

## TEACHER'S RESOURCES

# PRIVATE PEACEFUL

Michael Morpurgo



## NOVEL NOTES

**FOLENS**



*Novel Notes*  
Private Peaceful

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# Private Peaceful

It is June 1916 and Thomas 'Tommo' Peaceful keeps a vigil, initially unexplained, throughout the night in a barn in France. Tommo narrates the story of his life, growing up with his mother, his older brother Charlie, his eldest brother Big Joe and his friend Molly. The family live in Devon, England in a forester's cottage on the estate of a wealthy Colonel. Tommo's father was killed in a tree-felling accident for which Tommo has always blamed himself.

Tommo remembers his first day at school. A kind girl, Molly, helps him to tie his laces and Tommo instantly falls in love with her. Big Joe visits the school with a slow worm that he has found. Tommo's eldest brother is a gentle, nature-loving boy who has been intellectually disabled since having meningitis as an infant. Big Joe's visit results in a taunt from a local boy, Jimmy Parsons, and Tommo has a brawl with him. They are both caned by the headmaster. After the incident, Molly helps Tommo get cleaned up and a close friendship develops between Molly, Tommo and Charlie. Molly visits the Peaceful house regularly and becomes like one of the family.

In order to avoid eviction, Mrs Peaceful accepts the Colonel's offer of work at his house, where she looks after the Colonel's ailing wife. Mrs Peaceful's aunt moves into the forester's cottage to look after the family. She is an unpleasant woman who the children nickname 'Grandma Wolf'. She bullies Big Joe and kills his collection of wild animals. When the Colonel's wife dies, Grandma Wolf replaces Mrs Peaceful in the Colonel's home and Mrs Peaceful comes home, to her family's relief.

Charlie, Tommo and Molly begin to poach fish from the Colonel's estate, but the boys are caught by the Colonel. They are made to clean his stables and kennels as punishment. Eventually, Charlie and Molly go to work in the Colonel's estate, leaving Tommo in school feeling lonely and jealous. Charlie steals a foxhound, Bertha, from the Colonel's kennels when he discovers that the Colonel wants to shoot the dog. As a result Charlie loses his job and goes to work on a dairy farm. Molly's strict parents prevent her from seeing the Peaceful brothers after the incident. Tommo delivers letters between Charlie and Molly. He feels betrayed when Charlie admits that he has also been meeting Molly in secret. When the Colonel shoots Bertha, Big Joe, who has adopted the dog, goes missing. This prompts a desperate search by everyone in the village. Eventually he is found sleeping in the church tower, safe and well.

Molly becomes pregnant with Charlie's baby and is thrown out of her house. She comes to live with the Peaceful family. She and Charlie get married. The two Peaceful brothers join the army at the Colonel's insistence. Although too young to enlist, Tommo pretends to be Charlie's twin brother. They are trained by a ruthless officer called Sergeant Hanley, who punishes Charlie for insubordination.

The novel then tells of the brothers' experiences in World War One in Belgium. Charlie and Tommo deal with the terror of trench warfare and the deaths of many comrades. Charlie gets to return home to Britain to recuperate from a foot injury. He is able to visit his newborn son. Tommo survives a deadly gas attack and Charlie returns to the trenches. After Tommo gets wounded in no-man's-land, Charlie disobeys a direct order to charge from Sergeant Hanley. Charlie is accused of cowardice and given a court martial. The reason for Tommo's vigil in the barn is revealed: he is counting down the hours till his brother is to be executed at 6am. Tommo promises Charlie that he will look after Molly and the baby. Tommo finally confesses his guilt over the death of their father but Charlie reassures Tommo that he was blameless and that it was an accident. The novel ends after Charlie's execution, with Tommo marching towards the Somme, determined to survive and return home.

Themes and issues included in this book include bullying, animal welfare, war, prejudice, violence and the death penalty.



### About the Author

**M**ichael Morpurgo was born in St Alban's, England in 1943. He is a poet and playwright but is best known as a writer of children's books. He is married with three children.

Morpurgo was educated in English schools including boarding schools, which would influence the writing of *The Butterfly Lion*. He went on to study English and French at London University and became a primary school teacher. His first book was published in 1974. He has written over 120 books, including *Waiting For Anya*, *The Butterfly Lion*, *War Horse*, *Kensuke's Kingdom* and *Private Peaceful*. He held the title of Children's Laureate from 2003 to 2005.

He has been shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal four times and his children's books have won the Whitbread Children's Book Award, the Smarties Book Prize and the Red House Children's Book Award. His novel *War Horse* has been adapted into a film directed by Steven Spielberg.



### Objectives

#### Curriculum Objectives

The child should be enabled to identify unfamiliar words by reference to word parts, prefixes and suffixes; engage in talk about the book; using dictionaries effectively; using information technology to increase motivation and to enhance reading achievement; continue to develop comprehension strategies such as assimilation (what did I learn?), inference (what may I conclude?), analysis (what are the details and how do they come together?), prediction (what might happen next ?) and summarising (how can I give a brief account of the main points?)

#### Learning Outcomes

The child should be enabled to:

- Keep a reading log.
- Participate in a class debate.
- Write a newspaper account.
- Create a family tree.
- Draw or paint a poster.
- Create a map.
- Design an illustrated timeline.



## Cross-curricular Links

### SPHE

Growing and changing: How does Tommo grow and change in the book? How does Tommo rely on his family for support? What role does his brother Charlie play in his life? How do characters' perceptions of each other change in the book?

### History

There are obvious links with World War One and in particular trench warfare in Belgium at that time. Tommo's vigil for his brother takes place in 1916 – draw parallels between this war and events in Ireland at the time, the Easter Rising and also Irish involvement in WW1. The incident with the aeroplane can link to the history of aviation. The importance of written communications in a time before internet or mobile phones can be explored.

### Geography

Work on map skills should include locating places mentioned in the novel, such as Iddesleigh, Salisbury Plain, Étaples, Ypres and the Somme.

### Visual Arts

Draw and/or paint a scene from the book – perhaps the arrival of the yellow aeroplane in the Colonel's estate, or the crowd watching the army recruiters marching into the village. A picture portrait of a character from the story could be accompanied by a descriptive quote about them, chosen from the text.

### Drama

A scene could be acted out and improvised with the character of Tommo being interviewed by a war reporter in the trenches about his experiences, or a scene involving many participants as they organise the search for Big Joe.



## Suggestions for Classroom Work

- Keep a reading log for every chapter.
- Children could take part in a class debate: 'Court martials are important during wartime to keep everyone focused on their job'.
- Write a local newspaper account of one of the events in the story – the search for Big Joe, the gas attack, Charlie's court martial. Choose an appropriate headline.
- Write a letter home from a soldier who survived the German attacks, talking about Charlie's bravery and Tommo's vigil. Or, write a letter from Tommo to his family explaining what has happened to Charlie.
- Create a family tree for the characters in the book showing the Peaceful family, Molly, her parents, the Colonel, teachers, etc. This can then branch into the soldiers and sergeants encountered later in the story. Labels can denote the relationships between the various characters.
- Draw and paint a colourful poster for a movie version of *Private Peaceful*, or create your own book cover for the novel.
- Children can create a map of a section of Europe around the English Channel, showing Southern England, France and Belgium and marking a) the locations used in the book and b) the journey taken by the Peaceful brothers.
- A timeline of Tommo's life could be created, marking important events from the story. This could be created on large pieces of card and displayed in the classroom.





## Web Links

### **A PDF resource on the novel from the UK Booktrust charity:**

<http://filesserver.booktrust.org.uk/usr/resources/243/privatepeaceful.pdf>

### **A BBC site with resources for children to explore World War One:**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/worldwarone/>

### **News articles about the 2006 general pardon of those courts-martialed in World War One:**

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2006/aug/16/military.immigrationpolicy>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1526437/Pardoned-the-306-soldiers-shot-at-dawn-for-cowardice.html>

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/4796579.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/4796579.stm)



## Pre-reading Activities

### **Oral Pre-reading Questions**

#### **Chapter 1**

What does the front cover of this book suggest to you about this story?

#### **Chapter 2**

Is this story being told in the past or present tense? What is the reason for the small illustration of two butterflies near the start of each chapter?

#### **Chapter 3**

So far, all of the chapter titles are clock times. Why do you think this is?

#### **Chapter 4**

How is the life of the Peaceful brothers similar to your own? How is it different?

#### **Chapter 5**

What consequences might Charlie face for taking Bertha?

#### **Chapter 6**

Why do you think the Colonel shoots Bertha?

#### **Chapter 7**

Would you describe this book as being a happy story overall at this point? Why?

#### **Chapter 8**

Do you think Tommo and Charlie will see their home again? Why?

#### **Chapter 9**

Would you describe Charlie as a hero? Why?

#### **Chapter 10**

'Tell you what - if anything happens to me it's yours, all right?' Why might this line be worrying? What have we heard Tommo say about Charlie's watch in a previous chapter?



### Chapter 11

If you could grant Tommo one wish at this point in the story, what do you think he would ask for?

### Chapter 12

Things seem to have taken a very bad turn for Tommo, Charlie and his friends but can you name three positive things that happened in the last chapter?

### Chapter 13

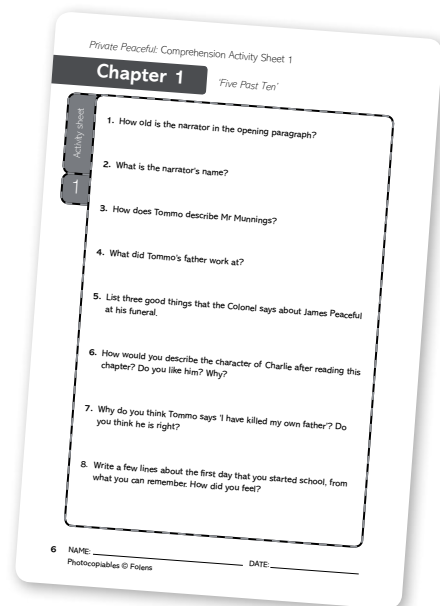
The next chapter brings us up-to-date as we join Tommo on his vigil at one minute to six. Do you think having this countdown throughout the book at the start of each chapter was a good idea by the author? Why?

## Vocabulary

Pre-teach the relevant new vocabulary in each chapter. Add new words to the word wall, ask the students to use new words in a sentence, get the children to think of words that mean the same thing as the new words (synonyms), etc. This novel contains some slang terms that British soldiers used at the time which can be investigated.

## Comprehension Activity Sheets

Presented on the following pages are a selection of both lower and higher order questions for each section of this novel, which the teacher may choose from.



# Chapter 1

*'Five Past Ten'*

Activity sheet

1

1. How old is the narrator in the opening paragraph?
2. What is the narrator's name?
3. How does Tommo describe Mr Munnings?
4. What did Tommo's father work at?
5. List three good things that the Colonel says about James Peaceful at his funeral.
6. How would you describe the character of Charlie after reading this chapter? Do you like him? Why?
7. Why do you think Tommo says 'I have killed my own father'? Do you think he is right?
8. Write a few lines about the first day that you started school, from what you can remember. How did you feel?

## Chapter 2

1. What trick do Tommo and Charlie play on Big Joe?
2. Write down five of your own words to describe Big Joe.
3. How does their mother punish the boys for the trick they play?
4. According to Tommo, what did the Peaceful brothers do that first caused the Colonel to dislike them?
5. Describe what Mrs Peaceful was like before her husband died.
6. Write down four words that you would use to describe Grandma Wolf.
7. At the end of this chapter, Tommo talks about his bad dreams. Have you had a nightmare or bad dream before? What was it about?

## Chapter 3

*'Nearly Quarter Past Eleven'*

Activity sheet

3

1. What does the opening paragraph tell you about where Tommo is at present?
2. What did Molly's father work at?
3. Name three types of animal that Big Joe keeps.
4. Grandma Wolf had a deep fear of mice. Do you have any fears? Write about one of them.
5. What happens in this chapter to make the children feel 'liberated'?
6. What do Tommo, Charlie and Molly spend their time doing for the next couple of years?
7. Why do you think Molly's parents are so unfriendly towards the boys?

## Chapter 4

1. What is Tommo talking about in the opening paragraph?
2. Who is Lambert and what is his job?
3. What punishment does the Colonel want to give the boys after they are caught poaching? What punishment do they end up receiving?
4. What is different about Molly's appearance after her illness?
5. Why does Ms McAllister call Mr Munnings 'a wicked, wicked man'?
6. Why do you think the visit of the aeroplane leaves the children breathless?
7. Imagine that you could read Bertha's mind. What might she be thinking about in the old forester's shack? Write down some of her thoughts.

## Chapter 5

*'Twenty-Four Minutes Past Twelve'*

Activity sheet

1. Why is Tommo thinking about foxes and owls at the start of this chapter?
2. How does Charlie's mother stop the Colonel from punishing him?
3. What nursery rhyme does Big Joe like to sing?
4. Why is Molly forbidden from seeing Charlie?
5. Why doesn't Tommo mind being a 'go-between postman'?
6. How does Charlie first hear news of the war?
7. Write some lines that Tommo may have written in his diary, after finding out that Charlie had been meeting Molly in secret.
8. 'The Colonel had total control over the happiness of the Peaceful family'. Write down whether you agree or disagree with this, and why.

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## Chapter 6

1. Why does Big Joe go missing?
2. Who takes part in the search for Big Joe?
3. Why does Molly suggest that they search in the Church?
4. Write a few lines about a time when you found something that was very important to you that you feared you had lost.
5. What do you think Big Joe means when he says 'Ungwee. Ungwee.'?
6. Write a paragraph that a local newspaper, *The Iddesleigh Gazette*, might have used in a story describing the search for the missing boy and how he was found.



## Chapter 7

*Twenty-Eight Minutes Past One'*

Activity sheet

1. How does the first paragraph of this chapter relate to events in the previous chapter?
2. What is the 'broken promise' that Tommo says was responsible for bringing him to France?
3. Why does Tommo feel both overjoyed and miserable on the evening when he learns that Molly is pregnant?
4. What fills Tommo with shame after seeing the soldiers?
5. How is the Colonel able to force Charlie to go to war?
6. Why do you think Tommo decides to go to war with Charlie?
7. Write down five words that you think describe how Tommo feels as he leaves on the train with his brother.

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*'Fourteen Minutes Past Two'*

## Chapter 8

Activity sheet

1. What lie do the brothers tell so that they'll get recruited to the army?
2. What sound like 'distant thunder' do the boys hear at the training camp in Salisbury, England?
3. Why does Tommo compare himself to a bee that he sees while training?
4. How do Tommo and Charlie cope with crossing the English Channel by ship?
5. How do you think Sergeant Hanley expects Charlie to respond when he calls him a 'blot on Creation'?
6. Write down five of your own words to describe Sergeant Hanley.
7. What do you think is the most difficult thing about the boys' careers as soldiers so far? Why?

8

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## Chapter 9

*'A Minute Past Three'*

Activity sheet

1. Like the other chapters, this chapter opens with Tommo staying awake all through the night. Describe how you think he might be feeling at this time.
2. Why do you think the soldiers are relieved to be going to the front?
3. Why does Tommo imagine that he can almost taste humbugs?
4. What kind of food do Tommo and Charlie eat at the estaminet?
5. The soldiers have a nickname for the town of Ypres in Belgium which is being pounded by bombs. What is it?
6. If the 'Hun prisoner' was asked to write a few lines about his ordeal, what would he say, do you think?

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'Twenty-Five Past Three'

## Chapter 10

Activity sheet

1. Based on the opening paragraph of this chapter, what is your best guess as to why Tommo is spending the night alone in a barn?
2. Why does Tommo give up all hope of Charlie returning to the dugout alive?
3. Tommo picks out two stars in the night sky. Who does he imagine these stars to be?
4. Who makes an unwelcome return to Tommo's life at the end of this chapter?
5. Use five words of your own to describe some of the different emotions that Tommo feels in this chapter.
6. Anna, the girl from the estaminet, reminds Tommo of Molly. Write about a time when you saw someone who reminded you of a person you know.

10

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

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# Chapter 11

*'Nearly Four O'Clock'*

Activity sheet

11

1. In this chapter's opening paragraph, what do we find out about the vigil that Tommo is keeping in the barn?
2. Why are the new recruits so badly needed?
3. What sort of attack takes place as Tommo is writing his letter home?
4. What harmful effects does the gas have on the soldiers?
5. What good news does Tommo hear in his mother's letter?
6. Tommo receives three written letters from home. How do you think today's soldiers might hear from their families while at war? Why?
7. Charlie tells the sergeant that it's raining 'cats and dogs' in England. What do you think this saying means?

'Five To Five'

## Chapter 12

Activity sheet

12

1. What is about to happen at 6am, according to the opening paragraph?
2. Why does Charlie disagree with Sergeant Hanley's decision to leave the dugout and attack the German bunker?
3. How many witnesses does the British army have at Charlie's court martial?
4. Is Charlie's court martial fair or unfair in your opinion? Why?
5. Why doesn't Captain Wilkie help to support Charlie's case in the court martial?
6. Write a brief summary of the events that led to Charlie's death sentence.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Chapter 13

*One Minute To Six'*

Activity sheet

13

1. How does this short, final chapter make you feel?
2. Why is Tommo 'far from alone' in his grieving?
3. Where is Charlie buried?
4. Write your own happy ending for Tommo in a few lines, after he fights in the famous historic Battle of the Somme.
5. Why do you think the author includes a postscript after this chapter?
6. Do you agree with the 'conditional pardon' granted by the British Government in 2006? Why?/Why not?



# Book Report Sheet

If you don't have enough space to write your answers, use the notes section on the following pages.

Pupil's name:

Class:

Date:

Title of book:

Author:

Illustrator:

Setting (where the story took place):

List the main characters:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

Write about each of the following:

Your favourite character: \_\_\_\_\_

The plot: \_\_\_\_\_

The climax: \_\_\_\_\_

The ending: \_\_\_\_\_

Write four adjectives to describe this book:

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_ 4. \_\_\_\_\_

Did you like the book? Why?/Why not?

Grade the book (✓ Tick one)

Easy to read ☐

Just right ☐

A little difficult ☐

Difficult ☐

Rate the book out of ten: \_\_\_\_\_ /10

# Notes

Notes

# Notes

Notes

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_