

Charlotte's Web

Rated: G

Running Time: 96 minutes

Themes: Selflessness, friendship, humility, keeping promises, celebrating miracles, protecting life, kindness, seeing true beauty, avoiding worry, coping with death

Story Summary

This live-action, non-musical remake of the 1973 animated classic stars Dakota Fanning as Fern, the young girl who rescues a runt piglet from her father's ax. Wilbur is a congenial little pig. He gets along with even the most prickly animals on Zuckerman's farm—including an obnoxious, self-serving rat—and soon befriends a marginalized spider named Charlotte. She's an eight-legged outcast deemed "creepy" for binding and sucking the blood from her prey. But Wilbur sees beauty beneath that grim exterior, and the two become fast friends.

Sadly, life on the farm can be short, especially for a pig earmarked for Christmas dinner. Will Wilbur live to see a winter snowfall? He will if Charlotte has anything to say about it. The loyal arachnid proceeds to spin impressive words into her web that become a local phenomenon and earn Wilbur stays of execution. Some call these web sights "miracles." One thing's certain, Wilbur is a special animal worth showcasing at the county fair. Charlotte tags along, only to grow weak from producing the culmination of her life's work: an egg sac. She'll soon die. And it's up to Wilbur to deliver her babies safely back to Zuckerman's barn.

Family Activity

On 3x5 cards or sheets of paper, write six results of pride (leads to shame, encourages quarrels, disliked by friends, leads to punishment, ends in downfall, hated by God) and six fruits of humility (leads to wisdom, teachable spirit, brings honor and respect, receives grace, loved by God, yields contentment and freedom). Shuffle and place them face down on the floor about two feet apart in a rectangular grid. Players turn over any two cards at a time. If the card lists a result of humility, "cling to it" by placing a hand on it. If it contains a result of pride, "stamp it out" by putting your foot on it. Keep going until all of the cards

Cautions: Jokes involve flatulent cows, a horse's posterior, a belching rat and confusion over the phrase "in the can." There's also name-calling, the British profanity "bloody" and the expression "what the heck." Fern is disrespectful toward her father and tells a lie, both to protect Wilbur. There's an ever-present threat of our porcine hero becoming dinner, and a very sad scene in which a dying Charlotte says goodbye.



have been flipped and players are tangled in a *Twister*-like knot. Afterward, discuss pride and humility in light of Proverbs 11:2, 13:10, 16:18-19 and 18:2, and look for examples in the film.

Talking Points

1. Fern argues that there's no difference between a human life and the life of a barnyard creature. Help children see that, although all life has value, there is indeed a difference (Genesis 1:24-28, Matthew 6:26). Also, talk about the harsh tone she takes with her father in that scene, and the need for children to respect their parents.

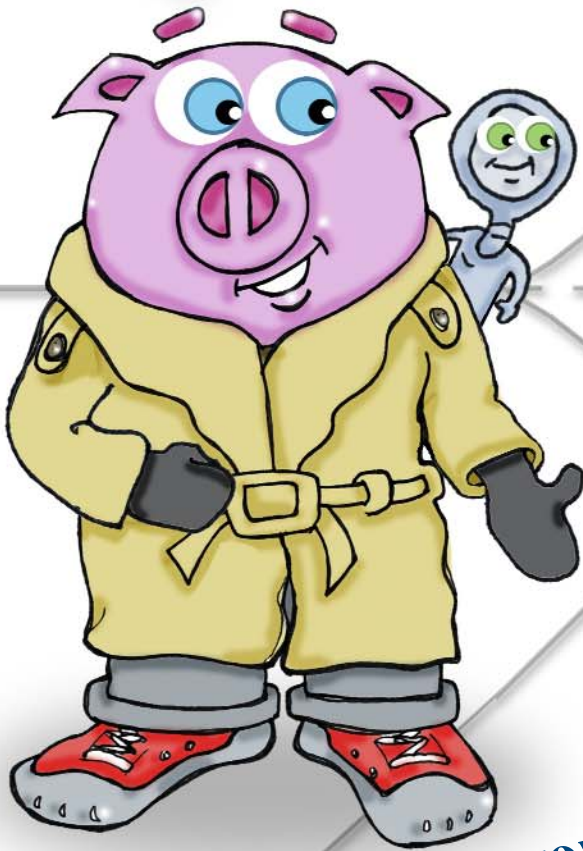
2. Wilbur tells the sheep, "I'm not sure being in the same place is the same as being friends." Discuss the difference between friendships of *proximity* (neighbors, classmates, or playmates whose *parents* are friends) and deeper, more enduring relationships. How are true friends different, both in what they supply to us and what they require of us?

3. There's an unusual respect for religious faith in this film, including the doctor's awe over the "miracle" that spiders can spin webs at all. Read Romans 1:20. Together, point to God's fingerprints elsewhere in nature.

4. Death plays a significant role in this story, which may be upsetting to some children. How has your family been forced to deal with death? Invite your child to share how that part of the movie made them feel. —by Bob Smithouser



That Wilbur is a credit to pigs everywhere! And while I'm not usually wild about spiders, Charlotte was a good friend. So let's try to help her find her way through this web maze!



BARNYARD CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 2. Place of worship; crow voice actor
Thomas Haden
- 5. First of baby spiders introduced by name
- 7. New England state in which the story is set (postal abbreviation)
- 8. Second message spun into the web
- 10. Word borrowed from an Oxydol ad
- 12. Selfish, gluttonous rodent
- 14. Building that strikes fear in some animals' hearts

DOWN

- 1. Surname of Fern's uncle Homer
- 3. Charlotte's fancy way of saying "hello" (also a fave of *Adventures in Odyssey's* Eugene Meltzer)
- 4. First message to appear in the web (two words)
- 6. Book author E.B.
- 9. Web word spun at the fair
- 11. Fern's little brother
- 13. Charlotte's hangout, or the World Wide one