

Take 5: Ideas for Independent/Home Learning

Charlotte's Web by E B White, illustrated by Garth Williams (Puffin)



1. Explore it

Read the extract from the book below, thinking about what is happening and the characters you meet:

Fern loved Wilbur more than anything. She loved to stroke him, to feed him, to put him to bed. Every morning, as soon as she got up, she warmed his milk, tied his bib on, and held the bottle for him. Every afternoon, when the school bus stopped in front of her house, she jumped out and ran to the kitchen to fix another bottle for him. She fed him again at suppertime, and again just before going to bed. Mrs Arable gave him a feeding around noontime each day, when Fern was away in school. Wilbur loved his milk, and he was never happier than when Fern was warming up a bottle for him. He would stand and gaze up at her with adoring eyes.

For the first few days of his life, Wilbur was allowed to live in a box near the stove in the kitchen. Then, when Mrs Arable complained, he was moved to a bigger box in the woodshed. At two weeks of age, he was moved outdoors. It was apple-blossom time, and

the days were getting warmer. Mr Arable fixed a small yard specially for Wilbur under an apple tree, and gave him a large wooden box full of straw, with a doorway cut in it so he could walk in and out as he pleased.

'Won't he be cold at night?' asked Fern.

'No,' said her father. 'You watch and see what he does.'

Carrying a bottle of milk, Fern sat down under the apple tree inside the yard. Wilbur ran to her and she held the bottle for him while he sucked. When he had finished the last drop, he grunted and walked sleepily into the box. Fern peered through the door. Wilbur was poking the straw with his snout. In a short time he had dug a tunnel in the straw. He crawled into the tunnel and disappeared from sight, completely covered with straw. Fern was enchanted. It relieved her mind to know that her baby would sleep covered up, and would stay warm.

What do you think is happening in this extract? Who are the central characters? Can you summarise what you've read in a couple of sentences?

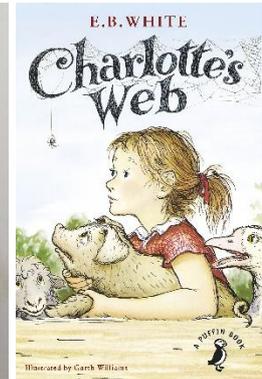
What do you think you know about Fern, her parents, the situation that has brought her and Wilbur together? What kind of person do you think she might be? How would you describe her? What kind of animal do you think Wilbur might be? How do you know? Did you think he was an animal at first? What does the way Fern treats him tell us about her feelings toward him?

Think about how this extract makes you feel and what you like or dislike about it. Does it remind you of anything you know in stories or real life? How? Think about how it is written. Do any parts of the extract really stick in your mind? Which words and phrases do you like best? What do you like about them? Do they help you make a picture in your mind?

2. Illustrate it

Re-read the passage, or ask someone to read it to you, or maybe record it for you so you can play it over again. After you have read the extract a few times, take a pen or pencil and a bit of scrap paper. You can use the back of an old envelope or cereal packet; whatever is to hand. Draw what you see in your imagination. It can be shapes or shading — anything that captures what you hear. It might be interesting to share the passage with a friend or family member and see what they draw, then compare it with what you have drawn.

Then look at how the illustrator, Garth Williams, chose to illustrate the scene and cover. What is similar and different about your illustrations: did you draw Fern, the box by the stove, the small yard outside, Fern feeding Wilbur, Wilbur hiding in the straw? Remember, everyone has their own ideas and imagines things their own way. This is a good thing!



3. Talk about it

Read the extract again and look at the illustrations. Think more about what you have seen and read:

- How does Fern feel about Wilbur? What are she and her parents doing to look after him? What in the text tells you this?
- How old do you think Wilbur is at this time? What time of year do you think the story is happening?
- How do you think Fern's parents feel about Wilbur? Do you think they feel the same about him as Fern? How do you know?
- Do you think a pig is a good choice for a pet? Why? Why not? What do you think makes for a good pet?

4. Imagine it

Imagine you are Wilbur, recently born into the world, and finding yourself looked after by a girl called Fern Arable, and living with her family. What do you think are your needs and concerns? How do you think you might feel about your situation? What do you think will happen next? Do you think Fern will be able to keep looking after you? What do you think it might be like to live as part of a human family? What do you think will happen as you grow up? You could choose to write about your experiences, your hopes and fears, for someone else to read.

5. Create it

In this extract Fern is doing her best to look after Wilbur, and treating him as a pet although he is a farmyard animal. Do you have a pet? What do you do to look after it? If you don't, what kind of pet would you choose to have? What do you think makes for the best pet? What do you look for in one — friendship, loyalty, humour, beauty, exercise, warmth?

Write some guidance for how to choose and look after your dream pet. It could be whatever you choose: dog, cat, goldfish, hamster — or something exotic: snake, tarantula, llama...or pig! You could even invent a new creature that combines the best of several different animals. Explain to someone else why your pet is the perfect choice then how to select one, provide food and shelter, exercise and look after it. Are there special things the owner would need to know or do to care for it properly? You can explain your ideas in any way you wish, using words and pictures. You could do this by hand or on a computer.