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April 16, 2009

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History of *Charlotte's Web*

Charlotte's Web has been a heartwarming childhood favorite for more than half a century. Author E.B. White first published the award-winning children's book, with illustrations by Garth Williams, in 1952.

"The story of *Charlotte's Web* deserves the fullest stage realization we can provide," said Director Kevin Ehrhart. "We need friends. Not just friends to help us out of a tight spot, but friends to teach us who we truly are."

In the classic tale, a pig named Wilbur is saved from slaughter by a clever gray spider named Charlotte. When a sow on the Arable's farm gives birth to piglets, eight-year-old Fern begs her father Mr. Arable not to kill the runt of the litter named Wilbur. Spared from death, Wilbur moves to the Zuckerman's farm.

Though he is lonely at first, Wilbur befriends Charlotte, and when he hears that he is going to be eaten at Christmas dinner, he turns to her for help. Charlotte decides to weave positive messages about Wilbur into her web, such as "some pig" and "radiant" in hopes that if he can become famous, the Zuckermans will not slaughter him.

With the assistance of the other barn animals, Charlotte is successful and Wilbur becomes so well-loved that he winds up winning a prize at the county fair. In a heart-wrenching twist, Charlotte passes away from old age at the fair. To symbolically repay her, Wilbur brings her sac of eggs back to the farm and becomes friends with three of her babies. It is the ultimate story of friendship.

It is theorized that E.B. White wrote the story to counter *Death of a Pig*—a story about a pig he failed to save—which he published in 1948. White's original version of the *Charlotte's Web* opened with Wilbur

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in the barnyard, but he decided to add a few chapters at the beginning to introduce Fern and add a human element to the book.

After graduating from Cornell University in 1921, White wrote for several publications including *The New Yorker* magazine. Inspired by his young niece in the late 1930s, he began writing children's fiction. He is most famous for writing *Stuart Little* and *Charlotte's Web*.

Charlotte's Web was well received from the start. It was the best-selling children's paperback book of all time as of 2000, and was adapted into an animated feature film in 1973. It was presented on stage by the Omaha Theater Company in 1988, 1992, 1998 and 2004, and will be presented again May 1-17, 2009.

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