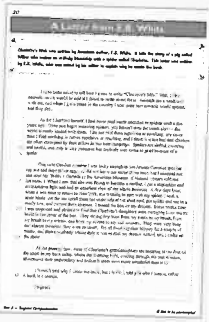


A Letter from E.B. White



Question Book:
Year 5, pages 20-21

Author / Source:
E.B. White

Genre:
Non-fiction — letter

Cross-curricular links:
• Science (spiders)

Introduction

E.B. White's letter to his editor is full of subtle humour and gentle eccentricity. Some students may not have read *Charlotte's Web*, so make sure that all pupils read the introduction before they read the letter. Ensure that pupils are aware that, in the book, Charlotte is a spider and Wilbur is a pig, and both animals can talk. Before pupils read the letter, ask them to think of reasons why authors might write books.

Answers

1. E.g. A weakness can be used to describe something that can't be resisted. E.B. White says that animals are a weakness with him because he can't resist writing about animals or being fascinated by them.
2. E.g. When a person changes for the worse.
3. E.g. He thinks that adults teach children to dislike spiders.
4. E.g. Because it makes the spiders' webs sound beautiful and shows how skilful and hardworking spiders are.
5. c. metaphor
6. E.g. Kind and funny. He seems like a kind man because he treats the spiders in a gentle and caring way, and he sounds like he has a sense of humour because he says that "A book is a sneeze".
7. Any appropriate answer. E.g. Yes, because he says "A book is a sneeze", which tells you that he wrote the book because he felt like it was something he just had to do, rather than something he decided to do.
OR E.g. No, I don't think it explains why he wrote the book — it just explains why he likes spiders.

Extra Activities

- With the whole class, discuss what E.B. White means when he says "A book is a sneeze". How does this explanation compare with the reasons for writing that pupils suggested before reading the letter?
- As a group, discuss the techniques E.B. White uses to describe spiders, and how they affect the reader.
- Ask pupils to imagine that they are E.B. White. They should write a letter to their friend, using figurative language, to describe their favourite animal.
- Get pupils to create a spidergram of all the adjectives, verbs and adverbs they can think of that describe the way spiders look and behave. Pupils should then write a short descriptive passage about a spider, using as many of these words as possible.
- In the letter, E.B. White describes spiders as "skilful, amusing and useful". Ask pupils to research spiders' behaviour to find evidence for and against this view. They can then use the evidence they have gathered to debate positive and negative views of spiders.
- The spider E.B. White describes in his letter is from the species *Araneus cavaticus*. Get pupils to research this species and produce a poster describing its appearance, habitat and behaviour.

