

**SOUTH COAST REPERTORY
PLAYGOER'S GUIDE**

*to the
2007-08 Theatre for Young Audiences Production
of*



Based on the Story by
E. B. WHITE

Adapted by
JOSEPH ROBINETTE

Directed by
SHELLEY BUTLER

Honorary Producer Bank of America

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Literary and Education Associate and TYA Coordinator*

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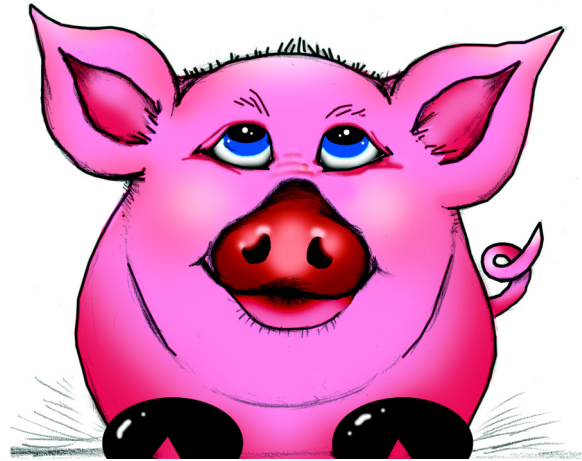
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Part I: THE PLAY

Saving Wilbur's Bacon

Wilbur the runty newborn piglet has a big, fat problem: how to avoid winding up on the butcher's block. Enter eight-year-old Fern Arable, who loves this funny-looking little fellow more than anything else in the world and can't bear the thought of losing him—or even worse, having him fried up crisp for breakfast one morning.



So Fern decides to rescue Wilbur from his grisly fate by selling him to her Uncle Homer for six dollars. Wilbur's new home in Zuckerman's barn is nice enough, but he's homesick and lonely until he meets a beautiful gray spider named Charlotte, who wants to be his friend. When they learn that Wilbur is about to be slaughtered, Charlotte springs into action by weaving a series of miraculous words into her silky web.

Charlotte's astonishing feat transforms Wilbur into a TERRIFIC, RADIANT, and HUMBLE pig whose newfound fame ensures that he will live out the rest of his days in the safety and comfort of his cozy old barn. But tragically, the cleverest spider in the world is unable to save herself. In memory of his loyal and loving friend, Wilbur safeguards Charlotte's egg sac—her *magnum opus*—until 514 baby spiders emerge in the spring and the cycle of life on Zuckerman's farm begins anew.

In 1939, author E. B. White moved his family from Manhattan to Maine, where he first encountered the barnyard animals he would later personify to perfection in *Charlotte's Web*. White wrote the story to help explain the harsh duality of life and death on a farm. "The tragedy of animal death by murder, which always haunts a farm, haunted me, and I guess I was trying to write my way out of the dilemma in the story of Charlotte, and with her able assistance." White's attempt to make peace with what he believed was a betrayal of the animal by the human resulted in the creation of an enduring classic work that was named by the Children's Literature Association as one of the best American children's books of the past two hundred years.

Charlotte's Web has been adapted to the stage by Joseph Robinette and is directed by Shelley Butler, who also directed last season's TYA production of *James and the Giant Peach*. Previews of *Charlotte's Web* begin February 8, 2008, and weekend public performances continue through February 24th. Thousands of Orange County elementary students from Huntington Beach, Westminster, and Santa Ana Unified School Districts will attend free weekday matinees of *Charlotte's Web* thanks to the generous support of Honorary Producer Bank of America.

The Designs of E. B. White

The design of *Charlotte's Web* is intricate, a fact that would surely please Charlotte. In 1948 White wrote "Death of a Pig," which appeared in *Atlantic Monthly*, an oddly affecting account of how he failed to save the life of a sick pig, made ironic by the fact that the pig had been bought to act its part in the "tragedy" of the spring pig fattened for winter butchering. Since literature is not life, White set out in *Charlotte's Web* to save his pig in retrospect, this time not from an unexpected illness but from its presumably fated "tragedy."

The main plot, then, is that staple of adventure literature—the rescue of the innocent. The hero, however, is neither Jack Dalton nor a knight disguised as a wandering bard; it is a committee of sorts, consisting of a little girl, a rather wordy spider and a rat named Templeton. Nor is there a villain; Wilbur the pig has to be saved from the inevitable course of events. Fern rescues Wilbur in the first chapter, pleading with her father not to kill him because he is a runt, only to learn that he must grow up to be bacon in any case. Then Charlotte, out of love and friendship, and Templeton, out of greed, join forces and save the pig again. If the natural processes cannot be disrupted now and then, what is fantasy for?

Yet, E. B. White tells the story of Wilbur's escape within a context that embraces the natural world, the process of growth and change. The subplot is Fern's story, her growing up and out of the barn (where she feels at one with the animals) and into the human world. One of the loveliest things in the book is that White chooses the scene of Wilbur's triumph—the prize-giving that saves his life, when all the formerly indifferent humans dance around him—to let Fern break away, to let her think not of Wilbur and Charlotte but of Henry Fussy and a ride on the Ferris wheel.

Allied to the rescue story is the plot implicit in Charlotte's methods, the advertising slogans in her web ("SOME PIG!"), a comment on the gullibility of man, a kind of self-delusion which in this book at least is life-giving. Finally, from the opening threat to Wilbur, to Charlotte's lonely death toward the end, the book holds to the idea of death as a fact of life, but the last chapter brings new spiders, new lambs, new goslings, another spring. The book is not about the charmed life of Wilbur, but about real life and all that implies."

(Excerpted from an article by drama specialist and theatre critic Gerald Weales, which was published in the *New York Times* on May 24, 1970. Read the entire essay:

<http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/08/03/lifetimes/white-designs.html>.)

“Life in the Barn Was Very Good” by Eudora Welty

E. B. White has written his book for children, which is nice for us older ones as it calls for big type. Most of the story takes place in the Zuckerman barn through the passing of the four seasons. This book has liveliness and felicity, tenderness and unexpectedness, grace and humor and praise of life, and the good backbone of succinctness that only the most highly imaginative stories seem to grow. The characters are varied--good and bad, human and animal, talented and untalented, warm and cold, ignorant and intelligent, vegetarian and blood-drinking--varied but not simple or opposites. They are the real thing.

Wilbur is of a sweet nature--he is a spring pig--affectionate, responsive to moods of the weather and the song of the crickets, has long eyelashes, is hopeful, partially willing to try anything, brave, subject to faints from bashfulness, is loyal to friends, enjoys a good appetite and a soft bed, and is a little likely to be overwhelmed by the sudden chance for complete freedom. He changes the subject when the conversation gets painful, and a buttermilk bath brings out his beauty. When he was a baby he was a runt, but the sun shone pink through his ears, endearing him to a little girl named Fern. She is his protector, and he is the hero.

Charlotte A. Cavatica ("but just call me Charlotte") is the heroine, a large gray spider "about the size of a gumdrop." She has eight legs and can wave them in friendly greeting. When her friends wake up in the morning she says "Salutations!"--in spite of sometimes having been up all night herself, working. She tells Wilbur right away that she drinks blood, and Wilbur on first acquaintance begs her not to say that.

Another good character is Templeton, the rat. "The rat had no morals, no conscience, no scruples, no consideration, no decency, no milk of rodent kindness, no compunctions, no higher feeling, no friendliness, no anything." "Talking with Templeton was not the most interesting occupation in the world," Wilbur finds, "but it was better than nothing."

There is the goose, who can't be surprised by barnyard ways. "It's the old pail-trick, Wilbur. He's trying to lure you into captivity-ivity. He's appealing to your stomach." The goose always repeats everything. "It is my idio-idio-idiosyncrasy."

What the book is about is friendship on earth, affection and protection, adventure and miracle, life and death, trust and treachery, pleasure and pain, and the passing of time. As a piece of work it is just about perfect, and just about magical in the way it is done. What it all proves--in the words of the minister in the story which he hands down to his congregation after Charlotte writes "Some Pig" in her web--is "that human beings must always be on the watch for the coming of wonders."

"At-at-at, at the risk of repeating myself," as the goose says, "Charlotte's Web" is an adorable book.

(Review published October 19, 1952 in the *New York Times*. Read the entire review online www.nytimes.com/books/97/08/03/lifetimes/white-web.html)

“The Spider’s Web” by E. B. White

The spider, dropping down from twig,
Unfolds a plan of her devising,
A thin premeditated rig
To use in rising.

And all that journey down through space,
In cool descent and loyal hearted,
She spins a ladder to the place
From where she started.

Thus I, gone forth as spiders do
In spider’s web a truth discerning,
Attach one silken thread to you
For my returning.

Farms and Fairs

Although not high-profile or glamorous, agriculture is an important industry in Orange County, contributing more than \$300 million annually to our local economy. In addition, the farmers of Orange County maintain tracts of open space, plant trees and crops that help improve air quality, provide a sumptuous harvest of locally grown products and help preserve pockets of tranquility that serve as reminders of our simpler farming past. (It might surprise you to learn that there are still working lima bean and strawberry fields within walking distance to South Coast Repertory!)

Agricultural education, through the FARMS Leadership Program of the Orange County Farm Bureau, works with farming partners to provide working classrooms for high school and college students. The Centennial Farm, a 4-acre working farm located on the grounds of the OC Fair in Costa Mesa, was created to educate visitors about our region’s agricultural heritage by providing guided tours and demonstrations for local residents and school groups. Centennial Farm is home to fruit and vegetable gardens, livestock, and Millennium Barn, where youngsters can view pigs, peacocks, cows, honey bees and more. Tour reservations for the 2008-09 season will open on May 1, 2008.

During the 28th annual Youth Expo (also at the OC Fairgrounds) April 25-27, future gardeners and farmers can show off their talents in the Li'l Sprouts Farm and Garden Competition and the 4-H Livestock Competition. Although Centennial Farm is closed July 11-August 3 during the run of the 2008 OC Fair, there will be lots of other opportunities to get up-close-and-personal with farm animals at various agricultural exhibits and contests. And don’t forget to ride the Ferris Wheel, just like Fern and Henry Fussy!

Find out more about the OC Fair and Centennial Farm www.ocfair.com

PART II: IN THE CLASSROOM

Before the Show: Read About It! Think About It!

These introductory exercises are designed to prepare students for their visit to SCR. Try to complete as many as possible before seeing the production. The more they learn about what they're going to see, the more benefit they are sure to derive from the experience. (Please note: Parenthetical data refer to specific domains, strands, and standards for Grades 3 and 4 in the curriculum areas of English-Language Arts or Visual and Performing Arts.)

1. Introduce E. B. White's novel *Charlotte's Web* to the class by either reading aloud, or asking students to read aloud. **(Reading Grades 3 & 4 - 2.2, 2.3)**
2. Ask students to:
 - a. Identify the main events of the plot, their causes, and their effects on future actions. **(Reading Grades 3 & 4 - 3.2)**
 - b. Discuss the traits of major characters, their motivations and contributions to the dramatic action. **(Reading Grade 3 & 4 - 3.3; Theatre Grade 4 - 1.2)**
 - c. Identify speakers or narrators. **(Reading Grade 3 - 3.6)**
 - d. Determine underlying theme or message. **(Reading Grade 3 - 3.4)**
3. Discuss the differences between realism and fantasy. Could any of these events really happen? Ask students to name other types of fantasy writing, such as fairy tales, legends, fables, and myths. Have them talk about what they like and dislike about this literary genre, identifying universal themes, character types, and actions. **(Reading Grade 3 – 3.2, Grade 4 – 3.1)**
4. Allow students to retell or dramatize this story by employing different vocal tones and attitudes to explore multiple possibilities in a live performance. **(Theatre Grade 3 – 2.1; Grade 4 – 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1)**
5. Examine the structural differences between fiction and drama. **(Theatre Grades 3 & 4 – 1.1; Reading Grades 3 & 4 - 3.1)**
6. Explore what it means to “adapt” literature from one form to another, specifically from fiction to drama. Discuss various ways that the content of books might have to change in order to be suitable for staging using information in the book, as well as prior knowledge of the conventions of live theatre. **(Reading Grade 3 - 3.1; Theatre Grades 3 & 4 - 1.1)**
7. Ask students to make predictions about the play they're going to see based upon their knowledge of the source text and its film adaptations, as well as other works by E. B. White they may have read or seen on film. For example, not every character in the book appears in the play. Which ones do you expect to see onstage? How do you imagine Zuckerman's farm and the County Fair will be recreated onstage? What will the animals look like? How do you imagine the scenery, costumes and props? Will there be music? If so, how will it sound? **(Theatre Grades 3 & 4 - 1.1; Reading Grade 3 - 2.4; Grade 4 - 2.3)**
8. Listen for these vocabulary words in the play: runt; weakling; injustice; specimen; slops; marmalade; imagination; surroundings; resident; charitable; commotion; trifle; glutton; goslings; sulphur; salutations; restore, wits; brutal; bloodthirsty; gamble; victim; anesthetic; unremitting; dud; conspiracy; hysterics; exhausting; miracle; racket; satisfying; radiant; guarantee; competition; errand; personality; gigantic; confident; humble; schemer; acute; hankering; bravery; distinguished; mysteriously; supernatural; trough; forlorn; deserted; rafters; medal; rightfully; dedicate.
9. “It is not often that someone comes along who is a true friend and a good writer.” What does this sentence mean to you?
10. *Charlotte's Web* is set on two farms. Discuss farms and farm life with students, especially ways in which a child's life on a farm would be very different from living in a house or apartment.

After the Show: Talk About It! Write About It!

1. Discuss ways in which the play differed from students' predictions, paying special attention to the differences between written, film and stage versions. **(Listening and Speaking Grade 3 - 1.1, 2.0; Grade 4 - 1.0, 2.1)**
2. Ask students to use the vocabulary of theatre (see Part IV of this guide) to describe the performance. **(Theatre Grade 3 - 1.1, 4.1; Grade 4 - 1.1, 4.3)**
 - a. How did the actors look (costumes, makeup, movement)?
 - b. How did the actors prepare to play the animal roles?
 - c. How did the stage look (scenery, lighting, props)?
(Visual Art Grade 3 – 1.5, 4.1; Grade 4 – 3.1, 4.1)
 - d. How did the play sound (music, singing, special effects)?
(Music Grades 3 & 4 – 4.1, 4.2, 5.1)
3. Give students an opportunity to create their own variations of the play:
 - a. Tell the story from the point of view of another character.
 - b. Choose another ending by rewriting the last scene.
 - c. Add a brand new character and see what happens.
 - d. Imagine a continuation: what happens after the last scene?
4. Ask students to recall the words that Charlotte wove into her web, and the order in which they appeared. Discuss the reasons why she might have chosen each word. Have students select other words to describe Charlotte, Templeton, Fern, and the other characters.
5. Story circle – One person begins a story featuring Fern from *Charlotte's Web* and a character from another book by E. B. White, such as Stuart Little or Louis the Trumpeter Swan. The first person stops after a few sentences. The next person picks up the story and continues it, then stops. Next person adds to it and so on until the tale comes to a resolution. A title can be provided to guide the exercise.
6. Dramatize original stories featuring other characters from the animal kingdom. Personify the objects by giving them names and human characteristics, à la E. B. White. **(Theatre Grade 3 – 5.1; Grade 4 – 5.2)** Plan and present to the class as dramatic interpretations. **(Speaking Applications Grade 3 – 2.2)**
7. Ask students to come up with definitions for the vocabulary words listed in Question #8 on the previous page. Have students locate each of the words in White's book in order to discover how context offers clues to their meaning. **(Reading Grades 3 & 4 - 1.0)**
8. Have students imagine that they are reporters interviewing one of the human characters in the play about the amazing happenings on Zuckerman's farm and at the County Fair. Write and present orally to the class a brief newspaper article containing descriptions of concrete sensory details to present and support their impressions of people, places, things or experiences. **(Reading Grade 3 – 2.1, 2.2; Speaking Applications Grade 3 – 2.1, 2.3)**
9. Write letters of thanks to BANK OF AMERICA describing the most memorable aspects of attending a performance of *Charlotte's Web*, and what they enjoyed most about their visit to SCR. **(Writing Grade 3-2.3; Grade 4-2.1; Written and Oral Conventions Grade 3 & 4-1.0)**

**South Coast Repertory
Attn: TYA
PO Box 2197
Costa Mesa, CA 92628-2197**

PART III: AT THE THEATRE

Welcome to the Argyros

The 336-seat Argyros Stage is the newest theatre space at SCR. It opened in 2002 with a huge celebration and we are delighted that thousands of Orange County school children fill this state-of-the-art facility each season to enjoy our Theatre for Young Audiences productions. The Argyros is a proscenium theatre designed to provide audiences a feeling of intimacy, with no seat more than 39' feet from the stage.



Theatre Etiquette

Theatre is an art form that depends on both the artists and the audience. A performance is influenced by an audience, just as an audience is influenced by a performance. The artists and staff of South Coast Repertory are creating a special new world for you to visit. When you walk into the theatre, you will feel that behind the curtain lies the secret of that new world which is about to come to life before your eyes. Sometimes it's so exciting, you can barely hold still. But remember that once the play begins, you have a very important job to do. Everybody in the theatre is a part of the play. You are connected to all the other people in the audience, as well as to the actors on the stage. They can SEE you, HEAR you, FEEL you, just as you can SEE, HEAR, and FEEL them. Your attention, involvement, responses, and imagination are a real part of each and every performance. The play can actually be made better because of you!

Student Tips for Theatre Trips

- * Stay with your group at all times and pay attention to your teachers and chaperones.
- * Listen carefully to the SCR staff member who will board your bus with last-minute tips.
- * Take your seat in the theatre **before** going to the bathroom or getting a drink of water.
- * Make yourself comfortable while keeping movement to a minimum.
- * Please do not stand up, walk around, or put your feet on the seat in front of you.
- * Absolutely no chewing gum, eating, or drinking in the building.
- * No backpacks, cameras, or electronic devices are permitted in the theatre.
- * Feel free to talk quietly in your seats before the show.
- * The performance begins when the lights dim to a blackout and the music starts to play.
- * Show your appreciation by clapping for the actors at the end of the play.
- * After the lights come back up, wait for the ushers to escort your group out of the theatre.
- * Programs for the group will be given to teachers following the performance.

Filling the Bill

Everyone who attends a Theatre for Young Audiences performance at SCR receives a program, also called a playbill. Patrons at weekend public performances receive their programs from the ushers upon entering the theatre. At the conclusion of each weekday matinee, teachers will be given programs for their students which can be distributed back in the classroom.

In addition to the customary information about the play and the players, the program for *Charlotte's Web* also contains these features and activities that students will have fun working on after the show, either in class or at home on their own.

“Bard of the Barnyard” – a letter written by E. B. White to his young readers in 1985

“Arachno Facto” – Lots of fascinating information about spiders

“The True Masters of Web Design” – Step-by-step as the orb spider weaves her web

“Major Rattitude” – Help Templeton get through the maze to find the rotten egg

Excerpt from Chapter One of *Charlotte's Web*

“Farm Family Fun” – Identify the male, female and baby animals

Word Search Puzzle – find hidden names and words from the play

PART IV: EDUCATION STATION

Five Strands of Arts Education

Students in a comprehensive program are expected to master the standards of an arts discipline, which includes the following five strands:

1.0 Artistic Perception refers to processing, analyzing and responding to sensory information through the use of the language and skills unique to dance, music, theatre and visual arts.

2.0 Creative Expression involves creating a work, performing and participating in the arts disciplines. Students apply processes and skills in composing, arranging and performing a work and use a variety of means to communicate meaning and intent in their own original formal and informal works.

3.0 Historical and Cultural Context concerns the work students do toward understanding the historical contributions and cultural dimensions of an arts discipline. Students analyze roles, functions, development in the discipline, and human diversity as it relates to that discipline.

4.0 Aesthetic Valuing includes analyzing and critiquing works of dance, music, theatre or visual arts. Students apply processes and skills to productions or performances. They also critically assess and derive meaning from the work [. . .] and from performances and original works based on the elements and principles of an arts discipline.

5.0 Connections, Relationships, Applications involves connecting and applying what is learned in one arts discipline and comparing it to learning in the other arts, other subject

areas and careers. Students develop competencies and creative skills that contribute to lifelong learning.

From the California Visual and Performing Arts Framework

“A discussion of the arts focuses on how people communicate their perceptions, responses, and understanding of the world to themselves and to others. Since their first appearance thousands of years ago, the arts have been evolving continually, exhibiting the ability of human beings to intuit, symbolize, think and express themselves through dance, music, theatre and the visual arts. Each of the arts contains a distinct body of knowledge and skills that characterize the power of each to expand the perceptual, intellectual, cultural and spiritual dimensions of human experience.

[. . .] Education in the arts is essential for all students. California’s public school system must provide a balanced curriculum, with the arts as part of the core for all students, kindergarten through grade twelve, no matter what the students’ abilities, language capacities or special needs happen to be. Each of the arts disciplines maintains a rich body of knowledge that enables the students to understand their world in ways that support and enhance their learning in other core subjects. In addition, through this rich body of knowledge, students learn how each of the arts contributes to their own sensitivity of the aesthetic qualities of life. Students learn to see what they look at, to hear what they listen to, feel what they touch and to understand more clearly what they integrate into their own experience.

Basic Theatre Vocabulary (*Theatre 1.1*)

Acting The process by which an individual interprets and perform the role of an imagined character.

Action The core of a theatre piece; the sense of forward movement created by the sequence of events and the physical and psychological motivations of characters.

Ad-Lib To extemporize stage business or dialogue; to make it up as you go along.

Apron The area of the stage that extends toward the audience, in front of the main curtain.

Backstage The space behind the acting area, unseen by the audience.

Balcony An upper floor of seats projecting out over the main seating area of a theatre.

Blocking The movement and stage business, designed by the director and performed by the actors.

Boxes Seats separated from the main seating area located on the upper level near the stage.

Box office A windowed space at the front of the theatre building where tickets are sold.

Business Any action performed on stage.

Character The role played by an actor as she or he assumes another’s identity.

Choreography The art of creating and arranging dances onstage.

Conflict The problem or incident that creates the action and is resolved by the end of the play.

Costume The carefully selected or specially designed clothing worn by the actors.

Cross The actor's movement from one stage location to another.

Cue The last words or action of an actor immediately preceding the lines or business of another actor.

Dialogue The stage conversation between characters.

Diction The clarity with which words are pronounced.

Director The person who oversees the entire process of staging a theatrical production.

Downstage The part of the stage closest to the audience. At one time stages were raked, or sloped, with the lower ("down") part closest to the audience, and the higher ("up") part further away.

Ensemble A cast of actors working together effectively to present a theatrical performance.

Flats Canvas or wood-covered frames that are used for the walls of a stage setting.

Green Room A room near the stage where actors await entrance cues and receive guests. The room's name comes from Elizabethan times, when actors waited on a real "green" (or patch of grass).

Improvisation The spontaneous use of movement and speech to create a character.

Lobby The public waiting area outside the theatre space.

Mezzanine Lower level seating area beneath the balcony overhang.

Monologue A solo speech during which the character reveals personal thoughts.

Narrator A character who tells the story of the play directly to the audience.

Orchestra Lower level seating area immediately in front of the stage.

"Places" Direction given by the Stage Manager for actors to be in position before each act begins.

Plot The "what happens" in a story: beginning (the setting, characters, and problem); middle (how the characters work to solve the problem); and the ending (resolution of the problem).

Project To speak loudly so the entire audience can hear you.

Props All the stage furnishings, including furniture, that are physically used by the actors.

Proscenium Stage A traditional theatre with a proscenium arch framing the stage.

Run Length of time the play will be presented (i.e two weeks, two months, two years).

Script The text of the play, including dialogue and stage directions, all written by the playwright.

Set All of the scenery that makes up the physical environment of the world of the play.

Stage Left That part of the stage to the actor's left when the actor faces the audience.

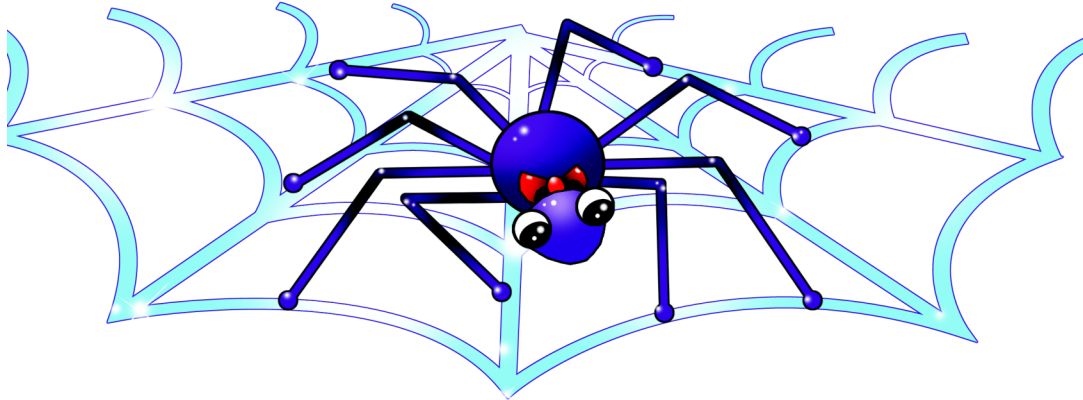
Stage Manager The person who supervises the physical production of a play and who is in charge of the stage during the performance.

Stage Right That part of the stage to the actor's right when the actor faces the audience.

Strike Dismantling the set, costumes and props at the end of the run of a show.

Theme The central thought, idea, or significance of the action of a play.

Upstage The area of the stage farthest way from the audience and nearest to the back wall.



PART V: RESOURCES

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Lesson Plans for teaching *Charlotte's Web*
<http://www.cyberspaceag.com/farmanimals/animallinks.htm>
Links to More Information about Spiders <http://www2.lhric.org/pocantico/spiders/links.htm>
Literature Unit www.edhelper.com/books/Charlottes_Web.htm
S.C.O.R.E. supplemental unit for *Charlotte's Web*
www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/charl/charltg.html
Sorting Through Spiders for Grades K-3 <http://score.kings.k12.ca.us/lessons/spiders.html>
Spiders of Orange County, California <http://nathistoc.bio.uci.edu/spiders/>
Web English Teacher Lesson Plans www.webenglishteacher.com/white.html
Web of Life www.kidsplanet.org
Welcome to SpiderRoom <http://www.spiderroom.info>
Where Charlotte Wove www.simplysharing.com/white.htm