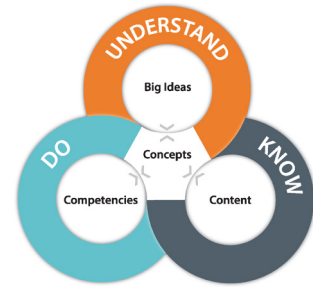


## Charlotte's Web

by E.B. White

*Charlotte's Web* (1952) is an award-winning children's novel about survival, friendship and sacrifice. Ranked #4 on the BCTF's Top 100 Books list, the story revolves around 8-year-old Fern, her pet pig Wilbur, and a barn spider named Charlotte who hatches a plan to help save the pig from slaughter.

In the second half of the book, several chapters are devoted to the much-anticipated County Fair, featuring contests, food, rides, games and gambling. This lesson features passages from those chapters as stimulus for whole-class and small-group discussions around the human desire for fun and excitement as well as the role of self-regulation and safety when having a really good time. Students get a chance to consider their own "web" of friends and others they enjoy spending time with and can rely on for support. They also get a chance to express themselves and develop their writing, math, decision-making, movement and social skills through a range of fun extension activities.



### Instructional strategies

Read aloud (or have students read) *Charlotte's Web*. (Or you may want to watch the movie version, if available.)

1. Draw attention to the passages below on the fun and excitement of going to a fair. Then facilitate a class discussion using the questions provided.

*The night before the County Fair, everybody went to bed early. Fern and Avery were in bed by eight. Avery lay dreaming that the Ferris wheel had stopped and that he was in the top car. Fern lay dreaming that she was getting sick in the swings. Lurvy was in bed by eight-thirty. He lay dreaming that he was throwing baseballs at a cloth cat and winning a genuine Navajo blanket. Mr. and Mrs. Zuckerman were in bed by nine. Mrs. Zuckerman lay dreaming about a deep freeze unit. Mr. Zuckerman lay dreaming about Wilbur. He dreamt that Wilbur had grown until he was one hundred and sixteen feet long and ninety-*

*two feet high and that he had won all the prizes at the Fair and was covered with blue ribbons and even had a blue ribbon tied to the end of his tail. (Ch. 16, p. 118-9)*

*After the heat of the day, the evening came as a welcome relief to all. The Ferris wheel was lighted now. It went round and round in the sky and seemed twice as high as by day. There were lights on the midway, and you could hear the crackle of the gambling machines and the music of the merry-go-round and the voice of the man in the beano booth calling numbers. (Ch. 18, p. 138)*

- a. What is a fair? What's its purpose?
- b. The characters had different feelings about the fair. How do you feel when you hear a fair is coming to your town or neighbourhood? Why?



**c.** What things, if any, do you most look forward to at a fair? Why? What, if anything, do you avoid? Explain.

**2.** Have students work in pairs or small groups. Invite them to read and discuss the opening passage of Chapter 17 (or copy and distribute the [Chapter 17 handout](#) at the end of this document), which touches on freedom, risk and the responsibilities of “growing up”—in particular the managing of time and money.

**a.** Fern and her brother are given money to last them all day.

**i.** How easy or difficult would it be for you to manage your spending?

**ii.** Where would you go first? What would your strategy for the day be?

**iii.** What do you think would be trickiest to resist or hold back on spending on?

**b.** Based on Mr. and Mrs. Arable’s warnings, there’s a lot that could go wrong at a fair.

**i.** What do you think may have prompted those particular fears?

**ii.** What kinds of warnings do your parents offer you? Are warnings helpful when you’re excited to do something? Why or why not?

**c.** Mr. Arable suggests a fair is a good place to “grow up.”

**i.** What do you think he means by this? Do you agree? Why or why not?

**ii.** Where do you think is a good place for young people to learn how to handle aspects of getting older, such as having the freedom to make choices and taking responsibility for the consequences of

their choices? How are freedom and responsibility related? How can we find balance between the two? Give examples.

**d.** Fern and her brother can barely contain their desire and demands for treats and fun times at the fair. Mr. and Mrs. Arable also think and act a little differently than they do on a typical day on the farm.

**i.** Why do you think we change our behaviours or bend the rules on special occasions? What is it about events and holidays that may change our expectations of ourselves and others?

**ii.** Have you ever behaved differently or bent any rules during holidays or special occasions? If so, give examples.

**3.** Choose one or more of the extension activities.

**a.** Ask students to consider who’s in their “web” (i.e., network of friends and others who provide help and support). Have them draw themselves as a spider in a web and suggest adding friends and other forms of support, with a brief description indicating their special role in the student’s life. Follow up with a brief discussion about the importance of caring for our webs and how we can avoid tears or holes. (You may want to further explain this concept by likening our society to a fabric, weaved together with different threads and vulnerable to tears if not tended to with care.)



- b. Give students an assignment involving writing a descriptive passage about an event or holiday. Encourage them to include all the senses, as E.B. White does, so readers can “feel” the scenario.
- c. Give students an art assignment involving the opening scene of Chapter 17. Allow them to choose the medium: drawing, painting, dancing, music, and so on.
- d. Transform your classroom (or school yard) into a fun fair! You could:
  - i. set up a series of contests, games and menu of fair food
  - ii. use fake money or create a currency that students can use to buy tickets
  - iii. fill envelopes with different amounts of money and give one to each student to use to ‘go to the fair’
  - iv. have students take turns working at or participating in the fair
  - v. debrief with the students about their decision-making experiences at the fair (how/where did they spend their time and money, and why)

**Note:** Some students may come from cultures where gambling is frowned upon. Encourage those students to explain their cultural perspectives, if they’re interested.

## Gambling literacy

### Big ideas

- ✓ Gambling can be a fun recreational activity but can also lead to significant harm
- ✓ As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage gambling in our midst
- ✓ We can learn how to control gambling by examining the different ways people have thought about it, engaging in critical self-reflection and listening to each other

### Competencies

- ✓ Explore and appreciate the diverse cognitive, social, emotional and physical factors that impact gambling behaviour
- ✓ Recognize binary constructs (e.g., win vs lose or success vs failure) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like gambling
- ✓ Develop personal and social skills to reflect on and manage personal behaviour and choices related to gambling

For a complete look at the gambling literacy competencies, as defined by the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, see: <https://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/assets/docs/iminds/hs-gambling-curriculum.pdf>



## Links to curriculum

### First Peoples' principles of learning

- ✓ Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)
- ✓ Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors
- ✓ Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions
- ✓ Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities
- ✓ Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story

### English Language Arts 3/4/5

#### Big ideas

- ✓ Language and story can be a source of creativity and joy (Grade 3/4/5)
- ✓ Curiosity and wonder lead us to new discoveries about ourselves and the world around us (Grade 3)
- ✓ Stories and other texts help us learn about ourselves, our families, and our communities (Grade 4/5)
- ✓ Questioning what we hear, read, and view contributes to our ability to be educated and engaged citizens (Grade 3/4/5)

#### Competencies

- ✓ Make connections (Grade 3) and access and integrate information and ideas from a variety of sources and from prior knowledge to build understanding (Grade 4/5)
- ✓ Apply a variety of thinking skills to gain meaning from texts (Grade 4/5)

- ✓ Use personal experience and knowledge to connect to text and make meaning (Grade 3) or deepen understanding of self, community, and world (Grade 4/5)
- ✓ Engage actively as listeners, viewers, and readers, as appropriate, to develop understanding of self, identity, and community and make meaning (Grade 3)
- ✓ Create stories to deepen awareness of self, family, and community (Grade 3)
- ✓ Plan and create a variety of communication forms for different purposes and audiences (Grade 3)
- ✓ Respond to text in personal and creative ways (Grade 4/5)
- ✓ Exchange ideas and perspectives to build shared understanding (Grade 4/5)
- ✓ Use writing and design processes to plan, develop, and create texts for a variety of purposes and audiences (Grade 4/5)

### Arts Education 3/4/5

#### Big ideas

- ✓ Dance, drama, music, and visual arts are each unique languages for creating and communicating

#### Competencies

- ✓ Create artistic works collaboratively and as an individual, using ideas inspired by imagination, inquiry, experimentation, and purposeful play
- ✓ Explore identity, place, culture, and belonging through arts experiences
- ✓ Interpret and communicate ideas using symbolism in the arts
- ✓ Express feelings, ideas, and experiences in creative ways



## Physical and Health Education 3/4/5

### Big ideas

- ✓ Adopting healthy personal practices and safety strategies protects ourselves and others (Grade 3)
- ✓ Having good communication skills and managing our emotions enables us to develop and maintain healthy relationships (Grade 3)
- ✓ Our physical, emotional, and mental health are interconnected (Grade 3)
- ✓ Knowing what we enjoy doing and knowing about our opportunities to participate in those activities helps us develop an active lifestyle (Grade 4/5)
- ✓ Understanding ourselves and the various aspects of health helps us develop a balanced lifestyle (Grade 4/5)
- ✓ Personal choices and social and environmental factors influence our health and well-being (Grade 4/5)

### Competencies

- ✓ Describe physical, emotional, and social changes as students grow older (Grade 3) or explore and describe strategies for managing physical, emotional, and social changes during puberty (Grade 4/5)
- ✓ Identify and describe factors that influence healthy choices (Grade 3/4) and impacts of personal choices on health and well-being (Grade 5)
- ✓ Describe and apply strategies that promote a safe and caring environment (Grade 3/4/5)
- ✓ Describe factors that influence mental well-being and self-identity (Grade 3), describe and assess strategies for promoting mental well-being for self (Grade 4/5) and others (Grade 5)
- ✓ Explore and describe how personal identities adapt and change in different settings and situations (Grade 5)

## Mathematics 3/4/5

### Big ideas

- ✓ Development of fluency and flexibility in addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division have practical uses such as financial literacy

### Competencies

- ✓ Develop, demonstrate, and apply mathematical understanding through play, inquiry, and problem solving
- ✓ Visualize to explore mathematical concepts
- ✓ Develop and use multiple strategies to engage in problem solving
- ✓ Engage in problem-solving experiences that are connected to place, story, cultural practices, and perspectives relevant to local First Peoples communities, the local community, and other cultures

This resource was developed by the **Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research** with funding provided by the **BC Responsible & Problem Gambling Program**. Any views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the BC Responsible & Problem Gambling Program or the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research.



## STUDENT HANDOUT

### Charlotte's Web, Chapter 17

When they pulled into the Fair Grounds, they could hear music and see the Ferris wheel turning the sky. They could smell the dust of the race track where the sprinkling cart had moistened it; and they could smell hamburgers frying and see balloons aloft. They could hear sheep blatting in their pens. An enormous voice over the loudspeaker said: "Attention, please! Will the owner of a Pontiac car, license number H-2439, please more you care away from the fireworks shed!"

"Can I have some money?" asked Fern.

"Can I, too?" asked Avery.

"I'm going to win a doll by spinning a wheel and it will stop at the right number," said Fern. "I'm going to steer a jet plane and make it bump into another one."

"Can I have a balloon?"

"Can I have a frozen custard and a cheeseburger and some raspberry soda pop?" asked Avery.

"You children be quiet till we get the pig unloaded," said Mrs. Arable.

"Let's let the children go off by themselves," suggested Mr. Arable. "The Fair only comes once a year."

Mr. Arable gave Fern two quarters and two dimes. He gave Avery five dimes and four nickels. "Now run along!" he said. "And remember, the money has to last all day. Don't spend it all the first few minutes. And be back here at the truck at noontime so we can all have lunch together. And don't eat a lot of stuff that's going to make you sick to your stomachs."

"And if you go in those swings," said Mrs. Arable, "you hang on tight! You hang on very tight. Hear me?"

"And don't get lost!" said Mrs. Zuckerman. "And don't get dirty!"

"Don't get overheated!" said their mother.

"Watch out for pickpockets!" cautioned their father.

"And don't cross the race track when the horses are coming!" cried Mrs. Zuckerman.

The children grabbed each other by the hand and danced off in the direction of the merry-go-round, toward the wonderful music and the wonderful adventure and wonderful excitement, into the wonderful midway where there would be no parents to guard them and guide them, and where they could be happy and free and do as they pleased. Mrs. Arable stood quietly and watched them go. Then she sighed. Then she blew her nose.

"Do you really think it's all right?" she asked.

"Well, they've got to grow up some time," said Mr. Arable. "And a fair is a good place to start, I guess."