some the experience is not particularly memorable or entertaining. The fault may lie with the production – but often the fault lies in the fact that these youngsters have not been properly briefed on appropriate theatre manners. Going to the theatre is not a casual event such as flipping on the TV set, attending a movie or a sports event. Going to the theatre is a SPECIAL OCCASION, and should be attended as such. In presenting theatre manners to young people we take the liberty of putting the do's and don'ts in verse, and hope that concerned adults will find this a more palatable way of introducing these concepts to youngsters.

MATINEE MANNERS

By PEGGY SIMON TRAKTMAN

The theatre is no place for lunch,
Who can hear when you go "crunch?"
We may wear our nicest clothes
When we go to theatre shows.
Do not talk to one another
(That means friends or even mother)
When you go to see a show,
Otherwise you'll never know
What the play is all about
And you'll make the actors shout
Just to make themselves be heard.
So, be still - don't say a word
Unless an actor asks you to...
A thing they rarely ever do.
A program has a special use
So do not treat it with abuse!
Its purpose is to let us know
Exactly who is in the show
It also tells us other facts
Of coming shows and future acts.
Programs make great souvenirs
Of fun we've had in bygone years
Keep your hands upon your lap

But if you like something you clap
Actors like to hear applause.
If there is cause for this applause.
If a scene is bright and sunny,
And you think something is funny
Laugh- performers love this laughter
But be quiet from thereafter.
Don't kick chairs or pound your feet
And do not stand up in your seat,
Never wander to and fro -
Just sit back and watch the show.
And when the final curtain falls
The actors take their "curtain calls"
That means they curtsy or they bow
And you applaud, which tells them how
You liked their work and liked the show.
Then, when the lights come on, you go
Back up the aisle and walk - don't run
Out to the lobby, everyone.
The theatre is a special treat
And not a place to talk or eat.
If you behave the proper way
You really will enjoy the play.

Standards for Theatre Etiquette:

TH.K.S.1.1-Demonstrate appropriate audience behavior at a live performance.

TH.1.S.1.1-Exhibit appropriate audience etiquette and response.

TH.2.S.1.1-Exhibit the behavior necessary to establish audience etiquette, response, and constructive criticism.

TH.3.S.1.1-Demonstrate effective audience etiquette and constructive criticism for a live performance.

TH.4.S.1.1-Exhibit proper audience etiquette, give constructive criticism, and defend personal responses.

TH.5.S.1.1-Describe the difference in responsibilities between being an audience member at live or recorded performances

THE STORYTELLER

E. B. White (1899–1985)

E. B. White, the author of such beloved children's classics as *Charlotte's Web*, *Stuart Little*, and *The Trumpet of the Swan*, was born in Mount Vernon, New York on July 11, 1899. E. B. White had two brothers and three sisters, and his father was a piano manufacturer. E. B. White graduated from Cornell University in 1921 and, five or six years later, joined the staff of *The New Yorker* magazine. E. B. White authored over seventeen books of prose and poetry and was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1973. In addition to writing children's books, E. B. White also wrote books for adults, as well as writing poems and essays, and drawing sketches for *The New Yorker* magazine. Some of his other books include: *One Man's Meat*, *The Second Tree from the Corner*, *Letters of E. B. White*, *The Essays of E. B. White*, and *Poems and Sketches of E. B. White*



Funnily enough for such a famous writer, he always said that he found writing difficult and bad for one's disposition, but he kept at it!

Mr. White has won countless awards, including the 1971 National Medal for Literature and the Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal, which commended him for making “a substantial and lasting contribution to literature for children.”

He died on October 1, 1985, and is survived by his son and three grandchildren.

The Stories Behind The Books

During his lifetime, many young readers asked Mr. White if his stories were true. In a letter written to be sent to his fans, he answered, “No, they are imaginary tales... But real life is only one kind of life — there is also the life of the imagination.”

Mr. White lived on a farm in Maine where he kept animals, and some of these creatures made their way into his stories and books, like Stuart in *Stuart Little*, or Charlotte in *Charlotte's Web*. After all, as E.B. White said, “I like animals, and my barn is a very pleasant place to be, at all hours!”

Stuart Little

“Many years ago,” E.B. White would say, “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.”

Charlotte's Web

How did E. B. White think up the story for *Charlotte's Web*? “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.

THE ACTIVITIES

BEFORE THE PLAY:

1. Read Charlotte's Web to your students. The play the students see will not be exactly like the book they have read or the video they have seen. Discuss the differences between the play and book.

✍ **TH.1.H.3.1** Identify similarities between plays and stories.

✍ **TH.1.O.3.1** Compare a play to an animated movie that tells the same story.

✍ **TH.3.O.3.1** Compare the characteristics of theatre to television and movies.

✍ **LAFS.2.RL.3.9** Compare and contrast two or more versions of the same story (e.g., Cinderella stories) by different authors or from different cultures.

2. Ask your students to discuss the difference between television and live theatre. It is important that they know about "theatre etiquette," or manners. Refer to the poem "Matinee Manners" listed above.

✍ **TH.1.S.1.1** Exhibit appropriate audience etiquette and response.

3. Wilbur praises Charlotte for her gift for words. The spider introduces Wilbur and the barn animals to new words and their meanings. Have the students learn the following vocabulary words and listen for them during the play. See how many words they can recall and how the characters used them in the context of the play.

runt	humble	radiant	deserted
injustice	loyal	paradise	triumph
enchanted	salutations	extraordinary	detested
slop	inheritance	terrific	aeronaut
gander	hysterics	gullible	desperate

✍ **LAFS.1.L.3.5.** With guidance and support from adults, demonstrate understanding, word relationships and nuances in word meanings.

✍ **LAFS.1.L.1.1** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

4. Have the students look and listen for patterns during the play. See how many patterns they can recall and how they were used in the context of the play. Encourage students to be aware of patterns that may occur in music, dance, scenery, costume fabric and dialogue. Students may also notice architectural patterns in the theatre.

✍ **MAFS.K12.MP.7.1** Look for and make use of structure. Mathematically proficient students look closely to discern a pattern or structure. Young students, for example, might notice that three and seven more is the same amount as seven and three more, or they may sort a collection of shapes according to how many sides the shapes have.

5. Discuss the elements that make *Charlotte's Web* a fiction. Discuss the key story elements such as character, setting, plot, theme and point of view.

✍ **LAFS.1.RL.2.5** Explain major differences between books that tell stories and books that give information, drawing on a wide reading of a range of text types.

AFTER THE PLAY:

Part I

1. Ask your students to write letters, or draw pictures, to send to the cast of *Charlotte's Web*. What did they like about the play? Who was their favorite character? What did they learn from the story?

✍ **LAFS.1.W.1.3** Write narratives in which they recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, include some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide some sense of closure.

✍ **LAFS.2.W.2.5** With guidance and support from adults and peers, focus on a topic and strengthen writing as needed by revising and editing.

2. Have the students choose their favorite scenes from *Charlotte's Web* and act them out for one another. Be creative by assigning a director, actors, prompter and by making and using props and scenery.

✍ **TH.1.S.3.1** Use simple acting techniques to portray a person, place, action, or thing.

3. The better children are at detecting rhymes, the quicker and more successful is their reading progress. "When children rhyme, it really draws attention to the fact that words have parts," according to Sally Shaywitz, a professor of pediatrics and brain research at Yale University. Back in class, have the students write their own rap or poem about a character in *Charlotte's Web* or even a short synopsis of the play in rhyme.

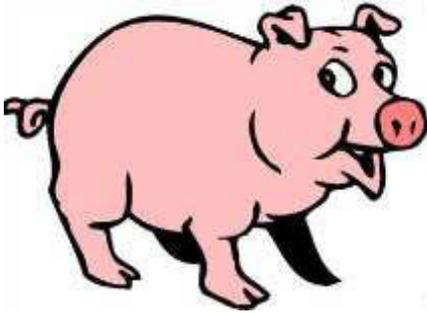
✍ **LAFS.2.RL.2.4** Describe how words and phrases (e.g., regular beats, alliteration, rhymes, repeated lines) supply rhythm and meaning in a story, poem, or song.

✍ **LAFS.2.SL.2.4** Tell a story or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking audibly in coherent sentences.

✍ **LAFS.2.L.2.3** Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.
a. Compare formal and informal uses of English.

✍ **LAFS.3.L.2.3** Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

4. The stage adaptation of Charlotte's Web includes many characters played by a few actors. Ask the children to observe how the actors are able to portray the different roles. Be sure to discuss costume, vocal and physical differences that the performers use to help them change characters.



Part II

Relevant Themes:

1. Friendship
2. Cooperation/Teamwork
3. Gluttony

Refer to the themes listed above. Ask the following questions to relate the themes to everyday life:

- 1.. One of the major themes in the play concerns friendship. Have a conference in your classroom on the value of friendship.
 - a. What qualities do real friends possess
 - b. How was the friendship between Wilbur and the Charlotte a two way street?
 - c. Why does friendship hurt sometimes? Is it worth it?
 - d. Which characters in Charlotte's Web would make the best friends?
 - e. Have you ever had a really close friendship with an Animal? Ask the students to talk about their favorite pet and what makes it so special.

✍ **LAFS.1.SL.1.1** Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

✍ **LAFS.1.SL.1.2** Ask and answer questions about key details in a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media.

2. Even though Charlotte is the heroine of the story she could never have saved Wilbur alone. However, when she joins forces with the other animals and humans they become strong.
- A. Can you think of other circumstances in which teamwork is necessary?
 - B. Have you ever been a part of a team when you didn't want to be?
 - C. How did you learn to work together even when you didn't want to?

 **LAFS.3.SL.1.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 3 *topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

3. Templeton the rat is motivated by one thing only; his appetite. In today's culture of junk food, eating disorders and obesity, dietary habits are a growing concern for many children as well as adults.
- A. Ask the students for examples of real-life "perils" associated with overeating, such as tummy aches or other health problems.
 - B. Just what is obesity and is it always the result of overeating?
 - C. What is the ideal body image?

 **HE.1.B.5.2** Identify healthy options to health-related issues or problems.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Fern saves Wilbur from death at the start of the book. Tell about a time when you stood up for someone smaller or weaker than yourself.
2. Think of other words that you would have written in your web about Wilbur.
3. Is Templeton the Rat a hero or a villain in the story? Why?
4. Why do you think that Charlotte liked Wilbur so much?
5. List five ways that the farm life is different from city life.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Internet fun. Go to the following links for outstanding Teacher Guides and Activities for Charlotte's Web. There guides include language art, reading, writing and creative art activities for all grades. <http://www.abcteach.com>. The crossword puzzle, word search and who am I exercise are excellent activities for Charlotte's Web.

THE PRODUCER

STAGES PRODUCTIONS is a professional theatre ensemble that specializes in bringing classic fairy tales to over 150,000 young people each year throughout the Southeast.

STAGES' show credits include critically acclaimed performances of: *Mother Goose*, *Snow White*, *The Three Little Pigs*, *Let Freedom Sing* and *The Princess and the Pea*. Be sure to join us for our 27th anniversary season featuring; *School House Rock Live!*, *Santa's Holiday Revue*, *Charlotte's Web*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Cinderella*.

Stages Productions is dedicated to making drama an integral part of education, and lesson plans are available to incorporate these plays into the student's curriculum. Thank you for supporting this mission by choosing a STAGES PRODUCTIONS play! www.stagesproductions.com

THE REFERENCES

White, E.B., (1952) [Charlotte's Web.](#)

Traktman, P., [Matinee Manners.](#)

www.floridastandards.org,www.cpalms.org [Online], 2014

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