Charlotte's Web



0. Charlotte's Web - Story Preface

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Dew drops on this spider's web, following an early-morning fog, help us to better see its intricate beauty. The photo, by Fir0002/Flagstaffotos, was taken at Swifts Creek, Victoria - a gorgeous location in southeastern Australia - during June of 2007. Image online, via Wikimedia Commons. License: GFDL v1.2

> *The web itself is a miracle.*
>
> Dr. Dorian
> Charlotte's Web

As Andy White went into his North Brooklin barn to feed a pig, he was distracted by a gray spider spinning a web. Working hard, that barn spider produced strands of silk stronger than similarly-sized strands of steel. How could such a thing be?

Not long before he watched the spider, one of White's pigs had died. Distraught, he wrote an essay called "*Death of a Pig*." His sadness is reflected in words like these:

> *He had evidently become precious to me ...*

So ... what if it were possible for White to write a different ending for the pig who took sick and died? And ... what if a spider, whom he called Charlotte, became part of the story?

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Charlotte-s-Web

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Charlotte-s-Web

Questions 2 Ponder

How Does Close Observation Cause Us to See Things in a Different Light?

Before writing "Charlotte's Web," E.B. White watched a barn spider spinning a web. He seemed mesmerized by the activity.

White wasn't merely distracted by this hard-working spider ... he began to think about it in a different way. What if he wrote a story featuring a web-spinning spider?

Closely observing the web-spinning spider, White saw it in a different light. It wasn't just some annoying spider to ignore or eliminate. He even gave the spider a name.

Does close observation—of an event, of a person, of an animal or an insect—cause us to view things in a different light? How does that happen?

If White hadn't watched the web-spinning spider so closely, do you think he would have made it the subject of a major story? Why, or why not?

Does staring intently at something cause us to start daydreaming about it? Has that ever happened to you? If so ... do you think that daydreaming helps us to get rid of distractions that might interfere with our creative ideas? How would that work?

Does Creating a Fictional Story, about a Real Event, Help Us to Process Sadness?

Before developing his story about a barn spider, which he observed in his barn in Maine, E.B White—author of "Charlotte's Web"—wrote an essay about one of his pigs who'd died of an apparent illness.

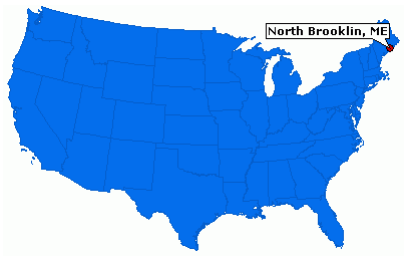
Even though the pig who died was always destined to become someone's ham dinner, White was upset at its early death. "Evidently," he wrote, that now-lost pig had "become precious to me."

In "Charlotte's Web," White invented a pig named Wilbur who was befriended by a spider named Charlotte. This fictional pig avoided death in the smokehouse, thereby fulfilling a different purpose than just being part of the food chain.

Via his fictional story, in "Charlotte's Web," E.B. White gives his pig a different ending. Do you think a fictional story, about a non-fictional event, helps people to deal with sadness? How?

Have you ever experienced an event which caused you to be really sad? If so, do you think that writing a fictional story about that event—thereby allowing you to change the ending—would help you to feel less sad? Why, or why not?

Media Stream



Location of North Brooklin, Maine

Map image online, courtesy Epodunk.

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View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Location-of-North-Brooklin-Maine