

**Discussion Questions for
Charlotte's Web (1952)
by E. B. White**

Chapter 1 – Before Breakfast (pp. 1-7)

1. Fern's father plans to "do away" with the pig runt. Is this shocking to you? If you were in Fern's place, what would you have done? Would you have followed Fern or made a different choice?
2. After delivering her argument about the injustice of being born small, 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?
3. Fern decides to name her little pig "the most beautiful name she could think of" (p. 7)—*Wilbur*. Is the name Wilbur beautiful to you? If you had a pet pig, what would you call it? Is there any significance to your name of choice?

Chapter 2 – Wilbur (pp. 8-12)

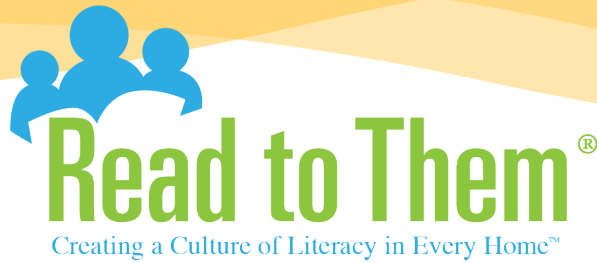
4. While Wilbur is still a baby, Fern does a number of activities with him. These include bottle feeding, pushing Wilbur in a baby carriage, and taking him for a swim. What would be your favorite pastime with Wilbur? Beyond Fern's activities, what else would you do with Wilbur?
5. Mr. Arable has Fern sell Wilbur to her uncle, Homer. How do you believe this home change will affect Wilbur? What about Fern?

Chapter 3 – Escape (pp. 13-24)

6. From page 13:

The barn was very large. It was very old. It smelled of hay and it smelled of manure. It smelled of the perspiration of tired horses and the wonderful sweet breath of patient cows. It often had a sort of peaceful smell—as though nothing bad could happen ever again in the world.

How does the description of the Zuckerman's barn enhance your reading of this chapter? Is there a line that stands out to you? Which is it?



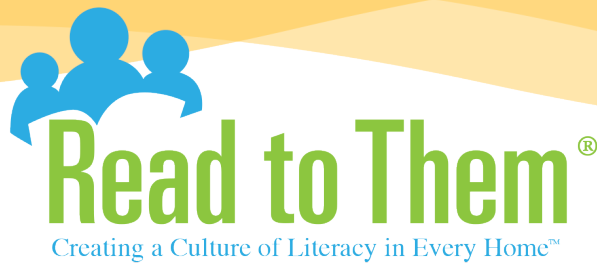
7. Why do you believe the goose shows Wilbur how to escape? Why is the goose so adamant that Wilbur run?
8. On page 23, the goose tells Wilbur: “An hour of freedom is worth a barrel of slops.” What do you think freedom means to the animals on the Zuckerman farm? Do you think their idea of freedom differs from yours? Yes or no?

Chapter 4 – Loneliness (pp. 25-31)

9. 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.
10. None of the other animals in the barn want to play with Wilbur. The sheep goes as far as saying, “Pigs mean less than nothing to me.” (p. 28) Do you think Wilbur’s barn-mates are being mean intentionally? How might they have better communicated they didn’t wish to play with Wilbur?
11. Alone in the barn, Wilbur cries and yearns for friendship. Have you ever felt loneliness like Wilbur? Can you describe it? What helped that feeling go away? Share, if you’d like.

Chapter 5 – Charlotte (pp. 32-41)

12. Charlotte tells Wilbur that she eats a number of bugs by catching them in her while Wilbur calls this act cruel. Charlotte counters that she has to get by on her own, even if it does include killing bugs. Do you believe Charlotte and Wilbur raise fair points? Why do you think it can be helpful to look at both sides of an argument before coming to your own conclusions?
13. The goose reveals that Mr. Zuckerman and Lurvey are going to kill Wilbur at Christmas. Did this shock you? If not shock, how did you react to this line? What role do you believe this will play in later chapters of the novel?
14. Wilbur reflects on the “gamble of friendship,” going on to think about how different he and Charlotte are. What was your first impression of your best friend like? Has time changed how you view your friend? What are two or three words you’d use to describe them?



Chapter 6 – Summer Days (pp. 42-47)

15. Summer days at the Zuckerman barn are “the happiest and fairest days of the year.” (p. 42) Do you agree with this sentiment? If you don’t, what is your favorite season? With your answer in mind, what would be your perfect day during one of the four seasons? Describe it.
16. In regard to Templeton, it’s said that *a rat is a rat*. Do you think this stereotype should be believed? Even if you agree with the assessment about Templeton, why is it important not to blindly believe in stereotypes?

Chapter 7 – Bad News (pp. 48-51)

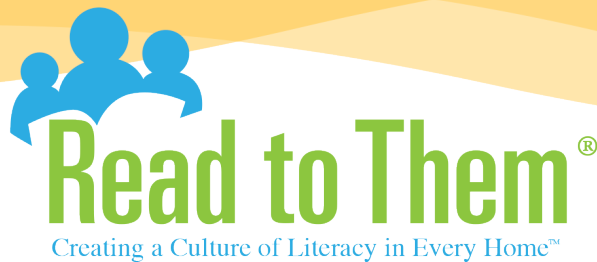
17. The sheep points out that Wilbur is being fattened so he can be killed come winter. Though it’s important Wilbur knows this information, what did the sheep do wrong? How would you have told Wilbur this horrible news?
18. Charlotte, after hearing Wilbur will likely die, vows to save him. Will Charlotte’s determination be enough? What do you think her plan is to keep Wilbur alive?

Chapter 8 – Talk at Home (pp. 52-54)

19. Fern tells her parents about how Zuckerman’s barn animals talk, leaving her mother to worry for her health. Is there any reason that Mrs. Arable should be concerned? Why or why not? If someone told you they could understand animals, would you believe them? Is there any animal in particular you’d like to communicate with?

Chapter 9 – Wilbur’s Boast (pp. 55-65)

20. Wilbur attempts to make a web, but, after a number of tries, fails. Like Charlotte with her web spinning, do you have a special talent? What is it? Do you know many people who are capable of this skill?
21. Charlotte tells Wilbur that, “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? If you prefer to think alone, would you be open to working with a team, and vice versa?



Chapter 10 – An Explosion (pp. 66-76)

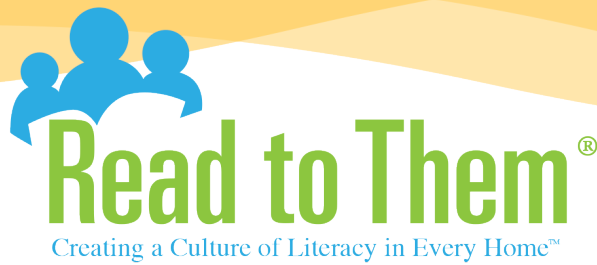
22. Avery tries to capture Charlotte only to overturn Wilbur's trough and send the rotten goose egg breaking open. Are you glad for this result? If Avery hadn't fallen down, how might you have gone about keeping Charlotte safe?
23. From page 75:
- It was a delicious meal—skim milk, wheat middlings, leftover pancakes, half a doughnut, the rind of a summer squash, two pieces of stale toast, a third of a gingersnap, a fish tail, one orange peel, several noodles from a noodle soup, the scum off a cup of cocoa, an ancient jelly roll, a strip of paper from the lining of the garbage pail, and a spoonful of raspberry jello.*
- What was the purpose of providing such an in-depth description of Wilbur's meal? How do passages like these enhance the text for you? Do you like them?
24. Given what you know about Charlotte, what do you think she's going to spell in her web? Be creative.

Chapter 11 – The Miracle (pp. 77-85)

25. Reactions to Charlotte's weaving of SOME PIG! 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?

Chapter 12 – A Meeting (pp. 86-91)

26. Charlotte calls a meeting and asks for suggestions of what words she should weave next. Knowing Wilbur as you do, what short phrase would you suggest? What part of his character does your answer reflect?
27. Templeton isn't swayed to help until Charlotte points out his and Wilbur's fates are connected. How is his selfishness both a good and a bad thing? Is Charlotte right to use Templeton's selfishness for her and Wilbur's benefit? Why or why not?
28. Wilbur insists that he's not *terrific*, but Charlotte says, "You're terrific as far as *I'm concerned*... and that's what counts." (p. 91) When you hear Wilbur try to disagree with 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.



Chapter 13 – Good Progress (pp. 92-104)

29. While building her web, Charlotte talks to “cheer herself on.” (p. 94) When you need to finish a task, how do you encourage yourself? How would you encourage someone else? How do you feel once the task is done?
30. Consider Charlotte’s tales about her cousins—one who snared a fish in a web and another who was an aeronaut. Do you have any outstanding family members? What, to you, makes them so memorable? Please share your answer.

Chapter 14 – Dr. Dorian (pp. 105-112)

31. From page 110:

“Still, I don’t understand how those words got into the web. I don’t understand it, and I don’t like what I can’t understand.”

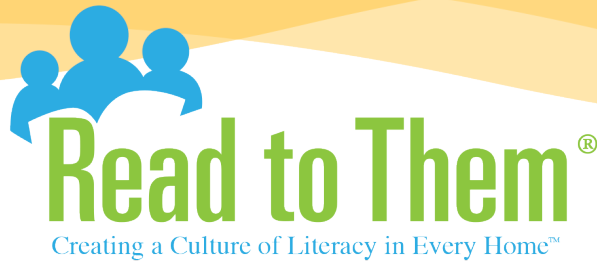
“None of us do,” said Dr. Dorian, sighing. “I’m a doctor. Doctors are supposed to understand everything. But I don’t understand everything, and I don’t intend to let it worry me.”

Why do you believe Dr. Dorian places such a large emphasis on being understanding? How do you incorporate understanding into your daily life? How might you encourage others to do the same?

32. What were your thoughts about Dr. Dorian’s assessment of Fern? Was Mrs. Arable right to be worried about her daughter? What do you think?

Chapter 15 – The Crickets (pp. 113-117)

33. What is the significance of the cricket’s song? When you hear crickets, what do you think of? What does their song sound like to you?
34. The barn animals note that “Wilbur was modest; fame did not spoil him.” (p. 115) If you were to become famous, do you think you would change in some significant way? How? What would you like to become known for? Would you want to be famous at all?
35. On page 115, Wilbur says that “friendship is one of the most satisfying things in the world.” Do you agree? What does friendship mean to you?



Chapter 16 – Off to the Fair (pp. 118-129)

36. 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?
37. After Charlotte mentioned she'd soon be laying her eggs, did it surprise you when she went with Wilbur to the fair? Why or why not? Did you expect Templeton to be invited by Charlotte, too?
38. Mr. Arable makes a comment about how Wilbur would be good bacon and ham once it's time to kill him. Wilbur, in his shock, falls to his knees and pretends to pass out. Do you think Mr. Arable's words were meant to be taken seriously? If yes, what more can be done to save Wilbur's life?

Chapter 17 – Uncle (pp. 130-137)

39. Have you ever been to any kind of fair? Do the details in this chapter's opening paragraph do it justice? What was missing? How would you describe the fairgrounds to someone who has never been previously?
40. Though Uncle may be bigger than Wilbur, Wilbur is kinder and far cleaner than the other pig. Do you believe the judges will take Wilbur's positive attributes into account, even with Uncle's larger size? What consequences will Wilbur face if Uncle wins the fair's competition?

Chapter 18 – The Cool of the Evening (pp. 138-143)

41. To Templeton, Charlotte says: "I hope you brought a good one... It is the last word I shall ever write." (p. 140). Why would Charlotte make a claim like this? Is she speaking too soon? If you were Templeton, what would you have said in response to Charlotte?

Chapter 19 – The Egg Sac (pp. 144-154)

42. Charlotte refers to her egg sac as her "*magnum opus*." Why do you believe she uses this term? What would make her egg sac a *magnum opus*?

43. From page 147:

The rat was swollen to twice his normal size. His stomach was as big around as a jelly jar.

While Templeton doesn't seem to mind, he's overeaten. Can you think of a time that you've eaten too much and not felt very well? When was it? Was the food so good that you'd do it again?

44. Even though Uncle received the fair's blue ribbon, a special prize was made for Wilbur and, very likely, is the thing that saves Wilbur's life. Did this twist in the story surprise you? Do you wish the characters would have found some way to thank Charlotte for her efforts?

Chapter 20 – The Hour of Triumph (pp. 155-162)

45. Before Wilbur can receive his award, Fern asks for money to go spend time with Henry. Did you expect her to stay with Wilbur? How does Fern's decision reflect her growth over the course of the novel? Looking back, does this change in Fern make sense to you? Why or why not?
46. The person over the loud speaker says that "supernatural forces" were at play in the creation of Charlotte's web. 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?
47. Wilbur wins a prize of twenty-five dollars and a bronze medal. Have you ever won a prize? What was it for? If not, has someone you know ever received an award and was the award ceremony anything like Wilbur's?

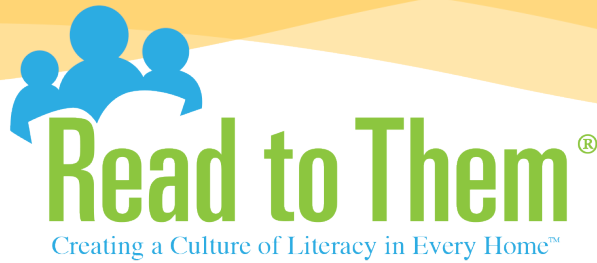
Chapter 21 – Last Day (pp. 163-171)

48. From page 164:

"Why did you do all this for me?" he asked. "I don't deserve it. I've never done anything for you."

"You have been my friend," replied Charlotte. "That in itself is a tremendous thing."

How is Charlotte's reply the best example of her unconditional love for Wilbur?



49. Templeton only helps Wilbur retrieve Charlotte's egg sac once Wilbur promises to let Templeton eat from the trough first. Do you think Templeton is capable of improving his character? Do you think he wants to become a better rat? Explain your answer using the text.
50. The final paragraph of this chapter is one of the saddest in the books—Charlotte passes away alone. What impact did this scene have on you? How would the text have changed if Wilbur had stayed with Charlotte in her last moments? Would you have preferred it this way?

Chapter 22 – A Warm Wind (pp. 172-184)

51. Was it realistic of Wilbur to expect all five hundred and fourteen of Charlotte's children to remain in the barn? Yes or no?
52. Three of Charlotte's daughters stay with Wilbur—Joy, Aranea, and Nellie. What similarities to their mother do Joy, Aranea, and Nellie demonstrate? As they grow older, what other ways might Charlotte shine through them?

End of Book

53. Knowing that three of Charlotte's daughters remain with Wilbur, what sort of adventures do you believe will take place at the Zuckerman barn?
54. Charlotte and Wilbur both demonstrate a number of positive character traits. What are they? How, after reading *Charlotte's Web*, might you carry these traits into your everyday life?
55. In *Charlotte's Web*, the natural world is very much a character in and of itself. How does E. B. White achieve this? How might the text be different if the setting changed from a farm to a city? Do you think the book would have the same impact? Why or why not?