

Book Club Guide
***Charlotte's Web* (1952)**
by E. B. White

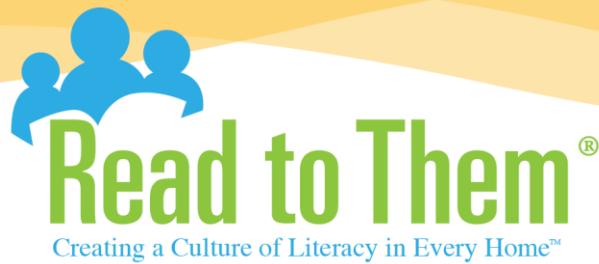
Week One Bonus Activity: Character Raffle-n-Write (pp. 1-54)

There are a host of distinct characters in E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web*—and we get to know most of them in the first 54 pages. For this activity, type these characters' names and include a "personality quote" on each slip of paper.

Here are some examples:

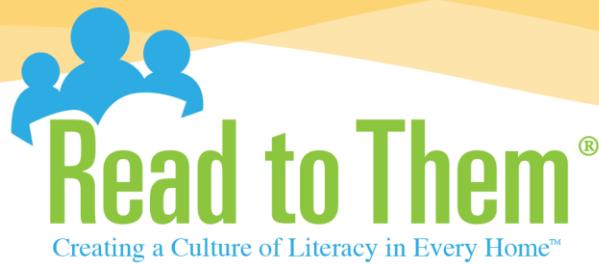
- Templeton, the rat: "*The rat had no morals, no conscience, no scruples, no consideration, no decency, no milk of rodent kindness, no compunctions, no higher feeling, no friendliness, no anything.*" (p. 46)
- Fern, the girl: "*Fern loved Wilbur more than anything. She loved to stroke him, to feed him, to put him to bed.*" (p. 8)
- Wilbur, the pig: "*Wilbur didn't want food, he wanted love.*" (p. 27)
- The goose: "*How does it feel to be free?*" (p. 17)
- The old sheep: "*If you have a new friend here, you are probably disturbing his rest; and the quickest way to spoil a friendship is to wake somebody up in the morning before he is ready.*" (p. 35)
- Charlotte, the spider: "*Well, I am pretty, There's no denying that. Almost all spiders are rather nice-looking. I'm not as flashy as some, but I'll do.*" (p. 37)

There are several more to choose from, and you can repeat some depending on the size of your group! Invite your book club members to each pull a character quote from a bag or a hat, and then write a paragraph from their character's perspective. What does their character's voice sound like? If you feel that your club needs a bit more direction, give them a specific prompt such as—"Write about your dream evening," or "Write about something you feel passionate about," or "Write about your favorite meal". Encourage your club to really step into the shoes of their character and write as them!



Week One Discussion Questions

1. *“The pig couldn’t help being born small, could it? If I had been very small at birth, would you have killed me?”* (p. 3) After delivering her argument, Mr. Arable lets Fern keep the pig. Did Mr. Arable’s choice surprise you? What lessons do you think Mr. Arable intends for Fern to learn by raising a pig?
2. *“Fern loved Wilbur more than anything. She loved to stroke him, to feed him, to put him to bed.”* (p. 8) What might your favorite pastime be with Wilbur? What else would you do with Wilbur?
3. *“An hour of freedom is worth a barrel of slops.”* (p. 23) The goose urges Wilbur to break free. What does freedom mean to the animals on the Zuckerman farm? Is their idea of freedom different than yours?
4. *“From eleven to twelve he planned to stand still and watch flies on the boards, watch bees in the clover, and watch swallows in the air.”* (p. 26) Wilbur has a daily schedule and is gloomy when his plans are disrupted. Do you have a series of tasks you complete, without fail, each day? How do you feel when that routine is disrupted? How do you navigate around these disruptions? Share at least one strategy.
5. *“Maybe our ears aren’t as sharp as Fern’s.”* (p. 54) Fern tells her parents about how Zuckerman’s barn animals talk, leaving her mother to worry for her health, and her father to consider the possibility. Is there any reason that Mrs. Arable should be concerned? Why? If someone told you they could understand animals, would you believe them? Is there any animal in particular you’d like to communicate with?



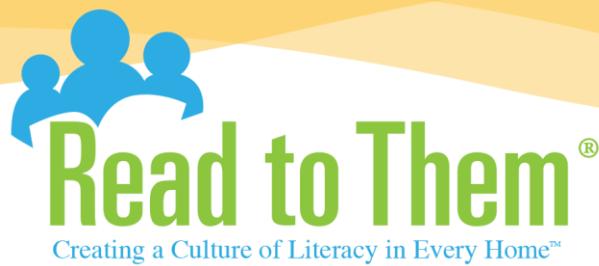
Week Two Bonus Activity: Your Web (pp. 55-117)

In our story, Charlotte is helping out her friend by advertising him as “some pig”, and “terrific”. If your book club members had to create a word web of adjectives they’d use to describe each other, what would their lists consist of?

In this week’s activity, invite the club to spend some time thinking about that. Then, once they’ve come up with a list, they should draw a web and add their words into their design. They can get as creative as they’d like in bringing this word web to life. Once they’ve finished their webs, create a bulletin board of all of their webs!

Week Two Discussion Questions

1. *“I can think better if I think alone.”* (p. 64) Why do you think Charlotte likes to think alone? When you have a problem that needs solving, do you prefer to have help or work it out by yourself?
2. *“SOME PIG!”* (p. 77) Reactions to Charlotte’s weaving are mixed: Lurvy can’t believe the sight, Mr. Zuckerman trembles, and Mrs. Zuckerman goes pale. What would your reaction to seeing Charlotte’s web be? Would your view of Wilbur change? If yes, how so? If not, why do you think the others quickly shift their view of him?
3. *“You’re terrific as far as I’m concerned... and that’s what counts.”* (p. 91) Charlotte defends Wilbur when he tries to argue that he isn’t “terrific.” When you hear Wilbur try to challenge Charlotte, how does that make you feel? Why should you try to look beyond your own view of yourself? Take a moment and pay yourself a compliment...then give one to a friend.
4. *“Wilbur was modest; fame did not spoil him.”* (p. 115) If you were to become famous, do you think you might change in some significant way? How? What would you like to become known for? Do you want to be famous?
5. *“Friendship is one of the most satisfying things in the world.”* (p. 115) True? What does friendship mean to you?



Week Three Bonus Activity: 514 Babies, 514 Stories (pp. 118-184)

Any reader might shed a tear for Charlotte's heroism and bittersweet departure. Like any sad part of nature, though, there is a bright side. Charlotte leaves a legacy with 514 babies born into Wilbur's loving gaze. Three of those babies stay with Wilbur, and 511 mini-Charlottes depart on the breeze—off to their own adventure.

For this activity, your students could either break into groups (depending on the size of your book club) or tackle this task on their own. Allow book club members to imagine that they've been tasked with creating a sequel for *Charlotte's Web*, based upon one of her daughters. They should name their spider, choose a setting (where did the wind take her?), and maybe even a best friend (who is this spider's Wilbur? or this spider's Fern?). What sort of conflict might arise for her? What sort of web will she spin? Encourage your book club to share what they've come up with—and if they're inspired, write their own story!

Week Three Discussion Questions

1. *"A fair is a rat's paradise. Everybody spills food at a fair. A rat can creep out late at night and have a feast."* (pp. 122-123) The Arables, Zuckermans, and the assortment of barnyard animals are all eagerly awaiting the fair. What is an event you've been very, very happy for? Describe it. Were you able to go to sleep the night before or were you too excited to get some rest? Was your anticipation worth it?
2. *"It's a perfectly beautiful egg sac."* (p. 145) Charlotte has created unthinkable art with her web, but she refers to her egg sac (which most spiders make in their lives) as her masterpiece. Can you compare the value of her webs for Wilbur, and the value of her own egg sac? Which is more valuable?
3. *"In the last analysis, we simply know that we are dealing with supernatural forces here, and we should all feel proud and grateful. In the words of the spider's web, ladies and gentlemen, this is some pig."* (p. 157) Why do you think, other than Fern, that no one else is willing to believe a spider is capable of writing? Knowing what you do about Charlotte, how did you read this scene? Was it funny? Ridiculous? Something else entirely?
4. *"I notice that it's always me you come to when in trouble. But I've never heard of anyone's heart breaking on my account. Oh, no. Who cares anything about old Templeton!"* (p. 168) What do you think of Templeton's role in the book? Do you think he was only in it for himself? What would have happened without Templeton's help?
5. *"It is not often that someone comes along who is a true friend and a good writer. Charlotte was both."* (p. 184) Is *Charlotte's Web* about Charlotte? Is it about Wilbur? What are you meant to take away from the book?