

# Charlotte's Web

## Background Information

### FILM SYNOPSIS

In *Charlotte's Web*, a very small pig finds that the most powerful force in the world is the bond of friendship. Wilbur, a pig and the runt of the litter, has a youthful manner that makes him seem naïve to the other animals in his new barn, but to Charlotte – the spider who lives in the rafters – he is a welcome friend. Their friendship is shown to be a lasting one when the other animals reveal that the pig's days are numbered. It seems that only a miracle will save Wilbur's life, but a determined Charlotte has set out to do just that: she spins words into her web in an effort to convince the farmer that Wilbur is 'some pig' and worth saving. E B White's magical, beloved story of loyalty and sacrifice comes to life in this live-action /CG animation adaptation.

### PRODUCTION NOTES

The producer of *Charlotte's Web*, Jordan Kerner, knew that he wanted to bring the story to the big screen when he read the book to his daughters. He felt that a movie version of the story would help to answer...

'...all of the questions that fill us when we're three or four years old – questions of life and death, how long we're going to live, and what's going to happen to those we love stay with us and become even more relevant as we age and have children of our own.'

Likewise, the director, Gary Winick, felt that the simple story of the friendship between Wilbur and Charlotte was one that resonated with children and adults alike.

Walden Media has partnered with Nickelodeon Movies, Kerner Entertainment and Paramount Pictures to create a new live-action /CG animation adaptation of E B White's *Charlotte's Web*. First brought to the big screen in animation in 1973, White's story is now brought to life by director Gary Winick from a script by Susannah Grant and Karey Kirkpatrick.



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## LIVE ACTION AND COMPUTER GENERATED IMAGES

Most of the animals in the film are NOT computer generated, but live action - after photography, a team of very talented computer animators used movie magic to enhance the film.

The filmmakers behind Charlotte's Web wanted to make everything on the screen seem photo real. Wilbur is filmed as a combination of live action and CG animation; live action, CG animation and animatronics for the geese; live action and a little bit of CG animation for the sheep; live action with CG animation in their faces for the cows; the same, live action with CG for the horse.

Charlotte and Templeton the rat are CG. Jordan Kerner, Producer says:

'We're using Charlotte's body and leg movements to convey her sense of irony or her sense of being maternal or her sense of fear. Our quiver of emotional arrows in Charlotte's case is very limited and we have to be exceptionally careful how we use them. A spider's mouth is underneath its head, so there's no lip-synch, because the hairy sort of fangs - the clycera - are in front of the face, so we had to confront various challenges in making her both cinematically emotive and physiologically correct. I'd hope that if E B White were alive today, he would be fascinated by what we're doing and that he would be thrilled about the level of technology that's gone into the cinematic creation of his characters.'

## FILMING LOCATIONS

The film was shot in Australia, despite the fact that the story is set in America. This is because the story revolves around the seasons - it starts in Spring and progresses through to Winter. By the time they started filming, the crew needed to find a location that was experiencing Spring at the right time. This meant they had to shoot in the southern hemisphere.

E B White moved from New York to live in the country with his wife in the 1930s. They lived on a farm in a tiny place called North Brooklin. The film's production designer, Stuart Wurtzel, toured this area and researched White's barn to help him design a farm location for the film which was just how E B White described it.





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## About the Book and Author

### THE BOOK

The critically acclaimed book *Charlotte's Web*, written by award-winning author E B White and illustrated by Garth Williams, is the best selling children's paperback of all time. To date, the book has sold 45 million copies worldwide and has been translated into 23 languages.

Garth Williams was the original illustrator for the book. Born in 1912, he grew up on farms in New Jersey and Canada. His illustrations provided some inspiration for the overall look and feel of the film. There are actually shots in the movie that are literally right out of the book.

*Charlotte's Web* centres on an unusual friendship between a shy yet joyous pig named Wilbur and a caring spider named Charlotte. The runt of his litter, Wilbur is adopted by eight-year-old Fern, under whose care he flourishes. Unfortunately, Wilbur's progress seemingly ensures a trip to the smokehouse. Determined to save her friend and barnmate, Charlotte comes up with a daring plan. One foggy morning, the farmer enters the pigpen to see the mysterious words 'Some Pig!' woven into Charlotte's web. Convinced this is a miracle and that Wilbur is indeed an extraordinary animal, the farmer decides that Wilbur is too valuable to make into ham and pork chops. When Wilbur has his chance, he finds a loving way to return Charlotte's kindness. A tale of friendship and renewal featuring a motley crew of barnyard characters, *Charlotte's Web* is a tribute to everyday miracles.

### E B WHITE

Elwyn Brooks White (1899 – 1985) was an American journalist and writer of essays, textbooks and novels. He was born in Mount Vernon, New York and graduated from Cornell University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1921. He wrote for the *New Yorker* and *Harper's* magazines until the 1930s, when he started to write children's novels for his niece, Janice Hart White. His first children's book, *Stuart Little*, was published in 1945, and *Charlotte's Web* appeared in 1952. Both were highly acclaimed, and in 1970 jointly won the Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal, a major prize in the field of children's literature.

In 1978, White was awarded a special Pulitzer Prize for his life's work. He died on October 1, 1985 at his farm home in North Brooklin, Maine, after a long fight with Alzheimer's disease. He was buried beside his wife, Katherine Sargeant Angell, also a magazine editor and author, at the Brooklin Cemetery.

### TURNING THE BOOK INTO A FILM

The filmmakers aimed to be as true to the book and its author as possible. Everything that is in the film is there because the filmmakers felt that E B White would have approved. Producer Jordan Kerner says:

'Even today as I'm reading the book to my four-year-old daughter, I'm highlighting words as we read. When I find a notion, a turn of E B White's phrase that we haven't used, I try to keep plugging them into the screenplay before we lock in all of the visual effects for the barn animals. We've combed Mr White's words about a hundred times already, and we keep combing them every day to see if we can add something that will be direct from the book.'

