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CHARLOTTE'S WEB

Study Guide

THE STORY

Our play is based on E.B. White's classic book, CHARLOTTE'S WEB, which has been read by generations of children since it first appeared in 1952 and remains a favorite today.

The story opens on a farm with the birth of a litter of pigs. The farmer, Mr. Arable, is about to destroy the tiniest one, or the "runt," but is stopped by the pleading of his young daughter, Fern. She takes over the bottle-feeding and special care required for such a little pig -- whom she names "Wilbur" -- and the pig flourishes. Now that Wilbur is growing, Mr. Arable must sell him -- but, again at Fern's urging, the pig is sold to her Uncle Homer Zuckerman. Since the Zuckerman's farm is just down the road, Fern can still visit him often.

On the Zuckerman's farm, Wilbur meets many new animals -- Goose and Gander, Sheep, and Templeton the Rat -- but without Fern around as much, he admits to feeling lonely. One night, a voice answers his wishes, and promises to be his friend. The next morning, he finds out that the voice belongs to a beautiful grey spider named Charlotte. Although Wilbur is nervous about trusting this new acquaintance (she captures bugs in her web, so he thinks she's "brutal"), he soon learns that Charlotte is his loyal and true friend when she devises a plan to save him from his inevitable trip to the slaughterhouse. Through her talent at weaving words into her web, and her sacrificing of most of her energy to do so, she convinces "the people" that Wilbur is "some pig," and he is insured a long life in the barnyard.

BEFORE SEEING THE PLAY

1. Ask students if they have ever visited a farm. If so, what kinds of animals did they see there? Read about farms in class, or show a film or video about raising animals on a farm.

2. Review the following vocabulary words which will be heard in the play:

runt	**slops** (scraps fed to pigs)	**terrific**	**radiant**
gander (male goose)	**lonesome or lonely**	**humble**	
goslings (baby geese)	**famous**	**loyal**	

Tell students to listen -- and look -- for some of these words in the play.

3. Show the class a picture of a spider's web. Does it look like something that would be easy or difficult to make? Explain how the web is used to capture food for the spider. Finish the lesson with a discussion of the way a spider makes an "egg sac" for their hundreds of eggs, which then hatch into baby spiders.

4. In our play, there are fewer actors than characters. Ask children to observe closely to see if they can tell which actors play more than one part.

5. Since the main theme of the play is friendship, have a class discussion on this topic. What makes a good friend? What kinds of things do friends do for each other? Have students give examples from their own circle of friends.

(O V E R)

AFTER SEEING THE PLAY

1. How does Fern convince her father not to kill the smallest pig -- the "runt" -- of the litter? What does she do to help raise the little pig?

2. When Wilbur moves to the Zuckerman farm, he meets many animals but is still lonely until he meets Charlotte. What is different about Charlotte that makes her become Wilbur's friend?

3. When Wilbur first meets Charlotte, he wonders if he will ever learn to like someone who is so "brutal" and "bloodthirsty," yet Charlotte soon becomes his best friend. Have you ever changed your opinion about someone after you got to know them better? Are first impressions always reliable?

4. In the play, we see both Charlotte and Templeton the Rat do things for Wilbur which help to save his life. Do they both help him for the same reasons? How is Templeton convinced to help? Why does Charlotte make sacrifices for Wilbur? What does Wilbur do to return the favors?

5. Although our play is not a musical, there is music heard throughout. How is music used in setting the mood? What kind of music is played for the happy parts? The sad parts? Tell students to listen for music that sets the mood the next time they see a movie or television show.

6. Ask students if they were able to pick out the actors playing more than one character. What did the actors do to show that they were playing different parts (change costumes, voices, body movements)? How did the actors portray the animal characters? Have children take turns imitating different animals sounds. If these animals could talk, how would they sound?

7. Ask students if they can remember which words Charlotte wove into her web (SOME PIG, TERRIFIC, RADIANT, HUMBLE). How did the appearance of these words save Wilbur's life? What other words can they think of that Charlotte might have used?

8. Activity Sheet. Attached is a "fun sheet" with two activities based on *Charlotte's Web* for your class to do after they have seen the play.

FOR FURTHER READING

Students may also enjoy these animal stories by E.B. White:

Stuart Little

The Trumpet of the Swan

Here's a sampling of the many books available about farm animals and spiders which may be helpful to your students before or after seeing the performance:

Ancona, George, photographs, text by Joan Anderson. Pets and Farm Animals, A Photo Essay. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Publishers, 1989.

Isenbert, Hans-Heinrich, translated by Elizabeth D. Crawford, photographs by Ruth Rau. Baby Animals on the Farm. New York: B.P. Putnam's Sons, 1981.

Miller, Jane. Seasons on the Farm. New York: Prentice-Hall Books for Young Readers, 1986.

Schnieper, Claudia, photographs by Max Meier. Amazing Spiders. Minneapolis: Carolrhoda Books, Inc., 1989.

Webster, David, pictures by Carol Hellman. Spider Watching. New York: Julian Messner, 1984.

(CONTINUED)

CHARLOTTE'S WEB

FUN SHEET

1. There are 10 words from the play hidden in this puzzle. Circle the words you find -- don't forget to look in all directions (including backwards!)

A	N	S	L	O	P	S	B
S	R	G	T	R	I	H	O
P	A	G	X	O	G	E	T
I	B	F	A	I	R	E	W
D	C	E	Z	N	W	P	W
E	R	J	M	U	D	T	T
R	U	N	T	Q	E	E	A
E	L	B	M	U	H	A	R

HINT: Words to look for are: spider, rat, pig, gander, runt, fair, humble, slops, sheep, barn.

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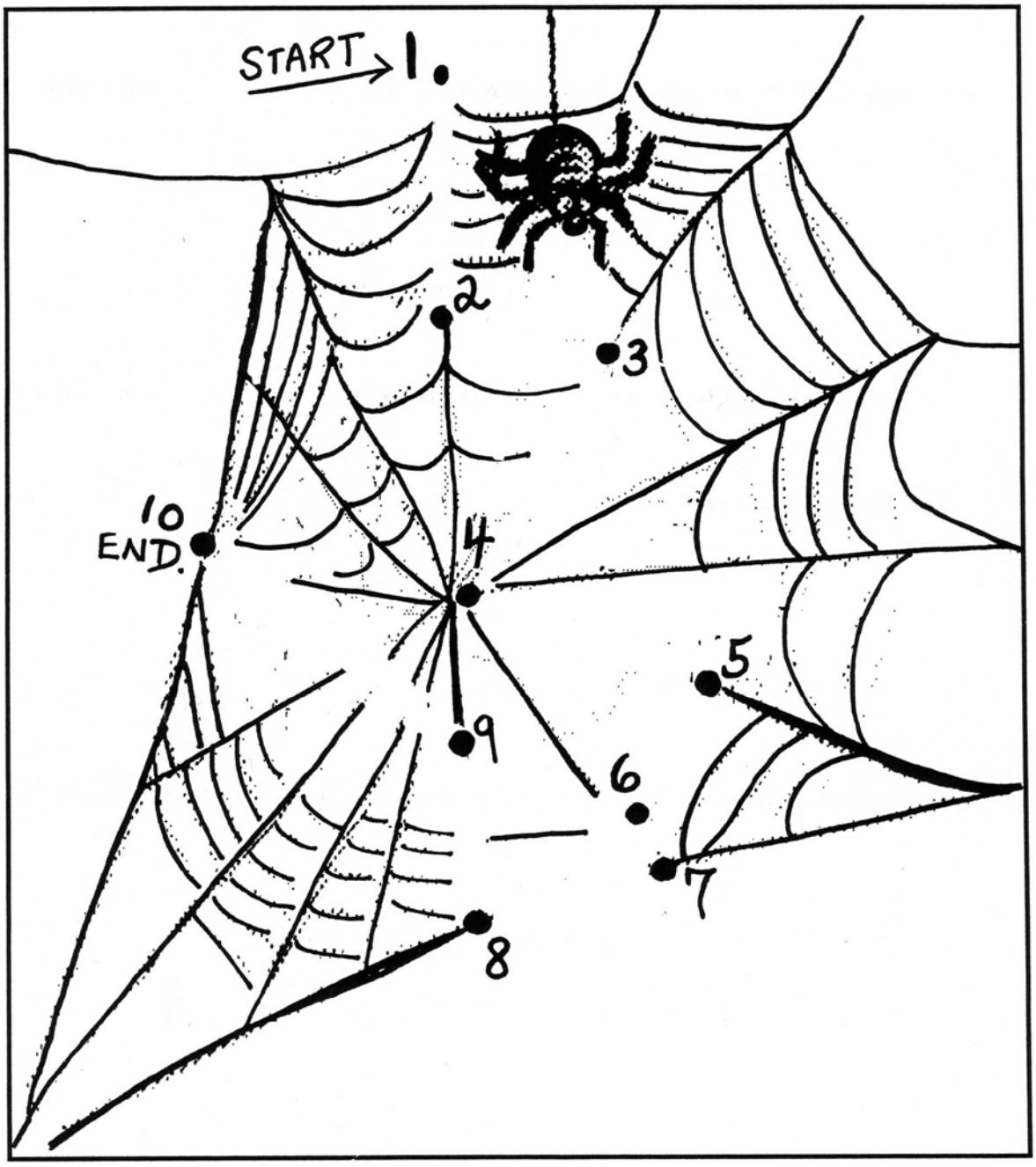
FUN SHEET

2. Charlotte has a hole in her web! Help her to fix it by connecting the dots <u>in order</u>, #1-10.