AWESOME stories

WILBUR and the FARM



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Charlotte (a spider) and Wilbur (a piglet) are pals in E.B. White's story *Charlotte's Web*. This still, from the live-action movie "Charlotte's Web," depicts the two friends together. Image, copyright Paramount, all rights reserved; provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with the film.

Andy White owned a "saltwater farm" - a home and farm nestled on the shores of a saltwater estuary - near the town of Brooklin, Maine. He worked his farm and cared for his animals. When he wrote about them, he tried to be faithful to nature's ways. As he once observed:

> *My feeling about animals is just the opposite of Disney's. He made them dance to his tune and came up with some great creations, like Donald Duck. I preferred to dance to their tune and came up with Charlotte and Wilbur.* (E.B. White letter, dated January 12, 1971, to Gene Deitch.)

Who was Wilbur? A piglet initially saved by Fern Arable who grew into a pig saved by Charlotte. Where did Wilbur live when he was taken to the Zuckerman farm? The same place where Andy White's pigs lived, since the Zuckerman farm (search for "Zuckerman place," then select page 83) was modeled on his own:

> *Wilbur's new home was in the lower part of the barn, directly underneath the cows. Mr. Zuckerman knew that a manure pile is a good place to keep a young pig. Pigs need warmth, and it was warm and comfortable down there in the barn cellar on the south side.* (*Charlotte's Web*, page 14.)

Pigs do not have sweat glands, so they also have to look for a way to cool off on a hot day. It's one reason why they wallow in mud!

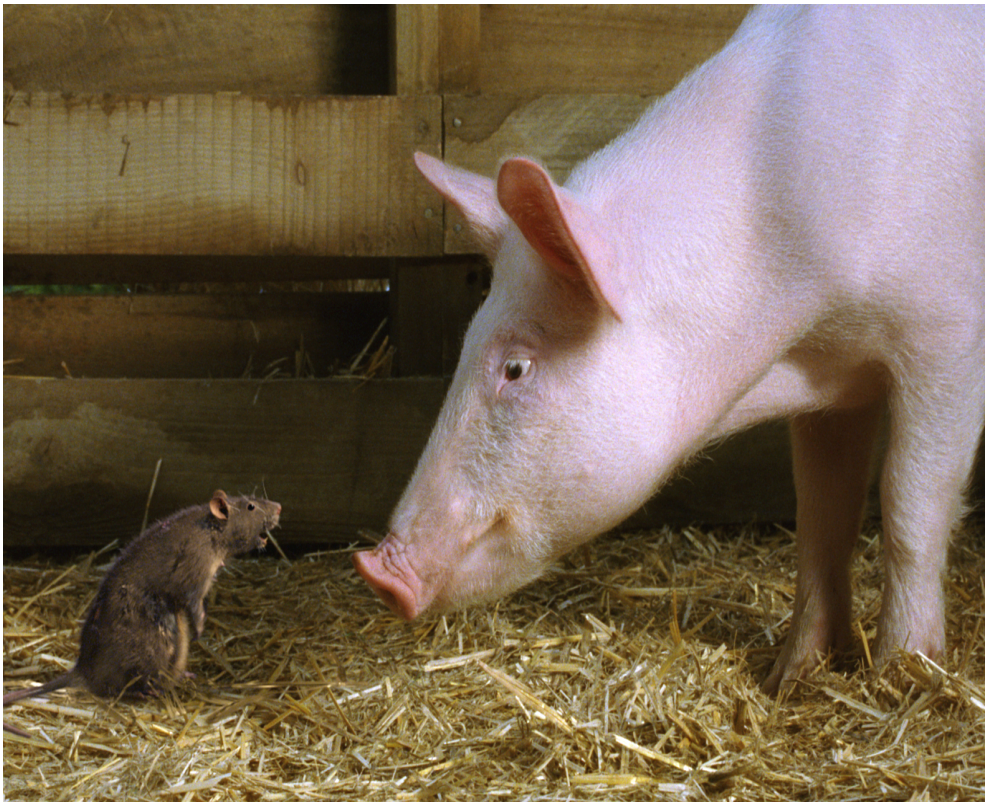
Pigs love to eat, and there is usually no shortage of food for them:

- At first, a sow (the female pig) feeds her piglets.

- Piglets, nestling with their mother, feel warm and full.

The fatter a pig gets, the better its chances of being turned into ham or bacon. Wilbur didn't want to become one of those pigs!

And ... speaking of getting fatter ... we have to investigate Templeton, Wilbur's barn-rat colleague. **



He is a type of rodent one can always find on a farm. Although they try to stay out-of-sight during the day, they are there. If we look for them, we can find evidence of their nests. If their favorite food is available, they will stash it away for current (or future) use.

Rats, for most humans, are a bother. But for E.B. White, Templeton the rat plays a key role in the story.

** Wilbur (a piglet) and Templeton (a barn rat) are pals in E.B. White's story Charlotte's Web. This still, from the live-action movie "Charlotte's Web," depicts the two friends together. Image, copyright Paramount, all rights reserved; provided here as fair use for educational purposes and to acquaint new viewers with the film.

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

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

Questions 2 Ponder

Is It Better to Dance to Nature's Tune or to Have Nature Dance to Ours?

E.B. White—who was also known as Andy White—wrote a famous story about “Charlotte’s Web.” Years later, in a 1971 letter, he said this:

> *My feeling about animals is just the opposite of Disney's. He made them dance to his tune and came up with some great creations, like Donald Duck. I preferred to dance to their tune and came up with Charlotte and Wilbur.*

White’s observation prompts a few questions:

What did the author of “Charlotte’s Web” mean when he said that Walt Disney made his creations—such as Donald Duck—“dance to his [Disney’s] tune?”

What did White mean when he said that he made *his* creations—such as Charlotte and Wilbur—dance to their own tunes?

Could we apply White’s observation to the concept of climate change—a key 21st-century issue? How?

With the concept of climate change in mind, consider these alternative positions: Is it better to dance to nature’s tune—or—to have nature dance to our tune? Explain your answer.

Is it possible that those two alternatives are not mutually exclusive? In other words ... can we simultaneously dance to both nature's tune and to our own? Why, or why not?

Media Stream



A Pig Enjoying A Manure Pile
Image online, courtesy Wikipedia.
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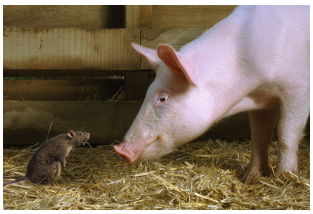

A Rat Called Templeton
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Manure Pile - Good Place to Keep Young Pigs
Image online, courtesy USDA NRCS.
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Pigs Eating - Their Daily Chores
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Sow (Female Pig) Feeds her Piglets
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Pigs Nestle with their Mother to Keep Warm
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En route to What Wilbur Did Not Want to Become (Bacon or Ham)
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Templeton (Barn Rat)- Wilbur's Friend

Image online, courtesy USDA.

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Templeton Staying out-of-sight During the Day

Image online, courtesy USDA.

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Templeton - The Rat

Image online, courtesy U.S. National Park Service (NPS).

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