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Teaching Guidelines

TEACHER PREPARATION:

- A. Thoroughly read these Teaching Guidelines.
- B. Read the Introductory Essay that follows the Teaching Guidelines.
- C. Contemplate the Essential Questions after the Introductory Essay, which should guide major discussions for this book.
- D. Read through the textual evidence lists in the Appendix.
- E. If included, read through Elements of Story and familiarize yourself with the Plot Diagram of the novel in the Appendix. Filling in the plot Diagram will be assigned in the last chapter of the study guide. Young students (3rd-5th) will need this modeled for them on the board, and then they should copy it into their guides. Older students will also benefit from discussion and guidance before completing the Plot Diagram.

PREPARING TO READ:

I. Review

- A. Review the plot of the book as read so far.
- B. Periodically review the concepts of character, setting, and plot (see Appendix).

II. Study Guide Preview

- A. Reading Notes: Read aloud together. This section gives students key characters, places, and terms that are relevant to a particular time period, etc.
- B. Vocabulary: Read aloud together so that students will recognize words when they come across them in their reading.
- C. Comprehension Questions: Read through these questions with students to encourage purposeful reading.

READING:

I. Mark Your Book

- A. Appreciation: Have students mark something that is True, Good, or Beautiful with a double line in the margin (this could be different for each student).
- B. While reading, have students mark each vocabulary word as they come across it. This shouldn't interrupt the flow of reading once students get used to marking the words. (In a classroom, students can be taught to raise their hands when they come across a word so that everyone sees it, and then students can mark it without disrupting the reading.) Students can also mark answers to comprehension questions, but this should not interrupt the flow of their reading either.
- C. Don't put undue pressure on students to find vocabulary words and comprehension answers if it is interfering with their enjoyment of the story, but this is an important skill to teach. It is worth helping students to go back and mark their books as they work through their comprehension questions in the guide if they struggle to complete this task as they read.

II. Reading

- A. Have younger students read the chapter aloud. You can alternate between teacher-read and student-read passages. Older students can read silently, but ideally they would also read sections aloud as you discuss. Reading aloud is a skill that continues to be important as the content students are reading elevates in difficulty. Reading aloud even after students are good independent readers prepares them for the difficulty of reading Shakespeare, Homer, Dante, etc. Reading aloud trains students to become good orators. Model good reading skills. Encourage students to read expressively and smoothly. You may occasionally take oral reading grades.

AFTER READING:

I. Vocabulary

- A.** Look at each word within the context that it is used and help students come up with the best synonym or short phrase that defines the word. Refer to the book to see the words within a larger context as needed and use students' knowledge of Latin and other vocabulary to decipher meanings. Make sure you choose synonyms students know the meaning of.
- B.** Have students record the word's meaning in the study guide.

II. Comprehension Questions

- A.** Older students can answer these questions independently, but younger students (3rd-4th) need to answer the questions orally, form a good sentence, and then write it down using correct punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. Write the sentence on a board after students form it orally, and then students should copy it perfectly. Toward the end of 4th grade, or when you feel students have mastered forming a good sentence, after you have discussed the answer to each question, transition to only putting key words on the board and let students form their own full-sentence answers.
- B.** The goal is to write an answer for every comprehension question, but if time does not permit this, be sure to answer the questions on the test (denoted with an asterisk) and answer the rest orally.
- C.** Thorough answers are supplied for the teacher in the teacher guide, but student answers will probably be shorter and simpler, which is fine as long as the answers are complete.
- D.** Consider comprehension questions to be composition exercises. Require students to answer in complete sentences with proper spelling, punctuation, and grammar. It is important that students practice forming their own unique sentences as answers to the questions so that they will acquire the skill necessary to do this work independently.

III. Quotations and Discussion Questions

- A.** Use the Quotations and Discussion Questions section of each lesson as a guide to your oral discussion of the key concepts in the chapter that may not be covered in the comprehension questions.
- B.** These talking points can take your oral discussion to a more elevated level than covered in the students' written work. Use this time as an opportunity to introduce higher-level thinking. You can introduce concepts the students may not be mature enough to fully understand yet but that would be beneficial for them to begin thinking about.
- C.** A key to the Discussion Questions is in the back of the *Teacher Guide*.

IV. Enrichment

- A.** The Enrichment activities include poetry work, literary terms, theme development, cross-subject connections, and more.
- B.** We highly recommend that you take the time to complete the Enrichment activities that teach literary terms and theme development, especially the Evidence Lists in the Appendix. These activities will serve students well as they move into more complicated literature.

V. Essential Questions & Evidence Lists

- A.** The major themes of the work—the Essential Questions that the text is contemplating—are explored in both the Discussion Questions and the Enrichment activities. The Discussion Questions will lead students to notice and think deeply about the Essential Questions, while the Enrichment activities will prompt students to gather Evidence Lists as they read that pertain to the Essential Questions. In the grammar school years students are not required to write analytical literary essays, but completing these sections of the grammar school guides will prepare them for doing so in high school. Ideally the Essential Questions would be posted in your classroom and referred to repeatedly while students read.

VI. Unit Tests

- A.** There is a unit review and a quiz or test following every few lessons (varies by individual guide).
- B.** On the weeks that have these reviews and tests, you may want to do the review early in the week, and then drill it orally a couple of times before giving the test at the end of the week.
- C.** A final comprehensive test is also included.

Introductory Essay

Charlotte's Web, written by E. B. White in 1952, is a quintessential book for children. While conveying important truths about the nature of people and the world, it is also an imaginative, happy story about life on a family farm. The book gives us a clever glimpse into the lives of our animal friends while beautifully describing nostalgic childhood experiences like attending state fairs, visiting barnyards, and making our first friends. *Charlotte's Web* points out what is miraculous in the often underappreciated experiences of everyday life. It exquisitely details the changing seasons of both land and life. While there are a number of meaningful themes in this book, one of the most profound is sacrificial friendship.

The idea of sacrifice is likely a familiar virtue to children, hopefully discussed in the context of their faith. It is important, however, that students truly understand the idea and know what it means practically. Sacrifice means that something must be given up. An act of sacrificial friendship is the necessary surrender of something desired for the happiness or well-being of another. Sacrifice naturally involves a loss—but, importantly, contributes to a greater gain.

Charlotte's Web beautifully demonstrates the idea of sacrifice in a couple key relationships. By explicitly discussing what is given and what is gained in each, students can see more tangibly what sacrificial friendship truly looks like.

The relationship between Fern, a young girl, and Wilbur, a newborn piglet and the runt of the litter, is the first example we see of sacrificial friendship. Fern, outraged by the injustice that awaits Wilbur, saves him from an untimely death. She courageously stands up to her father and fights for Wilbur's survival. Fern loves Wilbur instantaneously—like the love of a parent for a child. She doesn't love him on his merits—she doesn't even know him except as the victim of a perceived injustice. She simply loves him for being him, and soon, for being hers.

After winning an argument with her father, Fern quickly dignifies Wilbur's mere existence by giving him the "most beautiful name she could think of" and by further committing to his physical and emotional well-being. Fern nurtures the runt pig with (adorable) acts of mercy and love—she feeds, shelters, and provides for Wilbur, and later, visits him when her father insists he be moved to the Zuckermans' farm. Fern is courageous and tenacious in protecting Wilbur from the very beginning. She sacrificially gives her time, energy, and affection to Wilbur, and he receives from her not just life, but an enchanted life, one that introduces him to another special, loving friend. Fern's model of genuine friendship is the seed that bears much fruit as the story progresses. Wilbur, learning from Fern (and later Charlotte), knows what to look for in a friend and, ultimately, how to be one.

We also see sacrificial friendship in the relationship between Charlotte and Wilbur. After his move from the Arable home to the Zuckermans' farm, Wilbur finds himself "friendless, dejected, and hungry." One dreary, rainy day he bemoans as "the worst day of his life," he wonders whether he can "endure the awful loneliness any more." But then Charlotte appears and Wilbur is blessed with the promise of an unexpected new friendship. Charlotte takes up the mantle from Fern to protect Wilbur. Her contribution to Wilbur's happiness and safety is just as significant and just as providential. She is uniquely qualified to serve Wilbur both by her talent and by her temperament.

Charlotte is a genuine friend to Wilbur from the outset. Importantly, she is consistently honest with him—sometimes lovingly revealing hard truths about the nature of the world. She acknowledges, for instance, that she is "not entirely happy about [her] diet of flies and bugs, but it's the way [she's] made." Similarly, she cedes to the old sheep that Wilbur is at risk of being turned into "smoked bacon and ham"—but with her next breath declares that Wilbur will not die for she will save him. Resolute in her commitment to save Wilbur from his inevitable fate as a pig, Charlotte is dependable, bold, and wise. Even when she doesn't have a plan, she breeds hope and confidence with matter-of-fact imperatives. She admonishes Wilbur: "Never hurry and never worry."

Ultimately, Charlotte recognizes that her special ability as a weaver is precisely the thing that can save Wilbur. She fulfills her natural purpose by using her good gifts in a miraculous way—and also by taking advantage of the "mercy" that "people are very gullible."

While she calls her true *magnum opus* the creation of her egg sac filled with 514 eggs, Charlotte's pinnacle feat for Wilbur happens at the County Fair, where she weaves above the radiant pig a web that wisely reads: "humble." When both Charlotte and Wilbur are at the height of personal glory, the reminder to stay low and "near to the ground" is the message that hangs boldly in the air: They are not to give way to pride. The true victory for each is better than a blue ribbon.

Charlotte gives all that she has for her friend Wilbur. Wilbur comes to know what it truly means to be a friend. Charlotte—content in her service, confident in Wilbur's fate, and secure in the knowledge that her children will be safe—is asked by Wilbur: "Why did you do all this for me? I don't deserve it." Charlotte responds, "You have been my friend. That in itself is a tremendous thing."

Essential Questions

1. What is the relationship between freedom and responsibility?
2. What is genuine friendship?
3. How is home defined? How do you know when you're there?

Literary Devices

- **Hyperbole:** A literary device that employs exaggeration to bring an understanding of truth, or for emphasis, or for humor. (Chapter IV, Discussion Question #1; Chapter XII, Enrichment #1)
- **Foreshadowing:** When the author gives the reader some clues about what is going to happen later in the story. This can be a hint about what a character is really like or an event that is about to happen. (Chapter X, Enrichment #1; Chapter XIX, Discussion Question #1)
- **Repetition:** The intentional repeating of a word, phrase, or theme for emphasis. (Chapter XVI, Enrichment #1; Chapter XXII, Comprehension Question #4)

Chapter I: Before Breakfast

READING NOTES

plaster	a paste applied to walls that hardens as it dries
roller towel	a long, continuous towel sewed together and hung on a roller; it can be washed and reused
dagger	a short, sword-like weapon
specimen	an example

VOCABULARY: Write the meaning of each bold word or phrase.

1. one of the pigs is a **runt**. _____
2. I know more about raising a **litter** of pigs than you do. _____
3. This is the most terrible case of **injustice** I ever heard of. _____
4. A **queer** look came over John Arable's face. _____
5. Saved from an **untimely** death. _____
6. No, I only **distribute** pigs to early risers _____

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: Answer the following in complete sentences.

1. What does the word "arable" mean? From what Latin word does "arable" come? Why is it a good name for a farm family?

2. Why does Mr. Arable decide to do away with the runt?

3. How does Fern convince her father not to kill the runt? What is her reasoning?

4. What is the first thing Fern teaches her pig? Why is this important?

5. Why does Fern choose the name "Wilbur"?

6. Why does Fern say "Wilbur" instead of answering her teacher's question about Pennsylvania's capital?

QUOTATIONS

Fern couldn't take her eyes off the tiny pig. "Oh," she whispered. "Oh, look at him! He's absolutely perfect."

"Fern was up at daylight, trying to rid the world of injustice. As a result, she now has a pig."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Fern sees injustice in the possibility of Wilbur's death. How does she react? Why?
2. What physical acts of charity does Fern do for Wilbur?
3. In what ways does Fern care for Wilbur beyond physical acts of charity?

ENRICHMENT

1. In the Appendix, begin filling in the list of Freedom and Responsibility.
2. In the Appendix, begin filling in the list of Genuine Friendship.
3. In the Appendix, read the biographical sketch of E. B. White and the poem "The Spider's Web (A Natural History)" by White.

Chapter XI: The Miracle

READING NOTES

spang	directly
Studebakers, Packards, De Sotos	types of cars; now antiques
buckboards	four-wheeled wagons drawn by a horse or other large animal

VOCABULARY: Write the meaning of each bold word or phrase.

1. Charlotte, sleepy after her night's **exertions**, smiled _____
2. Instead, he walked **solemnly** back up to the house _____
3. A look of complete **bewilderment** came over Mrs. Zuckerman's face. _____
4. She's a rather queer child—full of **notions**. _____
5. his **principal** farm duty was to feed the pig _____

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS: Answer the following in complete sentences.

1. Describe Lurvy's reaction when he first sees Charlotte's web.

2. What does Mr. Zuckerman make of Charlotte's web?

3. What does Mrs. Zuckerman make of Charlotte's web?

4. On what do Mr. and Mrs. Zuckerman agree?

5. What are specific ways that Mr. Zuckerman's opinion of and behavior toward Wilbur changes?

QUOTATIONS

"A miracle has happened and a sign has occurred here on earth, right on our farm, and we have no ordinary pig."

Secrets are hard to keep. Long before Sunday came, the news spread all over the county. Everybody knew that a sign had appeared in a spider's web on the Zuckerman place. Everybody knew that the Zuckermans had a wondrous pig.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. "Gullible" can mean easily tricked. In what way does the web prove that people are gullible?
2. How does the excitement on the Zuckermans' farm affect the community?

ENRICHMENT

1. Match each character to his or her reaction to Charlotte and her web.

Lurvy minister	Mr. Zuckerman Avery	visitors Mrs. Zuckerman	Fern
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- a. _____ "But we have received a sign.... A miracle has happened on this farm."
- b. _____ "... this community has been visited with a wondrous animal."; "human beings must always be on the watch for the coming of wonders."
- c. _____ tried to hit the spider with a stick (previous chapter)
- d. _____ "It seems to me we have no ordinary *spider*."
- e. _____ dropped to his knees and uttered a short prayer
- f. _____ was happy but felt the barn was not nearly as pleasant
- g. _____ came to stand hour after hour at Wilbur's pen, admiring him

What insight can you gain about each character from his or her reaction?

2. In the Appendix, add to the list of Freedom and Responsibility.
3. In the Appendix, add to the list of The Idea of Home.