



CHARLOTTE'S WEB

BY E.B WHITE

ADAPTED BY JOSEPH ROBINETTE

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EDUCATOR RESOURCES

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PLAY SYNOPSIS

Charlotte's Web follows a young pig, Wilbur, who is rescued from death at the hands of the farmer, Mr. Arable, and cared for by his eight year old daughter, Fern. When he is ready to be sold, Wilbur is sent to the Zuckerman family who live down the road. In their barn he quickly makes new friends and finds a new best friend in Charlotte, the spider.

His days are often spent visiting with Fern and his new animal friends until one day, Wilbur learns from the sheep that Mr. Zuckerman is fattening him up to eat him for Christmas dinner.

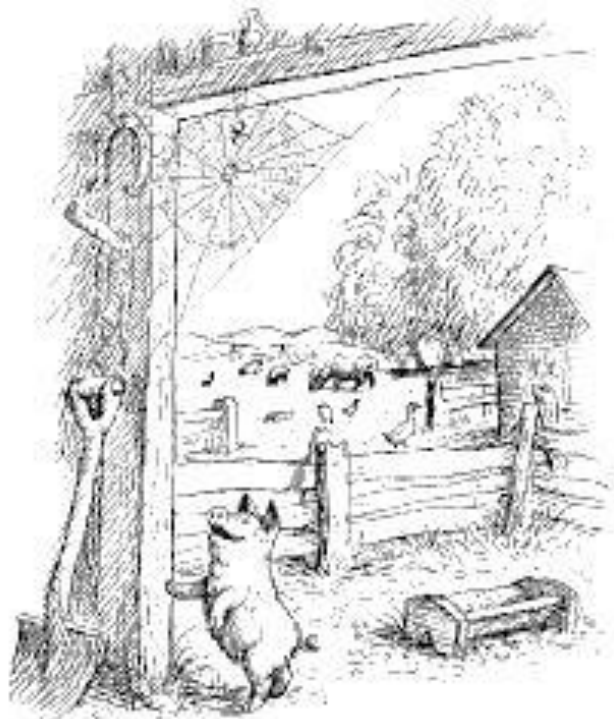
Charlotte consoles the naïve swine and promises Wilbur that she won't let him be killed, devising a plan to save him. All through the night, Charlotte delicately spins the words 'SOME PIG' into her web, asserting that indeed Wilbur is a valued member of the animal farm life.

Soon the news of the web spreads and Wilbur's popularity increases, amazing everyone including Mr. Zuckerman. With Templeton the rat's help, Charlotte finds more words to weave into her web, exclaiming that Wilbur is 'TERRIFIC' and 'RADIANT'. These newest works of art prompt Zuckerman's decision to take Wilbur to the County Fair. Charlotte obliges to join Wilbur on the trip, even though she must reserve her strength to create her most precious masterpiece yet; her egg sac.

At the fair, Charlotte sees Wilbur's competition is much larger, provoking her to display one of Wilbur's most genuine characteristics; 'HUMBLE' in her web. The following day our hero receives a bronze medal 'far outshining any blue ribbon' for being the star attraction of the fair, all thanks to the dedication of Charlotte who is overjoyed that Mr. Zuckerman will never hurt her friend.

Upon returning to his pen, Wilbur notices that Charlotte looks unwell and she confides in the pig that she will not be able to make the journey home. The spider has spent her last loving hours creating her offspring's woven home, in the hopes that Wilbur will take it with him back to the Zuckerman's farm.

After a tearful goodbye, Wilbur tenderly takes her egg sac home where Charlotte's children are born. Wilbur's bond with the spider's children is a special one, but none will ever compare to Charlotte, as "it's not often someone comes along who is a true friend and a great writer. Charlotte was both."



CHARACTERS

Charlotte's Web hosts a flurry of fur, feathers and human characters. The performers, costume designer and the director work together to create these individuals and to make each one of them distinct. Here are a few of the main characters you will see on stage.

Wilbur

Sensitive and vulnerable, Wilbur is born a runt and saved from an untimely death by Fern who subsequently looks after him until he is five weeks old. He is pampered and babied by her and is completely content when he is surrounded by Fern's love. When he becomes too large to be taken care of at the Arable farm he is brought to Fern's uncle Zuckerman's farm. There he finds himself extremely lonely until he finds love and friendship when he meets Charlotte. Wilbur is keen to learn from Charlotte's knowledge and wisdom and the first time they speak to each other Charlotte teaches him a new word. "Salutations!" she says and, when Wilbur asks what that means, she goes on to tell him: "Salutations are greetings." He is very polite and considerate. Wilbur experiences a whole range of emotions on his journey through the story and his life is saved twice by two devoted friends. He is forever grateful to Charlotte's kindness in particular and does the only thing he can think of to repay her – he looks after her egg sac.



Charlotte

Charlotte is cool and collected. She is practical, beautiful, skilled and unsentimental. She is clever and loyal to her friends - she is the first to comfort Wilbur by assuring him she will save him when he finds out that he is to be killed at Christmas. She is an artist and through her creativity manages to manipulate the events that take place. Her love for Wilbur pushes her to save his life and she manages to produce a miracle – she singlehandedly manages to make the humans see in Wilbur what she sees: a 'terrific' and 'radiant' 'humble' pig. Throughout the tale she mothers Wilbur and looks after him as if he were her own. She works tirelessly to save him and even though she is dying at the end of the novel, she motivates herself to write the word that will secure his safety.

Templeton

Templeton is the rat that lives under Wilbur's trough. Templeton describes himself as 'a glutton but not a merry-maker'. Crafty and selfish, he collects and stores bizarre odds and ends and is happy to dig a tunnel to Wilbur's trough and eat his food but never offers to give anything in return. He is completely selfish and cares not a bit for Wilbur's well-being - sadly for him, he has no idea about friendship. He is persuaded to find words only with the promise of food - he is reminded by the barn animals that if Wilbur dies, there will be no slops for him to steal. Similarly at the fair, he is persuaded to retrieve Charlotte's egg sac on the promise that he will be given first choice of the

slops forever after. Nevertheless, Templeton plays a crucial role in the story by finding the words and retrieving the egg sac. Although he does so reluctantly, he has a large impact on what happens to Wilbur in the end.

Lurvy

Lurvy is the Zuckerman's hired man who works very hard and is completely hands on. He feeds Wilbur and helps to catch him when he escapes. Lurvy is the first person to see the words in Charlotte's web and when Wilbur becomes famous, he obediently shifts his focus from the usual garden chores to looking after Wilbur.

Fern

Fern is completely loving and, at the beginning of the novel, totally innocent. She is a moralist who saves Wilbur's life by arguing with her father that a small piglet has just as much right to live a large piglet. She subsequently looks after him as a mother would and when he is sent to live with her uncle, she still visits him. She has a big heart and a motherly nature. Fern is enchanted by life at the Zuckerman's barn and enjoys listening to Charlotte's stories and spending time with the animals there.

Avery

Avery is Fern's elder brother: he is boisterous and aggressive. His mother describes him as a typical out of doors boy - adventurous and carefree. Avery is destructive and wants to dominate nature and has nothing like the sensitivity his sister has for nature and animals. When he first sees Charlotte he is so impressed by her size that he tries to knock her out of her web and into his box but he slips and falls, breaking the dud egg. He is also a bit of a performer and continuously tries capture the attention of those around him.

Mr Homer Zuckerman

Mr Zuckerman is Avery and Fern's uncle and the owner of a large farm down the road from the Arable's. When Mr Zuckerman sees the writing in the web, he is shocked and immediately believes what he reads (that he has got 'some pig' living on his barn), despite his wife's more sensible suggestion that it is actually the spider that is extraordinary. Mr Zuckerman benefits hugely from Wilbur's fame and does everything he can to capitalize on it. He is much more attentive to Wilbur as a result and enters him into a competition at the County Fair.

Mr Arable

Fern's father. Mr Arable's decision to go out and slaughter the runt is what starts the process in motion for the whole story. His disregard for the piglet is what brings Fern to stand up for it and to fight for its life. He does let Fern keep the piglet and is touched by her protestations but is firm when he decides to sell Wilbur at five weeks old. Moreover, he is a practical man who has lost any sentimental feelings for the animals he keeps.

SETTING

The story of Charlotte's Web takes place in 2 locations. We first meet Wilber, Fern and their barnyard pals at the Zuckerman farm, the farm of Ferns Uncle Homer and Aunt Edith. For this production we have placed the Arable and Zuckerman families in Alberta, near the city of Calgary.

The second act of the play the Arable family brings Wilber to the county fair to participate in the livestock competition. The county fair we have created for our production is inspired by the Calgary Stampede. You may see sight and sounds similar to our city's beloved summer tradition.



ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Charlotte's Web at Alberta Theatre Projects



E.B. WHITE, AUTHOR OF THE NOVEL CHARLOTTE'S WEB

Elwyn Brooks White, the author of the beloved children's classics *Charlotte's Web*, *Stuart Little*, and *The Trumpet of the Swan*, was born in Mount Vernon, New York on July 11, 1899.

He graduated from Cornell University in 1921 and worked for United Press International and the American Legion News Service in 1921 and 1922. E.B. White was a reporter for the *Seattle Times* in 1922 and 1923. For the next two years, he worked at the Frank Seaman advertising agency as a production assistant and copywriter.

In 1925, E.B. White became a contributing editor of *The New Yorker* magazine in 1927, an association which continued until his death in 1985. E.B. White authored more than seventeen books of prose and poetry and was elected to the American Academy of Arts

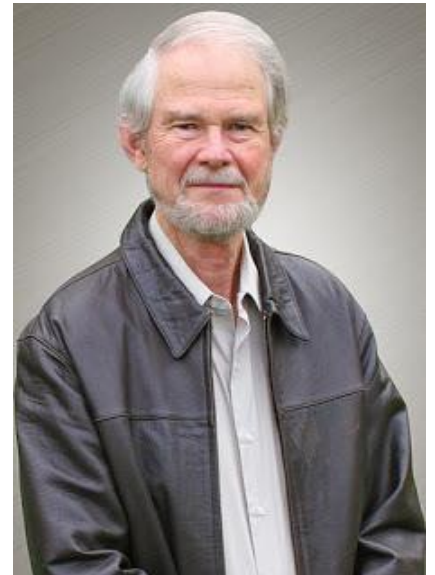
and Letters in 1973. In addition to writing children's books, E. B. White also wrote books for adults, as well as poems and essays, and he drew sketches for *The New Yorker* magazine. Some of his other books include *One Man's Meat*, *The Second Tree from the Corner*, and *Here is New York*. He revised and edited William S. Strunk's *The Elements of Style*, which is widely used in college English courses.

Funnily enough for such a famous writer, he always said that he found writing difficult and bad for one's disposition but he kept at it. Mr. White won countless awards, including the 1971 National Medal for Literature and the Laura Ingalls Wilder Medal, which commended him for making "a substantial and lasting contribution to literature for children." He died on October 1, 1985.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT – JOSEPH ROBINETTE

Joseph Robinette is a Tony Award nominee who has authored or co-authored of 55 published plays and musicals. His works have been produced at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre and Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York, Pittsburgh Playhouse, The 5th Avenue Theatre in Seattle, the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, Kansas City Repertory Theatre, the BBC and in all 50 states and in 17 foreign countries. Twelve of his works have been translated into foreign languages, and another five have been anthologized. Robinette collaborated with E.B. White on the authorized stage version of *Charlotte's Web*, and he wrote the musical version with Charles Strouse (*Annie*, and *Bye, Bye, Birdie*). Other dramatizations include *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *Anne of Green Gables* and *Stuart Little*. He is the recipient of the American Alliance for Theatre & Education's Charlotte B. Chorpenning Cup, the

2004 Distinguished Play Award for *Sarah, Plain and Tall* and the Children's Theatre Foundation of America medallion for his "body of dramatic works for family audiences in the United States and beyond.



DESIGN

Costume Design – Jennifer Lee Arsenault

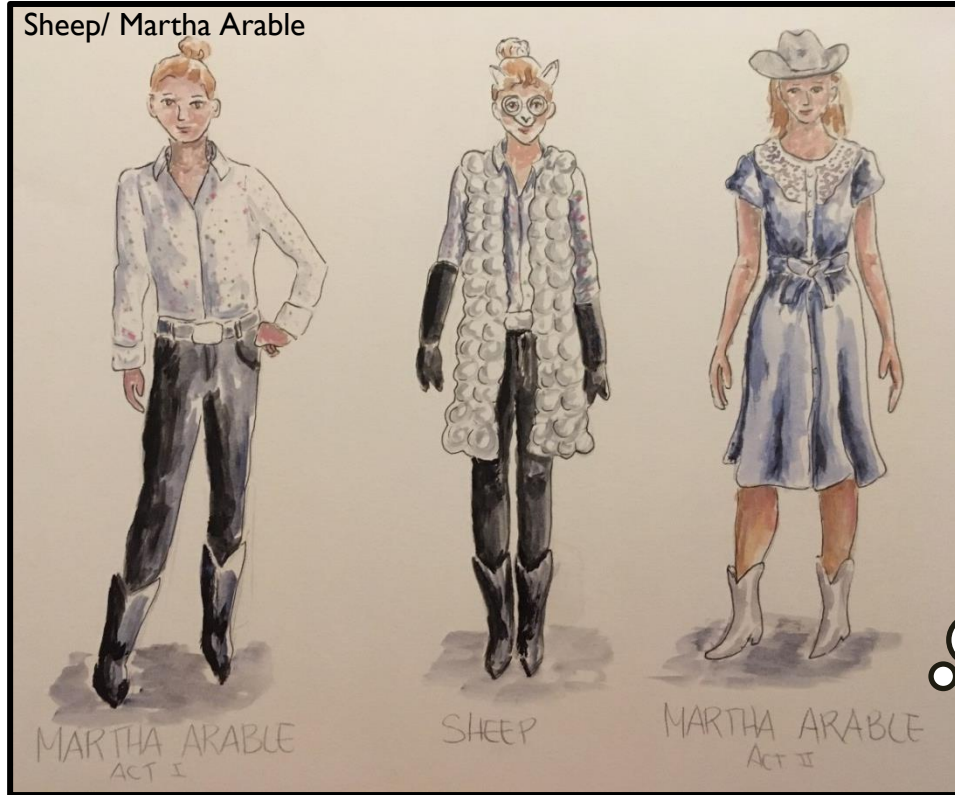
Here are a few of the amazing costumes from Charlotte's Web designed by Jennifer Lee Arsenault. These costumes are contemporary and reflect the fashions of modern day Calgary. Below you can see some examples of Jennifer's designs.



Wilbur

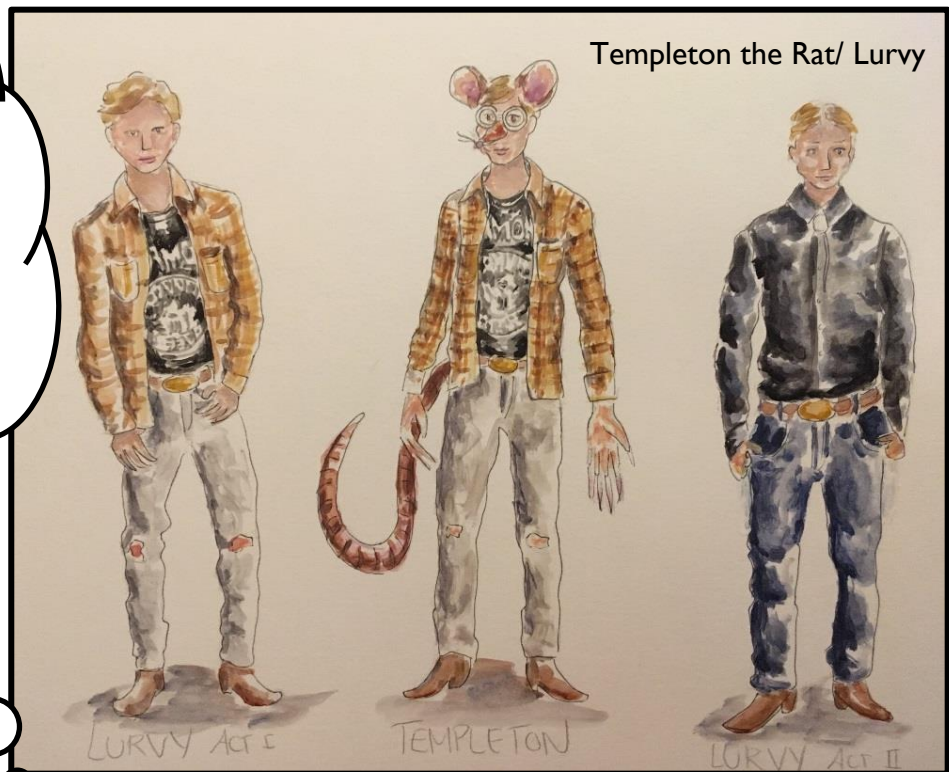
Charlotte (You might be wondering why she doesn't have eight legs. That is because the actress who plays Charlotte will be performing on the aerial silks as her web, so she needs to be flexible and able to move.)





The costume designer was faced with a difficult challenge with this production. Most of the actors play both humans and animals and the

Jennifer has come up with some unique techniques to transform the human characters quickly and effectively from humans to animal to human and back. As seen in the examples here



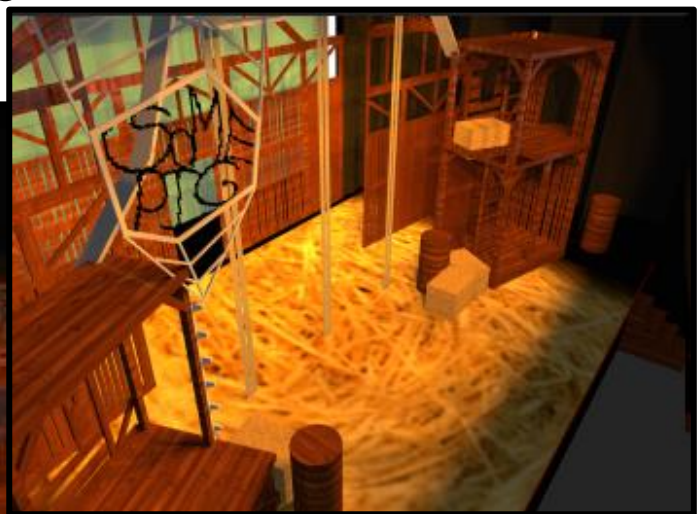
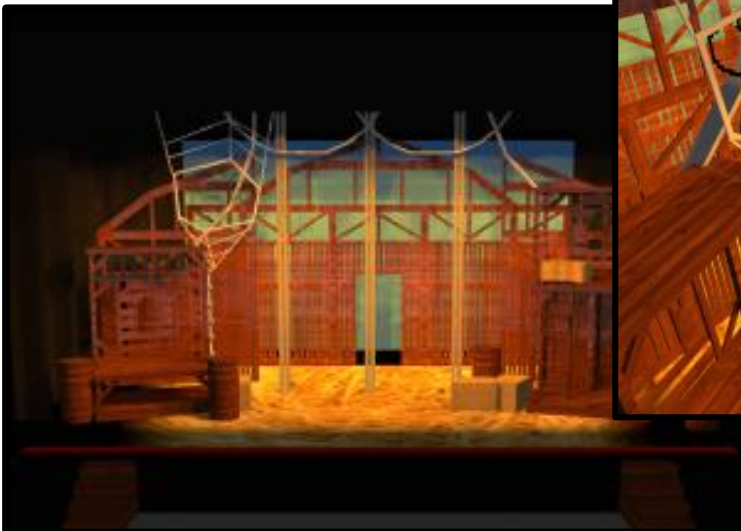
Set Design – Anton De Groot

This production of Charlotte's Web has been set in the present day, on a farm that we imagine is just outside of Calgary. The story will take place in the Zuckerman barn, and the Country fair.

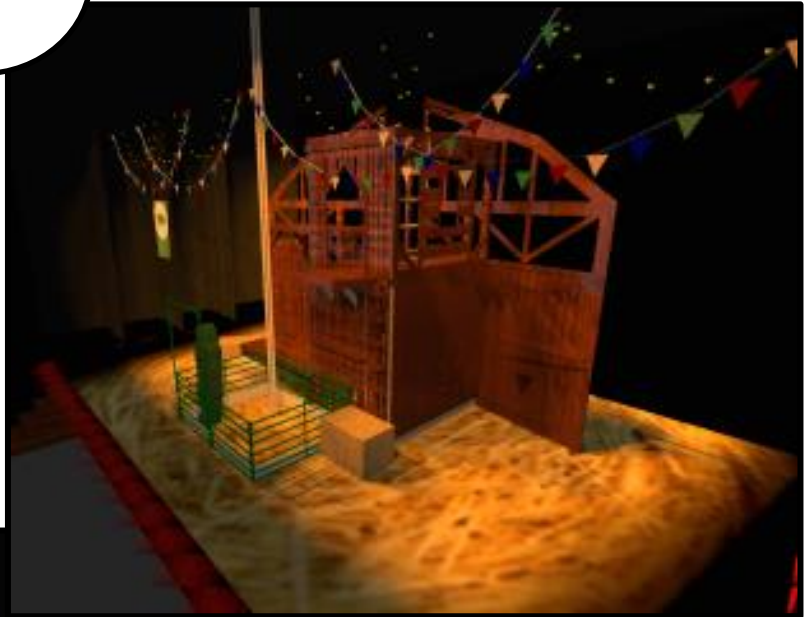
Our production of Charlotte's Web features an aerial acrobat in the role of Charlotte. Leda Davis will be performing the aerial web spinning choreography on aerial silks. Anton has designed a creative way to incorporate the aerial silks into the design of the set, by using the silks to look like the strand of silk from Charlotte's Web. During the first act of the play there will be 3 silks that Charlotte will be able to use. As she spins each web for Wilbur she will weave the silks into the web that will come down on stage right.



Seen here are the 3D digital renderings of the set design created by designer Anton De Groot. You can see the various locations of the silks, as well as the upper platforms that Charlotte will be able to rest on in between her movement sequences.



During the second act of the play the right and left platforms will move together to create the coral at the County Fair. Charlotte spins her final web in this location so there will be a single silk hanging during this act.



You may recognize signs lights and hear sounds similar to what we see at the Calgary Stampede!

THEMES AND TOPICS

Themes
The Natural World Charlotte as Author Words and Language Life, Death and Time Passing Friendship The Individual
Post Show Discussion Topics
<u>DISCUSSION QUESTIONS</u> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What is the significance of the words that appear in Charlotte's web? Think about the impact of the words that appear in Charlotte's web – what do they mean to the different characters and what does this tell us about the different characters?2. Specifically discuss Charlotte as author and what her legacy is to us and to the characters in the story.3. What is the part played by nature in Charlotte's Web? How far does nature control the events that take place? Consider the writing in the web; is it a natural or miraculous occurrence?4. Compare and contrast the main characters in the play; Templeton and Avery, Fern and Charlotte, Wilbur and Mr. Zuckerman. Talk about the roles played by each and find specific examples.5. Why do you think the journey to the Fair is such a turning point in the story?6. Wilbur has two great friends in the play: Fern and Charlotte. Discuss how his relationship with each develops throughout the course of the play. How are the friendships similar and how are they different? Why do you think Wilbur has such good friends? Think about those characters that do not have friends and assess why. What difference does friendship make to the play as whole?

ADDITIONAL READING

This production of *Charlotte's Web* features an Aerial silks performer as Charlotte. This involves a lot physical strength and complex choreography. Below is some further information about this unique art form.

What is Aerial Silks?

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Aerial silks is a type of performance in which one or more artists perform aerial acrobatics while hanging from a fabric. The fabric may be hung as two pieces, or a single piece, folded to make a loop, classified as hammock silks. Performers climb the suspended fabric without the use of safety lines, and rely only on their training and skill to ensure safety. They use the fabric to wrap, suspend, fall, swing, and spiral their bodies into and out of various positions. Aerial silks may be used to fly through the air, striking poses and figures while flying. In order to increase the friction and grip on the fabric some performers use dried or spray rosin or chalk on their hands and feet.

Tricks

The three main categories of tricks are climbs, wraps and drops. Climbs employed by aerialists range from purely practical and efficient, such as the Russian climb, to athletic and elegant tricks of their own, such as the straddle climb. Wraps are static poses where aerialists wrap the silks around one or more parts of their body. In general, the more complicated the wrap, the stronger the force of friction and the less effort required to hold oneself up. Some wraps, such as the straddle-back-balance, actually allow performers to completely release their hands. Foot locks are a sub-category of wraps where the silks are wrapped around one or both feet, for instance an ankle hang. In a drop, performers wrap themselves up high on the silks before falling to a lower position. Drops can combine aspects of free fall, rolling or otherwise rotating oneself before landing in a new pose.



Preparation for a drop can make for a pretty wrap, but the ultimate goal is the fall rather than the pose. Of the three trick types, drops require the most strength, and are also the most potentially dangerous. Rosin (dry or mixed with rubbing alcohol) is employed to help performers maintain their grip. Aerial silks are a demanding art and require a high degree of strength, power, flexibility, courage, stamina and grace to practice.



Fabrics

The fabrics used as silks are very strong with some give and flexibility. The fabric is 2-way stretch polyester lycra or Tricot Nylon. The width varies depending on the routine and the acrobat. The fabric is usually quite long, as it is doubled for rigging, giving the acrobat two strips of fabric to work with as they perform.

Stretch

- **Low stretch fabrics.** Low stretch fabrics are primarily used by beginners who have not yet developed proper climbing technique.
- **Medium stretch fabrics.** Medium stretch fabrics are the principal choice of professional aerialists and graduates of professional training programs.
- **Width.** Fabric width is mostly a personal choice. The thickness of the fabric when gathered is also influenced by the "[denier](#)", or technical thickness of the fabrics weave. 40 denier is a common choice. The following applies to 40 denier nylon fabric:
 - 60" - Narrow when open, thin when gathered. Fairly common simply because the fabric is widely available.
 - 72-84" - Average for adult performers
 - 96" - Wide when open, thick when gathered. Best for adults with large hands.
 - 108" - Very wide and thick. For adults with very large hands, or specialty acts.
- **Length**
 - Length is a function of the height of the space available.
 - For beginners, it is beneficial if the fabric comes down past the ground, allowing them to practice wraps at a lower level where they can be spotted.
 - For intermediate users and above, it is sufficient if the fabrics come down to the ground.
 - For all users, the space required is usually between 20 feet (6 m) and 30 feet (9 m). There are a great many tricks that can be done on a 12-to-15-foot (3.7 to 4.6 m) aerial fabric and a few drops require more than 30 feet, but for the most part 20 to 30 feet (6 to 9 m) is best.

Rigging

Aerial rigging applies to the hanging of aerial silks and hammocks.
Aerial silk rigging equipment commonly includes:

- a figure-eight descender, rescue eight, ring, or other piece of hardware for holding the silk
- a ball-bearing swivel to keep the silk from twisting and to allow for spinning, which is sometimes not used but makes spinning more manageable
- carabiners for connecting the silk hardware to the swivel, and for connecting the swivel to a mounting point



Exploring the history behind aerial silks

by Vertical Wise

www.verticalwise.com/en/exploring-the-history-behind-aerial-silks/



Aerial Silks constitute the new category of Aerial Acrobatics. Their origins are found around 1959, in a French circus school where some trainees were asked to make a difference by presenting an acrobatic act. One student presented her act by using a long piece of fabric.

Unfortunately, little is known about this performance except for one small account in a local newspaper. Nonetheless, from 1959 until 1998 (when Aerial Silks was officially recognized) a lot of artists had been experimenting with aerial silk in their performances. Interesting enough, during this period, the fabric which was coming out of the knot which supported it gave way to the second piece of fabric. In this way, Aerial Silks became what it is today.

Despite older experiments, the art of Aerial Silks became widely known by Isabelle Vaudelle and Isabelle Chasse. It was in 1998 when the two artists presented their Aerial Silks moves during a performance called Quidam, as part of Cirque du Soleil show. It is worth mentioning that Isabelle Vaudelle also took part in Mondial du Cirque de Demain in 1995 and presented an absolutely impressive act.

In the mid-90s, a team of British and French acrobats, who were influenced by Isabelle Vaudelle and her tutor, Gerard Fasoli, got interested in the art of this spectacular attraction. Soon after, aerial silk quickly caught on in the rest of the world.

In 2002, Acrobat Productions organized the choreographies of BBC TV Aerial Silks Ident, which had been a popular television show for over 5 years.

There is, however, an opposing argument regarding the founder of Aerial Silk. It is supported that the founder is Andre Simard who had specialized in the research and development of acrobatic moves of Cirque du Soleil since 1987. It was at that time when he was in charge of inventing new, innovative ways of showing acrobatic moves in order to impress the spectators. He transformed the acrobats from athletes to real performers by persuading them not only to use facial expressions but focus on body movements so as to express their inner feelings to the spectator in a unique and impressive way.

Soon, Simard's techniques became widely known and they were used in every acrobatic performance worldwide.

Nowadays, exercising with aerial silks has a lot of fans and it is becoming more and more popular. Aerial silks constitute a unique way of expression as well as a means of testing our limits. It combines creativity, exercising, flexibility and music in a unique way.