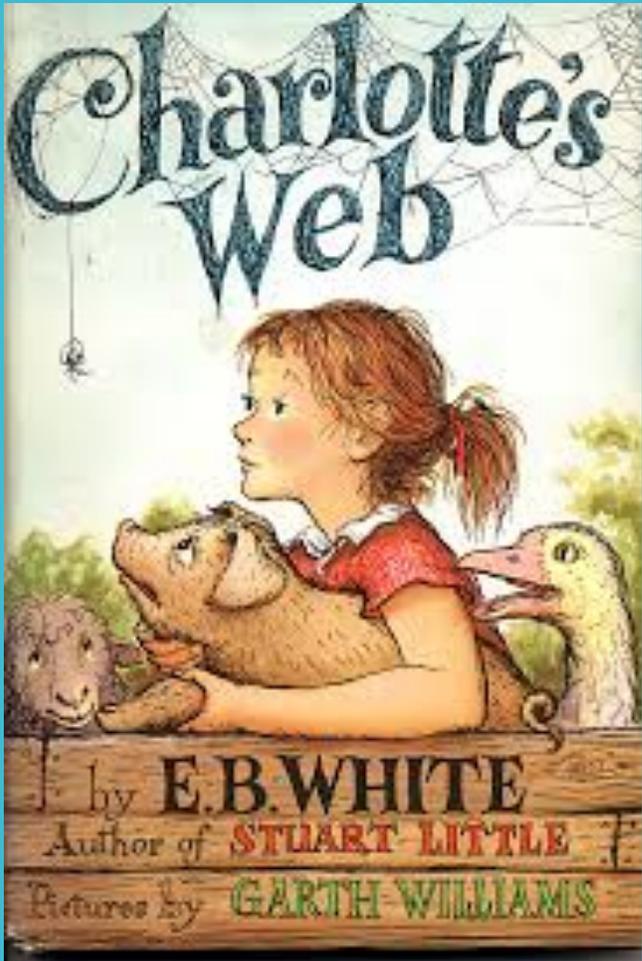


# Practicing Culturally Relevant Pedagogy through Reading

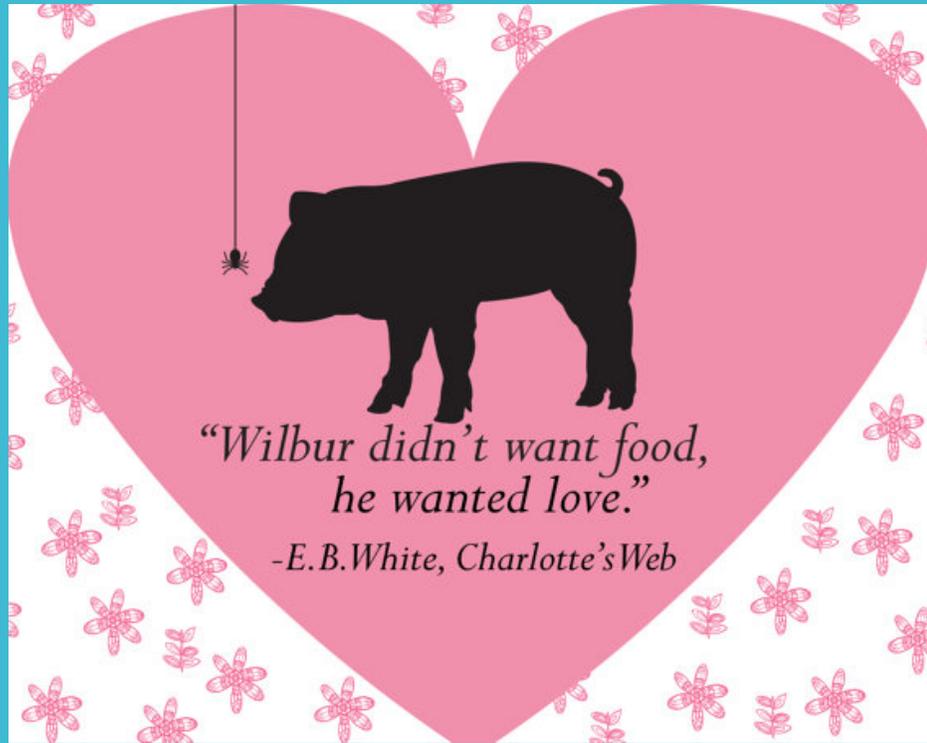
Martha St. Jean,

Secondary Inclusive Education (TSWD) Teacher's College

**Teaching  
well, *with  
books.***



"You have been my friend. That in itself is a tremendous thing. I wove my webs for you because I liked you. After all, what's a life, anyway? We're born, we live a little while, we die. A spider's life can't help being something of a mess, with all this trapping and eating flies. By helping you, perhaps I was trying to lift up my life a trifle. Heaven knows anyone's life can stand a little of that."



## #MiddleSchoolProblems

### *Culturally Relevant Themes*

- Love
- Friendship
- Language
- Mortality
- Language

## LANGUAGE

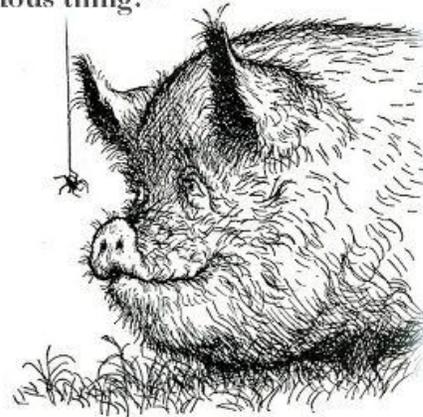


This is a stage in life many students are learning new ways of interacting. What is the language being used to self-describe or to ascribe something to another? A lesson we all can use no matter what age.

## FRIENDSHIP

“Why did you do all this for me?” he asked. “I don’t deserve it. I’ve never done anything for you.”  
“You have been my friend,” replied Charlotte. “That in itself is a tremendous thing.”

--Charlotte's Web



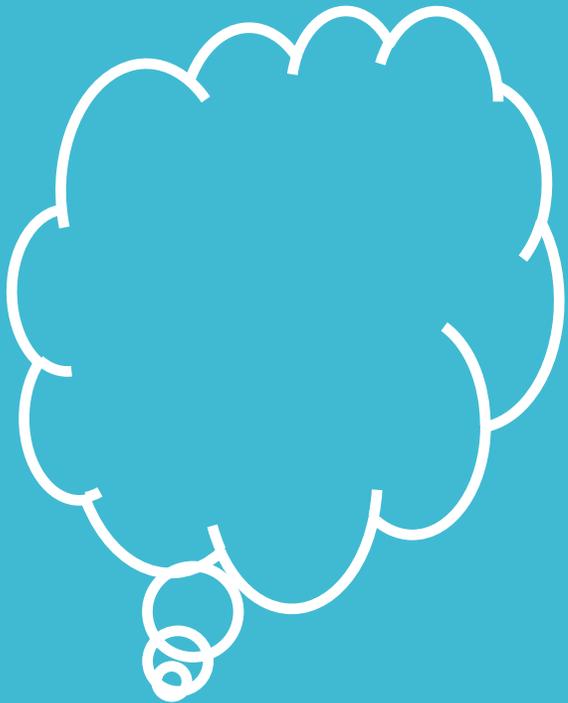
Middle School is often the first time students are choosing their own friends, without parental input. What are the qualities and actions of a good friend?

## MORTALITY



Students are often exposed to issues of life and death. It is a universal experience. The tenderness of the approach to a difficult topic allows students to discover how they react and cope.

# What do you think?



- I am recommending this book for sixth and seventh graders, and anticipate pushback. "Isn't the book, a little easy for that age group?" In regards to decoding, and comprehension, I believe that this book should be considered "below grade level". The argument has been made that "Charlotte's Web" is a second grade book, that is developmentally appropriate for fourth graders. Scholastic Books, the holy grail of childhood reading, has determined that it is a level 4 book, or simply stated for fourth graders.
- It begs to question, why am I recommending it for kids in middle school? I am recommending it first and foremost to help students feel successful as readers. While checking a book out of the classroom library, a student commented recently, "It's a chapter book." Her facial expression was aghast. She held the book with the tips of her fingers, away from her body. Her nonverbal and verbal reaction caused me concern. I asked, "Why does it matter that it is a chapter book?" She replied, "I can't read chapter books, they're too hard."
- I was stunned by the effect leveled reading was having on students. If this was an isolated occurrence, I may have let it go, but as I soon found out, this belief permeates the seventh grade class. My goal this year, in the classroom, "is to help students become more comfortable with "chapter" books. I no longer want them confined to the limits of leveled books. We preach growth mindset and practice a fixed mindset, this is apparent even of inclusive educators.
- As Marshall McLuhan stated, "The limits of my language are the limits of my world." The phasing out of text books, real libraries in school, and trips to the public library have been a detriment to students. Telling them, "Pick a book on your level," is detrimental to students. Having books labeled by level is detrimental to students. This mindset needs to be not simply remediated, but renewed. Many of my students cannot read well, 95% to be exact. What do you think about using a book, such as "Charlotte's Web", to help students feel comfortable with reading chapter books? Do you think that this book can help them feel successful as readers, or make them feel as if I as a teacher do not believe in their abilities. Do you think that I am also confining their choices?



“I wondered how she could say that. What was so great about me? A dyslexic, hyperactive boy with a D+ report card, kicked out of school for the sixth time in six years.”



“ It's hard to enjoy practical jokes when your whole life feels like one. ”

#MiddleSchoolProblems

*Culturally Relevant Themes*

- Family
- Identity
- Friendship
- Language
- Courage/Perseverance

## FAMILY



What family does not have its set of unique problems? Middle schoolers may think that no one can relate to their particular family dynamics. Percy Jackson blows the myth of the “perfect” family out of the water, while demonstrating all families have their secrets.

## IDENTITY



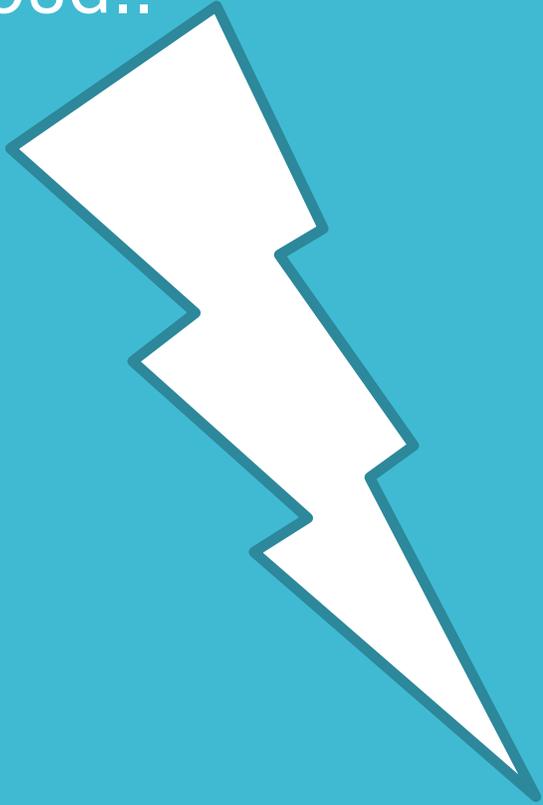
Middle school is a time of self-discovery. Who am I, is a question often asked. How do I fit in? Why am I so different? Percy Jackson celebrates diversity as a C-student who has dyslexia and ADHD. He lets students know that “average” is a way of thinking, not being.

## PERSEVERENCE



During this emotionally and developmentally taxing period students are also developing their learning mindsets? A key behavior that teachers can help encourage is perseverance in the face of challenges. These books discuss middle school challenges in an easy to understand manner.

Lightning strike:  
thinking out  
loud..



- "The Lightning Thief" tells the story of Greek gods and a half-human boy, whose life is complicated by issues acceptance, rejection, family, and identity. The myth presented in this book are far from those of Homer's Iliad and The Odyssey. This is the challenge of the Percy Jackson books. They may never challenge readers to journey into Homer's Iliad or read more complicated classics. Is not education about helping students foster an inquiry stance? Reading is not always pleasurable. There are times when reading is purely informational, and about increasing one's knowledge base. "The Lightning Thief" may or may not push students towards becoming better readers, but it is fun. Should books such as these, be included merely as a tool in classroom library, or incorporated into the curriculum to help struggling readers?