

4. Interesting Words and Phrases

In every culture, words change meaning over time, and many words have multiple meanings. Below is a list of some words with the meaning used by E.B. White in Charlotte's Web listed first, then other meanings you may have learned:

Queer (pg. 3) Strange or unusual (1952)
Someone attracted to a person of the same sex (2021)

Mr. Zuckerman gave Fern a queer look.

Carriage (pg. 10) Baby buggy, versus a horse-drawn wagon (see images on the internet)

Fern gave Wilbur a ride in a carriage.

Root (pg. 17) To search about, as with a snout
Other meanings: to cheer for, the part of a plant in the soil, the embedded part of a hair or tooth

Wilbur rooted in the dirt for food to eat.

Racket (pg. 122) A loud and disturbing noise
Other meaning: a type of bat with a round or oval frame strung with nylon or other materials, used especially in tennis, badminton and squash

Chasing Wilbur raised a racket at the farm.

An Invitation to Explore Further:

1. Listed on the next few pages are some words and phrases that may be new to you. See how many new words you already know or can figure out using context clues from the story.
2. Consider building a “bank” or list of words that you want to learn. Write down their meaning as shown above. Try using the new words in your everyday conversations or in your journal writings.

How Many Words and Phrases Do You Already Know?
(We've listed the page where the word is used because reading in context can help.)

Chapter I. Before Breakfast

Shrieked pg. 1 high-pitched sound or words, expressing fear or excitement

Fern shrieked at her father when she thought Wilbur would be killed.

Control yourself pg. 2 to manage your feelings and actions

Mr. Zuckerman told Fern to control herself.

Roller towel pg. 4 a cotton towel on a closed loop

After Mr. Zuckerman washed his hands, he dried them on a roller towel.

Chapter III. Escape

Hired man pg. 18 a man hired to do odd jobs around a farm or house

Lurvy was a hired man who worked at the Zuckerman's farm.

Pail of warm slops pg. 22 a bucket of warm food for pigs

Wilbur followed Mr. Zuckerman, who was carrying a pail of warm slops.

Drive pg. 19 Force to go , *Other meaning:* operate, as with a car

Lurvy tried to drive Wilbur back to the barn.

Fuss pg. 22 Excited activity *Other meanings:* to whine, as with a baby

Wilbur didn't like being in the middle of all the fuss.

Pail of warm slops pg. 22 a bucket of warm food for pigs or other farm animals

Wilbur followed Mr. Zuckerman, who was carrying a pail of warm slops.

Wheat middlings pg. 22 a wheat by-product fed to farm animals

Wilbur's slop included wheat middlings.

8-penny nails pg. 23 nails that cost 8 cents

Mr. Zuckerman hammered the board with 8-penny nails.

Chapter IV. Loneliness

Apple parings pg. 26 pieces of apple peel

Apple parings were included in Wilbur's slop pail.

Stale hominy pg. 26 a corn dish that is no longer fresh

Mr. Zuckerman put stale hominy in Wilbur's food.

Couldn't bear it pg. 27 a strong feeling you can't handle something

Wilbur couldn't bear another rainy day.

Mean less than nothing to me pg. 28 the lowest you can go

The sheep told Wilbur that he meant less than nothing to her.

Crafty pg. 30 sly or cunning

Templeton was a crafty rat.

Sulphur and molasses pg. 31 a homemade remedy for everything

Wilbur was given sulphur and molasses when he wouldn't eat his food.

Chapter V. Charlotte

Grinding his clashers pg. 32 wearing down his teeth

"Grinding his clashers" is how Wilbur described the noise made by Templeton's teeth as Templeton gnawed the wood.

Miserable inheritance pg 39 something passed down from parent to child that is not valued.

Charlotte comes from a long line of spiders; her diet of flies is her miserable inheritance.

Chapter VI. Summer Days

Desperately cramped pg. 44 restricted or very small space.

The goslings were living in a desperately cramped space inside their egg shells and were anxious to get out.

Unremitting effort pg. 44 constant and continuous hard work.

The goose spent four weeks of unremitting effort keeping her eggs warm until they finally hatched.

Sincere congratulations pg. 44 genuine, heartfelt compliments or praises.

She offered her sincere congratulations to the goose when the goslings were born.

Crept cautiously pg. 45 to crawl, sneak or slink very carefully.

Templeton crept cautiously outside.

Chapter VII. Bad News

Plucking thoughtfully pg. 50 pulling strings with one finger (or spider leg).

Charlotte adjusted her web by plucking at it thoughtfully.

Chapter VIII. A Talk at Home

Ears aren't as sharp pg. 54 not hearing as well as someone else

Fern has specatular hearing, our ears aren't quite as sharp as hers.

Chapter IX. Wilbur's Boast

Delicate strands pg. 55 fine threads or filaments.

A spider web is made of delicate strands.



Two half hitches pg. 57 a half hitch is a type of knot tied with rope.

The scout knew how to tie two half hitches.

Cool and collected pg. 63 calm and composed.

She wasn't nervous about the plan, she knew it would work and remained cool and collected.

Chapter X. An Explosion

That's a mercy pg. 67 an expression for a received blessing.

Mrs. Zuckerman exclaimed, "That's a mercy!" when Wilbur was saved.

Dull explosion pg. 72 small or slight bang or blast.

There was a dull explosion when the egg was crushed.

Chapter XI. The Miracle

Out of the ordinary pg. 80 unusual, not typical.

Wilbur, the pig, was truly out of the ordinary!

Buggies and buckboards pg. 84 a buckboard is a four- wheeled wagon meant to be drawn by a horse or other large animal. The buckboard has no springs between the body and the axles. The suspension is provided by the flexible floorboards of the body and a leaf spring under the seat.

The farmers came to the fair riding buckboards and buggies while the city folk arrived in fancy cars.



Center of Attraction pg. 85 What everyone is paying attention to or watching.

Wilbur was the center of attraction at the fair.

Chapter XII. A Meeting

Doesn't make a particle of difference pg. 89 it doesn't matter

Fern said it doesn't make a particle of difference if she has vanilla or chocolate ice cream.

Chapter XIII. Good Progress

Ice cream freezer crank pg 97 A can rotated by a handle to make ice-cream

Fern was eager to move the crank so that she could have some ice cream.



Chapter XV. The Crickets

Stuck up vs modest/humble pg 115 a person who feels they are better than others, which is the opposite of being humble, or having a low opinion of one's importance

The goose seemed stuck up, compared to Wilbur, who had a humble opinion of himself.

Distinguish himself pg 115 make himself and others proud of him

Wilbur wished to distinguish himself as a pig.

Chapter XVI. Off to the Fair

Pummeled, buffeted, lacerated pg. 125 ways to hurt someone: pummeled means hit, buffeted means bumped about, lacerated means cut

The criminal pummeled, buffeted and lacerated his poor victim.

Chapter XIX. The Egg Sac

Acute attack of indigestion pg 148 – severe abdominal pain that comes on suddenly and without warning

After the party, one guest had an acute attack of indigestion from eating too much.

Chapter XXI. The Last Day

To a small degree pg. 163 a little bit

To a small degree, Mrs. Zuckerman was pleased with how Fern took care of Wilbur.

Generous sentiments pg 165 exaggerated feeling of tenderness, very positive attitudes and or feelings

Charlotte had generous sentiments towards Wilbur, her friend.

How touching pg. 168 literal meaning is that the statement causes a positive emotional response in the listener, but is used sarcastically in this instance

“How touching it is to see you taking care of the pig,” said the butcher.

Chapter XXII. A Warm Wind

Plowed the drifts pg. 173 running something through piles of snow as a plow would in a field

Wilbur plowed the drifts of snow with his snout.

In the lee of the manure pile pg. 174 the sheltered side of the pile, the side away from the wind

Wilbur rested in the lee of the manure pile