

# **War Horse Study Guide**

## **War Horse by Michael Morpurgo**

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# Plot Summary

Note: This study guide refers to the First Scholastic Paperback Printing, 2010 edition of *War Horse* by Michael Morpurgo.

*War Horse* is a young adult historical novel by Michael Morpurgo that recounts the experiences of Joey the horse in World War I. Joey is purchased as a colt by the Narracott family in rural Devon, England, a few years before the war breaks out. Thirteen-year-old Albert Narracott comes to care for Joey, raising him well, training him to do farm work, and teaching Joey to come when called by owl whistle. Joey finds a fast friend in Albert, and the two are inseparable. As Joey and Albert both grow, Joey learns from Albert that war has broken out over in Europe. The war hits farm prices hard, causing Albert's father to sell Joey to a British cavalry officer, Captain Nicholls, so that the mortgage can be paid. Joey and Albert are both heartbroken by this.

Captain Nicholls promises Albert that he will take good care of Joey, and lives up to his promise. Not only does Joey train to become a war horse, but Joey befriends Nicholls, who takes seriously his promise to Albert. Joey also meets Captain Stewart, who rides a horse named Tophorn. Joey and Tophorn fast become friends, and are nervous shipping across the English Channel to serve in France. With the war raging all around them, Joey and his unit spend much of their time protecting the British flanks from German troops. During one engagement, Nicholls is killed. Joey then becomes the mount of Trooper Warren, who, like Nicholls, cares deeply for Joey. As the armies entrench, the British look for a way to break the stalemate, and decide a cavalry charge on German positions will be best. The cavalry unit is destroyed by German machine guns. Joey, Warren, Stewart, and Tophorn are captured by the Germans.

The Germans press Joey and Tophorn into medical service, where they help cart the wounded away from the frontlines to field hospitals. Each night, Joey and Tophorn are taken to a local farm where they are cared for by 13-year-old Emilie and her grandfather. Emilie, who has lost her entire family in the war apart from her grandfather, is delighted to have the horses around. Joey and Tophorn take a quick liking to Emilie, who treats them with sheer kindness. The horses are later given to Emilie in thanks for her help, but several months later are forced back into military service by a German artillery unit. Joey and Tophorn are forced to pull massive cannons into position during battles, which is hard work and is frightening. The horses have little food and rest, and often die of exhaustion and heart failure. Tophorn dies of heart failure, which devastates Joey. During a tank attack, Joey races away in fear, where he becomes trapped in no-man's land and injures his leg on barbed wire.

Joey is freed by a British soldier and a German soldier, who flip a coin to see who will bring Joey back to their lines. It is the British soldier who wins, and leads Joey back to his British veterinarian unit. There, Joey is stunned to find that Albert is a soldier working with the vet. Albert proves that Joey is Joey when he gets Joey to respond to an owl whistle. Albert is thrilled to have found Joey, believing all along that he would one day find him. However, as the war ends, the British government decides to auction off most



of the horses it has used. Emilie's grandfather bids and wins Joey, but when he learns who Albert is and what Joey means to him, he sells Joey to Albert for a single penny and the promise that Albert will tell others about the good things Emilie did for the horses. Albert learns that Emilie has died of weakness from pneumonia, and heartache at having lost her horse. Albert agrees to the sale deal, and returns home with Joey. There, Joey watches as Albert gets married, and Joey befriends Albert's children.



# Chapters 1 – 4

## Summary

Chapter 1 – Joey is a half-Thoroughbred red-bay farm horse residing in rural Devon, England. When he is a colt, he and his mother are brought to auction. His mother is quickly sold, and Joey, wild with fear, tries to run to her but it stopped. Joey is sold to a gruff-sounding farmer, who brings Joey to his barn. There, Zoey, the old cart horse, reassures Joey that everything will be okay. It is then that Joey meets the son of the farmer, 13-year-old Albert Narracott, and his mother. Mother believes Father has purchased Joey while drunk only to spite Farmer Easton. Albert soothes Joey by petting him and speaking gently, telling Joey he will be the smartest horse in the world, and that they will have lots of fun together. Mother insists Joey cannot understand Albert, but Albert believes it is only because people don't understand horses, or are afraid of them. Joey realizes he has found a friend for life in Albert.

Chapter 2 – Several years pass. Albert and Joey continue to grow up and grow closer as friends. Joey learns many tricks, such as when Albert whistles like an owl for Joey to come. Albert becomes the bell-ringer for the local church, while Joey comes to accept that Father is not a monstrous man despite always being drunk on Tuesdays, which are market days. On these days, Father gets into bad moods. One such evening, Father explains he has bet Farmer Easton that he cannot get Joey to plow a field. When Father attempts to fit Joey with a plow collar, Joey kicks Father and sends him back to the house. Father is prepared to shoot Joey, but Mother stops him. Father then tells Albert that Joey must be trained to plow, or else Joey will be sold. Albert and Joey get to work, and by the end of the week, the field is plowed. Father wins the bet, and Joey is safe. Sometime later, on the way back from the fields, Albert tells Joey about the war that seems to be coming. Albert says that if a war comes, he wants to go and fight, and that Joey would make a good war horse. In the late summer, violence increases in Europe. When Germany invades Belgium, England declares war on Germany. Mother is horrified.

Chapter 3 – Through the end of the summer, Albert rides Joey more and more, training Joey to take to a saddle. Father begins drinking more, which Mother says he cannot be blamed for because he is so worried about the farm's mortgage and falling crop prices due to the war. One day, Father comes into the barn and lures Joey close with treats, during which time Father places a halter on Joey's head, telling Joey "they" promised they would look after him. Father says he needs the money badly.

Chapter 4 – With Joey in tow, Father rides Old Zoey down to the village. There, a young military officer named Captain Nicholls purchases Joey for 40 pounds. Joey is examined and found fit by the vet. As Father leaves, Joey realizes he is being abandoned. It is then that Albert comes rushing through the village crowds, realizing that Joey has been sold. Albert is devastated and begs to join up, but because he is not 17, he is not



allowed. Nicholls tells Albert to join the cavalry when he is old enough, and until then, promises he will personally take very good care of Joey.

## Analysis

From the beginning of *War Horse*, Michael Morpurgo argues that there is a special bond between humans and animals, and that this bond broadens and deepens the lives of both. From the start, Albert and Joey take to one another, recognizing kindness and gentleness in the other. Joey himself explains that he knows he has found a friend for life in Albert; and Albert goes through great lengths to care for, protect, and train Joey to be the best horse in the world. When Father threatens to sell Joey, it is Albert who ensures Joey will not be sold by training Joey to plow. This loyalty between Joey and Albert will ultimately last their entire lives – and will prove vital in the final chapters of the novel.

The reader will note that Morpurgo has chosen to tell his novel in the first-person point of view – from the perspective of Joey himself. This is done for two reasons: first, the story being told is Joey's, and Joey's adventures will only ever be knowable and spoken about by him; and second, it is in keeping with Morpurgo's assertion that animals have a certain level of intelligence and understanding. Although animals do not have the reason or level of understanding of human beings, they do have an instinctive ability to comprehend things. For example, Joey can easily tell how good Albert is, and how bad Father can become when drunk. Rationalizations about such things (such as why Father drinks, owing to stress from the farm) are normally made by the people around Joey. However, Joey does know enough to realize he is being abandoned by Father, and that he will have a new owner in Captain Nicholls.

The bond between Joey and Albert is severely tested when Father sells Joey to Captain Nicholls, one of the members of a British cavalry unit. Both Albert and Joey are devastated to be without the other. Two things occur to cause this: the need for Father to keep up with the mortgage, and the war – which not only disrupts the economy but also requires the purchasing of horses for use in combat. Here, Morpurgo argues that war is a terrible and costly thing, and its costs are far-reaching. Albert is so desperate not to be without Joey that he tries to volunteer, but he is not old enough to do so. That Albert – and millions of others – will eventually join the war in some way, shape, or form, is further evidence that war is a terrible thing.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do Joey and Albert get along so well, and so quickly? What does this close relationship mean for both Joey and Albert?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Father sell Joey to Captain Nicholls? How does Albert respond to this? Why?



## Discussion Question 3

Although Albert is only 15, he attempts to join the British military when Joey is sold. Why is this so? Why is Albert turned away from service?

## Vocabulary

whisked, nickered, stuttering, pretext, war horse, acute, foreboding, vehemently, inquisitiveness, fetlocks



# Chapters 5 – 8

## Summary

Chapter 5 – Joey undertakes serious work to be transformed from a farm horse into a cavalry mount. Joey dislikes the military-grade saddle and bit he must wear, and dislikes his trainer, Corporal Samuel Perkins, even more because Perkins is brutal in driving the horses on to their tasks. In the evenings, Joey relishes his time with Captain Nicholls, who spends time with Joey, watches over him, and sketches portraits of Joey in preparation for a painting of him. Nicholls explains that most people don't understand the coming war will be long and nasty, and that new weapons like machine guns will make the war especially bloody. Nicholls personally takes Joey into final maneuvers, where Joey meets the black stallion of Captain Jamie Stewart, named Tophorn. Joey and Tophorn prove themselves to be the fastest horses in the regiment, with Joey beating Tophorn during a charge maneuver. The two become good friends. The next day, the regiments ships out for war by boat.

Chapter 6 – Joey finds that most of the men and horses of the cavalry regiment are optimistic and looking forward to war as they cross the English Channel. However, stormy weather does not do well for the horses. At the docks, the regiment encounters those who have been wounded in battle, awaiting passage back home. The sight of so many injured soldiers startles everyone in the regiment, but once they take to the open autumn countryside, their good mood returns. The regiment camps out some distance from the front lines, and the sound of guns can be heard. Joey continues to take to Captain Nicholls, who is kind and gentle. Joey and the regiment are assigned the role of protecting the flank of the British forces from attacks by the Germans. After several days, they encounter the Germans. The entire cavalry regiment charges with Joey and Captain Nicholls in the lead, and the Germans are defeated though many men and horses are killed. Among them is Captain Nicholls. This saddens Joey greatly. Joey is tended to by Captain Stewart, who tells Joey that Nicholls would be proud of him.

Chapter 7 – The next morning, Captain Stewart introduces Joey to Trooper Warren, who will be Joey's new rider. Trooper Warren is not a very good rider, but is a very good man who lives up to his promise to take good care of Joey. As the war drags on, Joey discovers that the regiment fights less and less as cavalry, and more and more as mounted infantry – soldiers who ride to battle, dismount, and fight on foot. As the time passes, Joey learns from Trooper Warren that Warren's own horse was killed in the first battle, and that Warren himself is the son of a blacksmith. The winter brings cold and terrible weather, making cavalry encampments miserable. Warren explains that the war has come to a standstill, with trenches and fixed positions now common. Warren also reads his letters from home to Joey, which are full of love from his mother and his girlfriend, Sally. Joey, meanwhile, continues his friendship with Tophorn. The time comes for an attack. The cavalry will be used to attempt to break through the enemy trenches. As the regiment moves on, they encounter destroyed villages without any people, and ruined farms and farmland. The cavalry then lines up for an attack.





Chapter 8 – The cavalry moves out between the British and German positions in no-man's land. Joey and the others encounter wire, and come under heavy artillery fire. Many fall, but still the regiment moves on. Joey and the others reach the enemy trenches, but the Germans have climbed and hidden behind trees in the wood beyond, safe out of reach of the cavalry. As the attack stalls, the Germans rush out and counterattack. The regiment is destroyed. Most are wounded or killed. Stewart, Warren, Joey, and Tophorn are taken prisoner. Wounded horses are killed by the Germans. Stewart calls the attack a ghastly waste, but reassures Stewart the Germans take good care of horses.

## Analysis

Joey transitions from farm horse to war horse in this section of the novel. This is also where the name of the title comes from. Morpurgo continues to argue that animals have some form of intelligence and understanding, and this is demonstrated by Joey's recognition that his purpose has changed from peace to war. Joey also recognizes in Captain Nicholls another kindhearted soul, like Albert. Indeed, Joey recognizes later that Warren, though a bad rider, is very much a kind man. When Nicholls is killed in combat, Joey is saddened because he knows men like Nicholls are rare.

Nicholls, Stewart, and Warren all treat Joey like he has some semblance of understanding, for they not only speak to him, but read letters to him as well. Here, Morpurgo continues to underscore his point that the relationship between animals and people is not only possible, but important. The bonding that occurs between Joey and those men around him (let alone his friendship with fellow horse, Tophorn) not only helps to calm and comfort Joey, but deepens the kindness and gentleness between rider and horse.

As the reader quickly sees, war is a terrible and costly thing, for people as well as animals. Upon arriving in France, the first thing Joey's unit sees are wounded and bloodied soldiers preparing for the return across the English Channel. While out on patrols protecting the flank of the British army, and later, on their way to prepare for the trench charge, Joey's unit sees the bombed-out villages, ruined farmland, and deserted places the battles have created. No-man's land between the British and German positions is likewise horrendous, for it is a place of mud, barbed wire, craters from artillery rounds, and destroyed landscape. The cavalry charge against the German trench results in even more death and destruction, as hundreds of horses and riders are killed by the Germans in minutes.

Morpurgo also makes it plainly known to the reader that World War I was a time of change and transition in terms of how wars were fought. Early in the war, the armies move, march, and fight in different places. By the middle of the war, the armies dig in and trench warfare has replaced movement with stalemate. Each side does whatever it can to break the stalemate, including the cavalry charge launched by the British of which Joey is a part. As Nicholls and other keen soldiers note, the old ways of fighting wars are largely finished. This is clearly seen in how Joey's unit is essentially wiped out



by German machine guns. Stewart calls the entire attack a ghastly waste, and hopes the British commanders will recognize that new ways of doing things are needed.

## Discussion Question 1

In Chapters 5-8, how does Joey become a war horse? What is his life like as a war horse, compared to what his life was like as a farm horse?

## Discussion Question 2

What are some of the horrors of war experienced by Joey, Nicholls, and the rest of the regiment? How are Nicholls, Joey, and the others affected by these things? Why?

## Discussion Question 3

Why do the British launch a cavalry charge against the German trenches? Why does the attack fail? What does Captain Stewart say of the attack? Why?

## Vocabulary

transformation, discipline, maneuvers, cumbersome, infuriated, defeatist, exhilaration, stamina, exuberance, peremptory, despondency, jocular, fodder, reveille, meticulous, monotony, resilience, ominous, sporadic, bedlam, no-man's land, counterattack, ghastly



## Chapters 9 – 12

### Summary

Chapter 9 – A German military doctor and a German captain, Hauptmann, disagree over what to do with the captured horses. Hauptmann wants them put into military service, while the Doctor says cavalry is now a thing of the past, and the horses will instead be put to use helping to haul the wounded. The Doctor has his way, so Joey and Tophorn become medical horses. At the end of their first day, they are taken to a barn to spend the night. There, a pretty young girl shows her farmer grandfather the horses.

Chapter 10 – Each day, Joey and Tophorn work to bring back the wounded, and each evening, 13-year-old Emilie and her grandfather tend to the horses, as the Germans who work them do not know the proper way to care for them. One day, a German soldier hangs a ribbon and an Iron Cross around the neck of Joey for the work he and Tophorn have done. That evening, Emilie begins speaking about how she would be thrilled to take care of Joey and Tophorn forever, if only they would stay with her when all the soldiers have gone. Emilie's grandfather reveals to the horses that Emilie's parents and brothers were all killed early in the war, and that Emilie's spirits have been lifted by Joey and Tophorn being around. He explains she prays for the horses every single night. He then reveals that Emilie has come down with pneumonia, and is being treated by the German Doctor. Fortunately, Emilie survives. Her grandfather is thrilled. To get Emilie to stay in bed and continue to recover, the Doctor promises the horses will be given extra food, which Emilie's grandfather provides.

Chapter 11 – The direction of the war moves away, giving Joey and Tophorn more free time. They spend this with Emilie, who begins to ride Joey as the spring comes on and as she continues to recover from her illness. In the early summer, the field hospital unit follows the war. The Doctor allows Joey and Tophorn to stay behind as payment for the help provided by Emilie and her grandfather. Emilie is delighted. Joey and Tophorn are happy to be put to work on a farm. In the early autumn, German troops return in the form of a battery of artillery, with each cannon pulled by a team of six horses. The German troops worry Emilie and her grandfather, but they allow the Germans to spend the night in the farm fields. The next morning, the commander of the artillery battery announces he will be taking Joey and Tophorn to help pull the guns. Emilie and her grandfather have no choice. Emilie tells the Germans they had better take care of her horses.

Chapter 12 – Joey and Tophorn help drag the artillery pieces into position. They are stunned by the sheer destruction of the war, and the terrifying noises made by the cannons. Sleeping outdoors is tough, especially as the winter comes on, and there is often little food for Joey and Tophorn. Joey and Tophorn get to know their fellow horses, including the angry Coco, the friendly twin Halflingers, and the large Heinie. Joey is given lead of the horse team, which must spend its days in freezing mud. The exposure, little food, and hard work wear on the horses, making them thin and causing



them to lose the hair on their legs. Heinie dies of exhaustion, while Coco is killed by shrapnel. The German artillery commander is warned to take better care of the horses, but Joey knows it is the mud, lack of shelter, and lack of food killing them.

## Analysis

Joey and Tophorn see their fortunes rise and fall in this section of the novel, all courtesy of the war. War, Morpurgo notes, even affects animals. Joey and Tophorn are first pressed into the medical service by the Germans, where the two horses cart the wounded and injured away from the front to the field hospitals in the rear. It is difficult work, but it is work that saves human lives and keeps Joey and Tophorn relatively safe. A bond quickly arises between Joey, Tophorn, and the medical staff, who recognize how valuable the animals are to saving lives, yet who also recognize that Joey and Tophorn are good and gentle creatures. The bond between animals and people is a welcome escape from the violence and horror of war.

Perhaps the best thing to happen to Joey and Tophorn in this section of the novel is how they come to be cared for by Emilie and her grandfather. Again, Morpurgo argues that the bond between man and animal is vital. Here, Emilie – who has lost almost her entire family to the war – is thrilled to have two horses she can care for. It elevates her spirits and gives her a purpose in life. Joey and Tophorn recognize that Emilie is a wonderful person and they quickly befriend her. In the midst of so much death, Emilie has found life in caring for the horses.

As Morpurgo continues to argue, war affects animals as well as people. Joey and Tophorn have no say in whether their owners are killed, where they end up, or what they end up doing. This makes it all the more important for those in charge – the people – to care deeply for the horses in exchange for the effect war has on them. Likewise, in this instance, Emilie and her grandfather have no say in the matter when a German artillery unit takes Joey and Tophorn away. Here, the horrors of war are again seen in the way that Joey and Tophorn must live. They have little food, no shelter, and must work in freezing mud all day. This leads to the death of many horses, including some in Joey's own team. The rest of them suffer from exposure, the loss of hair, and other hardships.

Morpurgo also comments again on the nature of the war itself. As noted earlier, cavalry charges are obsolete, and can only be considered a waste because all they do is get the horses and their riders killed. In past wars, teams of horses brought artillery onto battlefields to fire on enemy positions. In World War I, despite the increased sizes of the artillery pieces, horses are still being used to lug them into position. It is not always very effective, especially when horses die of exhaustion and there is no one to continue moving the guns. Because of the shortsightedness of the man in charge, the animals must suffer in horrible conditions.



## Discussion Question 1

What jobs are Joey and Tophorn forced to carry out for the Germans? What are these experiences for Joey and Tophorn like? Why?

## Discussion Question 2

How do Joey and Tophorn come to be cared for by Emilie and her grandfather? Why do Joey and Tophorn come to mean so much to Emilie?

## Discussion Question 3

In what ways does the war affect Joey and Tophorn in this section of the novel? How do they respond to their ever-changing circumstances? Why?

## Vocabulary

gait, hellfire, sacrilege, Iron Cross, prattle, instinctive, precludes, besieged, idyllic, interminable, sporadically, motley, recuperation, shrapnel



# Chapters 13 – 17

## Summary

Chapter 13 – Joey and Tophorn, though weak, survive into the spring. The fighting on their part of the battlefield grows quiet, but it heats up elsewhere. Joey and Tophorn regain their strength when they are allowed to roam in meadows and eat the delicious grasses and plants that grow in them. They are reassigned to supply duty, where they bring in ammunition from the trains. Joey and Tophorn are placed under the command of Crazy Old Friedrich, a kind and elderly soldier who always takes the jobs no one else wants to do. Friedrich has lived long enough to hate war, and wishes the war was over so he could return to his peacetime job as a butcher. Friedrich tells Joey and Tophorn they are the only rational creatures he has met, because they, like him, were forced to be in war, and no one else who is fighting has any idea why. Tophorn especially takes a liking to Friedrich. As the autumn comes on, Joey and Tophorn are put back into artillery. Friedrich volunteers to help train the horses in preparation for the coming campaign.

Chapter 14 – Joey and the artillery return to war. Two young brothers and both lovers of horses, named Rudi and Karl, are very impressed with Joey and Tophorn. They are with Friedrich one day when Tophorn collapses and dies of heart failure. Joey nuzzles Tophorn as he dies, and is very sad to see his only real friend go. Suddenly, the area comes under artillery fire. The German troops scramble for cover, but Joey will not leave Tophorn's side. Friedrich is killed during the bombardment.

Chapter 15 – Joey remains with the bodies of Tophorn and Friedrich through the day and through the night, for he is heartbroken. Only the sudden appearance of tanks causes Joey to leave the bodies of Tophorn and Friedrich. Joey is in a panic, and rushes away from the tanks. He unintentionally rushes into a battlefield during the fighting, and becomes tangled in barbed wire. He hurts his foreleg as he manages to get free, then continues to run as best he can. Joey eventually finds a soft spot of mud to lay down on, and tries to rest. Joey now realizes he is caught out in the middle of no-man's land.

Chapter 16 – As Joey wanders around in the morning, he discovers he is surrounded on all sides by barbed wire. On either side, Joey is met by cheering soldiers encouraging him to safety, but Joey is trapped. A British soldier and a German soldier both approach Joey to see about freeing him. Both the British and the German soldier are friendly, and wish they were not in war. The two men decide to toss a coin for the right to bring Joey back to be treated. The British soldier, a Welshman, wins by calling heads. The two soldiers wish one another luck, and go their own ways. Joey is led to the British lines.

Chapter 17 – Joey is brought to the British veterinarian to receive treatment. While awaiting the doctor, Major Martin, Joey recognizes something familiar about the voice of one of the British vet orderlies. The orderly speaks about getting Joey cleaned up and



healed, during which time he whistles. Joey then realizes the young orderly treating him is Albert. Albert has all along believed that one day, he would find Joey again. As the mud is cleaned off Joey by Albert's friend and comrade, David, Albert is stunned and thrilled to find Joey standing before him. Just to make sure, Albert does his special owl whistle, which brings Joey running to him.

## Analysis

Joey and Tophorn continue to have their lives deeply affected by the war. Morpurgo continues to argue that, not only is war a terrible and costly thing, but that animals are also affected by wars. This can be clearly seen in the fact that Joey and Tophorn are given a brief reprieve from the fighting, but then are reassigned to active duty, dragging cannons into position. The horses continue to die of exhaustion and failed hearts, including Tophorn himself. Joey is very saddened by Tophorn's death, and remains standing over his friend even during an artillery bombardment. If the Germans had come up with alternative ways of moving guns, Tophorn would never have been forced into service dragging them, and he would still be alive.

The war proves to be very costly in other ways as well. Crazy Old Friedrich is a kind and gentle soul who has found himself unwillingly pressed into military service. He would rather be back at home as a butcher, but for now, he tends to the horses. Again, the level of understanding horses have can be noted in Joey and Tophorn recognizing a kind and gentle soul in Friedrich. The man and the horses bond with one another, recognizing peace and comfort in the other. This does not last, however, as Tophorn dies of heart failure, and Friedrich is killed in the bombardment that follows. Joey's recognition of the death of both Tophorn and Friedrich is found in his refusal to leave the spot where both have died.

The reader should take note, however, of the scene in which Joey stands guard over the bodies of Tophorn and Friedrich. Only the arrival of a unit of tanks causes Joey to bolt into no-man's land. War horses have traditionally been referred to as war machines, for horses in the past made war possible – from transporting supplies, weapons, artillery, and the wounded, to fighting in actual battles and allowing commanders to quickly move along their lines. Joey, the war machine of the past, comes face-to-face with a tank, the war machine of the future. Morpurgo makes an extraordinary statement about the changing face of war in this scene. Joey's arrival in no-man's land is to then be seen as symbolic of the changing nature of war between the past and the future, but is also to be seen as symbolic of Joey being caught between the past with Albert and an uncertain future.

By chance, Joey is returned to the British lines, where he is reunited with Albert. It is the owl call that Albert makes that confirms to them both that Joey is actually Joey. Albert has long believed he would one day be reunited with Joey, and the bond that two developed growing up has remained unbreakable. Joey is thrilled to be back with Albert. Their coming back together has made all of their suffering and trials worth it. Indeed, Albert's entire purpose in joining the military veterinarian unit has been to reunite with



Joey, for he has had immense faith that he would actually find Joey in the midst of so much war. Without Albert's faith and loyalty, Joey's future would be deathly – something which will be demonstrated in the coming chapters.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Why does Joey remain rooted to the spot where Tophorn and Friedrich have died? What finally causes him to leave? Why?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What is important about the scene where Joey is scared away by a unit of tanks? What does this have to say specifically about war, and about the role of horses in wars?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What is the reuniting of Joey and Albert like? Why? How does Albert know beyond a shadow of a doubt Joey is who he thinks Joey is?

## **Vocabulary**

rational, campaign, spontaneous, barbed wire, crescendo





# Chapters 18 – 21

## Summary

Chapter 18 – Joey is absolutely ecstatic to be with Albert. Albert explains that Father has given up drinking, and is a good and decent husband and father once more. Major Martin treats Joey's leg, and stitches him up. Joey, however, falls ill, as his legs and back stiffen up. Major Martin and Sergeant Thunder diagnose Joey with tetanus, picked up from either the barbed wire or some small piece of metal that has found its way into his system. Nothing can be done, and horses rarely survive. It is recommended that Joey be put down, but Albert opposes this. Major Martin and Sergeant Thunder agree to allow Albert and his friends to treat Joey provided their work elsewhere still gets accomplished. Joey is put up in a sling to keep him off his feet. Each day, Albert, Major Martin, Sergeant Thunder, David, and the other members of the vet do what they can for Joey, which mostly consists of speaking to him and caring for him. Albert reveals to Joey that he has a girlfriend back home. After several weeks, Joey is able to shake his head and move around some, which demonstrates he will survive. Everyone is very happy about this, especially Albert.

Chapter 19 – Joey continues to heal just as the war continues to go on. When Joey recovers fully, he is put in charge of the horse team that brings the vet wagon to and from the front lines. Joey is not afraid, as he knows the spirit of Tophorn is watching over him. All the while, Albert tells Joey about how everything is – from the Germans being on the run, to his girlfriend, Maisie Brown. David is killed on the front a short time later when a stray shell lands nearby. Albert is saddened by the death, but glad to learn a short time later that Germany has surrendered. With the war over, British and Allied troops begin returning home – but the horses will be remaining in France as most are to be sold in auction according to orders. Albert and everyone else is horrified, but there is nothing Major Martin can do.

Chapter 20 – Joey and the other horses are saddened by what will now become of them. Joey overhears Albert and Sergeant Thunder talking about everyone giving Albert their pay, including the Major, and hoping that it will be enough. The following day, the auction is held. Sergeant Thunder becomes the one to bid for Joey, but he is outbid by a butcher. The butcher is then outbid by Emilie's grandfather, who says he will pay whatever is necessary to secure Joey, because it is Emilie's horse. Emilie's grandfather wins Joey.

Chapter 21 – Albert is heartbroken. Sergeant Thunder and Major Martin learn who Emilie's grandfather is, and that he is a good and kind farmer. They try to reassure Albert that everything will be okay for Joey. Albert then speaks with Emilie's grandfather, who tells the story of how he and Emilie cared for the horses, and how the horses made Emilie so happy. But without the horses, and already weakened by pneumonia, Emilie lost the will to live and died at the age of 15. Upon learning of who Joey is to Albert, Emilie's grandfather decides to sell Joey to Albert for one single penny, and a promise



that Joey will always be cared for, and that Albert will tell his friends and loved ones about Emilie and what she did. Albert readily agrees. Sergeant Thunder pays, and Emilie's grandfather says he will always treasure the penny. By Christmas, Joey and Albert are home. Albert marries Maisie, and Joey becomes friendly with Father and Albert and Maisie's children, though Maisie and Joey never quite take to each other.

## Analysis

Albert's loyalty and friendship with Joey is instrumental in saving Joey's life. Without Albert's insistence, based on the vital bond between person and animal, Joey would have been shot and put out of his misery. But because of that bond between owner and animal, Joey does not die. Here again, Morpurgo argues how vital the bond between people and animals can be. This bond is later demonstrated again when Emilie's grandfather purchases Joey at auction in honor of the deceased Emilie; but this bond between him and the horse ultimately compels him to return the horse to Albert. Emilie's grandfather recognizes the importance of the bond between Albert and Joey, just as he recognized the importance of the bond between Emilie and Joey.

Joey's survival, rooted in the bond between humans and animals, is yet another effect of war. Joey's time in no-man's land causes his leg injury, which in turn leads to his bout with tetanus. It is an agonizing couple of weeks that Joey spends trying to fight off the infection, and tended to as gently as possible by Albert and the other vet orderlies. The damage done by the war to Joey is war damage that Albert and the others attempt to heal. When the war ends, everyone is overjoyed – but the effects of war are still to be felt as the British government orders most horses used in the war to be auctioned off. Albert is stunned because Joey must be among them. Only by teaming up with his fellow soldiers does Albert stand a chance of winning Joey. It is fortunate for Albert that Emilie's grandfather was the one to win Joey, or who knows what may have ended up becoming of Joey.

The bond between Albert and Joey continues on through their return to Devon. Albert's homecoming is also Joey's homecoming, and it is a wonderful thing for them both. Morpurgo continues to press the point that animals have their own kind of intelligence and understanding. This is demonstrated through the end of the novel when Joey explains how Albert's family has grown closer, how Albert has married and had children, and how Albert's new wife never really takes to Joey. That Joey is aware of everything going on around him, and that Joey is able to explain these things to the reader, indicates a good intelligence on the part of Joey.

## Discussion Question 1

How does Joey manage to survive tetanus? Why does it matter so much to the rest of the vet orderlies, let alone Albert, that Joey survives?



## Discussion Question 2

What military order almost stops Albert from being able to bring Joey home? How is this situation resolved?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Emilie's grandfather decide to return Joey to Albert? What are the conditions of the sale? Do you believe this is fair? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

euphoric, unreality, tetanus, convalescence, jauntily, indignant



# Characters

## Joey

Joey is a half-Thoroughbred red-bay farm horse with four even white socks and a white cross on his head, and serves as the narrator of the novel. Joey is purchased by the Narracott family as a colt, where he quickly befriends young Albert Narracott. He and Albert become inseparable as Joey recognizes a friend for life in Albert.

Joey is later dismayed to be sold to Captain Nicholls at the start of World War I in order to pay the farm's mortgage, but quickly takes to Nicholls because Nicholls is a good man. Joey then trains to become a war horse for use in combat, and befriends Tophorn. Following the death of Nicholls, Joey is transferred to Trooper Warren, then captured by the Germans, and pressed into service as a medical horse, and later an artillery horse. In between, Joey is cared for by Emilie and her grandfather.

Joey is later frightened by tanks, leading him to bolt into no-man's land where he is freed by a British and a German soldier, and taken back to British lines. There, Joey is reunited with Albert, who is working as a military vet. Joey is thrilled to be with Albert again, and is later returned to Albert after Emilie's grandfather wins him at auction. Joey then returns with Albert to Devon.

## Albert

Albert Narracott is the owner of Joey, first coming to befriend and train Joey when Joey is a colt. Albert is a kind and gentle young man who helps teach Joey to do farm work, teaches Joey tricks, and spends as much time as possible with Joey. Albert is devastated when Joey is sold to the British military, and Albert tries to join the cavalry to go with Joey but is unable to join because he is too young. Albert, when he is old enough, joins up and becomes a part of the military veterinarian unit. There, Albert tells his fellow soldiers about Joey, and how he expects to one day find Joey in the war. When Albert finally does find Joey, he is thrilled.

It is because of Albert that Joey manages to survive tetanus, and it is because of Albert that Joey is not taken away by Emilie's grandfather. Albert returns to England with Joey, marries a local girl, and has children. Albert remains close with Joey for the rest of Joey's life.

## Captain Nicholls

Captain Nicholls is a British cavalry officer who purchases Joey for 40 pounds, and promises Albert that he will take good care of Joey. Captain Nicholls is a good and gentle man who is also an artist, and is utterly brilliant in knowing that the nature of war



is changing. He and Joey become close, and ride into battle together in France. After several months of engagements, Nicholls is killed by the Germans.

## Trooper Warren

Trooper Warren is the British cavalry soldier slated to replace Captain Nicholls with Joey. While Warren is not a very good rider, he is a brave soldier and a very kind man who Joey takes to quickly. Warren is captured along with Joey, Captain Stewart, and Tophorn during a deadly charge against fortified German trenches.

## Emilie

Emilie is a pretty teenage girl who lives with her grandfather in rural France. She is deeply saddened by the death of every member of her immediate family due to the war, and feels lonely and listless.

When she and her grandfather are entrusted by the Germans with the care of Joey and Tophorn, Emilie is thrilled and feels as if she has a purpose in the midst of so much destruction. Emilie survives a bad bout of pneumonia in large part because she wants to be well again to care for the horses. When the horses are taken away by the Germans, Emilie becomes despondent and saddened. This only adds to the health issues she still suffers from her bout with pneumonia, and she ultimately dies of a broken heart at the age of 15.

## Crazy Old Friedrich

Crazy Old Friedrich is an elderly German butcher drafted into the military, and is so-named "Crazy" because he takes all the jobs no one else wants, such as caring for the horses. Friedrich befriends Joey and Tophorn, and does his best to ensure that both horses are as well-cared for as possible despite the serious labor they perform in the artillery unit. Friedrich is ultimately killed in an artillery bombardment trying to urge Joey to safety.

## Mother

Mother is the mother of Albert, and is the wife of Father. Mother is a kind and decent woman who is wholly committed to her family and the farm no matter the cost. She often acts as an intermediary between Albert and Father, especially when Father is drunk and angry with Joey. It is Mother who prevents Father from shooting Joey when Joey kicks Father.



## Father

Father is the father of Albert, and is the husband of Mother. Father is overwhelmed by debt and stress from owning a farm, so he often drinks and becomes irritable. It is Father who first purchases Joey while drunk, just to spite Farmer Easton. Father makes a bet with Farmer Easton that Joey can plow a field within a week, a bet that Father wins because of Albert's hard work with Joey. Father later cleans up his act and quits drinking, and is able to develop a close relationship with Albert.

## Topthorn

Topthorn is a black stallion owned and ridden by Captain Stewart. Topthorn also becomes friends with Joey when the two become part of the same British cavalry unit. Joey and Topthorn serve alongside each other for the British, and are later captured and pressed into service by the Germans. Topthorn ultimately dies of heart failure after prolonged heavy work hauling German artillery pieces into battle.

## The Welshman

The Welshman is a British soldier who ventures out into no-man's land to free Joey. There, he meets a German soldier, and the two respectfully speak to one another and treat one another as friends. They decide to flip a coin to see who will bring Joey back. The Welshman calls heads and wins, and returns to the British lines where he brings Joey to the military veterinarian unit.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Owl whistle

Albert uses a whistle that sounds like the hoot of an owl to teach Joey to come when called, and serves as proof that Joey is who Albert believes him to be later in the book. Joey's ability to respond to the call demonstrates not only intelligence, but trust of Albert. When Joey is brought into the military vet, Albert uses the owl whistle to get Joey to come to him, proving that the muddy, bloody, and battered horse before him really is his Joey.

## Forty pounds

Forty pounds is the price for which Father sells Joey to Captain Nicholls. The 40 pounds is a tidy sum of money which will not only help keep the family afloat financially, but will help pay the farm's mortgage. Father does not sell Joey with any malice or happiness, but only regret, because he knows how much Joey means to Albert.

## Sketches

Sketches are made of Joey by Captain Nicholls, demonstrating that he has a very gentle understanding for horses, and for Joey in particular. Captain Nicholls spends his time sketching Joey and also talking to Joey about life in general, and about the dangers of those in charge of the war. The sketches themselves are very well done, and reveal that Nicholls truly wants to get to know Joey: attempting to correctly draw what he sees is reflective of Nicholls attempting to understand the horse in front of him.

## Machine guns

Machine guns are utilized by all sides during World War I, and are reflective of changing times and new technologies. Machine guns have a stunning rate of fire, and just one machine gun can take down dozens of enemy soldiers. The cavalry charge Joey participates in against German lines is shattered by machine guns, in which hundreds of horses and riders are killed and wounded. This causes Captain Stewart to call the charge a ghastly waste, and causes him to hope that tactics will change with the new technology.

## Iron Cross

An Iron Cross – a German military medal for bravery – is found discarded on a road and affixed around Joey for his, and for Tophorn's bravery. The Iron Cross becomes, according to the Germans, the only German medal awarded to anyone English during



the war. Emilie hangs the Iron Cross beside the stables where Joey and Tophorn sleep at night.

## Barbed wire

Barbed wire is defensive kind of fencing composed of metal wire interspersed with small, razor-sharp points that is designed to tangle up and deter attacking soldiers. No-man's land is full of barbed wire, and it serves as a major obstacle to any attacks, including the cavalry charge undertaken by Joey's unit. When Joey flees into no-man's land to escape the tanks, Joey injures his foreleg on some barbed wire, creating a deep gash that gives him tetanus.

## German coin

A German coin represents chance and is used by the German and British soldier to determine who will bring Joey back to their lines. The German soldier flips the coin while the British soldier calls heads. The coin lands with heads facing up, leading the British soldier to bring Joey back to the British lines. There, because of the coin flip, Joey is reunited with Albert.

## Tanks

Tanks are massive, heavily-armored vehicles with tracks and large guns or cannons and machine guns affixed to them, and represent the changing face of war as they are considered modern war horses. War horses have often been referred to as war machines, for in the past they made war possible – including transporting supplies, weapons, artillery, and the wounded, and fighting in actual battles and allowing commanders to quickly move along their lines. Joey, who comes to symbolize the war machine of the past, comes face-to-face with a tank in the novel, the war machine of the future.

## Twenty-eight pounds

Twenty-eight pounds is the price Emilie's grandfather pays to win Joey at auction, exceeding all other bidders and demonstrating his resolve to win Joey. Emilie's grandfather is so determined to win Joey because Emilie has died, and he sees Joey as part of her legacy of good things left behind. He will do whatever he can to own Joey in honor of his granddaughter.

## One penny

One penny is the price charged by Emilie's grandfather to sell Joey to Albert. After learning what Joey means to Albert, and after learning of their history together, Emilie's





grandfather realizes that by giving Albert Joey, he will ensure Emilie's love of the horse continues because Albert will not let anything bad happen to Joey. In addition to the penny, Emilie's grandfather asks Albert to tell everyone about the good things Emilie did for Joey, which Albert readily agrees to do.



# Settings

## Devon

Devon, England, is the home of Joey, Albert, and Albert's family in the novel. Devon is a rural area composed primarily of rolling hills, farms, and small villages. It is a beautiful and peaceful place that Joey enjoys growing up in alongside Albert. When Joey is sold to Captain Nicholls, he must leave Devon behind, and longs to return home each day he is away. When the novel ends, Albert and Joey return to Devon, where Joey spends the rest of his life in peace, and where Albert marries and raises a family.

## France

France is the country to which Joey and his cavalry unit ship when World War I breaks out. France is the home of Emilie and her grandfather, who are deeply affected by the war when Emilie's nuclear family is killed. France is devastated by the war as millions of men lose their lives in combat, the landscapes is destroyed, innocent civilians are killed, and as countless small towns, villages, and cities in France are destroyed. Joey serves the duration of his time in France, first with the British cavalry, then later with a German medical detachment and a German artillery unit apart from the time spent with Emilie and her grandfather.

## Trenches

Unable to beat each other through movement and quick battles, the armies of World War I bunker down in trenches to hold onto every single inch of territory they have gained. This causes a terrible stalemate, and some of the bloodiest fighting of the war as each side tries to dislodge the other from their trenches. Joey's cavalry unit participates in one such attempt, but is wiped out by German machine gun fire. The trench style of fighting causes Captain Stewart to reflect sadly on the ghastly waste of lives in a frontal charge.

## No-man's land

No-man's land is the area between the British and German lines, and symbolizes being trapped between the past and the future. No-man's land is composed of craters from artillery, ruined landscape, mud, barbed wire, destroyed buildings and weapons, and the dead. No-man's land is where Joey flees when he encounters tanks, signaling that Joey is stuck between the past and future of warfare, and that Joey is caught between a future of uncertainty and his past in Devon.

## **Veterinarian hospital**

The military veterinarian hospital is located a safe distance behind the British frontlines, and is where Albert is serving with his vet unit. The vet hospital primarily treats the horses used in combat and support operations, and the soldiers decide they will treat Joey. It is at the vet that Joey ultimately recovers, and is later sold at auction to Emilie's grandfather, and where Emilie's grandfather sells Joey back to Albert for a penny. It is from the vet hospital that Joey and Albert travel home to Devon.



# Themes and Motifs

## **Animals have their own level of intelligence and understanding**

Animals have their own level of intelligence and understanding, Michael Morpurgo argues in *War Horse*. While animals – specifically horses in this instance – may not have reason or the same level of intelligence and understanding as humans, they do have a certain level of intelligence and recognition. This is demonstrated primarily through Morpurgo choosing to narrate the novel from Joey's perspective, rather than the perspective of a person.

Through the novel, Joey comes to instinctively understand things pretty quickly. For example, he recognizes immediately that he will have a friend for life in Albert, and that Father is to be avoided when Father is drunk. Joey later recognizes kindness in Captain Nicholls, Captain Stewart, Trooper Warren, the German Doctor, and Emilie and her grandfather. When Joey is trapped out in no-man's land, he recognizes that the approaching British and German soldiers do not wish to harm him, but to help him.

As Joey trains for war, he recognizes his purpose as a horse has changed from farming to fighting. Joey courageously works with Captain Nicholls to defeat the Germans, braving enemy gunfire and artillery to charge the enemy lines. When Joey is impressed by the Germans to serve first as a medical horse, and then later as an artillery horse, Joey bravely works even at risk to his own life. Joey recognizes that he must do as he is told or he will lose his life and will never be able to see Albert again. Indeed, through the course of the war, Joey thinks on his peaceful life in Devon, and longs to go home. The recognition of home is a sign of intelligence.

When Joey is brought back to the British lines late in the novel, he recognizes Albert's voice and owl call – a sure mark of intelligence. As the reader will recall, Albert once told Joey he would be the smartest horse in all the world, and Albert taught Joey how to respond to the owl call. When Joey responds to the owl call at the vet hospital, Joey proves who he is, and confirms that he has a strong intelligence and a good memory to recall the owl whistle. Through the novel, Nicholls and others speak to Joey directly, knowing that Joey can understand to some degree what it is they are saying, a clear sign that an animal must be intelligent enough to be receptive to what is being said.

## **War is a terrible and costly thing**

War is a terrible and costly thing, Michael Morpurgo argues in *War Horse*. War affects everyone in direct and indirect ways, at home and at the front, and almost always negatively. Readers come to see these effects of war through the eyes of Joey.



Joey is initially sold to Captain Nicholls of a unit of British cavalry for 40 pounds. This is done for two reasons: first, war has broken out in Europe, and the British need cavalry mounts; and second, the war has disrupted the economy, sinking crop prices and causing money shortages. This, in turn, makes bills and mortgages difficult to pay, such as in the case of Father. Father is forced to see Joey because the money is desperately needed. The selling of Joey breaks up the Narracott family, as Albert must sadly watch Joey go.

Over in France, Emilie's life is turned upside down by the war. The war claims the lives of her brother, father, and mother early on, causing her to have to go and live with her grandfather. Emilie is brokenhearted by the deaths of her loved ones, all the while German troops come and go as they please and take things from Emilie, her grandfather, and their farming neighbors as needed for the war effort. Emilie and her grandfather are lucky, however, as Joey's travels through France reveal deserted and destroyed towns, ruined homes, devastated landscapes and farms, and countless injured and wounded soldiers and civilians.

The technology used for war has also made tremendous leaps forward, as tanks, heavier artillery, machine guns, and sophisticated trench systems have become common. While both sides effectively use these new technologies, neither side knows how to defeat the other side using them. Traditional tactics – such as cavalry charges and mass infantry attacks – are still used against enemy positions, resulting in literally millions of casualties. This is all referred to as a ghastly waste by Captain Stewart, and reflects clearly the horrors of war.

## **Even animals suffer in war**

Even animals suffer in war, argues Michael Morpurgo in *War Horse*. As noted in a previous theme, war is a terrible and costly thing – and animals are not spared the horrors of it. Such is the case with Joey and Tophorn.

Joey and Tophorn are sold to the British army for use in combat against the Germans. Horses have long been a necessary fixture in wars, doing everything from serving in the cavalry to helping to supply armies, serving as mounts for officers, lugging artillery, transporting the wounded, and so on. The present war, despite the new technology (such as heavier artillery), is no different. Joey's unit is initially used to protect the flanks of the British army, a very traditional role for cavalry.

In such operations, horses are again used commonly as they have been for thousands of years, but the new technology makes things deadly for them. Unable to break the stalemate of the trenches, British high command authorizes a massive cavalry charge against German trenches. Joey's unit participates in the charge, and a combination of bad ground, barbed wire, and heavy German machine gun fire decimates the cavalry unit, killing hundreds of men and horses. Captain Stewart sadly refers to the slaughter as a ghastly waste.



Joey and Tophorn are ultimately captured by the Germans and later pressed into service as artillery horses. They are forced to drag massive pieces of artillery into position so that the British lines can be bombarded. But the work is hard, there is no shelter, there is little food, and the cold mud and cold weather takes a hard toll on the horses. Many horses simply drop dead from exhaustion and failed hearts, while others are killed from tetanus or killed during the fighting. Joey himself loses all of the hair on his lower legs because of the mud, is heartbroken by the death of so many trusted horses and human friends, and nearly dies of tetanus before being able to return to Devon.

## **There is a special bond between humans and animals**

There is a special bond between humans and animals, argues Michael Morpurgo in *War Horse*. The bond between humans and animals – in this case, especially horses – deepens and broadens a life, causes one to live outside oneself for someone else, and brings about a loyalty and friendship that otherwise could not be had. This is especially true of all those who come into contact with Joey.

When Joey meets Albert, he recognizes in Albert right away a kind and gentle soul, and knows Albert will be a friend for life. This is true when Albert trains Joey to farm so that Father will not shoot or sell Joey. The loyal bond between Albert and Joey also prevails years later when Albert fights to keep Joey alive when Joey is suffering from tetanus. The loyalty forged between Albert, Joey, and the other members of the vet unit lead to the unit pooling their money to try to help Albert win Joey in auction.

When Emilie comes into possession of Joey and Tophorn, she is delighted. Having endured so much heartache in the war – her parents and brother were all killed early on – she feels as if she has little left in life to live for. But the appearance of Joey and Tophorn gives her great hope and gives her a new sense of purpose in life. She now has someone else to live for, and so she commits herself to taking extraordinary care of Joey and Tophorn. The bond between Emilie and the horses is so strong that when the German army takes them away later on, Emilie's will to life fades, and she dies.

When Captain Nicholls comes to own Joey, Joey recognizes that Nicholls is a good man and worthy of trusting. Joey performs admirably and heroically for Nicholls in battle, securing a bond of loyalty and friendship between them. Joey is stunned by Nicholl's death, but quickly warms to Warren, who Joey continues to serve admirably and ably. Joey goes on to serve the Germans, who first impress him to carry the wounded, and later to lug artillery. Joey bonds with Crazy Old Friedrich, who treats the horses lovingly. This kindness helps give Joey the strength to fight on.



## **New ways of war have arrived and are understood all too late**

New ways of war have arrived and are understood all too late, argues Michael Morpurgo in *War Horse*. World War I was a time of great heroism, sacrifice, beliefs, and ultimately waste. World War I brought new technologies to widespread, and in some cases, first-time use in battle. The tactics of those who fought, however, did not catch up quickly enough, and resulted in millions upon millions of dead, and many millions more wounded and maimed for life.

Early in the war, the armies behaved as they had always behaved in past wars. They moved, marched, chose battlefields, and fought. But in order to defend territory against the enemy, both sides dug in, using sophisticated systems of trenches to keep the ground they had gained and to repel enemy attacks. As a result, both armies became locked in a stalemate in which little ground was ever gained or lost. Machine guns, barbed wire, and heavy artillery became commonly used to defend ground against enemy attacks.

Despite the new technology, the same old tactics were used to try to win battles. This included massive infantry attacks and cavalry charges, such as the kind that Joey participated in. The result was killing on an unprecedented and unimagined scale. Joey's regiment is destroyed, with hundreds of men and horses killed by German machine guns. Early in the war, such charges and attacks were successful, but later in the war, they were very costly if they were successful, and were a waste at worst if they were unsuccessful. Captain Stewart considers the cavalry charge which leads to his capture a ghastly waste.

Only too late are new possibilities considered. The clash of old and new is seen in the scene where Joey, the war horse and traditional war machine, encounters tanks, the war machine of the future. Tanks, new to the battlefield, are used to help disrupt enemy positions and crash through enemy trenches in ways that previously could not be done. The limited use of tanks, in addition to the arrival of American forces and the tiring of German forces, ultimately leads to the surrender of Germany. The lessons learned from World War I – that tactics must change in relation to the weapons being used – are applied in World War II.

# Styles

## Point of View

Michael Morpurgo tells his novel *War Horse* in the first-person limited-omniscient reflective perspective from the point of view of Joey the horse. Morpurgo chooses to tell the novel from Joey's point of view for three primary reasons: first, he wants to demonstrate that animals also suffer in war; second, he wants to demonstrate that animals do indeed have a level of intelligence and understanding regarding the things that go on around them; third, only Joey is able to relate the events that have happened to him through the course of the war, as no one else is constantly with him from beginning to end. The limited-omniscient aspect of the narrative adds a sense of realism to the story, as no one ever knows everything going on at once. This also adds a level of drama and suspense, as the reader has no idea what may next happen to Joey. The reflective tone of the narrative (such as when Joey speaks about his earliest memories in Chapter 1, or how he recalls events in the final chapter years later, condensing those years into a few paragraphs) means that Joey is recalling the events from a place of safety at home in Devon many years later.

## Language and Meaning

Michael Morpurgo tells his novel *War Horse* in language that is simple, intelligent, and straightforward. This is done for at least two major reasons: first, the novel is targeted toward an audience of young adults and children, so the language used in the novel reflects their age and level of education; second, the novel is narrated from the first-person perspective from the point of view of Joey himself. Because Joey is an intelligent horse, there are some strong vocabulary words used throughout the novel (such as "cumbersome" instead of "difficult," and "inquisitiveness" instead of "curious"). These provide evidence to the idea that animals have at least some form of intelligence. Additionally, because Joey is a horse, he does not have the benefit of a formal education that humans might have, and so the language he uses is the simple language he picks up as he goes. This adds a level of realism to the novel and reinforces the idea that animals do have a limited intelligence.

## Structure

Michael Morpurgo divides his novel *War Horse* into 21 consecutive, linear, numbered, and chronological chapters that begin two years before World War I begins, and that end many years after the conclusion of the war. The straightforward and structured approach to the novel helps bring a sense of order to events that seem to blur together, as Joey does not have the same awareness of time as readers do; and it helps to bring the reader through a time span of several years as the difference between chapters allows the story to advance months and even years at a time. The straightforward



approach to the structure of the novel also allows the reader to focus primarily on the events of the plot as it unfolds, rather than becoming distracted by the structure of the novel itself.



## Quotes

I went over to the door and watched Albert and his mother walking away into the darkness. I knew then that I had found a friend for life, that there was an instinctive and immediate bond of trust and affection between us.

-- Joey (Chapter 1)

**Importance:** When Joey is purchased by Albert's father, Albert is thrilled. He tells Joey that Joey will be the smartest horse ever, and that they will have a good time together. Despite his parents' dismissal, Albert insists horses can indeed understand him. This is proved to be correct when Joey recognizes that he will have a good friend in Albert.

Mother says there's likely to be a war... But I tell you, Joey, if there is a war I'd want to go. I think I'd make a good soldier.... If it comes to that, you'd make a good war horse yourself, wouldn't you...

-- Albert (Chapter 2)

**Importance:** Joey first learns of the war that may soon come while on the way back from the fields with Albert one day. Albert is ready to fight for his country, and believes Joey would make an excellent horse for military use. This is an ominous statement, as it is only a matter of time before Joey and Albert both end up in the massive war which will come to be known as both The Great War and World War I.

You won't understand and neither will Albert, but unless I sell you, I can't keep up with the mortgage and we'll lose the farm.

-- Father (Chapter 4)

**Importance:** With the war hitting crop prices hard, Father struggles to earn enough money to pay the bills, including the mortgage. Father decides to sell Joey to Captain Nicholls, an officer in the British cavalry. The price for Joey is 40 pounds, which Father explains to Joey he desperately needs to save the farm. There is no other alternative, so Joey must now become a war horse.

I never saw Captain Nicholls again.

-- Joey (Chapter 6)

**Importance:** Joey and Captain Nicholls lead a cavalry charge against a German position while protecting the flank of the British forces in France. The Germans are defeated, but many of the soldiers and horses of the cavalry regiment are killed. Among them is Captain Nicholls. This saddens Joey greatly, for Nicholls was a rare, kind man. Joey's future, without his military owner, is now uncertain.

What a ghastly waste.

-- Captain Stewart (Chapter 8)

**Importance:** Joey's time with the British forces comes to an end following a cavalry



attack on heavy German positions. The cavalry regiment is destroyed, with most men and horses killed. Among those who are captured are Warren, Joey, Topthorn, and Stewart. Stewart is horrified by the slaughter, because so many men and horses have died needlessly.

She prays for you... Do you know, every night before she goes to bed, she prays for you?

-- Emilie's Grandfather (Chapter 10)

**Importance:** After they are captured by the Germans, Joey and Topthorn become medical horses, carrying the wounded to field hospitals. Joey and Topthorn are cared for each night by Emilie and her grandfather, local farmers. Emilie, who has lost her entire family due to the war, is thrilled to have Joey and Topthorn around. She prays for them because she is so grateful to have them around.

I shall be taking your horses with us.

-- German artillery commander (Chapter 11)

**Importance:** Emilie is stunned when a German artillery battery passes through, spends the night on the farm, and decides to bring along Joey and Topthorn. Emilie and her grandfather have no choice but relent, as the Germans insist on bringing along the horses. Joey and Topthorn are then pressed into war horse service once more, where they come to drag massive pieces of artillery into battle.

It was the mud that was killing us one by one – the mud, the lack of shelter, and the lack of food.

-- Joey (Chapter 12)

**Importance:** Joey explains that the work of a war horse – such as pulling cannons into position – is not what is harmful or deadly. What is deadly is the overall situation. The winter mud, no shelter, and little food make the horses weak and weary. They must struggle harder than ever to pull the artillery, and many of the horses die of exhaustion or from accidentally being killed by those fighting around them. Joey and Topthorn, however, survive the winter and make it into the spring.

You two are the only rational creatures I've met in this stupid war, and like me, the only reason you're here is because you were brought here.

-- Crazy Old Friedrich (Chapter 13)

**Importance:** Joey and Topthorn eventually come under the command of the elderly German soldier, Friedrich, who is a butcher in peacetime. Friedrich contends that it is crazy that the soldiers fighting in the war no longer have any idea why they are fighting. Friedrich explains that Joey and Topthorn are the only sane creatures he has met, because they, like Friedrich, have been forced into the war.

I will show the coin to everyone on both sides and everyone will know that whichever side wins the horse it is only by chance. Then no one loses any pride, yes? And



everyone will be happy.  
-- German soldier (Chapter 16)

**Importance:** When Joey ends up trapped in no-man's land, a kind German soldier and a kind British soldier both venture out to save him. The two soldiers get along well, and agree the horse must be taken care of. With both sides watching, the German suggests a coin toss to let chance determine who will bring back the horse. The British soldier wins the toss, and Joey is led back to the British lines.

There's no horse like him anywhere in the world.  
-- Albert (Chapter 17)

**Importance:** While Joey has been serving across France, Albert has joined a British military vet, and hopes one day to come across Joey. Speaking to his friends, Albert explains there is no other horse like Joey in the entire world. Albert is stunned and elated to find Joey before him.

So I want you to tell your friends back home about my Emilie. Otherwise it will be as if she had never even lived.  
-- Emilie's grandfather (Chapter 21)

**Importance:** When the war ends, the British troops receive the order to sell most of their horses at auction. Joey is put up for sale against Albert's wishes, and is purchased by Emilie's grandfather. Upon learning about who Albert is, and who Joey is to Albert, Emilie's grandfather sells Joey to him for a single penny and the promise that Albert will tell others about Emilie because Emilie has since died.