



### Genre Study

A **fantasy** is a story about events that could not really happen. Look for

- characters such as animals that do things real animals cannot do.
- a plot with a beginning, middle, and end.



### Comprehension Strategy

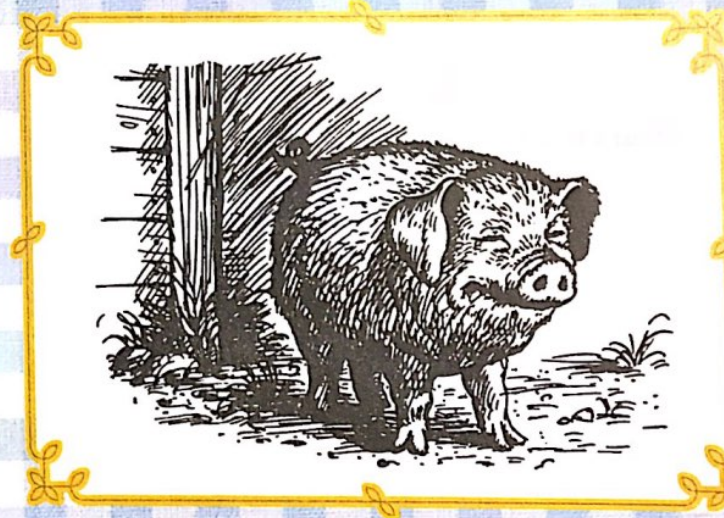


**Ask questions** as you read. This will help you focus on the important ideas in a selection.

**CALIFORNIA STANDARDS**  
**ENGLISH-LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS—Reading 2.2**  
Ask questions and support answers by connecting prior knowledge with literal information found in, and inferred from, the text. **Reading 3.1** Distinguish common forms of literature (e.g., poetry, drama, fiction, nonfiction).

# Charlotte's Web

by E. B. White illustrated by Garth Williams



The barn on the Zuckermans' farm is a lively place. Fern, a girl who lives nearby, loves to visit the barn and watch the adventures of the animals. She has a special fondness for Wilbur, a pig that she helped to raise. Wilbur has lots of friends in the barn, including Charlotte the spider. Templeton the rat can be a nuisance, but he is Wilbur's friend, too. Several lambs and a family of geese add excitement to the barnyard where the animals spend their days.

2

Wilbur is still a young pig, and he has a lot to learn about the world around him. Luckily, Charlotte is a wise and patient friend.

1



### Wilbur's Boast

A spider's web is stronger than it looks. Although it is made of thin, delicate strands, the web is not easily broken. However, a web gets torn every day by the insects that kick around in it, and a spider must rebuild it when it gets full of holes. Charlotte liked to do her weaving during the late afternoon, and Fern liked to sit nearby and watch. One afternoon she heard a most interesting conversation and witnessed a strange event.



"You have awfully hairy legs, Charlotte," said Wilbur, as the spider busily worked at her task.

"My legs are hairy for a good reason," replied Charlotte. "Furthermore, each leg of mine has seven sections—the coxa, the trochanter, the femur, the patella, the tibia, the metatarsus, and the tarsus."

3

Wilbur sat bolt upright. "You're kidding," he said.  
"No, I'm not, either."  
"Say those names again, I didn't catch them the first time."

"Coxa, trochanter, femur, patella, tibia, metatarsus, and tarsus." 1

"Goodness!" said Wilbur, looking down at his own chubby legs. "I don't think *my* legs have seven sections."

"Well," said Charlotte, "you and I lead different lives. You don't have to spin a web. That takes real leg work."

"I could spin a web if I tried," said Wilbur, **boasting**. 2  
"I've just never tried."

"Let's see you do it," said Charlotte. Fern chuckled softly, and her eyes grew wide with love for the pig.

"O.K.," replied Wilbur. "You coach me and I'll spin one. It must be a lot of fun to spin a web. How do I start?"

"Take a deep breath!" said Charlotte, smiling. Wilbur breathed deeply. "Now climb to the highest place you can get to, like this." Charlotte raced up to the top of the doorway. Wilbur scrambled to the top of the manure pile.

"Very good!" said Charlotte. "Now make an attachment with your spinnerets, hurl yourself into space, and let out a dragline as you go down!"

3  
Wilbur hesitated a moment, then jumped out into the air. He glanced hastily behind to see if a piece of rope was following him to check his fall, but nothing seemed to be happening in his rear, and the next thing he knew he landed with a thump. "Ooomp!" he grunted.

Charlotte laughed so hard, her web began to **sway**.  
"What did I do wrong?" asked the pig, when he recovered from his bump.

"Nothing," said Charlotte. "It was a nice try."

"I think I'll try again," said Wilbur, cheerfully. "I believe what I need is a little piece of string to hold me."

The pig walked out to his yard. "You there, Templeton?" he called. The rat poked his head out from under the trough.

"Got a little piece of string I could borrow?" asked Wilbur. "I need it to spin a web."

"Yes, indeed," replied Templeton, who saved string. "No trouble at all. Anything to **oblige**." He crept down into his hole, pushed the goose egg out of the way, and returned with an old piece of dirty white string. Wilbur examined it.



"That's just the thing," he said. "Tie one end to my tail, will you, Templeton?"

Wilbur crouched low, with his thin, curly tail toward the rat. Templeton seized the string, passed it around the end of the pig's tail, and tied two half hitches. Charlotte watched in delight. Like Fern, she was truly fond of Wilbur, whose smelly pen and stale food attracted the flies that she needed, and she was proud to see that he was not a quitter and was willing to try again to spin a web.

While the rat and the spider and the little girl watched, Wilbur climbed again to the top of the manure pile, full of energy and hope.

"Everybody watch!" he cried. And **summoning** all his strength, he threw himself into the air, headfirst. The string trailed behind him. But as he had neglected to fasten the other end to anything, it didn't really do any good, and Wilbur landed with a thud, crushed and hurt. Tears came to his eyes. Templeton grinned. Charlotte just sat quietly. After a bit she spoke.



"You can't spin a web, Wilbur, and I advise you to put the idea out of your mind. You lack two things needed for spinning a web."

"What are they?" asked Wilbur, sadly.

"You lack a set of spinnerets, and you lack know-how. But cheer up, you don't need a web. Zuckerman supplies you with three big meals a day. Why should you worry about trapping food?"

Wilbur sighed. "You're ever so much cleverer and brighter than I am, Charlotte. I guess I was just trying to show off. Serves me right."

Templeton untied his string and took it back to his home. Charlotte returned to her weaving.

"You needn't feel too badly, Wilbur," she said. "Not many creatures can spin webs. Even people aren't as good at it as spiders, although they *think* they're pretty good, and they'll *try* anything. Did you ever hear of the Queensborough Bridge?"

1



Wilbur shook his head. "Is it a web?"

"Sort of," replied Charlotte. "But do you know how long it took men to build it? Eight whole years. My goodness, I would have starved to death waiting that long. I can make a web in a single evening."

"What do people catch in the Queensborough Bridge—bugs?" asked Wilbur.

"No," said Charlotte. "They don't catch anything. They just keep trotting back and forth across the bridge thinking there is something better on the other side. If they'd hang head-down at the top of the thing and wait quietly, maybe something good would come along. But no—with people it's rush, rush, rush, every minute. I'm glad I'm a **sedentary** spider."

2

"What does sedentary mean?" asked Wilbur.

"Means I sit still a good part of the time and don't go wandering all over creation. I know a good thing when I see it, and my web is a good thing. I stay put and wait for what comes. Gives me a chance to think."

"Well, I'm sort of sedentary myself, I guess," said the pig. "I have to hang around here whether I want to or not. You know where I'd really like to be this evening?"

"Where?"

"In a forest looking for beechnuts and truffles and delectable roots, pushing leaves aside with my wonderful strong nose, searching and sniffing along the ground, smelling, smelling, smelling . . ."

3

"You smell just the way you are," remarked a lamb who had just walked in. "I can smell you from here. You're the smelliest creature in the place."

Wilbur hung his head. His eyes grew wet with tears. Charlotte noticed his embarrassment and she spoke sharply to the lamb.

"Let Wilbur alone!" she said. "He has a perfect right to smell, considering his surroundings. You're no bundle of sweet peas yourself. Furthermore, you are interrupting a very pleasant conversation. What were we talking about, Wilbur, when we were so rudely interrupted?"

"Oh, I don't remember," said Wilbur. "It doesn't make any difference. Let's not talk any more for a while, Charlotte. I'm getting sleepy. You go ahead and finish fixing your web and I'll just lie here and watch you. It's a lovely evening." Wilbur stretched out on his side.

Twilight settled over Zuckerman's barn, and a feeling of peace.

4



# Think Critically



- 1 What is Wilbur like? How do you know? 🐷

MAKE INFERENCES

- 2 How does Charlotte feel as she watches Wilbur try to spin a web? CHARACTER'S EMOTIONS

- 3 If you had been watching Wilbur as he tried to spin a web, would you have told him that it was impossible? Why or why not? EXPRESS PERSONAL OPINIONS

- 4 How can you tell that the author thinks people rush too much? DRAW CONCLUSIONS

- 5 **WRITE** Describe a time when you tried to do something new with the help of others.

EXTENDED RESPONSE

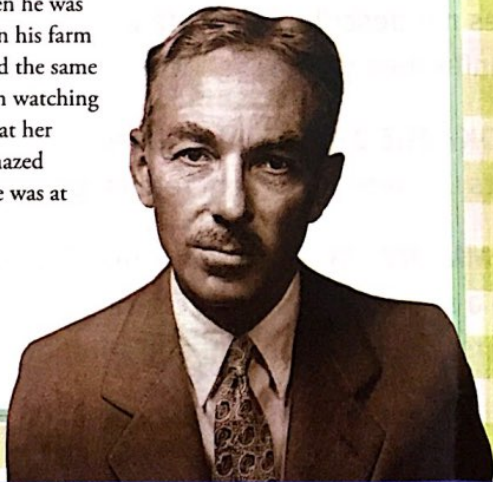
About the Author

# E. B. White

E. B. White couldn't remember a time in his life when he wasn't busy writing. He said he always wanted to put his thoughts down on paper, and since he couldn't draw, he wrote words instead. He first worked as a newspaper reporter. Then he began writing articles for a magazine.

The children in his family loved the stories he told, so he decided to turn the stories into books. The first book was *Stuart Little*. The second book was *Charlotte's Web*.

E. B. White got the idea for this story when he was feeding the pig on his farm in Maine. Around the same time, he had been watching a big gray spider at her work and was amazed by how clever she was at spinning.



About the Illustrator

# Garth Williams

When he was young, Garth Williams lived on a farm in New Jersey. He loved riding on the tractor with the farmer and watching him milk the cows. When he was ten, his family moved to England, where he went to school.

Both of his parents were artists, so Garth Williams decided to become an artist, too. He said, "Everybody in my house was either painting or drawing, so I thought there was nothing else to do in life but make pictures." He illustrated more than eighty children's books, including *Charlotte's Web*, and wrote and illustrated several books of his own.



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