StudySync Lesson Plan
Charlotte’s Web

Objectives

1. Engage students in the story, language and ideas of E.B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web*, preparing them for discussion and critical writing in response to the excerpt.

2. Practice and reinforce the following Grade 3 ELA Common Core Standards for reading literature, writing, and speaking and listening:
   - **READING: LITERATURE** – RL.3.1-7, 9-10
   - **WRITING** – W.3.1-8, 10
   - **SPEAKING AND LISTENING** – SL.3.1-6

Time

140 minutes (with an additional 230 minutes of extension possibilities)

Materials

SyncTV Premium Lesson on *Charlotte’s Web* by E.B. White

Overview

E.B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web* has sold more than 45 million copies and has been translated into 26 different languages, a testament to its enduring power as a landmark work of literature for children. White spent most of his life as a contributor to *The New Yorker* magazine before turning his attention to writing children’s books, including other famous novels such as *Stuart Little* and *The Trumpet of the Swan*. For his work he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize and the Laura Ingalls Wilder medal for children’s literature a decade before his death at the age of 86. *Charlotte’s Web* stands as his most widely read and beloved book, the story of a young farm girl named Fern, a weakling pig named Wilbur, and Charlotte, the spider who spins her web in a clever plot to save Wilbur’s life. In this excerpt, Fern begs her father not to kill Wilbur for being a runt, and finds herself with a new pet to care for after her pleas are successful. After reading, students will participate in class- and group-led discussions, asking and answering questions about the excerpt. They will then write critical responses consistent with the ELA Common Core Standards for the third grade.
Background (10 minutes)

1. Watch the Preview (SL.3.1-2). As a group, watch the video preview of the premium lesson. After viewing, use the following questions to spur a discussion:

   a. What does the “runt of a litter” mean? What can we infer about Wilbur based on this description? Why do you think Mr. Arable would want to kill him?

   b. What do the images, music, and narration in this preview tell you about the tone of this story? Will it be funny, sad, inspiring, mysterious, etc.? Discuss how you came to a conclusion about this.

   c. Have you read any other stories or watched any movies similar to Charlotte’s Web? What does this preview remind you of? Can you think of any other memorable animal characters from literature or film?

Extension (additional 75 minutes)

d. Timeline (SL.3.1, 4-5). Ask students to do a web search for a short biography of E.B. White. (Suggestions, if necessary: 1) http://www.notablebiographies.com/We-Z/White-E-B.html#b 2) http://www.kidzworld.com/article/7280-eb-white-biography 3) http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/contributor/e-b-white) After students read about the famous author, split them into groups and have them work on a visual timeline using the Easy Timeline app ($19.99), highlighting White’s important works, awards, and life events.

e. Define and Discuss (SL.3.1, 3-4). What is fair and what is unfair? In a class discussion, have students share their thoughts about fairness in society. Why is fairness important? How do we make sure things are fair? What can we do about unfairness? Is it a problem that can ever be solved? If desired, have students write down their thoughts in a journal-style entry and turn it in at the end of class.

f. Creating Characters (SL.3.1, 3-6). Charlotte’s Web contains many animal characters with human characteristics, a literary concept called personification. Define this concept for the class, and next, have students create their own “animal character” (similar to the characters introduced in the preview). Students should draw their character and answer a series of questions about its personality, the way it talks, the way it dresses, etc. When finished, encourage students to share their characters with the class.

Engaging the Text (130 minutes)

2. Read the Text (40 minutes)

   a. Read and Annotate (RL.3.1-7). Have students read and annotate the introduction and excerpt from E.B. White’s Charlotte’s Web. If your classroom has a projector, you might want to consider modeling proper annotating skills for the class, using the first couple of paragraphs as an example. If students are completing as a homework assignment, ask them to write any questions they have into the annotation tool—these questions are visible to you after the students submit their writing assignments or beforehand if you use the “Mimic” function to access the students’ accounts.

   b. Discuss (SL.3.1, 3). Have students get into small groups or pairs and briefly discuss the questions and inferences they had while reading. As a class, discuss the
following: Why does Mr. Arable decide not to kill the runt pig? What do we learn about the characters in the excerpt from this brief scene?

Extension (additional 30 minutes)

- **c. Listen and Discuss (SL.3.1-3)**. As a class, listen to the audio reading of the text. Ask students to share how their understanding of the text changed after listening. What additional images came to mind? What words did the author use to develop the setting?

- **d. Comprehend (RL.3.1-7, 10)**. Have students complete the multiple-choice questions. Collect papers or discuss answers as a class.

- **e. Illustrate (ELL)**. When we read, we create an imaginary world in our minds based on the details and descriptions in the text. Strengthen students’ abilities to do this by having them illustrate one of the settings in this excerpt, either the Arable home or the classroom at the end. Encourage students to use their imaginations when drawing, but also require them to use details specifically from the text to shape their drawings. When complete, encourage students to share their drawings with the class.

3. **Watch SyncTV (30 minutes)**

- **a. Watch**. Either watch the SyncTV discussion as a class or ask students to watch it on their individual computers.

- **b. Focus (SL.3.1-2 and RL.3.4-5)**. Model the discussion from 0:40-1:10, as the students look at unfamiliar words and phrases in the text. Exhibit how one student uses context clues to uncover the definition of “runt,” and how another student asks a question when he’s uncertain about the meaning of “do away with it.”

- **c. Focus (SL.3.1-2 and RL.3.3, 6)**. Next, model the portion of the episode from 2:25-3:17 as the SyncTV students make inferences about Fern using details from the text. Use this discussion to instruct students how to properly infer on their own, using specific quotes or passages from a text to come to a larger understanding about a character in a story.

- **d. Discuss (SL.9-10.1-2 and RL.9-10.1-2)**. From 4:45-5:45 the discussion turns to the historical context of Jackson’s story. Have students focus on the points the SyncTV students discuss and remind them of the importance of historical context in understanding a text's meaning.

- **e. Discuss (SL.3.1-4, 6 and RL.3.1-7, 10)**. After watching the model discussion, have a conversation with the class about the ideas discussed in the SyncTV episode. What new thoughts do they have after hearing the students’ discussion? Next, divide students into small groups (3-4 students). Move around the room monitoring groups as students follow the SyncTV episode as a model to discuss some of the following questions:
  
  i. Why is Fern successful in convincing her father not to kill the runt pig? What does she say or do to get Mr. Arable to change his mind?

  ii. Is it unfair of Mr. Arable to want to kill the pig? Why or why not? Is Mr. Arable being cruel in wanting to do so?
iii. Using the SyncTV students’ inferences about Fern as a model, make inferences about the kind of person Mr. Arable is. Point to specific quotes or passages in the excerpt that offer insight about Mr. Arable.

iv. Similarly, what can we infer about Fern’s older brother, Avery, from this excerpt? Once again, point to specific quotes or passages in the excerpt that show us or tell us something about Avery.

v. What is the lesson Mr. Arable wants to teach Fern? How does she respond to this lesson? What is the lesson he wants to teach Avery?

vi. Do you think Fern will take good care of Wilbur? Why or why not? Infer what will happen in the coming chapters, using clues from the text as well as your own knowledge and experience.

Extension (additional 45 minutes)

f. Debate (SL.3.1, 3-4, 6 and RL.3.2, 6). In a formal class debate, ask students to discuss the following: should “runt pigs” be killed? Why or why not? Separate the class into two sides and have each side work together to prepare their respective arguments, pro and con. Give each side an allotted time to share their views and make sure students are respectful during the debate. For an additional challenge, assign students roles that run contrary to their own opinions.

g. Interview and Record (SL.3.1, 3-6). Ask students to come up with three questions they’d like to ask each character. Offer prizes to the students who come up with the best and most interesting questions. When they are finished writing their questions, split the class into pairs or small groups and have the students interview each other, with one student as the interviewer and another student as the character in questions. Record these interviews using the Podcast app (free) and, if comfortable, have students share their interviews online or with the class.

4. Think (10 minutes)

a. Respond (W.3.1, 4). Ask students to read the “Think” questions, watch the corresponding video clips, and respond to the questions, either in class or for homework.

5. Write (50 minutes)

a. Discuss (SL.3.1, 3). Read the prompt you have chosen for students, and then solicit questions regarding the prompt or the assignment expectations. Whichever prompt you have chosen, make sure you are clear about the assignment expectations and the rubric by which you and the other students will be evaluating them.

b. Organize (RL.3.1-7, 10 and W.3.1-2, 5). Ask students to go back and annotate the text with the prompt in mind. They should be organizing their thoughts and the points they'll address in their writing as they make annotations. If you've worked on outlining or other organizational tools for writing, this is a good place to apply them.

c. Write (W.3.1-2, 4-6, 8, 10). Have students go through the writing process of
planning, revising, editing, and publishing their writing responses.

d. **Review (W.3.4-6)**. Use the StudySync “Review” feature to have students complete one to two evaluations of their peers' work based on your chosen review rubric. Have the students look at and reflect upon the peer evaluations of their own writing. What might you do differently in a revision? How might you strengthen the writing and the ideas?

**Extension (additional 80 minutes)**

e. **Write (W.3.1-2, 4-6, 8, 10)**. For homework, have students write an essay using one of the prompts you did not choose to do in class. Students should publish their responses online.

f. **Write Creatively (W.3.3-6, 8, 10)**. Now that students have read this excerpt from the first chapter of *Charlotte’s Web*, have them write the next one! In at least 250 words, students should continue the storyline from the excerpt as Fern cares for Wilbur and encounters new obstacles and challenges in her path. Encourage creativity, so long as students’ chapters continue with the storyline and characters that have already been set up!
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Key Vocabulary

1. runt (n.) – The smallest or weakest animal in a group born at the same time
2. hoghouse (n.) – A barn where pigs live
3. sopping (adj.) – Soaked, completely wet
4. injustice (n.) – Unfair treatment, especially the denial of rights that should be granted
5. queer (adj.) – Odd, strange
6. specimen (n.) – A particular example of a larger group or thing
7. promptly (adv.) – On time, quickly
8. blissful (adj.) – Full of happiness or joy
9. pupils (n.) – Young students
10. distribute (v.) – To give out or assign something

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Fern is upset at the beginning of the excerpt because _________________.
   a. her mother has forgotten to cook breakfast
   b. she has to go to school
   c. her father is planning to kill a weakling pig
   d. her brother continues to tease her

2. Mr. Arable is planning to kill the pig because _________________.
   a. he doesn’t have enough food to feed it
   b. he needs its meat to feed his family
   c. he thinks it is too weak to survive
   d. he is cruel and unkind

3. When Fern asks Mr. Arable if he’d have killed her if she were born small, Mr. Arable is _________________.
   a. angry
   b. moved
   c. confused
   d. annoyed

4. Mr. Arable decides to spare the runt’s life because _________________.
   a. taking care of a pig could teach Fern a lesson about responsibility
   b. he can’t bring himself to hurt Fern’s feelings
   c. both a and b
   d. neither a nor b

5. Fern protests her father’s plans to kill the pig because she feels the pig is _________________.

6. From his interactions with the family, we can infer that Fern’s brother is ____________________.
   a. disobedient
   b. lazy
   c. rowdy
   d. all of the above

7. Fern decides to name the pig ____________________.
   a. Wilbur
   b. Avery
   c. Arable
   d. Charlotte

8. Fern chooses this name because ____________________.
   a. it is her father’s name
   b. it is the capital of Pennsylvania
   c. she thinks it is beautiful
   d. all of the above

9. When the teacher calls on Fern, Fern is _________________.
   a. sleeping
   b. daydreaming about her pig
   c. listening closely
   d. fighting with the other students

10. We can infer that Fern is _________________.
    a. a great student
    b. thoughtful
    c. lonely
    d. misunderstood

Answer Key

  1. C
  2. C
  3. B
  4. C
  5. D
  6. D
  7. A
  8. C
  9. B
  10. B
Further Assignments

1. After completing this StudySync Premium Lesson, have students read the entirety of E.B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web*. Ask them to keep a reading journal as they progress through the novel and expand upon the themes and reading comprehension skills discussed in this excerpt from the first chapter. Point students to any important passages or sections in the novel and ask them to read the text both aloud and at home. (*SL.3.1, 3-5 and RL.3.1-7 and W.3.1, 4*)

2. After finishing *Charlotte’s Web*, have students read *Stuart Little*, another classic children’s novel by author E.B. White. Ask students to keep a reading journal and discuss key passages from the text. When they are finished reading, students should compare and contrast the two texts. Which one did they like better? What are some similar themes, styles, etc.? (*SL.3.1, 3-4 and RL.3.1-7, 9 and W.3.1, 4*)

3. Screen the 1973 *Charlotte’s Web* animated classic for the class after students have read the complete text. Afterwards, discuss how the movie compares with the book. What are some changes the filmmakers made in translating the story from page to screen? How faithful is the adaptation? What do the differences between the book and the movie tell us about the general differences between books and films? (*SL.3.1-4*)

4. You may also choose to screen the 2006 live action version of *Charlotte’s Web*, which offers a slightly different version of the classic tale. The 2006 version is slightly less faithful to the original text than the animated version; ask students to discuss why this is so. Also discuss: What are some of the different strengths of animation versus live action? If students have seen both versions, which do they prefer? Why do you think this story continues to be so popular, more than sixty years after its initial publication? (*SL.3.1-4*)

5. Using *Charlotte’s Web* as a basis of the discussion, ask students to brainstorm some of the important qualities of leadership exhibited in the text. What makes a good leader? What are some shared qualities all leaders have? Where do you see these qualities or personality traits in the text? Which of the book’s characters would make good leaders? Ask students to write their thoughts in written responses of at least 250 words. (*SL.3.1, 3-4 and RL.3.3, 6 and W.3.1, 4*)

6. Have students write a book review of *Charlotte’s Web*. You might want to consider modeling a couple of book reviews for the class so students can familiarize themselves with the format. Students’ book reviews should discuss 1) the plot of the novel (without giving away the ending), 2) the important themes and ideas presented within, and 3) their overall assessment of the book’s quality and audience. (*ELL*)