

Title: *Charlotte's Web*: To the Rescue!

Description: After reading *Charlotte's Web*, elementary students read an imagined "lost chapter" in which Wilbur's life is once again in peril. Students are charged with getting Wilbur out of this latest mess, while staying true to the characters in the book. Students use the *Seeing Reason Tool* to help them analyze the relationship between character and plot, and then write a final chapter that ensures Wilbur's safety, once and for all.

At a Glance

Grade Level: 3-5

Subject sort (for Web site index): Language Arts

Subject: Language Arts

Topics: Character Traits, Plot Development

Higher-Order Thinking Skills: Metacognition, Cause and Effect, Creativity

Key Learnings: Story Elements, Creative Writing, Poetry, Persuasive Speaking.

Time Needed: 15 class periods, 90 minutes each

Unit Summary

In this unit, students read *Charlotte's Web* and then write a chapter that is set one year after the state fair (and beyond the end of E.B. White's book). Presented with the scenario that Zuckerman's farm is failing and Wilbur again faces the chopping block, students take Charlotte's place as master problem solver and devise a plan to make sure Wilbur survives this latest peril. In order to focus attention on elements of characterization and plot, students are limited to using established characters in their stories, and must stay true to the traits bestowed on them by the author.

Using *Seeing Reason*, students consider the original story and analyze how traits of the characters influence story action and plot. Then they imagine plausible new actions for the characters to take in a new situation, based on the characters' personalities. They use their maps as an outline as they write the additional chapter. In culminating activities, students write cinquain poems and develop a persuasive presentation that shows how their interpretation of character ties into plausible actions in the final "rescue" of Wilbur.

Curriculum-Framing Questions

Essential Question

Why do we do what we do?

Unit Questions

Why do the characters in *Charlotte's Web* seem so real?

How do the personality traits of the characters in *Charlotte's Web* affect their actions and Wilbur's safety?

Sample Content Questions

How does Wilbur help or hurt his own safety?

What motivates the characters Fern, Charlotte, and Templeton to help save Wilbur?

Assessment Processes

View how a variety of student-centered [assessments](#) are used in the *Charlotte's Web* Unit Plan. These assessments help students and teachers set goals; monitor student progress; provide feedback; assess thinking, processes, performances, products; and reflect on learning throughout the learning cycle.

Instructional Procedures

Prior to Instruction

In this project, students use the *Seeing Reason Tool*. This [brief guide](#) will help you plan instruction, build a project, and introduce mapping to your students. Have students keep a reading journal where they answer questions, write down ideas, and respond to reading prompts.

Read the Story

Pose the Unit Question, *Why do the characters in Charlotte's Web seem so real?* Have students think about this question as you read *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White as a class or in reading groups. As you read the book, discuss character development and ask students to make predictions about the character's actions. For example, when Templeton is introduced, his first few words are:

"I prefer to spend my time eating, gnawing, spying and hiding. I am a glutton but not a merry-maker. Right now I am on my way to your trough to eat your breakfast, since you haven't got sense enough to eat it yourself."

After reading a passage such as this, ask:

- *What words would you use to describe someone who acts like this?*
- *How do you think the other characters in the story feel about him?*
- *What words does the author use to establish Templeton's personality?*
- *What else might you expect Templeton to do as the story progresses?*

To check for reading comprehension and encourage literary discussion, have students meet in small discussion groups as they read the book. During each meeting, have students rotate through the roles of group leader, monitor, recorder, and reporter as they discuss and record responses in their journals to example questions such as:

Charlotte spins the words "Some Pig," "Terrific," and "Radiant" in her webs to describe Wilbur. *Do these accurately describe him? Why or why not? What words would you use to describe Wilbur?* Find actions in the book that show why your words fit.

Get to Know the Author

To find out more about author E.B. White and read about his inspiration for *Charlotte's Web*, have students visit [E.B. White's Official Home Page](#)* and his author page at [Houghton Mifflin Reading Kids' Place](#)*.

Expand Understanding of Character Traits

During a brainstorming discussion, ask students to think of as many character traits as they can. Write the traits they offer in a list on a chart or the blackboard. To keep ideas flowing, recall a variety of vivid story or movie characters students may know who have strong character traits. To expand on their efforts, post or distribute this [list of character traits](#). Discuss how different terms might apply to people they know as well as to characters in stories. Show students how to find definitions of less common traits using [Word Central's Student Dictionary](#)*.

Introduce the Seeing Reason Tool

To address the Unit Question: *How do the personality traits of the characters in Charlotte's Web affect their actions and Wilbur's safety?* have students use *Seeing Reason* to express how characters' traits influence their actions and the plot of the story. Before students begin the use of the tool, have them use a graphic organizer to organize their thinking and analyze character traits. Students could use a T-chart or storyboard planner to organize this information. Before students begin their investigations and mapping, follow the steps for introducing *Seeing Reason* to your class in the [brief guide](#).

Establish Character Traits

Begin addressing the Unit and Content Questions:

- *Why do the characters in Charlotte's Web seem so real?*
- *How do the personality traits of the characters in Charlotte's Web affect their actions and Wilbur's safety?*
- *What motivates the characters Fern, Charlotte, and Templeton to help save Wilbur?*
- *How does Wilbur help or hurt his own safety?*

Assign students to teams of two or three, and have them log in to the [student workspace](#). Direct their attention to the question above the mapping space: *How do the personality traits of the characters in Charlotte's Web affect their actions and Wilbur's safety?* Help students create factors for the main personality traits of each of the major characters (The posted class list and list of character traits are helpful prompts for getting started). For each trait, have students add a definition in their own words in the "describe this factor" field. They can check definitions using [Word Central's Student Dictionary](#)* if they are unsure.

Show Relationships Between Character and Plot

After adding traits to their maps, students add the plot factor: "Wilbur's safety" and then map the relationships between the characters' traits (for example, "Fern's compassion") and the action of the story ("Wilbur's safety").

Have them use the description fields to describe the relationships between characterization and plot ("Fern's compassion causes her to persuade her father not to kill the runt."). Encourage students to supply excerpts from the book to support the relationships they identify.

Examine the Seeing Reason Activity

The *Seeing Reason Tool* workspace below represents one team's investigation in this project. The map you see is functional. You can roll over the arrows to read relationships between factors, and double-click on factors and arrows to read the team's descriptions. In this example, students are creating a *Seeing Reason* map based on their own analysis of the character traits and using decision-making and critical thinking skills to explain why they chose these character traits.

Project Name: *Charlottes Web*

Question: *How do the personality traits of the characters in Charlotte's Web affect their actions and Wilbur's safety?*

[Enter Map Here](#)

As students create their maps, look for opportunities to gauge understanding and guide learning. Look at maps, listen to conversations, and ask students to describe their maps. Prompt deeper metacognitive thinking about the intricacies of the topic. Choose one group to model a think aloud:

"My team put Templeton's selfishness as a factor which decreased Wilbur's chance to live. We asked ourselves the questions, *How does Templeton's selfishness cause him to behave?* and *How does his selfishness affect Wilbur's survival?* We added this into the factor box after we discussed the questions to support our opinion with facts from the story."

As students continue to work on their maps, drive further study by asking students questions and encouraging them to ask their own questions as well. Use this opportunity as an informal assessment of student understanding of the text.

Discuss and Refine

Using a projector system and networked computer, display several team maps and discuss general themes that appear. Encourage teams to describe the thinking behind their maps. Outside of class time, review maps and use the teacher comment feature to probe student

thinking and informally assess the cause-and-effect relationships on each map. Give each team time to go back to their causal maps and modify them based on what they learned from others.

Imagine a New Ending

In the next phase of instruction, have students apply their understanding of how characterization drove plot in the original story to plan a new ending for *Charlotte's Web*. Create an environment that fosters creative thinking by having students give and receive peer feedback. Invite local authors to share their process of writing story endings. Read this ["lost chapter" story prompt](#) to the class to set up the scenario (Wilbur is again in danger) and task (write a new ending and save his life, staying true to the characters). Brainstorm one solution with the class based on one character's predictable actions. You may want to read this [sample final chapter](#) to get the imagination going. Go over the following suggestions. Post them where students can refer to them often as they plan their new ending:

1. Decide on the character or characters you want to help Wilbur.
2. Write down many different ideas for how they might act in this new crisis. Talk through the different ideas and pick the best, most likely one.
3. Map out your plot ideas. Make sure to show characters' actions and link characters' traits to their actions.

Plan by Brainstorming Ideas

Before students write their new endings, have them refer to their *Seeing Reason* map they created earlier. Using the character traits and actions from the map, students plan their new ending by using cluster maps to brainstorm and plan their new chapter ideas. Ask students as they plan:

- *How are your characters' actions true to the personalities developed by author E.B. White?*
- *Is your plan believable, based on what we know about these characters?*
- *Does the sequence of events make sense?*

Guide students as they develop their stories. Remind them to consider the following Unit Questions as they work: *Why do the characters in Charlotte's Web seem so real?* and *How do the personality traits of the characters in Charlotte's Web affect their actions and Wilbur's safety?*

Write a New Ending

Before teams begin writing, pass out a copy of the [final chapter rewrite rubric](#) and discuss the criteria for effective writing processes. Make sure students have a clear understanding of what is expected before they begin writing. Use the [student example](#) to model using the rubric correctly and effectively.

Once the team has agreed on a plot, the actual writing process begins. Have students use their map, cluster, and other notes as an outline for writing a final chapter. Guide students through the writing processes of drafting, revising, editing, and publishing as they develop their original ending to the story. Hold one on one teacher/student conferences to discuss and give feedback to student creativity and originality. Encourage students to hold peer conferences along the way to get feedback and make appropriate revisions.

Draft and Practice Oral Presentations

After teams have completed their chapters, have each team prepare to read its story aloud and present a short persuasive presentation that justifies the new ending based on understanding of character. Have students use multimedia slides as props to support their presentations. Go over the [presentation scoring guide](#) before students plan their presentations and create multimedia slides. You might want students to create a simple storyboard handout to guide their slideshow planning. Remind students that the [presentation slides](#) serve as visual cues for their speech and

reinforce key points to the audience. Once students have completed their slideshow storyboards, they should meet with you to discuss their draft and get approval to move on to creating the actual slides and practicing their presentations.

Deliver the Presentations

Set aside a period for presentations. At the conclusion of each team's oral presentation, have presenters field questions from the audience. Ask the audience to assess each presentation using a [peer review form](#).

Create Character Cinquain Poems

In addition to writing the final chapter, students have a second opportunity to hone their writing skills and focus on the relationship between characterization and plot through the genre of poetry. Have each student write a cinquain poem about a character he or she selected to make the hero or heroine of the *Charlotte's Web* final chapter. Explain the [cinquain poetry form](#)^{*}, and share some examples. This [sample cinquain poem](#) includes an outline of one cinquain structure and does not follow any rules for syllabication. For guided practice, create a cinquain together using author, E.B. White's ending, and Charlotte the heroine of the story, as the poem's subject.

Example:

*Charlotte
Motherly, Diligent
Working, Writing, Saving
Creates Words in Her Web
Friend*

Once students understand the form, they can create poems of their own. Encourage students to write and rewrite their poems. Remind them that the fewer words in a piece of writing, the more important it becomes to select the perfect ones. You may want to have students publish their poems and mount them in [poetry frames](#) for a pleasing bulletin board display and invite others to recognize students' hard work and learning.

Wrap up the Unit

Bring the unit to a close by asking the Essential Question: *Why do we do what we do?* Help students to draw conclusions about how character traits influence actions in real life as well as in story books.

Prerequisite Skills

None needed

Differentiated Instruction

Resource Student

- Provide modifications as prescribed on the student's IEP.
- Use written and oral instructions presented in a variety of ways.
- Provide checkpoints and positive reinforcement throughout the unit and assigned projects.
- Select a class partner who is best suited to work with this student and address his or her needs.
- Provide extra time to complete assignments.

Gifted Student

- Have them create, introduce, and fully develop a new character into their final chapter.
- Have them do background research on the author and illustrator and report back to the class and/or create a "meet the author and illustrator" Web page or bulletin board to share with the class and others.
- Have them create character or chapter summaries to add to a class Web page or bulletin board to share with the class and others.

- Have them compile a class generated list of character traits along with definitions and publish it for the class.

English Language Learner

- Provide more templates and graphic organizers for students to use.
- Provide visuals and illustrated text.
- If possible, provide students with an additional copy of the literature in their native language.
- Select class partner who is best suited to work with this student and address his or her language needs.

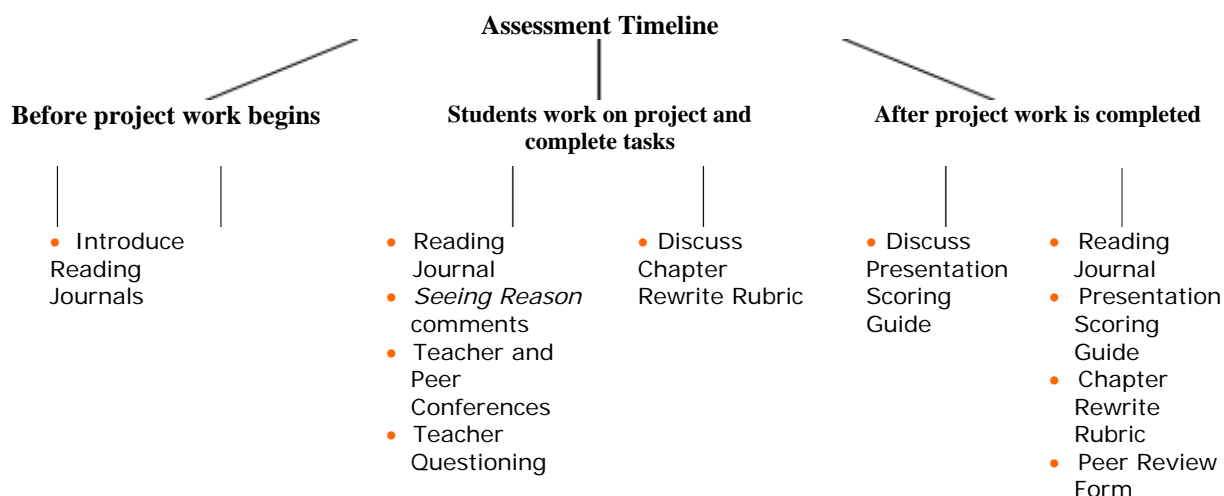
Credits

A classroom teacher participating in the Intel® Teach to the Future Program developed the idea for this Unit Plan. A team of teachers expanded the plan into the example you see here.

THINGS YOU NEED (highlight box)

The following [sections](#) are listed in the Things You Need highlight box (Assessment, Standards, Resources, PDF) and are linked to leaf pages that contain that section's content

Assessment Processes



Reading journals will be used throughout the unit to record answers to questions and brainstorm ideas. It will be assessed throughout the unit to check for student understanding and guide teaching and learning. Teacher responses to individual student entries should be done periodically. Hold one-on-one teacher/student conferences to check on student progress and give feedback to students while they work on their projects. Allow time for students to meet with one another to give and receive peer feedback. Review *Seeing Reason* maps and use the teacher comment feature to probe student thinking and informally assess the cause-and-effect relationships on each map. Give each team time to go back to their causal maps and modify them based on what they learned from others. Discuss project expectations using the [chapter rewrite rubric](#) and use this to assess student products. Discuss oral presentation expectations and requirements with students. Share the [oral presentation scoring guide](#) with students before they begin work on their presentations and use it to assess each group's presentation. Have students assess each group's presentation by using the [peer review form](#).

Targeted Content Standards and Benchmarks

California Language Arts Standards for Grade 3

Content Standards:

Literary response and analysis

- Determine what characters are like by what they say or do and by how the author or illustrator portrays them

Writing

- Students write clear and coherent sentences and paragraphs that develop a central idea. Their writing shows they consider the audience and purpose.
- Students progress through the stages of the writing process (prewriting, drafting, revising, editing successive versions).
- Write narratives: Include well-chosen details to develop the plot
- Vocabulary and concept development
- Use a dictionary to learn the meaning and other features of unknown words
- Write descriptions that use concrete sensory details to present and support unified impressions of people, places, things, or experiences
- Students write and speak with a command of standard English conventions appropriate to this grade level

Speaking

- Organization and delivery of oral communication
- Clarify and enhance oral presentations through the use of appropriate props (objects, pictures, charts)
- Make brief narrative presentations: Include well-chosen details to develop character, setting, and plot

Student Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify personality traits possessed by the characters in the story and show how traits directly influence a character's actions and drive the plot
- Use the *Seeing Reason Tool* to construct a cause-and-effect map
- Use imagination to write a second ending to the story that shows understanding of the relationship between characterization and plot
- Write creatively and apply character traits in a cinquain poem
- Persuade in a short oral presentation why a new ending is plausible, based on understanding of the characters' personalities

Materials and Resources

Printed Materials

Class set of:

White, E.B. (1952). *Charlotte's web*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

Supplies

Construction paper

Internet Resources

Word Central's Student Dictionary

www.wordcentral.com*

Dictionary to look up meaning of character traits

Harper Collins Children's Books: E.B. White Official Home Page
www.harperchildrens.com/authorintro/index.asp?authorid=10499*
Biography, books, features and news

Houghton Mifflin Reading: Meet the Author – E.B. White
www.eduplace.com/kids/hmr/mtai/white.html*
Brief biography of E.B. White

Technology - Hardware

- Computer to use the *Seeing Reason Tool*
- Internet connection to view Web sites and use the online tool
- Projector to model student use of the tool and share student maps

Technology - Software

- Multimedia presentation software to develop presentation slides
- Word processing software to create cinquain poetry
- Internet browser to view E.B. White's Web site and work with the *Seeing Reason Tool*