



By **Joseph Robinette**
Based on the Book by **E. B. White**

Directed by **David Saar**
Scenic Design by **Robert Klingelhofer**
Costume Design by **Catherine Hunt**
Lighting Design by **Rick Paulsen**
Sound Design by **Anthony Runfola**
Music by **Scott Kasbaum**
Stage Manager: **Abigail Hartmann**

Produced by special arrangement with
The Dramatic Publishing Company

The Cast (in order of appearance)

Fern Arable. Yolanda London
Mr. Arable/Templeton. Jon Gentry
Mrs. Arable/Goose. Katie McFadzen
Avery Arable. Ricky Araiza
Homer Zuckerman/Uncle. . . Christopher Mascarelli
Edith Zuckerman/Sheep. Kristin Hailstone
Wilbur. D. Scott Withers
Charlotte. Debra K. Stevens

Tempe Center for the Arts
September/October, 2007

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Arizona Commission on the Arts
Bashas' Markets

City of Tempe/Tempe Municipal Arts Commission
Wells Fargo

**We want to
hear from
you!**

Preview Guide for Parents and Teachers to Childsplay's Production of **Charlotte's Web**

We hope you find this guide helpful in preparing your children for an enjoyable and educational theatrical experience. Included you'll find things to talk about before and after seeing the performance, classroom activities that deal with curriculum connections and education standards, and resource materials.

The Story: By the time Wilbur the piglet is two months old, Farmer Arable's daughter Fern has already saved his life twice. First, she persuades her father to spare the runt of the litter from his ax. Then, when the thriving piglet has grown too costly to feed, she arranges for her Uncle, Farmer Zuckerman, to raise him. Safely settled in Zuckerman's barn, Wilbur meets his barnyard neighbors: the gossipy goose, the gloomy sheep, Templeton the self-serving rat, and Charlotte, the kind and gentle spider. When his new neighbors break the bad news that the farmer is fattening him up only to be slaughtered, Charlotte promises that she will save him. Miraculously, Charlotte writes the words "some pig" in her web, drawing attention to Wilbur and making him a local celebrity. Realizing that he has something special, Farmer Zuckerman decides to enter Wilbur in the County Fair. He promises Fern that, should Wilbur win the blue ribbon, he will never be slaughtered. Charlotte and Templeton accompany Wilbur to the fair, and the web writing continues to attract acclaim. When Wilbur fails to win first prize at the fair, everyone is despondent. However, the announcement that a special medal is to be presented to Wilbur, as the fair's star attraction, soon changes the mood. Charlotte has succeeded in saving her friend's life. On the final day of the fair, she breaks the news to Wilbur that she is near the end of her own life. She gives him the responsibility of transporting her precious egg sac back to the farm, and keeping it safe until it hatches her baby spiders. Wilbur sorrowfully agrees to help Charlotte, and fulfills his promise until spring, when he proudly watches the egg sac hatch and 514 baby spiders fly away. Three of Charlotte's offspring choose to stay on Zuckerman's farm, and as the play ends Wilbur contemplates a bright future with his new friends in the barnyard.

We would love to have your feedback on this Preview Guide. What did you find helpful? Did you use any of the content before seeing the play? After? Which activities did you try? Did you have success? Is having AZ Education Standards noted in the activities helpful to you or unnecessary? What else would you like to see us address in future Preview Guides? ANY COMMENTS WILL BE THOUROUGHLY APPECIATED! Please send them to:

Katie McFadzen at kmcfadzen@childsplayaz.org or c/o Childsplay, PO Box 517, Tempe, AZ 85280

Things to Talk About and Do Before Seeing *Charlotte's Web*:

Here are topics for discussion or activities to use before or after seeing the production:

Friendship • Cycle of life • State and County Fairs • Farming • Keeping promises • Spiders • Winning and losing • E.B.White • Pet care

Hold That Thought: Ask students the questions in **bold type** on this page before seeing the play and talk about their answers afterwards!

Theater Etiquette: It's helpful to review the rules of theater etiquette before seeing a show, especially since this may be the first live theater experience for some of your students. Please take a moment to discuss the following pointers prior to seeing the performance:

~Use the restroom before seeing the show as we do not have intermission during our school performances.

~Stay seated during the performance.

~ Be respectful to the performers and other people in the audience by not talking during the performance.

Remember, the actors can see and hear the audience just like you can see and hear them.

~ Appropriate responses such as applause or laughter are always welcome.

~Food, candy, gum and beverages are not allowed in the theater.

~Use of cell phones (including text messaging), cameras or any other recording device is *not allowed in the theater at any time!*

~**How is seeing a play different than seeing a movie?**

Things to Look for in This Production:

*Swinging in the barn
On a summer's afternoon.
Sunlight streaming
through the slats
In the side of the barn.
Dust particles hanging
in the air.*

Images from phrases such as this helped the design team to come up with ideas for the production. Here are some things to look for regarding the elements of design (set, costumes, sound and lights).

► Much of the set has been designed with Charlotte the spider in mind. There needed to be a web that an actor could climb on and write words into. The web ended up being built out of iron rods so it's kind of like a piece of playground equipment! **What are the different ways Debra K. Stevens, who plays Charlotte, uses the web?**

The set also needed to represent three different locations: the Zuckerman's barn, the fair, and Fern Arable's house. **How are these different locations represented without a complete change of scenery?**

► The animal costumes make no attempt to be realistic. The personality of the animal is presented through the costume and suggests "pigness" or "ratness" rather than specific physical characteristics. **What are some of the ways that the costume designer suggests the different types of animals?**

► Sound effects and music play an important part in creating the atmosphere. Listen for the sounds of the barnyard. Many of the characters have their own "theme music." **Can you identify different types of music and rhythms and melodies for each character?**

► Lighting plays an important part in setting the mood and

time in a play. **How do the lights change to suggest the time of day or night?**

Double Casting: Sometimes when a play has many characters, an actor will be assigned two or more roles to play. The main reason for this is to save on actor salaries but it also creates a wonderful challenge for the actors and a sense of ensemble. Since there are sixteen characters and only eight actors, several of the actors play more than one role in the play. **Can you track which actor plays which characters?**

Read the Book! It's always great to have an idea of what the story is about before seeing a play. Since *Charlotte's Web* is also a very popular and well-known book, read it or listen to it before you see the play. **How do you think the play will be different from the book?**

Vocabulary Words to Review

ARABLE [adj.] fit for cultivation

CONSPIRACY [noun] a treacherous plot

GOSLINGS [noun pl.] baby geese

HUMBLE [adj.] modest, meek, showing respect

INJUSTICE [noun] an unjust or unfair act; wrong

RUNT [noun] an undersized animal, especially the smallest animal of a litter

RADIANT [adj.] glowing, bright; filled with happiness, joy

SLOPS [noun] waste food used to feed pigs

SALUTATIONS [noun pl.] an expression or greeting

SPINNERETS [noun pl.] tiny holes through which silk passes from inside the spider's body to the outside world

TROUGH [noun] long, narrow, shallow receptacle for animal food

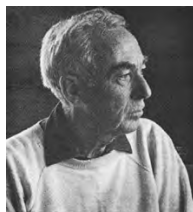
"Well, I am pretty, there's no denying that. Almost all spiders are rather nice looking."

~Charlotte A. Cavatica

More Things to Talk About Before Seeing *Charlotte's Web*...

E. B. White:

Elwyn Brooks White was born in Mount Vernon, NY in 1899. After graduating from Cornell University in 1921, he spent a short time as a newspaper reporter. Much of his literary career was spent writing essays for periodicals. He became one of the most important contributors to *The New Yorker Magazine* writing essays and columns for six decades. While he is widely regarded as one of the best essayists of the modern era, it is for his children's fiction that he is best known.



In the late 1930s, in the hopes of amusing a niece, Janice Hart White, E. B. White started writing the first of his three books for children. *Stuart Little* was published in 1945, and *Charlotte's Web* appeared in 1952. Both were highly acclaimed, and in 1970 jointly won the Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal, a major prize in the field of children's literature. In the same year, he published his third children's novel, *The Trumpet of the Swan*. In 1973, that book received the Sequoyah Award from Oklahoma and the William Allen White Award from Kansas, both of which were awarded by students voting for their favorite book of the year. It is said that some of the characters from his books were inspired by animals he kept on his farm in North Brooklin, Maine. Mr. White died October 1, 1985 after a long fight with Alzheimer's disease.

Spiders: E. B. White was fascinated by spiders: "Once you begin watching spiders, you

haven't much time for anything else – the world is really loaded with them. Spiders are skillful, amusing and useful..." One cold night on his farm in Maine, he watched a spider spin her egg sac and deposit her eggs. Not wanting to miss anything, he carefully put the spider and her egg sac in a box and took it with him to his home in New York. "Some weeks later I was surprised and pleased to find Charlotte's daughters were emerging from the tiny air holes in the cover of the box. They strung tiny lines from my comb to my brush, from my brush to my mirror, and from my mirror to my nail scissors."

Spiders are not insects. They belong to a group called arachnids. Scorpions, mites and daddy longlegs are also arachnids.

Here's the difference:

A spider...

~Has 8 legs, has 2 main parts, has no wings or antennae

An insect...

~has 6 legs, has 3 main body parts, has at least 1 pair of wings and antennae



Many spiders are orb weavers: they make a frame, then bicycle spokes, then weave in a circular pattern. They trap their prey in the web. Without spiders, the world would be overrun with insects. All spiders are carnivores (they eat other bugs). They do not chew but instead inject their victims with venom to liquefy the insect's insides. Sounds like a scene from a horror film, doesn't it?

Life expectancy among spiders varies and depends on each species. For example, tarantulas can live up to 20 years, violinistas live from 5 to 10, black spiders from 1 to 2.5 years, and other species only live several months.

Farms and Farming:

Farming can be traced back to around 7,000 B.C. in the Middle East. Archeologists say that people discovered that certain plants produced edible seeds could be planted to create new crops. They also learned how to tame wild animals that roamed the land. Eventually these 'farmers' stayed in one place (often near rivers) and formed farming settlements. Farming stayed the same for much of history until the late 1700's when farm machinery (like the cotton gin and steel plow) became popular. Farmers used horse, ox and man power until gas tractors were invented in the early 1900's.

The family farm was once the backbone of American society but is now a dying institution. In 1986, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced that an American farm was going out of business every six minutes. Increased consumer awareness of food safety issues and environmental concerns has contributed to the growth in organic farming over the last few years.

State and County Fairs: A state fair is a competitive and recreational gathering of a U.S. state's population. It is a larger version of a county fair, often including only exhibits or competitors that have won in their categories at the local county fairs.

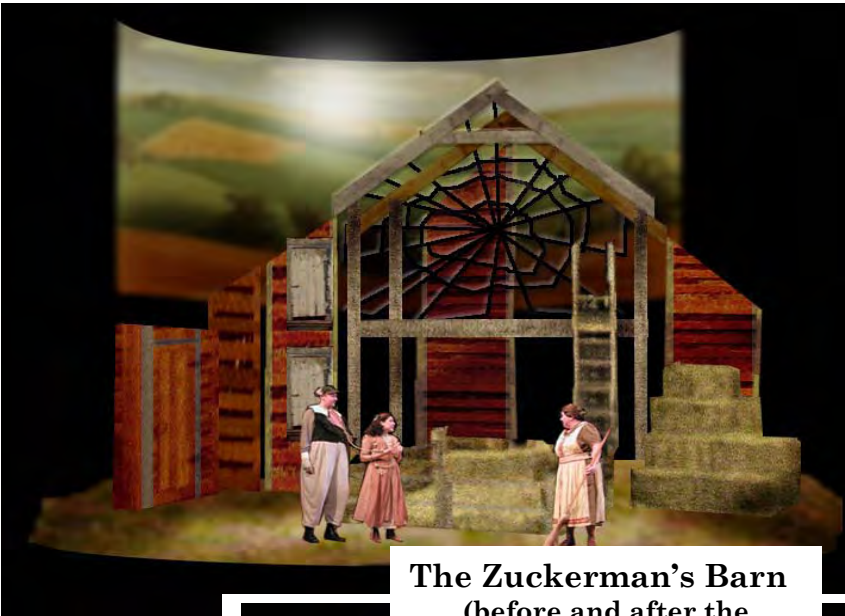
Originally a state fair was just a competitive exhibition of livestock in various competitions, the display of farm products which were not necessarily for sale, and the competition among various fairgoers and participants in such categories as handicrafts, baked goods, jams and jellies, etc., but has since been expanded to include carnival amusement rides and games, music, races, tests of

strength and skill, etc. Large fairs can see more than a million visitors over the course of a week or two. *From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sate_fair

The Life Cycle: All the living things in the world are part of nature's cycles of life. Living things depend on each other for survival. Most plants and creatures are part of a food chain. Here's one example: a grasshopper feeds on a flower, a rat feeds on a grasshopper, a snake feeds on a rat and a hawk feeds on a snake. Flowers grow, bloom and go to seed. Leaves on trees change color and fall and new buds appear in the spring. All of these things, including birth and death, are a part of nature's cycles. Talking about food chains and life cycles can help children to understand that the end of a creature's or plant's life is ultimate and that death is a part of life. While dealing with the loss of an animal or person is very sad, comfort can be found in the fact that a person or creature can live on through their offspring and in memories (just like Charlotte lives on through her baby spiders).



The Arable's Home



**The Zuckerman's Barn
(before and after the web is made)**



**Scenic Design and Renderings by
Robert Klinghoeffer**



The County Fair

Things To Talk About and Do After Seeing *Charlotte's Web*:

Discussion Starters:

Now that you've read and seen *Charlotte's Web*, here are some things to talk about: **How does the play differ from the book? Which characters or incidents were left out of the play or presented differently in the play? Why do you think the playwright chose to make the changes?** You can also compare and contrast the book and play with various movie versions of the story.

Story Structure~ All plays have three P's: People in a Place with a Problem. Where does the play take place (setting)? Who are the people (or characters)? What are the problems (conflicts)? **What happens at the beginning of the play? The middle? The end? What is the climax or high point in the plot? Resolution?**

Friendship~ Wilbur certainly has some good friends on the farm. One dictionary defines a friend as "a person whom one knows, likes and trusts."

What qualities make a good friend? Does Templeton become a friend? How does he change during the course of the play?

Promises~ Charlotte promises Wilbur that she will think of a way to save his life. Farmer Zuckerman makes a promise to Fern that Wilbur will not be slaughtered if he wins a ribbon at the County Fair. Wilbur promises Charlotte that he will look after her egg sac until it hatches. Much of the plot of this play depends on the making of promises and the importance of keeping them. Talk about promises you make in your lives, and how you go

about keeping them. **Have you ever not kept a promise? How did it make you (or somebody else) feel?**

Winning and Losing~ It becomes very important for Wilbur to win a ribbon at the fair. When the blue ribbon is given to Uncle, Wilbur reacts with a great deal of courage. Think of a situation when winning was very important. Did you win or lose? How did it feel? If you lost, how did you cheer yourself up? Wilbur also loses his friend Charlotte when she passes away. **Have you ever lost a friend, family member or pet? How did you feel? What do you do to remember that person or pet?**

Activities Linked to Standards (samples noted in bold):

Writing:

▶ Charlotte gets some of the inspiration for her web writing from magazines. Collect a selection of magazine ads and look at the descriptive words used. Cut and paste or make a list of all the adjectives you can find. Use the words to write a story about a friend or pet, real or imagined. **W-S2C4**

Reading:

▶ Read E. B. White's other books *Stuart Little* and *The Trumpet of the Swan*. What do they have in common with *Charlotte's Web*? How are they different? Take a vote to rank the three books. Which one is the favorite of your class? **R-S2C1**

Creative Drama/Theater:

▶ Create your own unique animal characters by finding pictures of animals or studying animals at the zoo. First, choose an animal. Then, explore the different physical and emotional characteristics

of your animal: movement, energy, attitude, mood, vocal qualities, etc. Find items of clothing that suggest your animal (think about the costumes in the play, for example). Give your character a name, age and occupation/job. Take turns sharing the characters in class. **T-S1C2-301. T-S1C2-302**

▶ Choose one of the characters from the play that you could create a story about (or make up a new one). Sit in a circle and start a story with one sentence like, "There was once a baby gosling named Inez." Each person in the circle gets to contribute two words to the story. Write down the story as it's being created (so you can read it back later). The goal for the students is to listen, work as a team, and think fast, making sure the story has a beginning, middle and end as well as a problem/conflict and solution. See if you can play the story out (in small groups or as a class).

Visual Art:

▶ Create a spider's web by using white chalk on black paper, string and glue, or glue and glitter. Now find an adjective that you can write in the web. Display in your classroom. **VA-S1C1-201**

▶ Using colored pencils (or another medium) draw a picture of your pet or a pet you would like to have. Use photos to help you. Now, write down or draw all of the things you need to do to take care of the pet (feeding, brushing, vet visits, etc.). Take it to the next level and see if you can come up with a budget for your pet. How much does it cost per month? Per year? **VA-S1C1-201, M02-S1C1-17, M06-S2C1-01**

More Discussion Starters and Curriculum/Standards Connections:

Courage~ Charlotte teaches Wilbur about courage. Wilbur shows courage when he thinks he is going to die. **What does courage mean? Have you ever done something courageous? Can you think of an example of someone showing courage?**

Injustice~ Fern fights for Wilbur's life at the beginning of the play. She says that killing Wilbur would be a "terrible case of injustice." **What does injustice mean? What examples from history or your personal lives can you think of where someone fought to overcome injustice? What type of injustice would you feel strongly about fighting against?**

To give life/end of life~ Charlotte helps save a life (Wilbur's) and gives life when she creates her egg sac. She knows her time on the earth is limited and she finds comfort in the fact that Wilbur will be alright and that her eggs will hatch on the farm. **Can you think of an example of someone saving another's life? What professions save lives?** Even though Wilbur's life is saved, it will come to an end one day. Nothing can live forever. Talk about life spans of plants and animals. **How long can a tree live? A cactus? A petunia? A fly? What is the average life of a household pet? What about a human?**

Science:

► You can try this activity by yourself or with a partner. Different types of creatures have different amounts of offspring and different life spans. Find out what the

average amount of offspring and the average lifespan is for the following: horse, dog, spider, snake, elephant, fish, or any other creature of your choice. Create a graph to chart the creatures and their offspring. Use or draw pictures to use on your graph. Answer the following questions: Which creatures have the most offspring? The least? Which creatures tend to have the longest life span? The shortest? **SC02-S4C2-02, M03-S2C1-02**

► Do a research project on spiders in Arizona or from another location in the world. How many different types of spiders are there in your chosen area? Collect pictures and facts about the different spiders (including what kind of webs they weave) and put them all together on a poster board that you can display in class. **SC01-S4C3-01**

Math:

► A spider's web can be a wonderful tool for introducing geometry. A number of shapes are hidden in the web: circles, triangles, squares, and rectangles. Draw your own spider's web and include as many shapes as possible. Exchange with a friend and highlight all of the shapes you can find. **M04-S4C1-04, VA-S1C1-203**

Social Studies:

► Zuckerman's farm has a community (a social group sharing an environment) that includes all of the animals. People are usually a part of more than one community: where they live, where they work or go to school, where they worship, etc. What are your communities like? Using circles to represent each community, write down who is in each. Are any of the people you've written down in more

than one circle? If so, create a Venn diagram of your communities overlapping those communities that have some of the same people in them.

More Writing:

► Goose often uses words three times in a row when she speaks or she adds extra syllables to words. Examples are "approximately-oximately thirty all told," and "now, now, now Old Sheep." Think up a topic for a short conversation that you might have with a friend. Write it out formatting it like a play script. Here's an example:

Katie: Wow, it's hot today.

Yolanda: Sure is. Wanna get some ice cream?

Katie: Yeah! I adore ice cream!

Next, go back and change all of *your* dialogue so you sound like the goose. Think about repeating words three times and repeating syllables within words. Like this:

Katie: Wow, it's hot, hot, hot, today.

Yolanda: Sure is. Wanna get some ice cream?

Katie: Yeah! I adore-ore-ore ice cream!

Share your before and after scenes with the class. **LS-F3, T-S1C1-201**

More Creative Drama:

► Create a story drama using *Charlotte's Web*. Divide students into groups of three or four. Assign different scenes from the play (or book) to dramatize. Take about ten minutes to work with your team on dramatizing the scene. Think about using voice, body and imagination to communicate what is happening in the scene. Take turns sharing the scenes in the order that they happen in the play/book piecing together the story. **T-S1C1-201**

Interesting Internet Connections:

www.amonline.net.au/spiders

-lots of spider info

<http://shamrockfarmstour.com>

-go on a tour of a dairy farm

www.schnepffarms.com

-another great local farm

www.azstatefair.com

-official site of the Arizona State Fair

<http://arizonafairs.com>

-a link to all of the county fairs in Arizona

<http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/family/pets/article7.html>

-a great article for kids on taking care of pets

www.enchantedlearning.com/coloring/lifecycles.shtml

-animal life cycle printouts

www.kidsfarm.com/farm.htm

-great interactive site for kids about farm animals

www.ade.az.gov/asd/arts/ArtsStandards.asp

-the newly updated Arizona Arts Standards



Want Some Drama in Your Classroom?

If you would like help incorporating drama into your curriculum by having a Teaching Artist come into your classroom, Childsplay can help. We offer a variety of artist-in-residence and teacher training experiences. We can also help with pre- and post-show activities related to the production. For more information, contact Patricia Black, Director of Education, at: pblack@childsplayaz.org or 480-350-8129

About Childsplay:

Childsplay is a non-profit professional theatre company of adult actors, performing for young audiences and families.

Our Mission is to create theatre so strikingly original in form, content or both, that it instills in young people an enduring awe, love and respect for the medium, thus preserving imagination and wonder, the hallmarks of childhood, which are the keys to the future.

We love to hear from our audience members!

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Email us at: info@childsplayaz.org

Web Site: www.childsplayaz.org



Charlotte's Web Booklist

Prepared with the help of
Tim Wadham, Youth Services
Coordinator for the Maricopa
County Library District



Curriculum Connections:

Friendship

Mis Amigos/My Friends by George Ancona
Nice New Neighbors by Franz Brandenburg
Baby Mouse: Queen of the World by Jennifer L. Holm

Cycle of life

The Tiny Seed by Eric Carle
Jack in the Green by Allen Atkinson

Losing a Pet

When a Pet Dies by Fred Rogers ("Mr. Rogers")
Goodbye Max by Holly Keller
The Tenth Good Thing About Barney by Judith Viorst
The Accident by Donald Carrick

State and County Fairs

Night at the Fair by Donald Crews
Minerva Louise at the Fair by Janet Morgan Stoeke
Country Fair by Mercer Mayer

Farming

The First Four Years by Laura Ingalls Wilder
Food and Farming by Pam Robson

Keeping Promises

Horton Hatches the Egg by Dr. Seuss
The Story of a Seagull and the Cat Who Taught Her to Fly by Luis Sepulveda
I Miss You, Stinky Face by Lisa McCourt
A Promise is a Promise by Robert Munsch

Spiders

Once I Knew a Spider by Jennifer Dewey
Be Nice to Spiders by Margaret Bloy Graham
Lady and the Spider by Faith McNulty
Sophie's Masterpiece by Eileen Spinelli

Winning and Losing

Junie B., First Grader: Dumb Bunny by Barbara Park

E.B.White

Charlotte's Web
Stuart Little
The Trumpet of the Swan



All materials are available through your local library.
Check it out!

"...a tale of friendship and salvation, a story of miracles – the miracle of birth, the miracle of friendship, the miracle of death."
~E.B. White about *Charlotte's Web*