WHO IS CHARLOTTE?



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Charlotte is a "barn spider." Her scientific name (today) is *Araneus cavaticus*. Her ability to spin orb webs is one of Charlotte's characteristics. This image, by Abrahami, depicts a spider like Charlotte inside a web. License: CC BY-SA 2.5

The American Museum of Natural History notes—in *The World Spider Catalog, Version 7.0*—that there are currently 39,490 identified species of spiders. Members of the animal kingdom, spiders are arachnids, not insects. Spiders have two parts to their body and eight legs. Insects have three parts to their body and six legs.

What type of spider is Charlotte? She gives us a clue when she tells us her name: Charlotte A. Cavatica. Let's break that down:

- The middle initial—A—stands for Charlotte's middle name: *Aranea*. That comes from Latin, since *Araneae* is the scientific name for spiders who, among other things, weave orb-webs.

- *Cavatica*—Charlotte's last name—comes from the Latin word *cavus* (which means a pit, hole or hollow). Spiders such as Charlotte, in other words, prefer to spend their lives in shady places—like one might find in a barn.

- At the time E.B. White was working on his book (including the year 1951), *Aranea Cavatica* was actually the scientific term) for barn spiders who mostly live in the area of northern New England and southeastern Canada.

- Today, spiders like Charlotte are known as *Araneus Cavaticus*.

Now that we know who Charlotte is, let's take a look at how she lives—and how she spins her webs.

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

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

Questions 2 Ponder

What Can We Learn from a Name?

When E.B. White wrote his still-beloved story, "Charlotte's Web," he was careful about giving his lead character a meaningful name. He named his creation "Charlotte A. Cavatica."

If we dig a bit deeper, into the origins of that name, we learn some interesting things. Those things tell us a lot

about Charlotte:

- The “A” stands for “Aranea.”
- “Araneae”—the pluralized form of "Aranea"—is the Latin word for the order of orb-weaving spiders.
- “Cavatica” comes from the Latin word “cavus” (which means a pit, hole or hollow).
- *Aranea Cavatica* was the scientific name for barn spiders, located in the general area of E.B. White's farm in Maine, at the time White was writing “Charlotte’s Web.”
- Charlotte, the star of White’s book, is an orb-weaving barn spider.

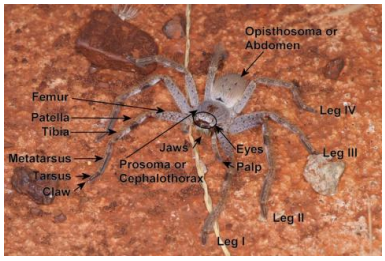
So ... we can learn a lot about Charlotte just from understanding the different parts of her name.

When parents name their children, should they pay attention to the meaning of the names they choose? Why, or why not?

Does your name have a particular meaning? If so, what is it?

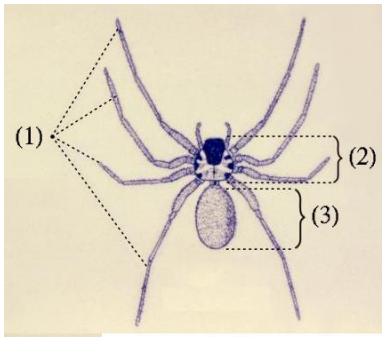
Do you have any friends with particularly meaningful names? What are they—and—what do the names mean? What is most special about your name?

Media Stream



Spider Body Parts

Image, described above, online courtesy Ed Nieuwenhuys.
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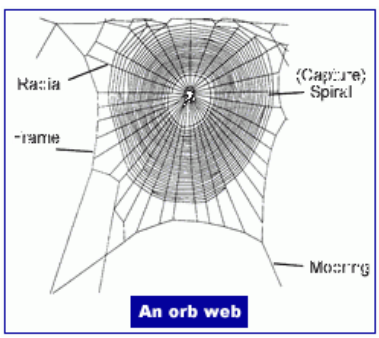


Spider's Eight Legs

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.
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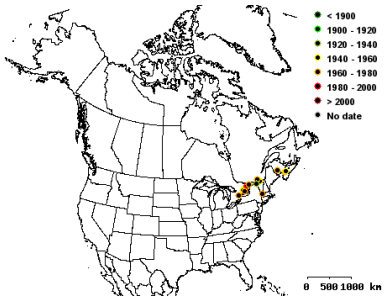
Charlotte the Spider

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Parts of an Orb Web

Image online, courtesy Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC).
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Map of Dominant Locations for Barn Spiders

Image online, courtesy Canadian Arachnology.

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Araneus Cavaticus - A Spider Like Charlotte

Image online, courtesy Professor C. Frank Starmer.

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Close-up of Araneus Cavaticus

Image online, courtesy Professor C. Frank Starmer.

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Charlotte's Webs

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