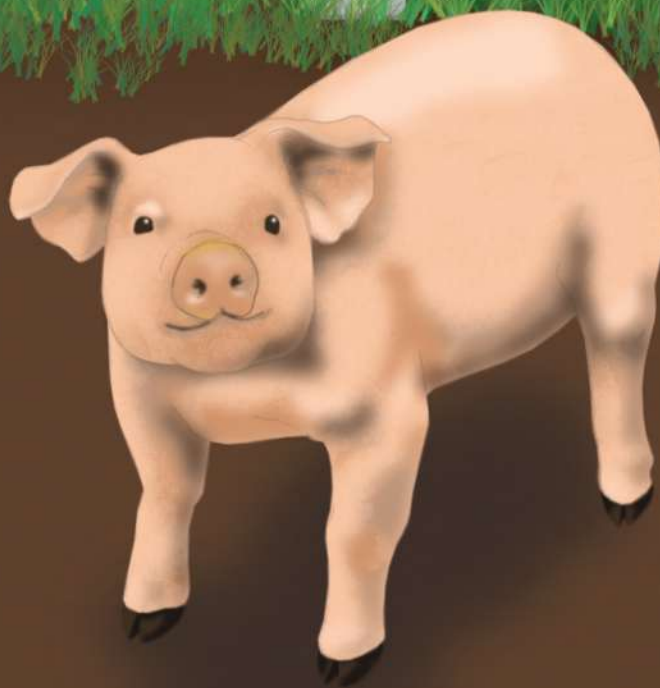


Charlotte's Web

Study Guide

by Andrew Clausen

For the novel
by E. B. White



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Synopsis

Early one spring morning, Fern Arable notices her father heading out to the hoghouse with an ax. Her mother informs her that some pigs had been born the previous night, but that one of the pigs is a runt. "It's very small and weak, and it will never amount to anything. So your father has decided to do away with it."

Outraged at what she sees as a terrible injustice, Fern pleads with her father not to kill the pig. Her father agrees, provided that Fern raise the pig herself. Fern names the pig Wilbur, and spends many happy hours caring for him.

When Wilbur is five weeks old, he is sold to Fern's uncle, Homer Zuckerman. Wilbur goes to live in Mr. Zuckerman's barn, and Fern goes to visit him nearly every day.

Wilbur quickly adjusts to his new life in the barn cellar, but soon experiences a painful loneliness. Then Wilbur meets Charlotte, a spider who lives in the doorway over his pen. Charlotte says that she will be Wilbur's friend. Wilbur is excited to have a new friend, but he is alarmed by Charlotte's habit of trapping insects and drinking their blood. Charlotte's kindness and good nature win over Wilbur, and they become fast friends.

Wilbur's happiness is short-lived when he learns that Mr. Zuckerman plans to kill him at Christmastime. "Turn you into smoked bacon and ham," the old sheep tells him. Wilbur becomes nearly hysterical at the news, but Charlotte hatches a clever plan to save Wilbur's life.

The story of Charlotte's effort to save Wilbur's life is a lesson in selfless love that demonstrates the beauty of true friendship and sacrifice.

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5. How is Charlotte saved?

Thinking About the Story:

6. When Wilbur asks Charlotte how he might help her think of a plan to save him, Charlotte gives Wilbur the following advice:

“Well,” replied Charlotte, “you must try to build yourself up. I want you to get plenty of sleep, and stop worrying. Never hurry and never worry! Chew your food thoroughly and eat every bit of it, except you must leave just enough for Templeton. Gain weight and stay well—that’s the way you can help. Keep fit, and don’t lose your nerve.”

Read the advice in each of the passages below. For each passage, write down the advice given in the passage. Then write down the similar piece of advice that Charlotte gives to Wilbur.

a. Matthew 6:25–27

b. Joshua 1:9

c. Proverbs 22:9

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17. Read James 3:2–10. Words can either hurt others or encourage them. It is important that we learn to watch what we say. Write down what guidance is given in each of the following proverbs.
- a. Proverbs 12:18:

 - b. Proverbs 15:1

 - c. Proverbs 17:27

 - d. Proverbs 21:23

Writing Assignment:

- Mrs. Arable worries about Fern when Fern claims that the animals can talk. While we know that animals do not talk like humans do, they do communicate by other means. If you have pets, you may notice certain behaviors that your pets do to attempt to communicate something. For example, a cat might communicate happiness by holding its tail high or purring. A dog might show submissiveness by keeping its tail or head low.

If you have any pets, try to write a “vocabulary” for them explaining what you think their various sounds or behaviors might mean. (For example, you might note that if the dog stands at the door and barks, it means “let me out!”)

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Overview

Story Structure:

1. The animals must find a way to keep Wilbur from being butchered at Christmastime.
2. The climax of the story occurs at the fair when the families hear the announcement of a special award for Wilbur. Students may also notice a second, lesser climax as Wilbur frantically attempts to get Templeton to retrieve Charlotte's egg sac before they leave the fair.
3. The resolution of the story occurs when Wilbur wins the special medal at the fair, and his survival is assured. He goes home to live in the barn, taking Charlotte's egg sac with him.

Character Study:

4. Answers may vary. Accept reasonable responses. Quiet: Fern. She sits quietly near the animals and they come to trust her. Talkative: The Goose. She has a repetitive way of talking. Selfish: Templeton. He does nothing for anyone unless he also benefits from it. Selfless: Charlotte. She did all she could to save someone else's life.
5. Fern: Yes. At the beginning of the story she spends all her free time down at the barn sitting near the animals. By the end of the story she has grown up and no longer spends time in the barn with the animals. Charlotte: No. She remains the same warm, friendly, selfless individual throughout the story. This is her strength. Wilbur: Yes. At the beginning of the story he is young, somewhat timid, and prone to feelings of loneliness and fear. By the end of the story he has shown selflessness, leadership, and the ability to reach out to Charlotte's daughters in friendship. Templeton: No. He is still the same greedy character at the end of the story as he is at the beginning.
6. Answers will vary.

Theme:

7. Wilbur thought it was cruel the way Charlotte trapped insects in her web and drank their blood. Answers may vary. Wilbur's opinion changed because she showed herself to be a true friend through her words and her actions.
8. We must be the servants of all. Charlotte let Wilbur get all the praise for what she did. She helped save his life. She put Wilbur's needs before her own by going to the fair with him when she could have stayed in the barn to make her egg sac there.

Cycles of Life:

9. The story begins in spring. One year of time passes.
10. At the beginning of the story, we read about Wilbur's birth and also the birth of the young goslings. Near the end of the story, we witness the death of Charlotte.
11. At the end of the story we read that the goose is sitting on nine new eggs, that "every morning there was another new lamb in the sheepfold," but most importantly, Charlotte's eggs hatch.
12. The first word is "Salutations." This helps reinforce the continuing cycle, because "Salutations" was also Charlotte's first word to Wilbur.
13. Answers will vary.
14. a. This passage tells us that God had numbered our days (knows how long we will live) before we were even born. b. This passage tells us that whoever believes in Jesus will not die, but will live eternally. c. This passage tells us that we have victory over death because of Jesus, and the dead will be raised up to life again.