

## *Charlotte's Web*

Adapted by Joseph Robinette  
From the book by E.B. White  
\*Especially for Grades K-8

**By the Barter Players, Barter Theatre, Spring 2024**

**(NOTE: standards listed below are for both reading the book and seeing a performance of *Charlotte's Web*.)**

### **Virginia SOLs**

**English** – K.1, K.5, K.8, K.9, K.12, 1.1, 1.5, 1.8, 1.9, 1.13, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 2.12, 3.4, 3.5, 3.9, 3.11, 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 4.7, 4.9, 5.1, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5, 5.7, 5.9, 6.2, 6.4, 6.5, 6.7, 6.9, 7.1, 7.4, 7.5, 7.7, 7.9, 8.2, 8.4, 8.5, 8.7, 8.9

**Theatre Arts** – M.6, M.7, M.8, M.9, M.13, M.14

### **Tennessee/North Carolina Common Core State Standards**

**English/Language Arts - Reading Literacy:** K.1, K.3, K.5, K.7, K.9, 1.1, 1.2, 1.7, 1.9, 1.10, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.10, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.9, 3.10, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.7, 4.9, 4.10, 5.1, 5.3, 5.4, 5.9, 5.10, 6.1, 6.4, 6.6, 6.7, 6.9, 7.1, 7.4, 7.7, 7.9, 8.1, 8.4, 8.6, 8.7

**English Language Arts – Writing:** K.1, K.5, K.7, K.8, 1.1, 1.3, 1.5, 1.8, 2.1, 2.3, 2.5, 2.8, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.7, 3.8, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.7, 4.8, 4.9, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.7, 5.8, 5.9, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.7, 6.9, 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.7, 7.9, 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.7, 8.9

### **Tennessee Fine Arts Curriculum Standards**

**Theatre** – K.1, K.3, K.4, K.5, K.6, 1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 4.1, 4.3, 4.6, 4.7, 5.1, 5.3, 5.6, 5.7

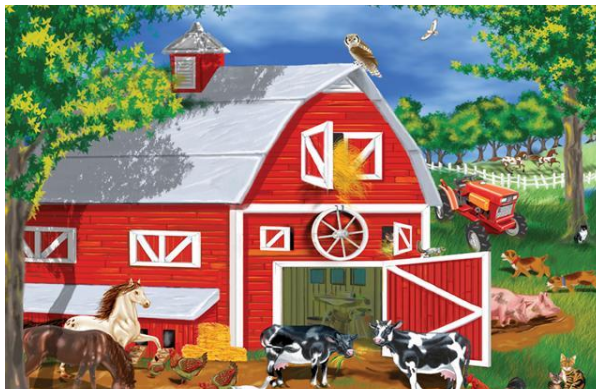
**Theatre 6-8:** 6.1, 6.2, 7.1, 7.2

### **North Carolina Essential Standards**

**Theatre Arts** – K.A.1, K.AE.1, 1.A.1, 1.AE.1, 1.CU.2, 2.C.2, 2.A.1, 2.AE.1, 3.C.1, 3.C.2, 3.A.1, 3.CU.1, 3.CU.2, 4.C.1, 4.A.1, 4.AE.1, 5.C.1, 5.A.1, 5.AE.1, 5.CU.2, 6.C.1, 6.C.2, 6.A.1, 6.AE.1, 7.C.1, 7.C.2, 7.A.1, 7.AE.1, 8.C.1, 8.C.2, 8.A.1, 8.AE.1, 8.CU.1, 8.CU.2

### **Setting**

The Arable's farmyard, the Zuckerman's barn, the County Fair.



## Characters

*Fern Arable* – a young girl

*John Arable* – her father

*Avery Arable* – her brother

*Homer Zuckerman* – her uncle

*Lurvey* – Homer's hired man

*Wilbur* – a pig

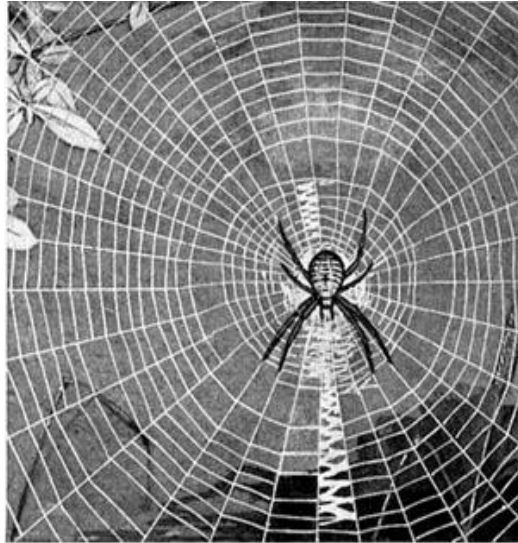
*Charlotte* – a spider

*Templeton* – a rat

*Goose* – a farm animal

*Uncle* – a very large pig

*Various people at the fair*

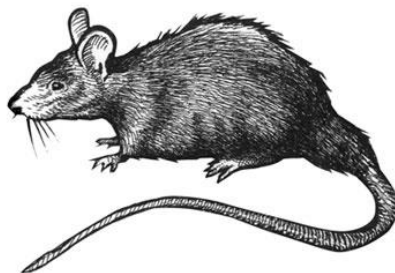


## Note: Cast Size and Doubling of Actors

In this production of *Charlotte's Web* we will be using only six actors, with some actors playing more than one role. Doubling of actors requires distinction between characters. In this production, characters will be distinguished by costume, voice and other physical character traits.

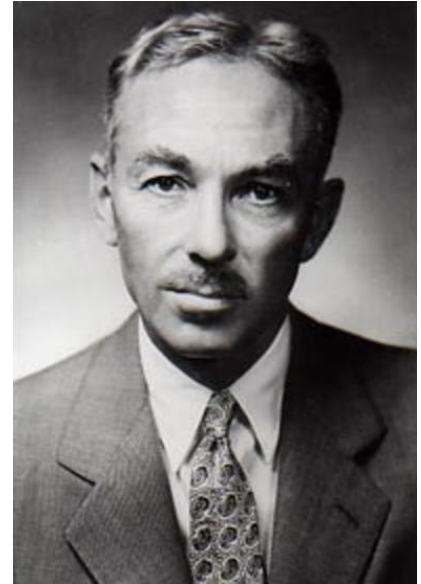
## Synopsis

At the Arable farm, a litter of pigs is born. One of the pigs is born a runt, and to protect it from being killed John Arable's daughter, Fern, begs to take care of it herself. She names her baby pig Wilbur. Wilbur quickly grows into a big, strong pig that must be sold, and he is taken to live at a farm owned by Fern's uncle, Homer Zuckerman. There, Wilbur makes friends with the other farm animals, which include a goose, a rat named Templeton, and a lovely spider named Charlotte. His friends tell him of the fate of a pig's life: when he is big enough, Zuckerman will kill him and turn him into ham or bacon. Wilbur is terrified by the thought of dying, so Charlotte comes up with an idea to write mysterious but complimentary messages in her web about Wilbur. After seeing a couple of these messages in her web and all the attention they cause, Zuckerman decides to take Wilbur to the County Fair. Charlotte writes another message at the fair that allows Wilbur to be honored with a bronze medal. Zuckerman decides not to kill Wilbur after all. Before they leave the fair, Wilbur learns that Charlotte is not returning to the barn and that she is going to die soon. Wilbur decides to take her egg sac back to the barn with him to take care of Charlotte's eggs. Some of Charlotte's children stay with Wilbur, and he loves them dearly, but none of them take the place of his very best friend Charlotte.



### **Biography of the Author**

Elwyn Brooks White was born in Mount Vernon, New York, on July 11, 1899, the youngest child of a large family. After graduating from Cornell University in 1921, White worked in various jobs, before joining the staff of the newly established magazine *New Yorker*. There he met his wife, Katherine Sergeant Angell, who was the magazine's literary editor. They married in 1929. In 1939, White moved to a farm in North Brooklin, Maine, and continued his writing career. Between writing columns, White also published children's books: *Stuart Little* (1945), *Charlotte's Web* (1952), and *The Trumpet of the Swan* (1970). In these works White explored such themes as loyalty, tolerance, and rural living. In 1963, White received a Presidential Medal of Freedom and was awarded an honorary Pulitzer Prize for his work as a whole in 1978. E.B. White died of Alzheimer disease on October 1, 1985.



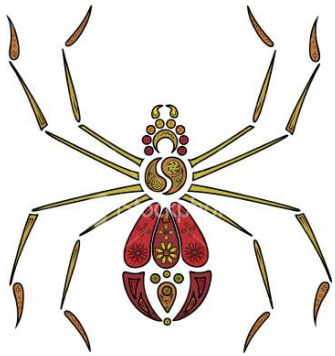
### **Biography of the Playwright**

Joseph Robinette is a professor of theatre at Rowan University in New Jersey. He is the author of more than 50 published plays and musicals including *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *The Paper Chase*, and *A Rose for Emily* as well as this adaptation of E.B. White's *Charlotte's Web*. In 1976, the Children's Theatre Association of America awarded him the Charlotte Chorpenning Cup, given annually to "an outstanding writer of children's plays who has achieved national recognition."



# Pig and Spider Fun Facts!

**Pigs don't sweat! Pigs do have a few sweat glands, but they're not very useful for temperature adjustment. Pigs have to roll in the mud in order to cool off. So next time you tell someone "you're sweating like a pig" just remember – you're WRONG!**



**All spiders have eight legs. They also have a "spinneret" which spins silk. They all have fangs as well as jaws and teeth – but they cannot chew!**

**A male pig is called a boar. A female pig is called a gilt if she hasn't had piglets yet and a sow if she has.**



**Fear of spiders is called “arachnophobia”. It is one of the most common fears among humans.**



**Pigs are very intelligent. They pick up tricks faster than dogs. Pigs rank #4 in animal intelligence behind chimpanzees, dolphins and elephants.**

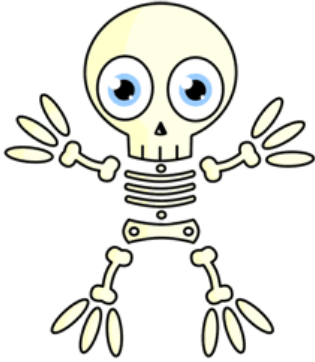
**Most spiders are very nearsighted. To make up for this, they use the hair on their body to feel their way around and to sense when other animals are near.**



**Pigs have a great sense of smell!**







**Spiders are invertebrates, which means they don't have backbones. They also have an exoskeleton, meaning that their skeleton is on the outside.**

**A pig can run a 7 minute mile!**



**A Daddy Long Legs isn't a spider, though it looks a lot like one. It doesn't have a waist between its front body part and its abdomen. Its legs are longer and thinner than a spider's, and it carries its body hung low.**



## Questions/Activities

1. When Wilbur was born, he was considered the “runt” of the litter. What does that mean? What would have happened to Wilbur if Fern had not adopted him as a pet? Why? Why does Fern’s father give Wilbur to the Zuckermans? **Discuss.**
2. Wilbur makes new friends in the barnyard at the Zuckermans. Who are they? **Draw a picture of the barn and barnyard where Wilbur lives.** Make sure you include Wilbur and his various new friends.
3. Characters in a play or a book always have a reason for doing what they do. This is called their “motivation”. **What motivates the following three characters** to help Wilbur: Fern? Charlotte? Templeton? **Discuss.**
4. **Compare and contrast the characters of Charlotte and Templeton.** Do they have anything in common? How do they differ? How do they help each other? **Discuss.**
5. Do you think it is wrong for the Arables and the Zuckermans to want to kill Wilbur? Why or why not? **Discuss.**
6. What does Charlotte like to eat? How does she catch her prey? How does she eat them? **Discuss.**
7. Using the Internet and the library as resources, research how and why spiders make their webs. Explain the different shapes and styles of webs, as well. Make a presentation to the class of your findings.



8. Spiders are the inspiration for many songs, nursery rhymes, movies, and even a comic book hero. **Put together a collage of all the famous “spiders” and present it to the class.**
9. What are the four words (or phrases) Charlotte weaves into her web? How will these words (or phrases) help Wilbur? Look up the definition of each word. How do these words apply to Wilbur? **Discuss.**
10. If you had Charlotte’s ability to weave words into a web, what adjectives would you weave to describe your best friend? Your parents? Your teacher? Why did you pick this word? **Discuss.**
11. Charlotte’s talent was spinning intricate webs. Everyone has a special talent, something they do very well. **What is your special talent?** Poetry? Painting? Music? Baking cookies? Math? Sports? Telling jokes? If you can’t think of one yourself, ask your friends to tell you what it is you do well.

12. Ask each student to write his/her name on a slip of paper and place it in a bag. Then have each student draw out a name. (Make sure it's not their own.) **Then, using their special talent, have each student do something for the person whose name they've drawn.**

13. Who wrote *Charlotte's Web*? What other children's books did he write? **Is *Charlotte's Web* fiction or non-fiction?** What is the difference? **Discuss.**

14. This play was adapted from the book *Charlotte's Web*. In what ways are the play and the book similar? How are they different? *Why* are they different? **Discuss.**

15. How many characters are in this play? How many actors? What do the actors change, besides their costumes, to become new characters? **Discuss.**

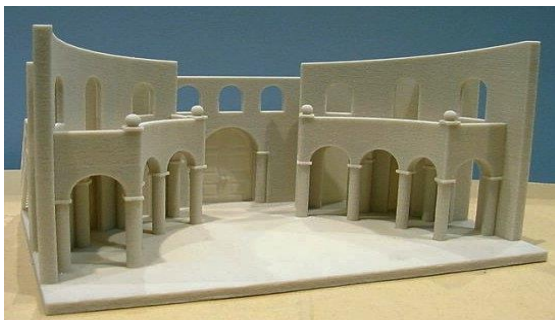
16. Locations onstage are called "settings." What are the three settings of this play? **Discuss.**

17. What was your favorite part in the play *Charlotte's Web*? **Write a paragraph retelling that part in your own words.**

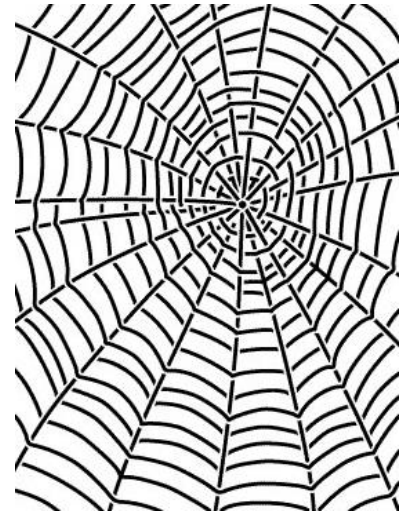
18. **Write a letter** to the actors from this production. Tell them what you liked about the play, their performance, etc. Mail your letters to:

The Barter Players  
c/o Barter Theatre  
P.O. Box 867  
Abingdon, VA 24212-0867  
ATTN: Charlotte's Web

19. Pick your favorite segment from the book and **write your own script for this scene.** Keep in mind that, in theatre, the story should be told in dialogue (conversation between two or more characters) and action (what the characters do). Try to avoid the use of a Narrator. Make sure that each one of your characters in the scene has a reason (a *motivation*) for being in the scene.



20. After you've finished your script, **design the set that suits the needs for your scene.** Keep in mind time, place and location. Is it inside or outside the barn? Is it day or night? Summer or winter? Also consider the entrances and exits of your characters. Draw a picture of what your set should look like. Then make a model of it and present it to your class, explaining how it will work when built.





21. “Props” (short for *properties*) are the objects a character uses in a scene. For example, if Templeton was eating a piece of cheese, the cheese would be considered a prop. **Determine the props your characters will need in the scene you’ve scripted and create a prop list.** Hint: Keep it simple. Unless a prop is absolutely necessary, don’t use it.

22. Now that you have your script, set, and props, design the costumes you’ll need for your scene. Again, keep in mind time and place. **Draw a picture of the costumes** you would need to turn an actor into a pig or a spider or a rat. Make it elaborate or as simple as you desire – but keep in mind the need for a character to speak and move comfortably and your ability to make the costume. Once you have your drawing (renderings) completed, **make your costumes.**



23. Working with other students, **rehearse the scene you have scripted** and using your costumes and props (and set, if possible), **present the scene to your class.** What did you learn about theatre from this process? Was there any aspect of the production process that you liked better than others? Why? **Discuss.**

24. What was the main conflict in *Charlotte’s Web*? How was it resolved? **Discuss.**

25. **“Backstory”** refers to the events in a character’s life that took place before we meet the character in the story. Write a backstory for Charlotte. Who was Charlotte’s mother? Why did Charlotte choose to live at the Zuckermans? What was it about the barn that made Charlotte want to spin webs there? Did Charlotte have any close friends before Wilbur? If so, what happened to them? How did Charlotte learn how to spell? **Come up with as many questions as you can about Charlotte’s life – then make up the answers.** As long as they are consistent with Charlotte’s character in *Charlotte’s Web*, the sky’s the limit!

26. Pretending that you are Templeton, **keep a journal** starting with the day Wilbur moves into the Zuckerman’s barn and ending with the day he returns from the fair. What sorts of things would Templeton write about? **What is his point of view?**

27. Have you ever been to a county fair? If so, what did you do/see there? What is the purpose of a county fair? Why was Wilbur taken there? **Discuss.**



28. How different would this story be if Fern or Lurvey or Mr. Zuckerman suffered from arachnophobia (a fear of spiders)? **Discuss.**

29. *Charlotte's Web* uses *personification* in order to tell the story. *Personification* means giving human characteristics to objects or animals. In this case, the animals in the story have the ability to talk. Can you think of other children's stories where this type of personification is used? **Make a list of these books and then practice your research skills by looking them up in your school's library.**

30. Books and plays are just two ways to tell a story. Stories can also be told through song, poetry or pictures. **Pick one of these three mediums and use it to retell the story of *Charlotte's Web*. Present it to your class.**

### **Vocabulary**

terrific

injustice

distribute

contented

specimen

marmalade

envy

sulphur

salutations

fragile

restores

unremitting

conspiracy

tremendous

delay

determined

spinnerets

miraculous

chronicle

secure

radiant

ascend

Navaho

regulation

spiffy

merely

humble

schemer

carousing

acute

mysteriously

trifle

trough

summoned

forlorn

dedicate

fondly

triumph

**Define the vocabulary words above and use them in a sentence!**

# True and False

Write **T** if the statement is **True** and **F** if the statement is **False**.

1. \_\_\_\_ *Charlotte's Web* is a book written by Mark Twain.
2. \_\_\_\_ Fern Arable begs her father to let her adopt a kitten.
3. \_\_\_\_ Mr. Zuckerman is Fern's uncle.
4. \_\_\_\_ Wilbur was the biggest pig in the litter.
5. \_\_\_\_ Templeton loves to eat.
6. \_\_\_\_ Wilbur's mother was named Charlotte.
7. \_\_\_\_ You can make a pig shiny by washing it in buttermilk.
8. \_\_\_\_ Fern falls in love with Lurvey.
9. \_\_\_\_ Avery took care of Wilbur every day he lived on the Arable's farm.
10. \_\_\_\_ Wilbur won a blue ribbon at the county fair.
11. \_\_\_\_ When Charlotte met Wilbur, she greeted him with the word "salutations".
12. \_\_\_\_ Lurvey was Mr. Zuckerman's hired hand.
13. \_\_\_\_ Mr. Zuckerman made his living as a country doctor.
14. \_\_\_\_ Charlotte was Wilbur's best friend.

# Matching

Match the person or place in the first column with the corresponding description in the second.

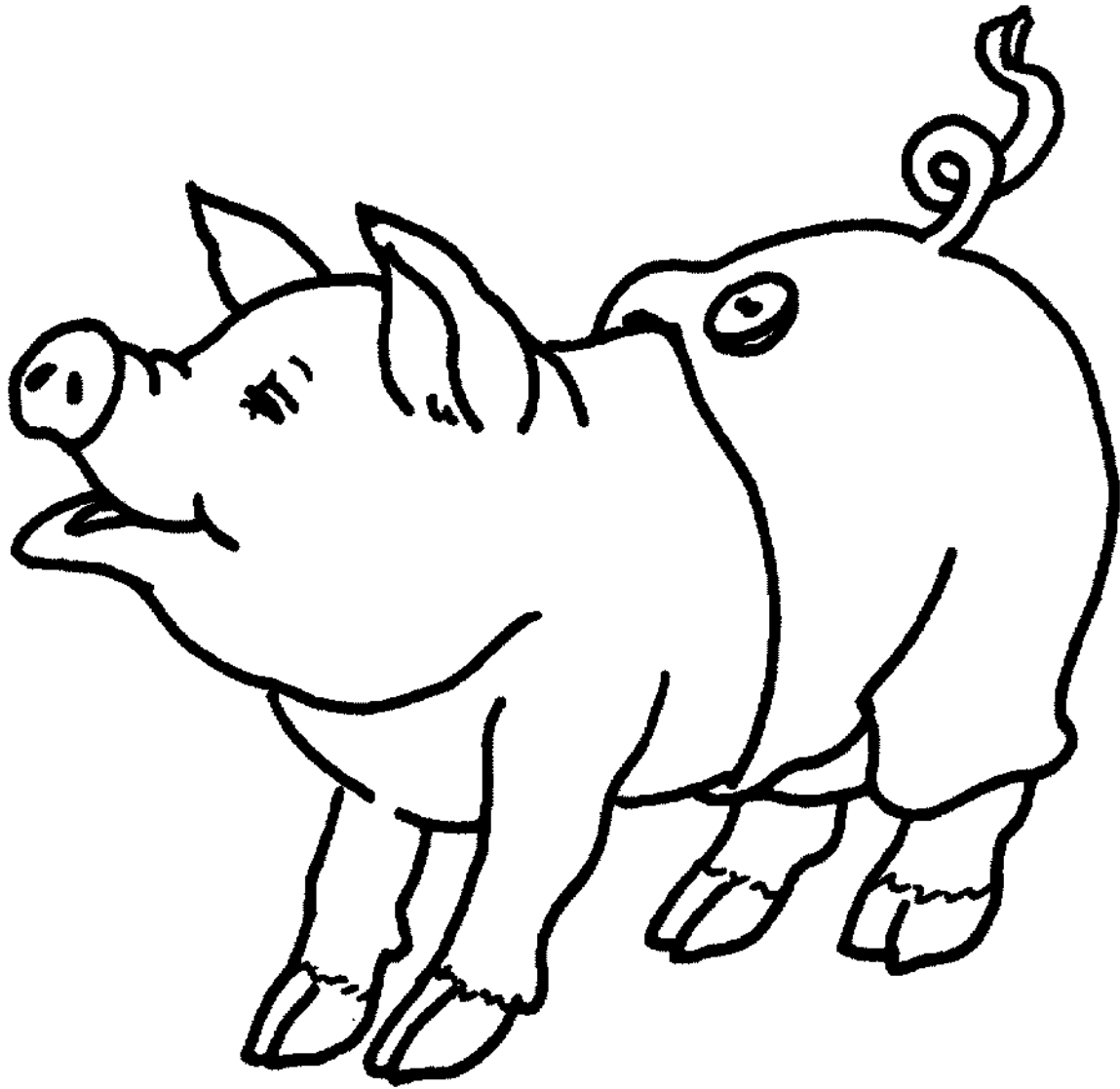
- |                         |                                  |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Wilbur               | a. where Wilbur was born         |
| 2. Arable farm          | b. a rat                         |
| 3. Charlotte            | c. rescues Wilbur from the axe   |
| 4. the County Fair      | d. slops the pigs                |
| 5. Templeton            | e. the runt of the litter        |
| 6. Goose                | f. where Templeton lives         |
| 7. Fern                 | g. where Charlotte lays her eggs |
| 8. Zuckerman's barnyard | h. says things in threes         |
| 9. Lurvey               | i. a spider who befriends Wilbur |

## WORD SEARCH

Find the following words below: axe, balloonist, barn, buttermilk, Charlotte, egg, fair, farmer, Fern, litter, pig, radiant, rat, runt, sow, spider, Templeton, terrific, web, Wilbur

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

**Color the pig and choose one word to describe him.**





## **Suggested Further Reading:**

*Stuart Little* by E.B. White

*The Trumpet of the Swan* by E.B. White