

War Horse



By

Michael Morpurgo

A Novel Study
by Nat Reed

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About the author: Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, please visit the websites www.reedpublications.org and www.novelstudies.org.

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Suggestions and Expectations

This curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. Each chapter of the novel study focuses two or three chapters of **War Horse** and is comprised of five of the following different activities:

1. Before You Read
2. Vocabulary Building
3. Comprehension Questions
4. Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (page 7) as well as a **checklist** (page 6) are included so that students may track their completed work.

Every activity need not be completed by the students.

Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to the following:

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases. . . including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters . . . respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story . . . and many others.

Themes which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include **loyalty, courage, perseverance** when facing challenges, **World War I, farm life, and horses**.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *foreshadowing*.
7. Identify *personification*.
8. Use of singular/plural nouns
9. Listing compound words
10. Identifying parts of speech
11. Determining alphabetical order
12. Identification of root words
13. Identify/create *similes*

Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Identify the climax of the novel.

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Comparing two characters
3. Relating personal experiences

Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Write a letter to a friend
4. Complete an Observation Sheet
5. Conduct an interview
6. Write about personal feelings
7. Write a book review
8. Create a poem

Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Design a cover for the novel

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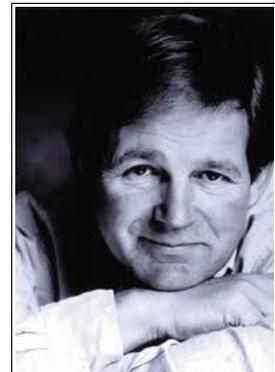
Synopsis

In 1914, Joey, a beautiful bay-red foal with a distinctive cross on his nose, is sold to the army and thrust into the midst of the war on the Western Front. With his officer, he charges toward the enemy, witnessing the horror of the battles in France. But even in the desolation of the trenches, Joey's courage touches the soldiers around him and he is able to find warmth and hope. But his heart aches for Albert, the farmer's son he left behind. Will he ever see his true master again?

Author Biography

Michael Morpurgo

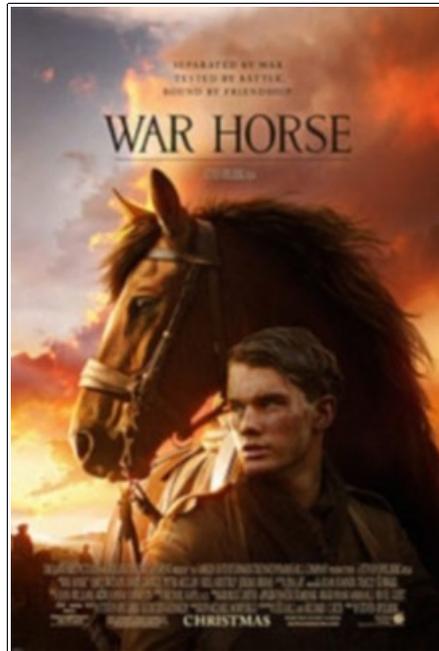
Michael Morpurgo is, in his own words, “oldish, married with three children, and a grandfather six times over.” Born in 1943, he attended schools in London, Sussex and Canterbury England (one at least of which was horrible enough to inspire him to describe it obliquely in *The Butterfly Lion*). He went on to London University to study English and French, followed by a step into the teaching profession and a job in a primary school in Kent. It was there that he discovered what he wanted to do.



“We had to read the children a story every day and my lot were bored by the book I was reading. I decided I had to do something and told them the kind of story I used to tell my kids – it was like a soap opera, and they focused on it. I could see there was magic in it for them, and realized there was magic in it for me.”

In 1976 Michael and his wife, Clare, started the charity *Farms For City Children*, which aims to relieve the poverty of experience of young children from inner city and urban areas by providing them with a week in which they work actively and purposefully on farms in the heart of the countryside. [From Mr. Morpurgo’s website: <http://www.michaelmorpurgo.com>]

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Name:

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Chapters 1 - 2



Before you read the chapter:

The protagonist in most novel features the main character or “good guy”. The protagonist of *War Horse* is quite different than most novels – a horse, Joey. Why might this be an especially difficult challenge for a novelist?



Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

stamina	dispose	venture	deliberate	consolation
conviction	instinctive	intricate	resolution	dismissive

1. How will you _____ of all those dead batteries?
2. Miss March was surprised at how _____ the rules of the game were.
3. It is critical for a workhorse to develop enough _____ to work all day.
4. The bronze medal was some _____ for the disappointed gymnast.
5. After it had rained all day, the children decided they would _____ outside.
6. The tone of her voice told us that she lacked _____ in what she said.
7. The colonel was most _____ of the corporal’s foolish suggestion.
8. “Connie made a _____ attempt to injure me,” Felicia stated angrily.
9. The organization passed a _____ banning firearms at all meetings.
10. Joey had an _____ sense of compassion when it came to horses.

Questions



1. The first paragraph of Chapter One is certainly an attention-grabber, isn't it? What phrase in this paragraph first lets the reader know that the narrator is probably not a person?

2. Describe the **setting** of the story for most of Chapter One.

3. What specific event separated the colt from its mother?

4. In Chapter One Joey and the readers are introduced to three new characters, Albert, his father and his mother. For each of these characters write a brief description of his/her personality from what we know of them so far.

Albert	
Albert's Father	
Albert's Mother	

5. It is evident that Albert is very pleased that his father purchased Joey. At one point in Chapter One he tells his mother that it was “the best thing he ever did.” Reread Albert’s mother’s response to this statement. What does the lack of conviction in her answer reveal about her true feelings regarding her husband?

6. **Investigate: The Torridge River in County Devon** (mentioned in Chapter Two) was the setting of an award-winning animal story written by Henry Williamson. Using resources in your school library or on the Internet, find out the name of this famous novel. (Check out some interesting Youtube clips from the movie.)

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7. What challenge did Albert's dad present to Albert in Chapter Two, and what would be the consequence of Albert failing to achieve what his father asked?

8. What two excuses did Albert's mother suggest as the cause of her husband's alcoholism?

1	
2	

9. **Foreshadowing** is a literary device defined as *a hint or clue provided by the writer to tip the reader as to what is to come later in the story*. How might the conclusion of Chapter Two be considered an example of this? What do you think is going to happen in Chapter Three?



Language Activities

A. Life Stages and Horse Terms

Investigate, then draw a line to match each term with the definition on the left.

A	Stallion
B	Filly
C	Foal
D	Mare
E	Colt
F	Yearling

Female horse 4 years or older
Male horse under the age of 4
Male horse 4 years old or older
A horse of either sex between 1 and 2 years old
A horse of either sex less than a year old
Female horse under the age of 4

B. The author seems to enjoy using **alliteration** – a literary device where the author repeats the same sound at the beginning of several words. An example from Chapter Two is “We’ll teach them a thing or two.”

Using your imagination, create your own examples of **alliteration** from the following topics. Each example must contain a minimum of three words.

The sound of an angry hive of bees	
A baby crying	
From your imagination	

C. Copy out any three sentences from these chapters and underline the **nouns**.

Extension Activity

Storyboard

A storyboard is a series of pictures that tell about an important event in a story. A storyboard can tell the story of only one scene – or the entire novel.

Complete the storyboard below illustrating the events described in the first two chapters of *War Horse*. You may wish to practice your drawings on a separate piece of paper.

1	2
3	4
5	6