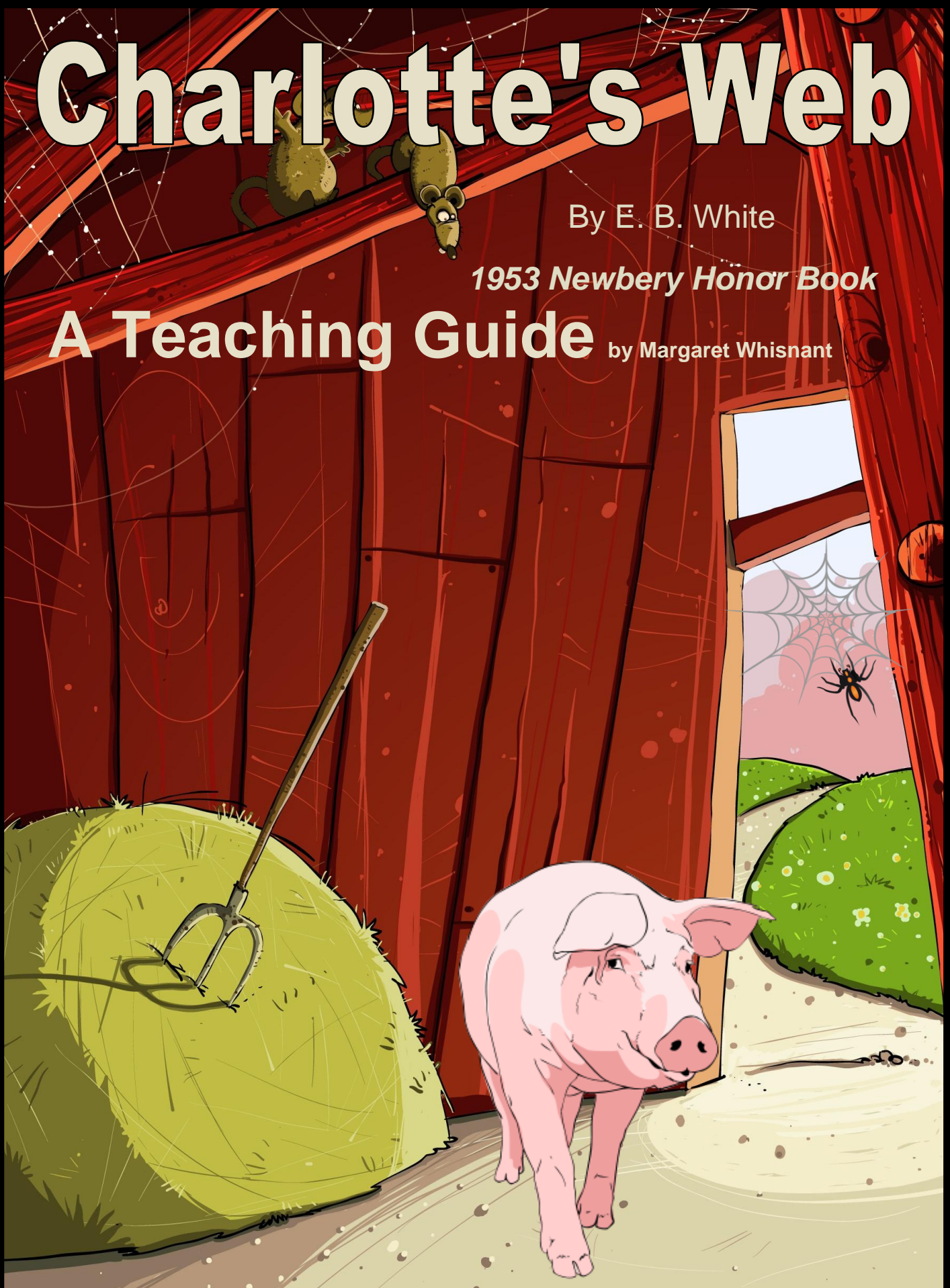


# Charlotte's Web

By E. B. White

*1953 Newbery Honor Book*

## A Teaching Guide by Margaret Whisnant



***Charlotte's Web***  
By E. B. White  
***A Novel Teaching Pack***  
By Margaret Whisnant

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Wilbur,  
born the runt in a litter of pigs,  
is saved by eight-year-old Fern Arable.

And then, just when life on Zuckerman's farm seems too boring to bear,  
Wilbur finds another friend.

Her name is Charlotte.  
She hangs upside down, eats blood,  
and writes his future in her web—

***Charlotte's Web.***



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# Chapter Summaries

## Chapter I Before Breakfast

- One morning before breakfast, eight-year-old Fern Arable is upset that Papa has gone to the hoghouse with an ax to get rid of a runt pig born the night before.
- Fern rushes from the house into the outdoor springtime and begs her father not to kill the pig.
- Mr. Arable tells Fern she must learn to control herself. He says a weakling makes trouble.
- Fern asks her father if he would have killed her if she had been very small at birth. She characterized what her father is planning to do as a *terrible case of injustice*.
- Mr. Arable sends Fern back to the house with a promise that he will bring the runt in to her.
- Inside the carton that Fern's father puts on her chair is the newborn white pig. Fern says he's absolutely perfect. She is holding the pig when her brother Avery enters the room.
- Ten-year-old Avery criticizes Fern's pig for being no bigger than a white rat, but he asks if he can have one, too. Mr. Arable says he only gives pigs to early risers.
- Fern cannot eat until her pig has a drink of milk. She sits on the floor in the kitchen and feeds her infant.
- The school bus arrives. Mrs. Arable takes the pig and gives Fern a doughnut. By the time the bus reaches school, Fern has named her pet Wilbur.

## Chapter II Wilbur

- Fern loves Wilbur more than anything. She feeds him every morning and several times more after she gets home from school. Wilbur watches Fern with adoring eyes when she warms his bottles.
- Wilbur is soon moved from his box near the stove in the kitchen to a bigger box in the woodshed. When he is two weeks old, Wilbur goes outdoors to live in a large wooden box full of straw under an apple tree. He burrows and disappears under the straw where he is comfortable and warm.
- Each morning Wilbur walks with Fern to wait for the school bus and stays to watch it vanish around the turn. He waits inside his yard until Fern comes home. He follows her everywhere.
- Fern puts Wilbur in the carriage beside her doll when he grows tired during their walks. She wheels the carriage very slowly so as not to wake her infants.
- One warm afternoon, when Fern and Avery go swimming in the brook, Wilbur amuses himself in the mud along the edge of the brook. The pig's days are happy and his nights are peaceful.
- Wilbur is a spring pig. When he is five weeks old, Mr. Arable says he must be sold like his ten brothers and sisters. Despite Fern's tears, Mr. Arable does not give in. Mrs. Arable suggests that Fern call her Uncle Homer Zuckerman who sometimes raises pigs. On the Zuckerman farm, Wilbur will be close enough for Fern to visit often.
- Mr. Arable suggests that Fern sell her pig for six dollars. The next day, Wilbur is taken from his home under the apple tree and goes to live in a manure pile in the cellar of Zuckerman's barn.

## Chapter III Escape

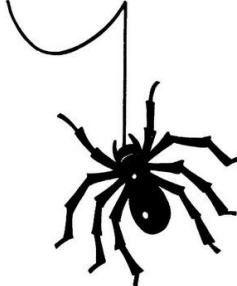
- Homer Zuckerman's barn is very large and very old, but Wilbur's manure pile in the cellar is warm and comfortable.
- Fern visits her Uncle Homer's farm almost every afternoon to sit on a milking stool as she thinks and listens and watches Wilbur. She is not allowed to take the pig out or go into his pen. The animals get to know and trust her because she is so quiet and friendly.
- Wilbur is happy to have Fern sitting outside his pen, but he never has any fun. One afternoon in June, when he is almost two months old, Wilbur believes that he's tired of living. There was no place to go but indoors or out into his small pen.
- The goose tells Wilbur that there is a loose board in the fence. Wilbur pushes it open with his head and squeezes through. On the advice of the goose, he goes to the orchard.
- Wilbur has rooted up quite a piece of ground before Mrs. Zuckerman sees him from the kitchen window and shouts for Mr. Zuckerman and Lurvy, the hired man.

# Word Lists with Definitions

(Arranged in story order. Some words may appear on more than one page.)

## Set One: Chapter 1 Before Breakfast—Chapter V Charlotte

- sopping** Being thoroughly soaked; dripping or soaked in liquid; dripping; soggy. (p. 1)
- injustice** Violation of another's rights or of what is fair; something that is wrong; violation; a crime; wrongdoing. (p. 3)
- specimen** An example regarded as typical of a class such as an animal, plant, mineral, etc.; an example; a sampling; representation. (p. 5)
- distribute** To divide and give out in shares; to pass out and deliver (as newspapers) to intended recipients; hand out; dispense. (p. 5)
- blissful** Full of, abounding in, enjoying extreme happiness; joyful; euphoric. (p. 7)
- adoring** Regarding with love, esteem, and respect; honoring; admiring; loving. (p. 8)
- enchanted** Attracted and delighted; entranced; charmed. (p. 9)
- discarded** Thrown away; no longer in use; rejected; cast aside. (p. 15)
- trough** A long, narrow, open receptacle, usually boxlike in shape, used chiefly to hold water or food for animals; a long depression or hollow, as between two ridges or waves. (p. 16)
- hullabaloo** Great noise or excitement; a noisy disturbance; an uproar; disorder; excitement; agitation; clamor. (p. 22)
- lure** To attract, entice, or tempt; a decoy; live or artificial bait used in fishing or trapping; bribe; tempt. (p. 22)
- eaves** The overhanging, lower edge of a roof. (p. 25)
- morsel** A bite, mouthful, or small portion of food, candy, etc.; scrap; bit. (p. 26)
- frolic** To play in a light-spirited manner; romp; to have fun. (p. 29)
- glutton** A person who eats and drinks in excessive amounts; a person with a remarkably great desire or capacity for something; overeater. (p. 29)
- stealthily** Done or acting quietly, cautiously, or secretly for the purpose of avoiding notice; furtively; secretly; surreptitiously. (p. 30)
- cunning** Skill employed in a shrewd or sly manner, as in deceiving; craftiness; ingenuity; intelligence. *Informal:* charmingly cute or appealing. (p. 30)
- dejected** Depressed in spirits; unhappy; disheartened; discouraged; despondent. (p. 30)
- endure** To carry on in spite of hardship; to continue without yielding; stand; suffer; bear. (p. 31)
- appropriate** *Adjective:* Suitable or fitting for a particular purpose, person, or occasion; *Verb:* to set apart, authorize, or legislate for some specific purpose or use; to take without permission or consent. (p. 34)
- meekly** Done without spirit or resistance; accomplished with patience and humility; humbly; submissively; docilely. (p. 35)
- salutations** A polite expression of greeting or goodwill, indicating respect or affection; hello. (p. 35)
- blundered** Moved clumsily or blindly; made an unusually serious mistake. (p. 37)
- detested** Disliked intensely; abhorred; despised. (p. 38)
- wits** Powers of intelligent observation, keen perception, and mental ability. (p. 40)



# Dictionary Digs

Set One: Chapter 1 Before Breakfast—Chapter V Charlotte

Dig into your favorite dictionary to find answers to all the following questions about some challenging words from the first five chapters of **Charlotte's Web**. Write the **letters** of the correct answers in the blanks to the left.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Which of the following is the best example of a **morsel**? (A) a piece of a broken chocolate chip cookie, (B) a tract of land less than one acre, (C) a cheese sandwich.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. A **glutton** is a person who (A) follows a strict vegetarian diet, (B) likes only one type of food and is a picky eater as well, (C) eats and drinks in excessive amounts.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. A **synonym** for the word **meekly** is (A) casually, (B) boisterously, (C) docilely.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. A good example of a fine **specimen** is (A) the tallest member of a basketball team, (B) a dog awarded the title of Best in Show, (C) any new technological discovery.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Which of the following phrases illustrates the *best* use of the word **enchanted**? (A) an **enchanted** solution to the problem, (B) fully **enchanted** with the most modern equipment, (C) **enchanted** by the baby's smile.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Which of the following words is closely associated with the term **sopping**? (A) mopping, (B) soaked, (C) sentimental
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The word that is an *antonym* of **detested** is (A) adored (B) abhorred, (C) ejected.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Which of the following cartoons *best* illustrates the meaning of the word **dejected**?

(A)



(B)



(C)



- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Under what circumstances is a person *most likely* to use a **lure**? When he or she (A) is shopping for a bargain, (B) is fishing, (C) wants to remain anonymous.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. A word that does not rhyme with **trough** is (A) cough, (B) scoff, (C) rough.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Which word can be substituted for **cunning** in the following sentence without changing its meaning?  
*With skillful use of words and **cunning**, Mr. Hensley drew others into his scheme.*  
 (A) shrewdness, (B) charisma, (C) ineptness
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Something that would probably **not** be part of a **hullabaloo** is (A) noise or excitement, (B) celebrations and festivities, (C) tranquility and quiet.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. A *synonym* for **blissful** is (A) euphoric, (B) dejected, (C) reproachful.



# Short Answer Questions

## **Chapter I Before Breakfast**

1. How did Fern find out that her father was going to kill the runt pig?
2. How old was Fern?
3. What example did Fern give her father to prove that killing the little pig was unfair?
4. How did Fern describe her father's intention to kill the runt?
5. Where did Fern find the pig when she came downstairs from changing her sneakers?
6. What color was the pig?
7. How did Mr. Arable answer when Fern's brother asked if he could have a pig?
8. What was Fern doing when the school bus honked from the road?
9. How did Fern feel about having entire charge of a pig?
10. Why did Fern answer the teacher's question about the capital of Pennsylvania with "Wilbur"?

## **Chapter II Wilbur**

1. How did Fern feel about Wilbur?
2. Who fed Wilbur while Fern was at school?
3. After he was moved from his place in the house to the box in the woodshed, where did Wilbur live next?
4. How did Fern know that Wilbur would stay warm in his outdoor home?
5. What did Wilbur do every morning after breakfast?
6. How did Fern help when Wilbur got tired during their walks with the doll carriage?
7. How old was Wilbur when Mr. Arable said he had to be sold like his ten brothers and sisters?
8. Why did Mrs. Arable suggest that Fern call her Uncle Homer Zuckerman?
9. How much did Mr. Zuckerman pay for Wilbur?
10. Where was Wilbur's new home?

## **Chapter III Escape**

1. How was Fern related to Homer Zuckerman?
2. What did Fern do when she visited Wilbur?
3. Why did all the animals trust Fern?
4. Who told Wilbur he could escape from his pen by pushing on the loose board?
5. Where was Wilbur when Mrs. Zuckerman saw him and what was he doing?
6. Who was Lurvy?
7. Why did Wilbur cry and wish Fern were with him?
8. What tempted Wilbur to follow Zuckerman back to his pen and walk through the loose board?
9. What did the goose say when Wilbur went back into the pen?
10. What statement did Wilbur interpret as words of praise?





Chapter I: *Before Breakfast*  
Pages 1-7

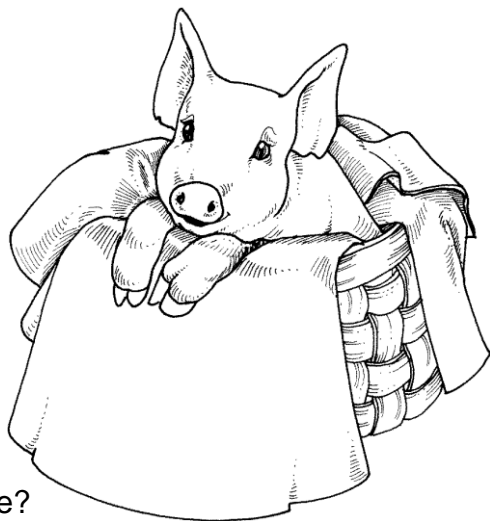
Write either **True** or **False** in the blank before each statement.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Mr. Arable planned to kill the small new-born pig because it was sick.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Mr. Arable was going to destroy the pig with an ax.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Fern asked her father if he would have killed her if she had been born very small.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Fern thought killing the pig was unfair and a terrible injustice.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Mr. Arable brought the pig into the house so Fern could bottle feed it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. When she saw the pig in the carton, Fern said he was absolutely too small for her to take care of.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Avery was Fern's younger brother.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Mr. Arable said Fern got the pig because she was an early riser.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Fern had trouble getting the pig to drink from the baby bottle.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Fern named the pig Wilbur.

Chapter II: *Wilbur*  
**Pages 8-12**

Write either **Yes** or **No** in the blank before each question.

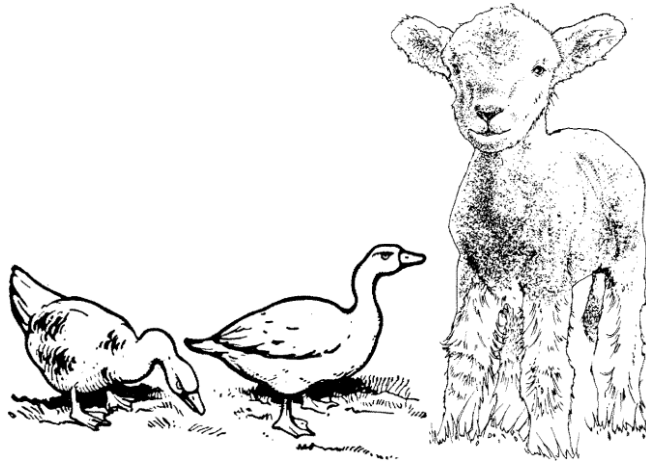
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Did Fern love Wilbur more than anything?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Did Fern feed Wilbur only once a day?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Was Wilbur moved from the kitchen because Mrs. Arable complained?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Was Fern worried that Wilbur would be cold in his box under the apple tree?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Did Wilbur watch Fern ride out of sight when she left on the school bus each morning?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Did Wilbur hate his home under the apple tree?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Did Wilbur stay shut up in his yard all the time?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Would Wilbur sometimes take naps when Fern put him in her doll carriage?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Did Wilbur like to go swimming in the brook?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Was Wilbur a spring pig?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Did Mr. Arable say Wilbur would have to be sold when he was five weeks old?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Did Fern's tears cause Mr. Arable to change his mind about selling Wilbur?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Had all of Wilbur's brothers and sisters been sold?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Did Mother suggest that Fern sell Wilbur to Mr. Zuckerman because his farm was close enough for her to go visit?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Was Mr. Zuckerman Fern's uncle?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. Did Fern refuse to ask for any money for Wilbur?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. Did Uncle Homer buy Wilbur because he felt sorry for him?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. Did Wilbur get to take his house from under the apple tree when he moved to Zuckerman's farm?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. Did Wilbur move into the main floor of the barn?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. Was Wilbur's new home on a manure pile?



Chapter IV: *Loneliness*  
**Pages 25-31**

Write the **letter** of the correct answer in the blank before each question.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Wilbur's plans for the day were ruined by (A) Mrs. Zuckerman, (B) rain, (C) a cold snap.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Templeton was (A) a goose, (B) a sparrow, (C) a rat.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Which of the following was **not** part of Wilbur's plans for the day? (A) take a nap, (B) scratch itchy places by rubbing against the fence, (C) break out of his pen again.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Wilbur cried because (A) he felt lonely and friendless, (B) he couldn't go out into the yard, (C) Templeton wouldn't talk to him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The goose could not play with Wilbur because (A) she didn't want to get wet, (B) she didn't like him, (C) she was sitting on eggs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. The lamb's opinion of Wilbur was that (A) he was less than nothing, (B) he was the smartest animal in the barn, (C) he was too dirty to play with.



- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Templeton moved from place to place around the farm by (A) slinking from one place to another, (B) traveling through tunnels and runways he had built, (C) waiting until no one was around.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. When he saw Templeton eating his breakfast, Wilbur (A) threw himself down in the manure and sobbed, (B) ran to his trough and started eating, (C) frightened Templeton away by snorting at him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Because Wilbur wasn't eating, Lurvy (A) gave him better food, (B) brought his food inside the barn, (C) forced him to take medicine.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Just after dark, Wilbur heard a voice that (A) told him to stop crying, (B) offered to be his friend, (C) sounded like Templeton.

# Think, Write, Create

## Chapter Activities

### Chapter 1 Before Breakfast

Eight-year-old Fern cried and begged her father not to destroy the runt pig. She sealed the little animal's fate by asking her father if he would have killed her if she had been born very small.

- Which **two** of the following words do you think **best** describe the way Fern's father behaved during this episode? Explain your choice. Include the definitions of the words you selected in your answer..

*practical*  
*realistic*

*sensitive*  
*flexible*

*cruel*  
*callous*

*loving*  
*compassionate*

*considerate*  
*logical*

- Choose **two** words from the list below that you believe **best** describe Fern's behavior. Explain why they are the appropriate words. Use the words' definitions as part of your explanation.

*impulsive*  
*undisciplined*

*compassionate*  
*naive*

*assertive*  
*juvenile*

*tender-hearted*  
*humane*

*hysterical*  
*empathetic*

When Avery asked if he could have a pig, Mr. Arable told his son he only distributed pigs to early risers. Mr. Arable's words were very much like the adage "*The early bird gets the worm.*"

What do you think this old saying means both *literally* (as it applies to actual birds and worms) and *figuratively* (as it applies to people getting what they want)? A maxim that seems to contradict the *early bird* advice is "*Better late than never.*" How do you interpret this idea?

Which bit of wisdom do you believe people should follow? Are both of them valuable? Which one do you think **best** describes the way you do things?

Think carefully, and then write a composition about ***The Early Bird Gets the Worm, But Better Late Than Never.*** (See **Graphic Organizer #1**)

The objects Avery took with him when he ran to catch the bus and his attitude toward the pig are clues to his personality.

- What were the objects that Avery carried? What do they tell you about his interests?
- How was Avery's attitude toward the runt pig different from Fern's? Which child was more interested in animals and their care? How can you prove that your answer is correct?
- Do you think Avery is a bad person? Why or why not?

The collection of toys Avery carried with him to school indicate that Charlotte's story was written quite a while ago.

- Prove it to yourself by thinking about what would happen to Avery if he came to your class adorned as described in the story?
  - Do you remember a time in your school career when such a thing would have been allowed?
  - What year was ***Charlotte's Web*** written? How old is the story?
-

# Think, Write, Create

## Whole Book Activities

It was the old sheep who gave Wilbur the bad news about what was planned for him at Christmastime. Though the information upset the young pig terribly, the old sheep's warning began the chain of events that changed Wilbur's fate.

What are some real-life warnings—a storm alert, a stop light, for example—that might sometimes seem *inconvenient* or *frightening*? Think of your home, riding in a car, your vulnerability as a pedestrian, your day at school, and repeated advice from adults to generate ideas. Choose the **four** warnings that you believe are the most important for **your own safety**. Write a composition about **Beneficial Warnings**. (See **Graphic Organizer # 8**)

---

As Wilbur and Charlotte's co-tenants on Zuckerman's farm, the goose and the gander mixed their unique personalities into the day-to-day drama. Take a look at the following list of behavior characteristics and select **three** that you think **best** apply to the goose. Then pick **three** for the gander. You may use the same word(s) for both animals. Find events in the story to explain and support **each word** you chose. Organize the required data and then write a composition about **The Goose and the Gander**. (See **Graphic Organizer #9**)

*scatterbrained*  
*dedicated*  
*intelligent*  
*empty-headed*

*talkative*  
*entertaining*  
*humorous*  
*braggart*

*friendly*  
*nurturing*  
*devoted*  
*irresponsible*

*supportive*  
*helpful*  
*protective*  
*playful*

---

The author wrote of Templeton. . . *The rat had no morals, no conscience, no scruples, no consideration, no decency, no milk of rodent kindness, no compunctions, no higher feeling, no friendliness, no anything.*

- Give **four** examples from the story that illustrate how Templeton's nasty personality was beneficial to Wilbur and Charlotte. Do you think they were wrong to take advantage of the rat's greedy nature? Why or why not?
  - What evidence can you find to prove that Templeton wasn't all bad?
  - Can you name any living thing on earth that has absolutely no worth? Explain how you arrived at the answer to this question.
- 

Avery Arable was rambunctious, impulsive, and a bit of a clown. Unlike his sister Fern, he had no concept of the plots brewing on his Uncle Homer's farm. Nevertheless, he managed to blunder into the action.

Imagine that Avery kept a journal. Write his entries for *the day Fern got Wilbur*, *the day he tried to capture Charlotte*, and *the day Wilbur won the special prize at the Fair*. (See **Graphic Organizer #10**)

---

## The Early Bird Gets the Worm, But Better Late Than Never



When Avery asked if he could have a pig, Fern's father said he only distributed pigs to early risers.

Mr. Arable's words were very much like the adage "*The early bird gets the worm.*" What do you think this old saying means both *literally* (as it applies to actual birds and worms) and *figuratively* (as it applies to people getting what they want)? A maxim that seems to contradict the *early bird* advice is "*Better late than never.*" How do you interpret this idea?

Which bit of wisdom do you believe people should follow? Are both of them valuable? Which one do you think **best** describes the way you do things? Use the thinking map below to organize your ideas and write a composition about ***The Early Bird Gets the Worm, But Better Late Than Never.***

What **literal** and **figurative** meaning do you see in the old adage "*The early bird gets the worm.*"?

What rule for living is hidden in the phrase "**Better late than never**"?

How do you feel about these ideas? Is one better than the other? Are they both valuable? Explain. . .

Which are you—an **early bird** or a **better-late-than-never** person? Explain your answer with examples. . .