



WAR HORSE KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

Context – *War Horse* was written by Michael Morpurgo and was first published in 1982.

Michael Morpurgo – Michael Morpurgo is an author, poet and playwright who is predominantly known for his children's novels such as *War Horse* (1982) and *Private Peaceful* (2003). His skill in 'magical story-telling' and vivid description has often been commended, most notably his depictions of World War I conditions and the Cornish coastline. Morpurgo served as the Children's Laureate, from 2003-2005. Morpurgo revealed to *The Guardian* in 2014 that his fireside conversations with World War I veterans in Devon influenced *War Horse*.



World War I – World War I, also known as the 'Great War', was a global war originating in Europe that took place from July 1914 to November 1918. It involved all of the world's major powers, opposing the Allies (including Russia, France, UK, and USA) against the Alliance (Germany, Austro-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire) Over 9 millions armed forces and 7 million civilians were killed in the war. Many more returned injured. The winter of 1916-17 was so cold that many lost fingers & toes to frostbite - trenches offered no protection.



Trench Warfare – The use of trench warfare significantly influenced the high death toll. Both sides dug deep defensive lines in the soil called trenches. Attacks involved going across No Man's Land (in the middle) where attackers were open to machine gun fire, mines, and shells. Even if successful, casualties were huge – No Man's Land was littered with bodies. Life in the trenches were awful, with disease and exposure rife. Men would often spend weeks at a time on the front line, where they would need to sleep, eat, and defecate close to the trenches.



Horses in World War I – Horses were of huge military value in World War I by 1917, Britain alone had over a million horses in active service. They were utilised for a number of purposes, including as cavalry, logistical support, increasing morale, pulling artillery, and aiding the transportation of the injured. They were so important that by 1917, many troops were told that the loss of a horse was of greater tactical concern than the loss of a soldier. Hundreds of thousands of horses were killed in the war, with many more injured.



Main Characters – Consider what Morpurgo intended through his characterisation of each of the below...

Joey – Joey is the anthropomorphic narrator of *War Horse*. Joey is a beautiful red bay with a white star on his head and four equal-length white socks. He is purchased when still young by a farmer, and forms an incredibly close bond, with the farmer's son, Albert. Joey is a quick learner, and is courageous, resilient, and loyal. He never stops believing in a reunion with Albert, and is overjoyed when it happens.

Quote: "His whistle imitated the stuttering of an owl- it was a call I never refused, and would never forget."

Albert Narracott – Albert is the gentle young son of a farmer, who bonds extremely deeply with Joey. He is very hard-working, and puts a great deal of hours into training Joey. He is often seen to put the needs of Joey above his own. When Joey is sold, he is still too young to join the army, but is determined to do so when he old enough, so that he can bring Joey home safely. He returns to his village a hero.

Quote: "Joey is my horse. He's my horse and he always will be, no matter who buys him."

Mother – Albert's mother is a kind and quietly strong soul, who forms the core of her family. She is restricted by the social norms of the time, which restrict her from overriding her husband. She is very loving, caring, and protective of Albert.

Quote: "Don't speak like that about your father, Albert. He's been through a lot."

Father – Father is a bully of a man, who shows little empathy, respect, or compassion towards anyone else. He is very competitive, and this is what initially leads him towards buying Joey. He softens slightly after selling Joey to the army.

Quote: "Forty pounds, you'll pay me, Captain Nicholls, like you promised yesterday?"

Tophorn – Tophorn is a beautiful and grand black horse, who rides alongside Joey in the army. His bravery is shown in his efforts at the front of the cavalry – he almost dies at one point due to illness, but shows the resilience and the tenacity to fight his way back. He becomes Joey's best friend in the war, but tragically does not make it back home.

Quote: "If it is possible to be happy in the middle of a nightmare, then Tophorn and I were happy that summer."

Captain Nicholls – Captain Nicholls purchases Joey from Albert's father. He is the strong leader of a mounted regiment, who loves and protects Joey – he makes sure that he receives extra rations and the best treatment. Although he is strong and courageous, he confides in Joey about the futility of war and his fear of battles to come. He dies a hero.

Quote: "He rode me...with a gentle hand and a firm grip of the knees...there was always some warm word of encouragement."

Themes – A theme is an idea or message that runs throughout a text.

Relationships – From the very outset of the novel, the deep and lasting bond between a horse and his rider is explored. From the moment that Albert and Joey meet, they are connected on an emotional level, finding ways to communicate with one another and demonstrate their love. Both prove willing to make the ultimate sacrifices to safeguard the other, and demonstrate unparalleled commitment to preserving their relationship. The bond between humans and equine characters is also alluded to as Joey describes the artillery horses and soldiers.



The Futility of War – At the beginning of the novel, the futility of war is discussed in an abstract sense, with the farming community discussing news from the front lines, such as the deaths of numerous young men. Whilst in war, Joey also expresses his admiration for the soldiers on both sides of the war, who he believes are similar and do not really understand why they are fighting. This is reinforced when both sides work together effectively to free Joey from 'No Man's Land', and then resume fighting – they are not true enemies, but fight because of their situation.



Chapter-by-Chapter Summary – Alongside key quotations.

Chapters 1-2	The story opens with the narrator (a horse) revealing how he was taken from his mother to live with Albert's family at 6 months. An immediate bond was formed with Albert, who names the horse Joey. Albert's drunkard father says that Albert must train Joey or he will shoot or sell him. Albert trains Joey to plough. Joey overhears talk of war.	"I remember well enough the day of the horse sale. The terror of it stayed with me my whole life."
Chapters 3-4	Albert and Joey continue to bond, as they ride around the country together. Albert's mother tries to convince Albert that his dad isn't so bad. However, Albert's dad sells Joey to Captain Nicholls – a soldier in town – for 40 pounds. Albert tries to stop the sale, and then to follow Joey into war. Nicholls tells him he can when he is old enough.	"You're too young and you know it. Seventeen's the youngest we take. Come back in a year or two."
Chapters 5-6	Joey is ridden by Corporal Samuel Perkins, who does not look after him well, until Captain Nicholls tells him how important horses are to the military. Before departing for the front line, Nicholls rides Joey. Here, Joey meets a black stallion named Tophorn. In their first battle, Joey is left rider-less as Nicholls is killed leading the charge. He dies a hero.	"I never saw Captain Nicholls again, and that was a great and terrible sadness for me...As I was to learn, there were few such good men in the world."
Chapters 7-8	Joey gets a new rider, Warren, who is not a great rider, but whom Joey decides is a nice man (as Warren reads letters from home). They charge into battle together, however the British forces are heavily defeated, and Warren is taken as a prisoner of war. Tophorn and Joey are taken as POWs too, and Warren must say goodbye to Joey.	"The bedlam of battle had begun."
Chapters 9-10	A German officer: Herr Hauptmann, sees that the horses are looked-after. Joey and Tophorn work retrieving wounded soldiers from the battlefields. They are treated as heroes and are given an iron cross. They are looked after by a girl named Emilie and her granddad.	"We became a familiar sight...More than once we were cheered by marching soldiers as they passed us."
Chapters 11-12	Joey and Tophorn spend some time with Emilie before some new soldiers show up, and they are whisked off to war again. They are given a new job, trudging a giant gun through the mud. Two horses that they work with (Coco and Heinie) die and even strong Tophorn becomes ill.	"Each night we spent in the lines up to our hocks in freezing mud."
Chapters 13-14	Spring is a slightly happier time, and Joey and Tophorn are put into the care of an officer named Friedrich, who takes good care of them. In the Autumn, Tophorn dies. Joey refuses to leave his side, even as shelling begins. Friedrich dies in the shelling, leaving Joey alone.	"Why does this war have to destroy anything and everything that's beautiful?"
Chapters 15-16	Joey is scared away by a tank. After running for some time, he finds himself dazed and injured in no man's land. Two soldiers approach (one from either side) with white flags. They have a remarkable conversation about war. They toss a coin, and the British soldier gets to take Joey.	"In an hour...we will be trying our best again each other to kill...God only knows why."
Chapters 17-18	Joey is treated at the veterinary hospital. There he is entrusted into the care of a boy named David, and his friend Albert. As Joey is washed, Albert recognises his white cross. Joey is diagnosed with tetanus, and euthanasia is recommended, however Albert nurses him back to health.	"I want a twenty-four hour watch on this horse – that means a man posted in here all day and every day."
Chapters 19-20	Battles continue, and Albert's friend David dies. Finally, war stops, but instead of returning home, the horses are to be sold to the French. Just as it looks as though Joey will be sold to a butcher, Emilie's grandpa stands and outbids everyone. The hammer falls, and Joey is sold.	"I'm afraid a decision has been taken to sell of many of the army's horses here in France."
Chapters 21	Albert is introduced to Emilie's grandpa as the boy who came to France to find Joey. Her grandpa speaks of how she lost the will to live after Joey was taken, and quickly faded to death. He sells the horse to Joey for a penny, making him promise to love him as Emilie did. They return home.	"Both of us were received like conquering heroes, but we both knew that the real heroes had not come home."

Morpurgo's Language Devices

Metaphors	"He did not turn out to be the monster I expected." "The air was electric with anticipation."	"I thought through the horse's eyes we could see the conflict from all sides, and tell the tale of the universal suffering in that war..." "I thought: people have written about this war almost always from one side or the other - British, German, French, American or Canadian. I wanted to tell the tale from no side - from the point of view of a horse who leaves the farm in that Devon village, is sold, trained as a cavalry horse by the British, is soon captured by Germans, is used by them to pull ammunition cars, ambulances, guns, and who spends the winter on a French farm." In <i>The Guardian</i> : 25 th July, 2014.
Simile	"Rode me heavy in the saddle like a sack of potatoes."	
Comparative Adjectives	"It was sweeter than the sweetest bran-mash I had ever tasted"	
Sound Imagery	"...a gradual crescendo of excitement and laughter...interspersed with barked orders"	

The Writer's Influences

