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# Lesson in Action

## AT A GLANCE

### Before Reading

- Review the content of the previous chapters of *Charlotte's Web*.
- Have students take a gallery walk around the classroom to examine the images of spider webs posted on the walls.
- Discuss the features of spider webs before having students draw them.
- Ask students to visualize Charlotte's web using guiding questions.

### During Reading

- Read aloud the first paragraph of chapter XI.
- Ask students to visualize the scene with closed eyes in response to prompts.
- Read the next lines, and compare the description of the web with Gareth Williams' illustration.
- Act out Lurvy's response to seeing the words in the web, with assistance from the students.

### After Reading

- Have students independently reread the first pages of the chapter and continue until the paragraph break halfway through.
- Have students pick one of the three humans—Lurvy, Mr. Zuckerman, or Mrs. Zuckerman—and visualize the moment that human first sees Charlotte's web.
- Ask students to illustrate their visualization by drawing a picture, writing a description, making an audio recording of a spoken description, or acting it out.

## Visualizing: Seeing Charlotte's Web

### Context

Mr. Sim's Grade 3 class has been reading *Charlotte's Web*, a Common Core State Standards (CCSS) exemplar text. The book's pastoral setting has presented vocabulary and comprehension challenges for his urban students, especially those who are struggling readers. Mr. Sim has posted images of farms and animals on the classroom walls to help his students identify with the book's setting. He used cotton spider webbing from a Halloween store to create a 3-D Charlotte's web at the front of the room. He feels that teaching his students visualization skills will help them better understand the story.

### Common Core State Standards

- ▶ [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.1](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/3/1) (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/3/1>)  
Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.
- ▶ [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.7](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/3/7) (<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/3/7>)  
Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).

### Lesson Objective

Students will learn to use visualization strategies to more thoroughly engage with the setting and atmosphere of a work of fiction that is set in a world different from their own environment.

### Technology

- ▶ Project Noah (<http://www.projectnoah.org>) and Google Images, for finding examples of spider webs
- ▶ Interactive whiteboard, for displaying text and images for class interpretation

### Assessment

- ▶ Note students' oral responses to questions
- ▶ Review student drawing, recordings, writings, and selected images

# Mr. Sim's Class in Action

## Before Reading

Mr. Sim's class is about to begin reading Chapter XI of *Charlotte's Web*, "The Miracle." This is where Charlotte reveals her plan to save Wilbur by writing the words "some pig" in her web. Since the last detailed descriptions of Charlotte's web appeared several chapters ago, Mr. Sim wants students to visualize the web to better understand this coming chapter.

He begins by having students take a gallery walk around the class to view close up the pictures of webs he has posted on the wall and the spider web hanging in the front of the classroom. Once the students are back in their seats, he opens the Project Noah website to show students an online gallery of images of spiders on webs on his interactive whiteboard.

He encourages conversation about the shape, size, design, and color of spider webs. He has students draw webs on paper with crayons.

To prepare for reading, he asks students to close their eyes and imagine Charlotte's web. He asks them a series of prompting questions to help them:

- ▶ How does she build her web?
- ▶ Who lives under her web?
- ▶ Where does Charlotte spend her time when she is not building her web?

## During Reading

Mr. Sim intends to encourage visualization of the core scene in Chapter XI to help students visualize how startling Charlotte's new web is. He begins by reading aloud the first paragraph of the chapter, as his students follow along in their books:

The next day was foggy. Everything on the farm was dripping wet. The grass looked like a magic carpet. The asparagus patch looked like a silver forest.

"I'm going to read this paragraph again," Mr. Sim says, "and this time I want you to listen with your eyes closed, and imagine what the scene looks like." He reads the paragraph slowly and with emphasis. When he has finished, he asks the class what the barnyard looks like.

"Wet," says one student.

"Pretty," says another.

"How do you know it's pretty? Did the author actually say that it is pretty?" asks Mr. Sim.

Bobbi raises his hand and answers, "He says it's like a magic carpet and a silver forest, so it made me think of pretty things." Mr. Sim smiles and explains that these similes are cues to aid our visualization of this pretty scene. He then moves on to read the next few lines of description:

On foggy mornings, Charlotte's web was truly a thing of beauty. This morning each thin strand was decorated with dozens of tiny beads of water. The web glistened in the light and made a pattern of loveliness and mystery, like a delicate veil.

Mr. Sim pauses and asks the class if they have ever seen anything like the web described here.

One student says, “I see one right here!” and points to a picture in the front of the book. The students turn to the inside front covers of their editions, which have Garth Williams’ illustration of Charlotte’s dew-covered web. They examine the picture and compare it with their own visualization of the web.

Mr. Sim continues reading aloud as the students follow:

Even Lurvy, who wasn’t particularly interested in beauty, noticed the web when he came with the pig’s breakfast. He noted how clearly it showed up and he noted how big and carefully built it was. And then he took another look and he saw something that made him set his pail down.

“Another way to visualize is through drama,” Mr. Sim explains. “You’re going to help me act out what Lurvy is doing here. While I get ready, please reread the paragraph again on your own.”

Mr. Sim puts on a straw hat and picks up a pail, announcing that he is now Lurvy and the classroom is the barnyard. He opens the door and re-enters the room, whistling, with his thumbs in his belt loops. He turns to the class and asks, “Now, what do I do?”

“You see the spider web!” the class says.

Mr. Sim resumes striding around the front of the room and whistling, pretending to be Lurvy. When he reaches the cotton spider web in the corner, he abruptly stops whistling. He takes off his hat and peers at the spider web with his hand shading his eyes.

“What do I do now?” he asks.

“You put down your pail,” the class says.

Mr. Sim takes a step back from the spider web and, still staring at it, slowly puts his pail down on the floor. “Golly!” he says.

Then Mr. Sim repeats the little scene, without interrupting himself this time. When he is done, he turns to the class.

“What emotion am I feeling?” he asks.

“Surprise,” says one student.

“Confusion,” says another.

“Excellent!” says Mr. Sim. “Now let’s read on and see what made Lurvy feel so surprised and confused.” He reads on:

There, in the center of the web, neatly woven in block letters, was a message. It said:

SOME PIG!

“Some pig!” Mr. Sim repeats. “What do you think this means?” The students are puzzled and don’t respond. Mr. Sim tries again and asks “How did the words get in the web?”

“Charlotte made them?” suggests one student.

“It’s her plan to save Wilbur!” says another student.

“Nice work! That seems to be the case,” says Mr. Sim. “Keep reading on your own and see what reaction these words are going to get from the humans.”

## After Reading

Mr. Sim has the students reread the first pages of the chapter independently. Some students opt to use headphones to hear the story read aloud, and others choose to read aloud with a reading buddy or to themselves. Students reread the passage read by Mr. Sim and continue on for three more pages to the paragraph break after Mrs. Zuckerman observes that they have “no ordinary spider.” As students begin reading, Mr. Sim reminds them to visualize the barnyard and imagine how each of the three humans—Lurvy, Mr. Zuckerman, and Mrs. Zuckerman—perceives the scene and responds to it.

After students finish reading the section, he asks them to pick one of the three humans. Students should try visualizing the moment of discovery for that character, and then represent it for the class. Students can convey their visualization in one or more ways as follows:

- ▶ They can draw a picture.
- ▶ They can act it out.
- ▶ They can record a description of their visualization using an audio recorder.
- ▶ They can write a description.

## Reflection

Mr. Sim is pleased with how his class engaged with this pivotal episode in *Charlotte’s Web*. He thinks the questioning behavior he modeled to encourage visualization really helped the students to understand the strangeness of Charlotte’s web. At the same time, he is concerned that his students will disengage from the barnyard setting when he isn’t constantly interrupting the narrative with questions and observations. Mr. Sim makes a note to himself for the next days of reading: less modeling, more doing. Have the students ask the questions. Have the students do the acting. Make sure students are visualizing the newly busy farm, and that they can tell that the changes in Zuckerman’s behavior are due to pride—which sets up the web word of “humble!”