

The Changing War

Based on *War Horse*
by Michael Morpurgo
Grades: 6-8



About the book

Joey loves his quiet, simple life as a farm horse. His best friend is a boy named Albert. As the Great War begins, Albert's father sells Joey to the Army. Joey then begins a journey that will take him from the farmlands of England through the battlegrounds of Europe. Joey's first duty is in a cavalry division, but with new technologies and warfare practices, the armies on both sides begin to use the horses differently. Joey experiences the harsh realities of war just as the soldiers do on the front line. His relationships with the people he meets along the way gives the reader a very realistic view of this war and paints a very human side of this conflict.

Set the Stage

Discuss the title and cover of the book. Ask students to predict what the book could be about. Ask what war they think this is about. Read the Author's Note at the beginning of the book. Discuss the painting mentioned in the note. Why would there be such a painting and what could be its significance?

Review

After reading the book, discuss the following:

- Were the predictions made before reading the book, correct?
- Why do you think that the book was written from the horse's point of view?
- What war is taking place? Where does Albert live?
- Use a map of Europe and point out Great Britain, France and Germany.
- Why do you think that Albert's father treats Joey so badly?
- Joey seems to have a good feel of the character of people. Why do you think this is the case?
- Describe Captain Nicholls' attitude about the war and the use of the cavalry. Describe Herr Hauptmann's attitude about the war. How are they similar? How do they differ from other peoples' thinking?
- If you were reading the story from Captain Nicholls' point of view, what would be the differences in the description of the first battle?
- Why were Joey and Tophorn such a comfort to the wounded men? What can give you comfort in tough situations?

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Review (continued)

- Discuss the new technology that comes about in this war. Compare and contrast this war with previous war technology. Is Joey useful in this war situation? Why or Why not?
- How did Joey feel when he was trapped in No Man's Land?
- When both the Welshman and the German were trying to help Joey, who did you want to take the horse? Why? What did the event say about how the soldiers on both sides really felt about the war?
- Joey had relationships with several people in the book – Albert, Captain Nicholls, Warren, and Emile. Joey was a confidante to these people. Why do you think that it was so easy for these people to talk to Joey so openly? In what way was this comforting to them?

How did you feel when Joey finally found Albert? Discuss the path that Albert might have taken to put himself in a position to find Joey again. Compare and contrast Joey's journey with the one that Albert might have made.

Student Activities

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Students will gain an understanding of how the war impacted Joey and how Joey influenced the people and animals around him.

Related Activities

To extend students' enjoyment of the book, try these:

- **Another Point of View:** The entire book was written from a horse's point of view. Have students choose one of the human characters from the book. Then, have them create a scene reflective of the story from that character's point of view. Share a few of the students' stories with the class. Suggest that students read another book set from an animal's point of view such as *Call of the Wild* by Jack London.
- **Pet Perspective:** Have students write about a day in the life of their own household through the eyes of an animal (i.e. dog, cat, mouse, bird, etc.).
- **Get Graphically Organized:** Use this book as a springboard into your unit on World War I by creating a graphic organizer on the main points of the story. As you progress through the unit, refer back to what Joey was experiencing during the war. As you study specific events, discuss whether a horse like Joey would have been around and what his functions would have been.
- **A New Kind of War:** During World War I, many new weapons were used for the first time. Cavalry horses like Joey and Tophorn were basically obsolete. Have students prepare a comparison/contrast chart between previously used weapons and fighting techniques of war to the new weapons and fighting techniques of World War I. Include examples mentioned in the book such as machine guns, tanks, and trenches with barb wire. If an extension of this activity is desired, the comparison/contrast chart can be expanded to include new weapons used in World War II. This would require student research.
- **The Best Listeners:** Joey was a great listener. He provided comfort to many people during a terrible time. Have students discuss how animals can be used in this way. Contact an organization that certifies dogs for therapy and assistance, to further learn about how dogs are helpful to many people. Invite someone who has a therapy dog to visit the classroom and share how dogs assist people.
- **In the News:** Many newspaper articles are written about war. Mostly they are about particular battles or the number of casualties. Have students write a human interest story that could have appeared in the newspaper about one of the following scenes from the book: A horse caught in No Man's Land, A French farmer and his granddaughter's life with their new "war horse", A horse's return to its original master.



Name: _____

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Directions: The Great War had a great impact on Joey. He weathered through it and gave encouragement to the people and animals around him. Describe each of the relationships that Joey had with the following people or animals.

Joey's Mother

Albert

Albert's father

Zoey

Captain Nicholls

Corporal Perkins

Tophorn

Trooper Warren

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Emile

Emile's grandfather

Friedrich

- Circle the relationship that had the most impact on other people or animals.
- Place a star by the relationship that meant the most to Joey.
- Place a check mark by the relationships whereby the person or animal learned something from Joey.
- Write a brief story as to how Joey would have impacted you if you were a soldier in the war.