

# Charlotte's Web



**Main Street Theater for Youth Study Guide**

*MainStreetTheater.com / 713-524-9196*



### Welcome to Main Street Theater for Youth!

We hope these supplemental materials will help you integrate your field trip into your classroom curriculum. We've included a number of activities and resources to help broaden your students' experience. Please make sure that each teacher that will be attending the play has a copy of these materials as they prepare to see the show.

Before you come to the theater, please take some time to talk with your students about what to expect. Going to a live play is an experience unlike any other, and many students are more familiar with going to the movies or sporting events. Please help them prepare for what they'll see and how they should act.

Here are some things to think about:

- How is a play different from a movie or a television show?
- How is a play different from real life?
- Can the actors see and hear the audience?
- Which of the following is appropriate behavior for a theater audience?  
Clapping, talking, eating, laughing, running, leaving during the performance.

Ask students who have seen a play before to talk about what it's like to be in the audience.

**Have students write letters or draw pictures to the cast of *Charlotte's Web* with their thoughts and comments on the production. All correspondence should be sent to:**

**SCHOOL BOOKINGS  
Main Street Theater  
3400 Main Street, Suite 283  
Houston, Texas 77002**

**All electronic devices should be switched off BEFORE the performance.** It is impolite and disruptive to the actors and the other audience members to hear a ringing phone or a patron talking on the phone. In addition, please do not leave the theater to take a phone call unless it is an emergency. You will have to climb over several other patrons to exit the seats and will disturb each one of them.

**No photography or video taping of any kind is allowed during any performances.**

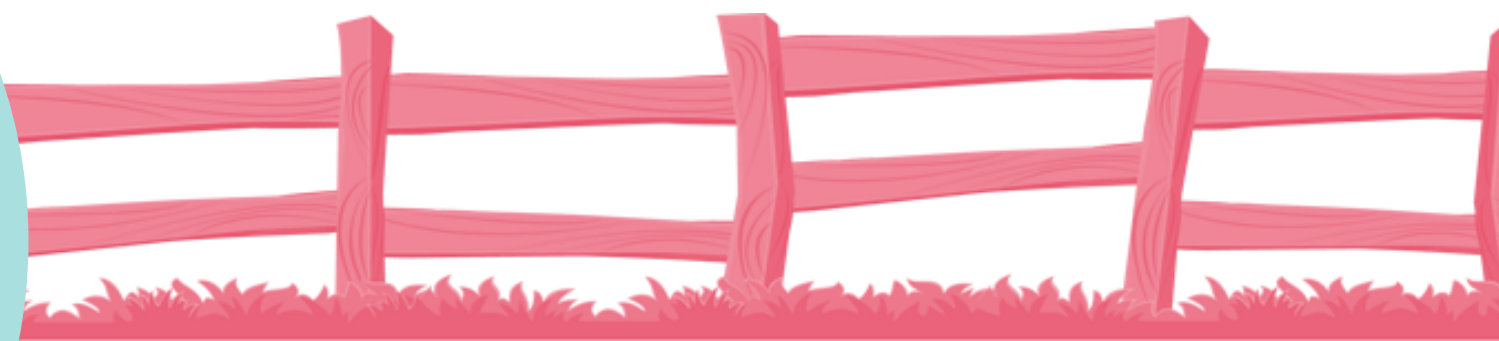
It is a disturbance to the performers because photography generates noise which creates a distraction both to audiences and performers. The sudden burst of flash photography blinds vision and can endanger the safety of the performers on stage. The only photography and recording rights are reserved for archival purpose. It is also against our contractual arrangements with the publishers to allow videotaping and photography.

**Do not put feet on the theater chairs.** It makes them dirty and disturbs the people in front of you.

**Never throw anything on stage.** Items thrown on stage can harm an actor.

**Discussion and comments** that you have about the performance should be left until you leave the theater or the question and answer session after the show.

Some audiences **leave the show** when it is nearing the end because they want to beat the crowds that are exiting at the same time. It is very disrespectful to the actors and the other patrons for people to get up before the show is over. Please stay seated until the very end.



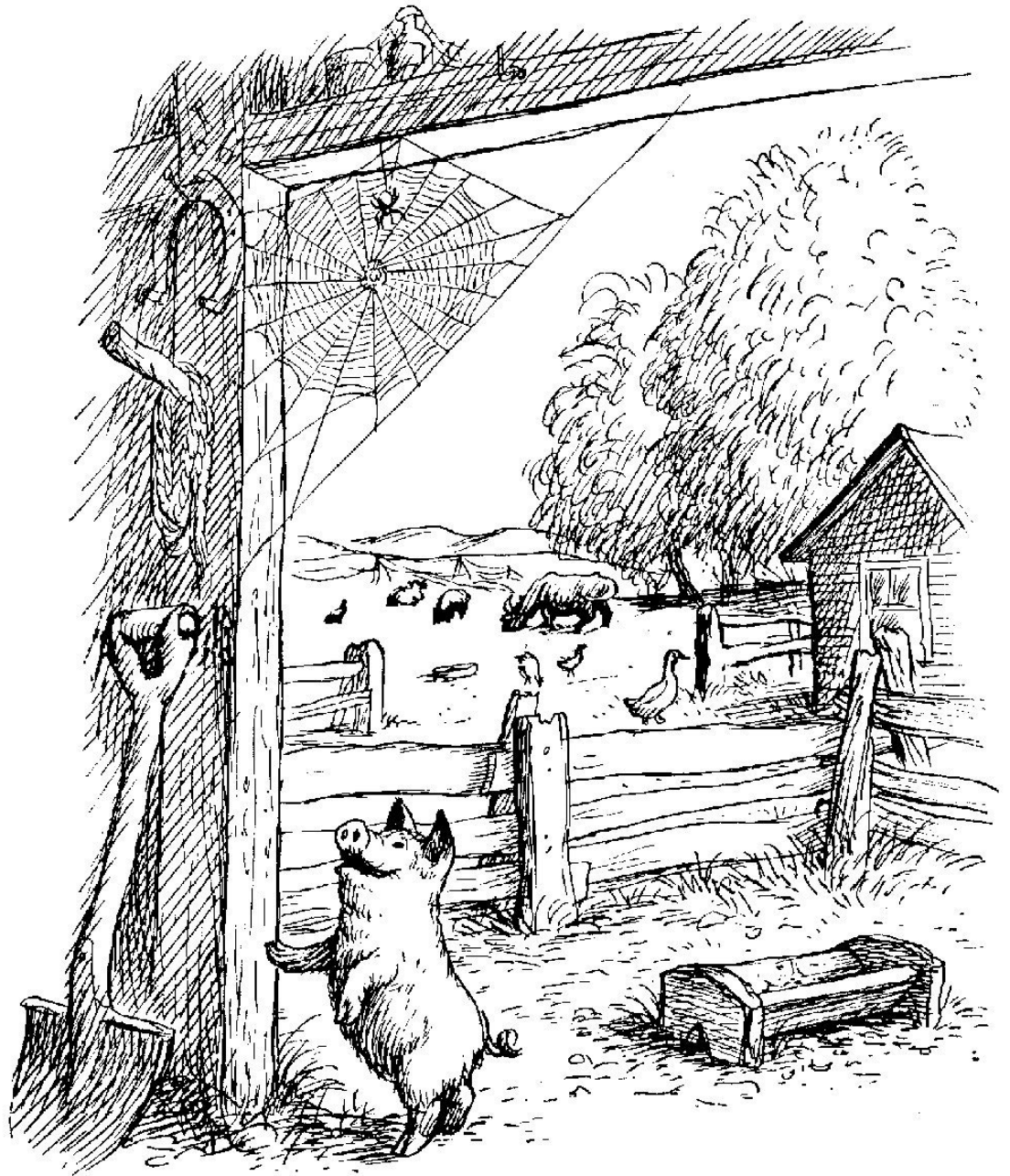
**Y**oung Fern saves Wilbur, the runt of a new litter of pigs on her father's farm, from an untimely death.

Wilbur is bought by Fern's relatives, the Zuckermans, where he searches for a friend. None of the other animals have time for Wilbur until he meets Charlotte, a spider that lives up in the rafters of the barn.

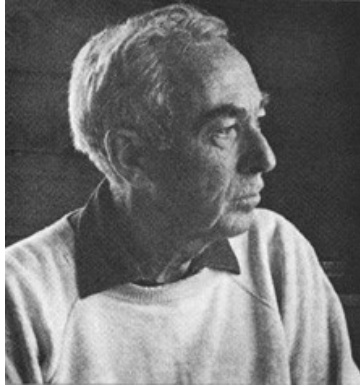
When Wilbur learns that he is to be killed Charlotte devises a plan to make everyone see

how important Wilbur is to life on the farm. She writes words of praise for Wilbur in her web and he becomes a famous pig. Wilbur even wins a prize at the county fair.

Charlotte has saved Wilbur and begins to concentrate on her goal of creating an egg sac with 514 eggs. This feat ends Charlotte's life and Wilbur rewards her friendship by sheltering and protecting the eggs so they can hatch.



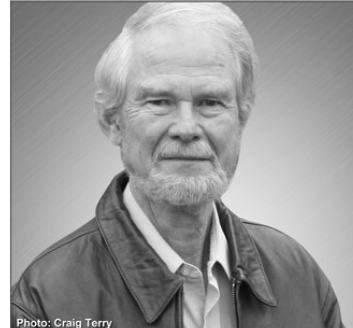
## WHO WROTE *the book*?



**Elwyn Brooks White** was born in Mount Vernon, New York, as the son of Samuel White, a piano manufacturer and Jessie Hart White. He was the youngest child

of a large family. White graduated from Cornell University in 1921 and worked as a reporter at different places. He joined the *New Yorker* in 1924 where he met his wife Katherine Sergeant Angell, the magazine's literary editor. They married in 1929. In 1939, White moved to a farm in North Brooklin, Maine where he continued to write. The barn near his home inspired many of the characters in his children's stories. In 1945 White published *Stuart Little*, the story of an independent and adventurous mouse born into a human family. *Charlotte's Web* was written in 1952 about the friendship between a young pig, Wilbur and a spider, Charlotte. In 1959 White published a standard style writing manual, *The Elements of Style*, which became a mainstay in high school and college English courses in the U.S. E. B. White died of Alzheimer's disease on October 1, 1985 in Maine. *Charlotte's Web* received the Newbery Honor Award in 1953. White was granted the Laura Ingalls Wilder award in 1970 for his contribution to children's literature for both *Charlotte's Web* and *Stuart Little*.

## WHO WROTE *the play*?



**Joseph Robinette** is the author or co-author of 55 published plays and musicals. His works have been produced in all 50 states and in 17 foreign countries.

Twelve of his works have been translated into foreign languages and another five have been anthologized. His plays have been produced by Lincoln Center, Pittsburgh Playhouse, Goodman Theatre, Kansas City Repertory Theatre, Seattle's Fifth Avenue Theatre and the BBC, among others. Robinette collaborated with E.B. White on the authorized stage version of *Charlotte's Web*, and he wrote the musical version with Charles Strouse (*Annie*, and *Bye, Bye, Birdie*). Other commissioned dramatizations include *The Lion*, *the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *The Chocolate War* and *The Paper Chase*. He is also the librettist for the musical version of the motion picture *A Christmas Story*. Robinette is the recipient of numerous playwriting awards including the AATE's Charlotte Chorpenning Cup and Best Dramatization of the Year for *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. In 2006, he received the Children's Theatre Foundation of America Medallion for his "body of dramatic works for family audiences."

### How should I prepare my students for a trip to the theater?

- Read the book to your students or have them read it. The play is taken directly from the pages of the book.
- Discuss the page on theater etiquette with your students. Remind them that it can get very dark in the theater before the play and in between scenes.
- Make sure your students use the restroom before they leave school or at the theater before the performance. There may be actors running, walking, or crawling in the aisles during the show. It can be very dangerous to get up to use the restroom during the performance. In addition, you may miss your favorite part!
- Talk about what kind of show they are coming to see. *Charlotte's Web* is a live theatrical performance. Our stage is very close to the seats and students will be very close to the actors performing. The actors are very friendly though so they should not be afraid.
- Talk to your students about imagination. People called actors perform in the play. Six grown-up actors perform in *Charlotte's Web*. Sometimes they talk about things that you cannot see on the stage. That is because in the theater you cannot have real rain or build a whole barn. You have to use your imagination to pretend to see rain when you hear the sound cue or imagine all of the guests at the fair.
- After the performance, the actors will remain on stage and answer questions that the students may have. Discuss with your students what a question is. While the actors love to hear what a good time the students had or what part they like the best, they LOVE to answer questions about the show, the book or being an actor. Don't forget to raise your hand!



**Listening to literature read aloud is one of the most valuable experiences beginning readers can have. Here are some helpful hints for reading aloud to children:**

1. Plan enough time in each session.
2. Choose stories that are of interest to the children—especially stories with vivid pictures, a strong story line, and engaging characters.
3. Preview the book to anticipate questions or reactions.
4. Introduce the book by pointing out the cover illustration, title and author. Give a brief explanation about why you chose to read this book. “This is the story of the friendship between a pig and a spider. I chose it because \_\_\_\_\_.”
5. Read with expression that reflects the tone of the story or the characters. Read slowly. Vary your pace so you can pause for emphasis or to allow time for the children to think about what’s happening.
6. Allow time for children to study the pictures as you read and to make comments and ask questions about the story.
7. Encourage predictions and help children confirm or revise these as the story unfolds.
8. Watch the children’s expressions and body language and be sensitive to signs of boredom or confusion.
9. Save time at the end of the story to get reactions. Ask open-ended questions that don’t have right or wrong answers and that can’t be answered with a yes or no reply. Ask the children what they liked or disliked about the story. What they thought about the characters? Did it remind them of their own lives?
10. Point out parts of the story you particularly noticed or liked.

For some children, listening to stories is a new experience and they need time to develop that interest and ability.

## Theme

The central theme of *Charlotte's Web* is friendship and leadership.

Talk with your students about the qualities that make someone a good friend or leader. Do they think they have those traits? Have your students make it a goal to do something nice for a classmate each day. It could be anything that exemplifies friendship such as sharing a lunch with someone else who forgot theirs, walking home with someone who usually walks alone, or including a new student in your game at recess.

**Activity:** Have your students complete the following sentence:

**“What I learned from Charlotte’s Web is \_\_\_\_\_”**

Have them draw a picture to go along with their sentence.

## Grammar

**Adjectives** are words that are used to help describe or give description to people, places, and things. These descriptive words can help give information about size, shape, age, color, origin, material, purpose, feelings, condition, or personality.

**Activity:** Charlotte has to come up with adjectives for her web to describe Wilbur.

Have your students come up with adjectives to describe the other animals.

## Vocabulary

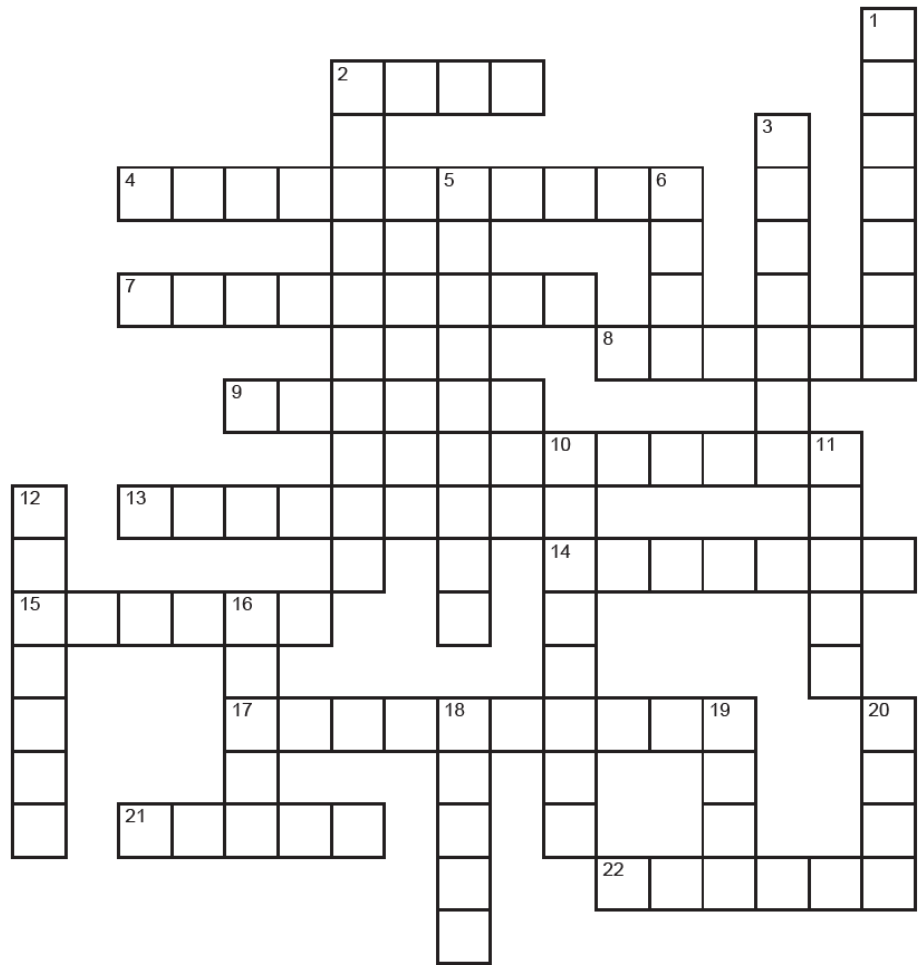
**Activity:** Pass out the attached crossword puzzle and have your students fill it in.



# CROSSWORD PUZZLE

### ACROSS

2. Where Wilbur lives.
4. How Charlotte greets Wilbur for the first time.
7. He buys Wilbur.
8. Season in which Wilbur is born.
9. The last message in the web.
10. Pig's food dish.
13. The heroine.
14. The third message in the web.
15. Fern says this is the capital of Pennsylvania.
17. Wilbur goes to this event.
21. Fern's older brother.
22. Season in which Charlotte dies.



### DOWN

1. The first message in the web.
2. Wilbur gets washed with this.
3. Baby goose.
5. He helps out when offered food.
6. Wilbur's favorite food.
10. The second message in the web.
11. Fern goes on the Ferris wheel with him.
12. The author.
16. He wins 1st prize at the county fair.
18. Number of Charlotte's children who stay with Wilbur.



### Character Matching

On the line, write the letter that matches the character to their description.

- |                   |                                                           |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| ___ Wilbur        | A. Speaks with a stutter                                  |
| ___ Charlotte     | B. Fern's father                                          |
| ___ Fern          | C. Owns the farm where Wilbur goes to live at 5 weeks old |
| ___ Templeton     | D. Lives underneath the pig feeding trough                |
| ___ Mr. Arable    | E. Raises Wilbur as a young pig                           |
| ___ Mr. Zuckerman | F. Hired hand at the Zuckerman farm                       |
| ___ Goose         | G. He is terrific, radiant, and some pig                  |
| ___ Lurvy         | H. Greet Wilbur by saying, "Salutations!"                 |

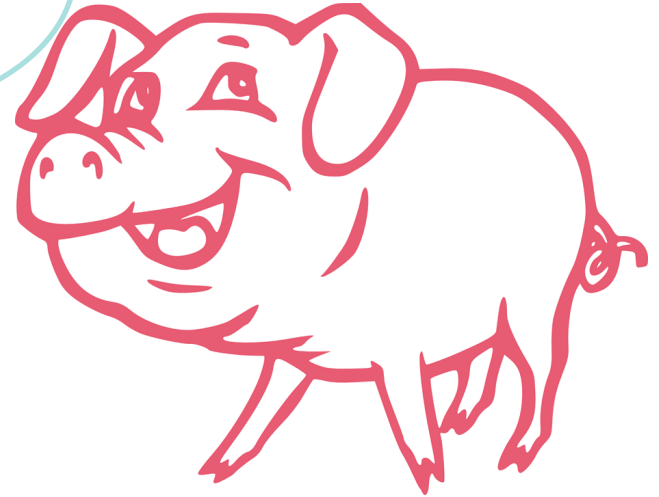
### Order of Events

Number the following events in the order they occurred in the story, from #1—#7

- \_\_\_ Wilbur, Charlotte & Templeton go in the truck to the Fair.
- \_\_\_ Wilbur is given to Fern in a carton.
- \_\_\_ Templeton finds the word 'humble' and brings it to Charlotte.
- \_\_\_ A sheep tells Wilbur that he will be killed at Christmastime.
- \_\_\_ Wilbur tries to build a spider web.
- \_\_\_ Mrs. Arable asks the doctor if she should worry about Fern.
- \_\_\_ Charlotte makes her egg sac with 514 eggs.

1. "People believe almost anything they see in print."
2. "Wilbur's destiny and your destiny are closely linked. If Wilbur is killed and his trough stands empty day after day, you'll grow so thin we can look right through your stomach and see objects on the other side."
3. "I never looked at it that way before."
4. "Maybe our ears aren't as sharp as Fern's."
5. "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."
6. "Oh no...I don't understand it. But for that matter I don't understand how a spider earned to spin a web in the first place. When the words appeared, everyone said they were a miracle. But nobody pointed out that the web itself is a miracle."
7. "After all, what's a life, anyway? We're born, we live a little while, we die. A spider's life can't help being something of a mess, with all this trapping and eating flies. By helping you, perhaps I was trying to life up my life a trifle. Heaven knows anyone's life can stand a little of that."
8. "On foggy mornings, Charlotte's web was truly a thing of beauty. This morning each thin strand was decorated with dozens of tiny beads of water. The web glistened in the light and made a pattern of loveliness and mystery, like a delicate veil."
9. "It's unfair...The pig couldn't help being born small, could it? If I had been very small at birth, would you have killed me?"
10. "That's a fine specimen of a pig—it's no bigger than a white rat."

**Who  
said it?**





## Spiders!

Spiders are seen as ugly creatures that instill fear in people and yet they provide a beneficial service.

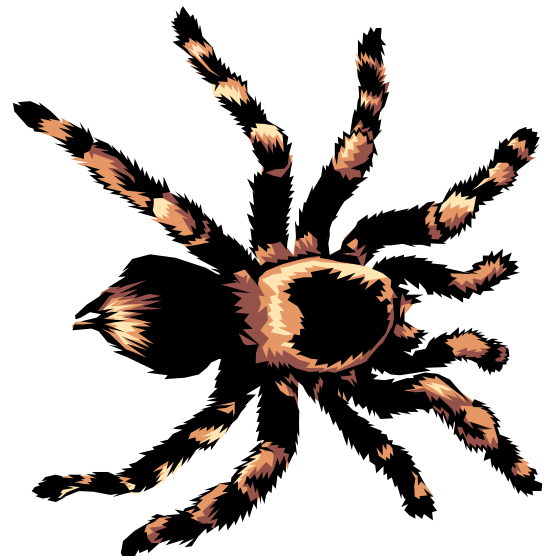
- Spiders capture insects.
- Spiders usually live in neglected areas such as attics, basements, behind and under furniture, bookcases or appliances.
- Many spiders are small and have small mouth parts. These spiders cannot even bite through human skin. Spiders that can bite through human skin only do so when they are provoked.
- All spiders inject a small amount of venom into their prey so they are all called poisonous. Some spiders though are known to be venomous to humans.

The only venomous spider native to Texas is the Brown Recluse although Black Widow spiders are spreading to this area.

Spiders themselves are not insects but belong to the arachnid class of animals. They have four pairs of segmented legs and can grow a new leg if they lose one. Most spiders have eight eyes, and they do not have antennae or wings. A spider's body is divided into two sections, the abdomen and the cephalothorax (the legs, eyes and mouthparts). Spiders usually have

six fingerlike silk glands called spinnerets located beneath their abdomen. The silk comes from inside the spider's body as a liquid, thicker than water. When a spider wants to make a web, it squeezes the silk out of the two small holes at the back of its body called spinnerets. The moment the silk hits the air, the silk dries into a line. Spiders use their sticky webs to catch food and to move from one place to another.

The Tarantula is the most popular spider as it can be tamed and kept as a pet. It is very big and can stretch itself up to 10 inches. Unlike other spiders, the tarantula is hairy. It is also a nocturnal animal, coming out at night to find food. Tarantulas can eat animals that other spiders cannot such as beetles, toads, frogs, small birds, snakes and lizards. Most spiders live one or two years but tarantulas take eight to ten years to become an adult and then live a few years after that.

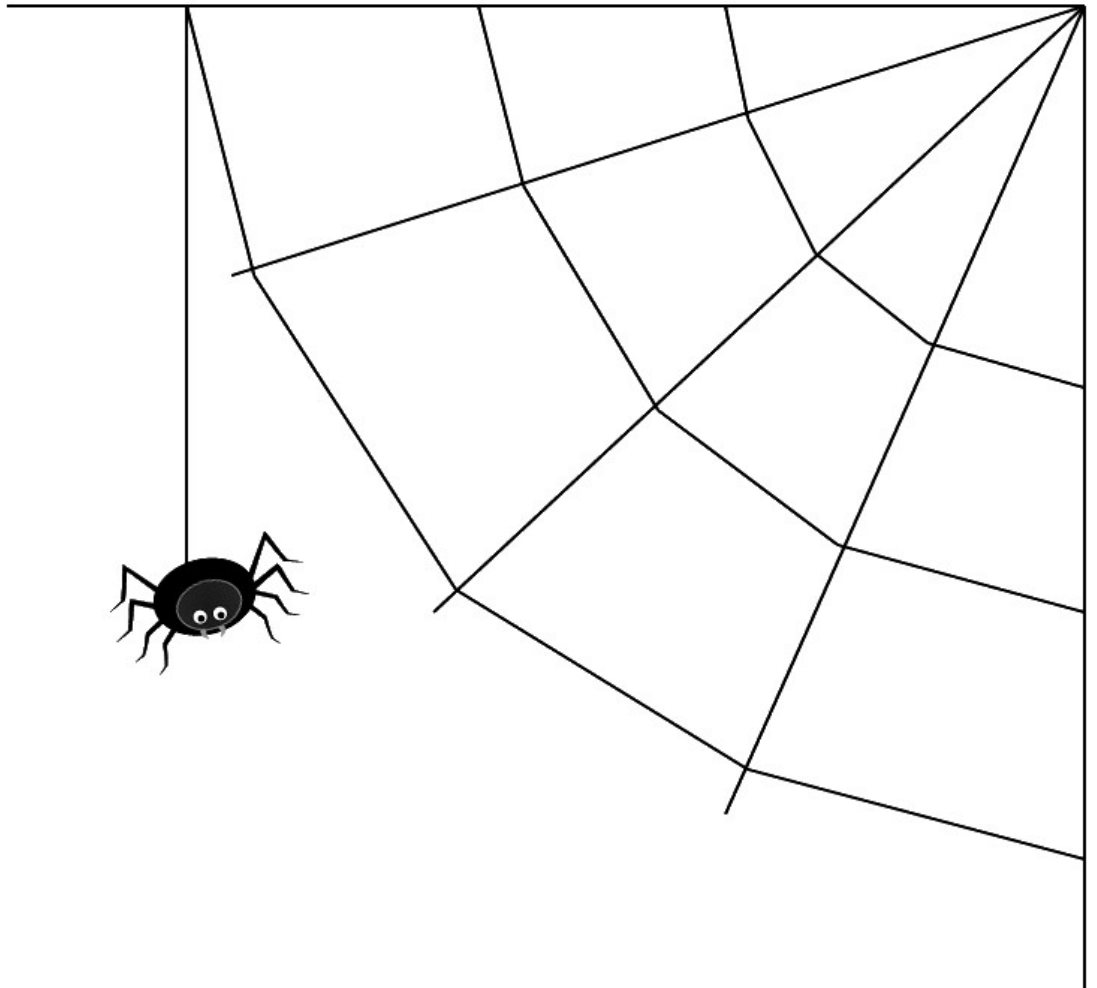


## Activity:

Make marshmallow spiders with your students! Help them practice their math skills by doing all the counting and measuring.

You will need:

- 30 large marshmallows
- a large package of chocolate chips
- 60 M & Ms
- a 5-oz. bag of red string licorice.



Instructions:

1. Poke eight small pieces of string licorice into the large marshmallow for legs.
2. Melt the chocolate chips.
3. Dribble a large spoonful of melted chocolate over the marshmallow.
4. Add two M & Ms for eyes while the chocolate is still sticky.
5. Set aside to cool.!

## Farming

Farming began more than 10,000 years ago in Turkey and the Middle East with the discovery that people could take seeds from the wild grasses they ate and plant them for food. These seeds are known as cereals and provided the first opportunity for people to farm and sell what they grew. Once these hunter-gatherers decided to settle in a particular area they then began to tame animals, breeding them and utilizing their meat, milk, and skins to supplement their diets and lifestyle. Many of the original settlers were based next to river systems to provide them with water for the crops and

animals. This transition from hunters and gatherers to people forming settlements was gradual and is still not the way in some parts of the world.

Farming changed very little until about 1700 when a “revolution” took place and crop production increased partly due to the adoption of “new world” crops such as potatoes and corn. In the 1850s, the Industrial Revolution led farming into its next change with the development of machinery for farming. The new machinery provided farmers the ability to produce their crops in mass quantity. Today over half of the world’s population is still employed in agriculture.



**Activity: Provide your students with collage materials. Have them make collages of barns, farm animals or crops.**

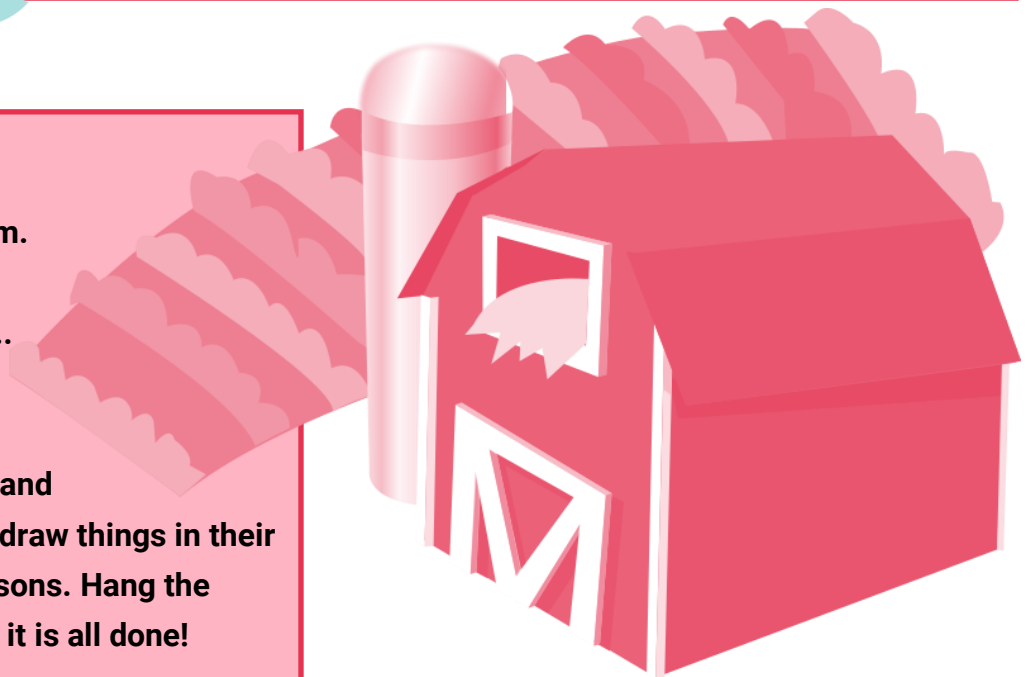
### Activity:

Seasons are so important on a farm.

A season for harvesting, a season for planting, a season for birthing...

Get a large piece of butcher paper and divide it into 4 sections.

Divide your class up into 4 groups and assign them a season. Have them draw things in their section that are images of the seasons. Hang the banner up in your classroom when it is all done!





## History of State Fairs

State fairs are descendants of the Olympics in Greece and the medieval fairs in Europe. Fairs were places where merchants would gather to sell their wares. The first fair in the U.S. was in New Haven, Connecticut in 1644 and was devoted to the exhibition of livestock and agriculture. State fairs were popular places for the whole family to spend several days at. The women would enter into the baking or sewing contests and men would try their luck at bull riding, calf roping and other events. There were booths set up with all sorts of novelty food like ice cream and cotton candy and plenty of rides for the children.

## The Texas State Fair

The Texas State Fair began in 1887 and grew to record breaking numbers in 1905 with 300,000 people in attendance. President William Howard Taft visited the fair in 1909 and Woodrow Wilson delivered a speech in 1911. Automobile races and stunt flying exhibitions became the top attractions. Attendance rose to one million in 1916. WW I caused the 1918 fair to be canceled and the Fair Park was used as a temporary army encampment.

In the 1920s the fair underwent major development with the Music Hall being completed in 1925 for New York shows to be presented. The Texas—OU game became an annual event at the fair in 1929 and in 1930 the race track was demolished to allow room for the fair park stadium otherwise known as the Cotton Bowl.

In 1935 the fair was cancelled in order to prepare the site for the Texas Centennial celebration, which more than 6 million people attended. No fairs were held during 1942–45 due to WW II.

In the 1950s a livestock show was added, a monorail was installed, Elvis Presley played at the Cotton Bowl and Vice President Richard Nixon appeared.

Since 1960 each exposition has had a theme.



**Activity:**  
Have your  
students create  
their own medals  
and ribbons for a  
state fair!

**Activity:** Have your students bring in pictures of their own pets. If they do not have a pet they can be the judges. Have the judges vote on different awards for the pets – Most fluffiest!; Longest tail; etc. Teach the students to work together to agree on the winners. Then award them one of the ribbons that they made. Make sure each pet wins an award!

## ANSWER KEYS

### CROSSWORD PUZZLE



### CHARACTER MATCHING

<u>G</u>	Wilbur
<u>H</u>	Charlotte
<u>E</u>	Fern
<u>D</u>	Templeton
<u>B</u>	Mr. Arable
<u>C</u>	Mr. Zuckerman
<u>A</u>	Goose
<u>F</u>	Lurvy

### ORDER OF EVENTS

- 5 Wilbur, Charlotte & Templeton go in the truck to the Fair.
- 1 Wilbur is given to Fern in a carton.
- 6 Templeton finds the word 'humble' and brings it to Charlotte.
- 2 A sheep tells Wilbur that he will be killed at Christmastime.
- 3 Wilbur tries to build a spider web.
- 4 Mrs. Arable asks the doctor if she should worry about Fern.
- 7 Charlotte makes her egg sac with 514 eggs.

### WHO SAID IT?

- |                         |                        |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Charlotte (p. 84)    | 6. Dr. Dorian (p. 102) |
| 2. Sheep (p. 85)        | 7. Charlotte (p. 154)  |
| 3. Mrs. Arable (p. 103) | 8. Narrator (p. 73)    |
| 4. Mr. Arable (p. 52)   | 9. Fern (p. 3)         |
| 5. Charlotte (p. 58)    | 10. Avery (p. 4)       |