

Thank you for attending TheaterWorksUSA's production of *Charlotte's Web*. We hope this guide will help your students learn more about the musical and its content, as well as give you creative ways to make the show part of your curriculum. A trip to the theater is always very special and unique, and it can create a lifelong passion for performance and storytelling. We hope our production will inspire your students. You may want to review some basic theater etiquette with your class, as this might be one of their first experiences seeing a live show. Talking or being disruptive during the performance is distracting to the actors and fellow audience members. However, we highly encourage clapping, laughing, and cheering at the parts they enjoy.

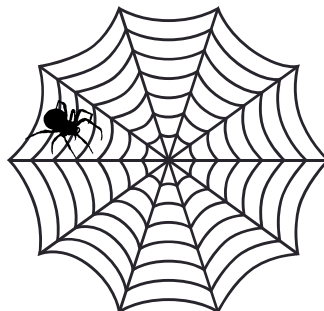
Feel free to use this guide as a starting point for you and your students to explore the show and its rich content. This study guide is designed to enhance your students' experience in seeing *Charlotte's Web*. It will provide discussion points after your class has seen the production, along with lessons and in-class activities. These activities will extend the topic-specific ideas within the show, and engage the students in a hands-on classroom project. Feel free to adapt or change any discussion prompts or material to suit your classroom and style!

## 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 slaughter 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: Tell students to listen, and look, for some of these words in the play.

**Runt** The smallest born of the litter

**Slops** Food scraps fed to pigs

**Terrific** Tremendous, great

**Radiant** Shining brightly

**Gander** Male goose

**Lonesome** Alone, lonely

**Humble** Modest, respectful

**Goslings** Baby geese

**Famous** Known about by many people

**Loyal** Faithful, devoted, true

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.




L-R: Matthew Dwight Lincoln, Cassidy Layton, Taylor Marie Rasmussen. Photo by Jeremy Daniel



## 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. Act it out: Have your students act out different animals that would be on the farm. What do they sound like? How do they move? How do they see other animals? Play and experiment!
9. Activity Sheet: Attached are "fun sheets" with activities based on Charlotte's Web for your class to do after they have seen the play. Feel free to use any or all sheets with your students.

## Additional Activities

- 1) The props in this play were made of found objects, an object being used to as something unexpected. Find new uses for your everyday objects! Sit or stand in a circle. Give the students one object (ex: a piece of paper, a rubber chicken, kitchen tongs, etc). Pass the object around the circle, and ask each student to come up with a possible use for this object and demonstrate it cleanly and safely. No repeats! (ex: kitchen tongs can be a tool to pick up garbage, a backscratcher, a nose picker, a statement necklace, the newest style in bowties, a shoe horn, etc.) Try with different objects for each round.
  - 2) Charlotte helped Wilbur by spinning her web to write lovely things about him. Everyone can benefit by kind words. Have each student write their name on a piece of paper. Pass the pieces of paper around the room so that everyone can write something nice about that student. These compliments can range from large to small (ex: You are such a good friend, your sense of style is awesome, I feel comfortable around you, you're good at basketball, etc). Have the students read these compliments, either to themselves or aloud, and have a class discussion about how writing compliments for others and hearing compliments about themselves makes them feel.
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3) The webs that Charlotte creates makes a big impact on Wilbur and the farm. Create your own spiderwebs! Here are two examples of spiderweb activities:

a) You will need white paper, a white crayon, and watercolor paints and brushes. Have the students draw a spiderweb using the white crayon (you can even add words like Charlotte did!) Paint over the crayon with the watercolors. This will color the paper, but the spider web will remain intact. You can optionally sprinkle a little salt on the page to dry the paint quicker, and create a slightly spotted effect.

b) You will need a paper plate, scissors, a hole punch, and yarn or twine. Cut out the middle of the paper plate so that the outer rim remains. Punch holes all around the paper plate. Have students weave the yarn in and out of the holes in the plate to make a spider web of their own in the middle. Additionally, you may paint the paper plate, customize the yarn color, or attach a bead/spider pendant to the web.

4) While not a musical, bluegrass music plays an important part in this production. You can incorporate bluegrass music into other music education by learning about bluegrass musicians such as Dolly Parton, The Punch Brothers, and The Foggy Mountain Boys. Bluegrass music typically incorporates banjo, mandolin, and guitar, and can include harmonica, accordion, or dobro. As a class, listen to your favorite bluegrass music, and you can even learn to sing or play a popular bluegrass song! Some examples are:

I'll Fly Away	Man of Constant Sorrow
Wagon Wheel	Blue Moon of Kentucky
Cotton-Eyed Joe	Jolene

## For Further Reading

Students may also enjoy these animal stories by E.B. White, free on Google Books:

*Stuart Little*

*The Trumpet of the Swan*

We'd love to hear from you! Please let us know what you thought of *Charlotte's Web*. Were your students familiar with the story before seeing the play? Did seeing it inspire them to read the book again? Send comments and suggestions to [marketing@twusa.org](mailto:marketing@twusa.org)



L-R: Taylor Marie Rasmussen, Matthew Dwight Lincoln. Photo by Jeremy Daniel

# Word Search

There are 10 words from the play hidden in this puzzle. Circle the words you find. Remember, the words can be forwards, backwards, up, down, and even diagonal!

## Word Bank

<b>Spider</b>	<b>Rat</b>	<b>Pig</b>	<b>Gander</b>	<b>Runt</b>
<b>Fair</b>	<b>Slops</b>	<b>Humble</b>	<b>Barn</b>	<b>Sheep</b>

**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**

# Answer Key

Word Bank

<b>Spider</b>	<b>Rat</b>	<b>Pig</b>	<b>Gander</b>	<b>Runt</b>
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A N S L O P S B

S R G T R I H O

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E R J M U D T T

R U N T Q E E A

E L B M U H A R

# Word Jumble

There are 10 words from the play all jumbled up. Rearrange the letters to make a word from the word bank. Use the definitions to help.

## Word Bank

<b>Lonesome</b>	<b>Radiant</b>	<b>Loyal</b>	<b>Gander</b>	<b>Runt</b>
<b>Terrific</b>	<b>Slops</b>	<b>Humble</b>	<b>Famous</b>	<b>Goslings</b>

- 1) Food scraps fed to pigs      **P S S O L**      Answer: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Baby geese      **L S G S G O I N**      Answer: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) Faithful, devoted, true      **Y L L O A**      Answer: \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) Alone, lonely      **M E O S N L O E**      Answer: \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) Tremendous, great      **C R I I R T E F**      Answer: \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) Smallest born      **U T N R**      Answer: \_\_\_\_\_
- 7) Male goose      **D R N G A E**      Answer: \_\_\_\_\_
- 8) Modest, respectful      **B H M U E L**      Answer: \_\_\_\_\_
- 9) Known by many      **M U S O F A**      Answer: \_\_\_\_\_
- 10) Shining brightly      **I T R A N A D**      Answer: \_\_\_\_\_

# Your Own Medal

Just like Wilbur, you won an award at the fair for being so 'terrific!' Fill in what type of award you would win, and draw what it would look like to receive it.



Now draw yourself receiving this award:





# Farm Animals

Color in the farm animals and label each one using the word bank.

**Spider**

**Horse**

**Rabbit**

**Chicken**

**Cow**

**Sheep**

**Pig**

**Gander**

**Rat**

