

Anticipation

Encourage the children to appreciate the anticipation of starting a new book. They should be familiar with book cover contents but revisit key features (title, author, illustrator if relevant, publisher). Explain that not all book covers or even editions contain identical information. Ask: *What other information is on the cover? Why is it there?* (For example, blurb and/or extract – to give a flavour of the contents; mini reviews – to show others have enjoyed the book; awards or sales figures – to show a book’s quality or popularity; design features and illustrations – to attract readers and give clues about the genre.)

Discuss how the cover provides clues to the story without spoiling the plot. Ask: *Who are the main characters?* (Charlotte and Wilbur.) *What can you discover about them?* (Wilbur is a pig; Charlotte is a spider – they should infer this from the title and blurb.) *What genre of book do you think it is? Why?* (Animal/fantasy/adventure.) *What do you predict the story is about?* (This might depend on the edition’s cover.)

There have been many covers since 1952, but some modern editions retain the original illustrator’s cover. Display a variety of covers including one with visuals from the 1973/2006 films. Ask: *Which do you prefer? Why?*

Setting the scene

Read the opening paragraph. Ask: *Is this a good opening? Why?* (It’s dramatic and grabs your attention – a deliberate author ploy.) Ask: *Where could he be going?* Read the rest of Chapter 1 and ask: *Which characters have been introduced?* (Fern, Mr and Mrs Arable, Avery and Wilbur.)

Read Chapters 1 to 4. Discuss why Fern wanted to save the runt. (She thought it was unfair just because he was small – an ‘injustice’.) Ask: *Do you agree with Fern? Why?* The children may agree that it is cruel. Use the opportunity to talk about why animals are raised on a farm. Ask: *What sort of person is Fern? How can you tell?* (Loving,

compassionate and loyal; she saves Wilbur, looks after him, plays with him and visits him in the barn.)

Focus on how the plot is set up: Fern saves Wilbur; they become friends; Wilbur moves to the barn and misses their fun; he fails to make friends easily in his new home. Ask: *How is Wilbur feeling?* (Miserable, bored and lonely.) Stop reading just before the end of Chapter 4. Ask: *What does Wilbur want?* (A friend.) Read the final two paragraphs. Ask: *Who does the voice belong to? How do you know?* (Charlotte – the title.)

As you read, focus in on the setting. Ask: *What clues tell you where the book is set and what time of year it is?* (Springtime, the animals are with their young, the barn, Wilbur is a ‘spring pig’, and so on.) Discuss springtime with the children. The cycle of life is a recurrent theme in the book.

Ask: *How does the author bring the setting and characters to life?* (Vivid descriptions: sights, smells, sounds and so on; the animals’ dialogue; the animals’ feelings and emotions.)

Finding a friend

Read Chapter 5 aloud. Discuss the way Wilbur speaks to Charlotte before he knows her. (Formal.) Ask: *What are Wilbur’s early impressions of Charlotte?* (Beautiful and clever but he is appalled at her diet and sad she is so bloodthirsty.) Talk about making new friends and first impressions.

The problem

Refer to question 2 on the bookmark (page 12). Read Chapters 6 to 10 with the class. Ask: *What’s the problem in the story that needs to be solved?* (How to save Wilbur from being slaughtered.) As the story unfolds, discuss the different farmyard characters.

Ask: *Who breaks the bad news to Wilbur and why?* (The old sheep – to cause trouble.) Compare Charlotte’s reaction to Wilbur’s (mature and calm versus childish and hysterical). Ask: *Are their reactions in keeping with their characters?* (Yes.)

1. Making links

To link ideas across sentences and paragraphs using adverbials.

What you need

Copies of *Charlotte's Web*.

What to do

- Check the children's recall of the purpose of adverbials to link sentences, especially of time and order. Practise with a brief set of instructions, for example: First, open *Charlotte's Web*. Second, turn to the beginning of Chapter 5. Third, locate the illustration of Charlotte. Ask: *What other adverbials could be used instead of 'second' and 'third'?* ('Next', 'then', 'finally', 'lastly'.)
- Together, read the text describing how Charlotte catches a fly, starting "First," said Charlotte... Ask: *Which adverbials does she use?* ('First', 'next', 'now'.) *Where are the adverbials? What do they link?* (At or close to the front of a paragraph. They link paragraphs.) Demonstrate how each stage is a paragraph, so paragraphs rather than sentences are sequenced.
- In Chapter 13, read the two paragraphs, from 'Charlotte climbed to a point...' to 'very busy helping.'
- Invite the children to summarise Charlotte's actions writing 'TERRIFIC' in her web into two short paragraphs, using adverbials of time and place to link ideas both within and across the paragraphs. Demonstrate that summarising requires only important words and actions, not all the detail.

Differentiation

Support: Provide a frame of adverbials to help children summarise:

Paragraph 1: First... Next... Then... Finally...

Paragraph 2: After that... Then... Lastly...

Extension: Ask children to summarise a longer part to include writing 'R' in the web up to 'Then she slept'. Suggest they summarise the numerous short steps into two or three sentences using adverbials in a third paragraph.

2. able or ible?

Objective

To master words ending in 'able' and 'ible' or 'ably' and 'ibly'.

What you need

Photocopiable page 22 'Sort your 'ibles' from your 'ables'', interactive activity "'ible' or 'able'?'.

What to do

- Both the 'ible' and 'able' suffixes mean 'able to be'. For example, 'visible' means able to be seen.
- Charlotte thinks humans are 'gullible'. Write the word on the board spelled 'gullible' and 'gullable'. Ask which is correct.
- Hold a quick spelling bee, with children guessing whether these words end in 'ible' or 'able': 'responsible', 'knowledgeable', 'legible', 'reliable', 'dependable', 'horrible'. Ask: *How did you choose?* (Sound, prior knowledge, guess.) *What word class are these words?* (Adjectives.)
- Using photocopiable page 22 'Sort your 'ibles' from your 'ables'', ask the children to underline the suffixes. Ask: *What do you notice about the root word or stem in questions 1–4?* (They are complete or recognisable words.) *What spelling rules are used when adding the suffix?* (No change to root, drop final 'e', change 'y' to 'i', double final consonant (usually only 't', 'g', 'b', 'm', 'p').)
- Ask: *What do you notice about the root or stem in the 'ible' list?* (Not complete words. Note that there are exceptions: 'accessible', 'digestible', 'flexible'.)
- Challenge the class to predict the spelling rule to change 'able' and 'ible' adjectives into adverbs. (Drop the final 'e' and add 'ly': terrible/terribly; understandable/understandably.)

Differentiation

Support: Give children additional practice, using interactive activity "'ible' or 'able'?'.

Extension: Challenge children to search for additional words that follow each rule and experiment with inventing new 'able' words, such as 'emailable', 'giffable' and 'jpeggable'.

Self-reflection

Person I helped

Why I helped

How I helped

How the person reacted

How it made me feel

How I think the person felt after being helped

Why I think it is important to be a 'friend in need' society

