

# A Letter from E.B. White

*Charlotte's Web* was written by American author, E.B. White. It tells the story of a pig called Wilbur who makes an unlikely friendship with a spider called Charlotte. This letter was written by E.B. White, who was asked by his editor to explain why he wrote the book.

I have been asked to tell how I came to write "Charlotte's Web." Well, I like animals, and it would be odd if I failed to write about them. Animals are a weakness with me, and when I got a place in the country I was quite sure animals would appear, and they did...

5 As for Charlotte herself, I had never paid much attention to spiders until a few years ago. Once you begin watching spiders, you haven't time for much else — the world is really loaded with them. I do not find them repulsive or revolting, any more than I find anything in nature repulsive or revolting, and I think it is too bad that children are often corrupted by their elders in this hate campaign. Spiders are skilful, amusing  
10 and useful, and only in rare instances has anybody ever come to grief because of a spider.

One cold October evening I was lucky enough to see *Aranea Cavatica* spin her egg sac and deposit her eggs. (I did not know her name at the time, but I admired her, and later Mr. Willis J. Gertsch of the American Museum of Natural History told me  
15 her name.) When I saw that she was fixing to become a mother, I got a stepladder and an extension light and had an excellent view of the whole business. A few days later, when it was time to return to New York, not wishing to part with my spider, I took a razor blade, cut the sac adrift from the underside of the shed roof, put spider and sac in a candy box, and carried them to town. I tossed the box on my dresser. Some weeks later  
20 I was surprised and pleased to find that Charlotte's daughters were emerging from the 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. They were very busy and almost invisible, they were so small. We all lived together happily for a couple of weeks, and then somebody whose duty it was to dust my dresser balked, and I broke up  
25 the show.

At the present time, three of Charlotte's granddaughters are trapping at the foot of the stairs in my barn cellar, where the morning light, coming through the east window, illuminates their embroidery and makes it seem even more wonderful than it is.

I haven't told why I wrote the book, but I haven't told you why I sneeze, either.  
30 A book is a sneeze.

[Signed]



1

Why do you think E.B. White says that animals are "a weakness" (line 2) with him?

.....

.....

.....

☐

2 marks

2

What do you think the word "corrupted" means in line 9? Check your answer in a dictionary.

.....

☐

1 mark

3

How does E.B. White explain that many children come to dislike spiders?

.....

☐

1 mark

4

E.B. White describes spiders' webs as "embroidery" (line 28). Why do you think he chose this word?

.....

.....

☐

1 mark

5

E.B. White says "A book is a sneeze" (line 30). What is this an example of? Circle one.

a. idiom

b. simile

c. metaphor

d. personification

☐

1 mark

6

After reading the letter, how would you describe E.B. White's personality? Use two adjectives to describe him, and then explain your choices.

.....

.....

.....

☐

2 marks

7

Do you think this letter explains why E.B. White wrote the book? Explain your answer.

.....

.....

.....

☐

2 marks

Total  
out of 10

☐