

War Horse

Year 6 unit of work – Literacy (English National Curriculum)

written by Lynn Sear, literacy consultant

Text/genre

This 3-week unit of work relates to the story *War Horse* by Michael Morpurgo and the play by the National Theatre. Drama techniques such as 'role on the wall', 'hot seating', 'conscience alley' and 'still images' are used to stimulate ideas and create situations. Visual images and music are also incorporated. Specific teaching strategies are highlighted in bold and there is a glossary to explain how each of these works in a classroom situation. This unit of work would be most appropriate if used in a Year 6 class.

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|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| <p>SESSION 1</p> <p>To discuss possibilities and predict outcomes using text</p> <p><i>I can make predictions from text</i></p> | <p>Activating response to the text using Book Talk. Teacher to read aloud the author's note at the front of the book. Children to use paired talk to share likes/dislikes/puzzles/questions and to jot these down on a sticky note. Teacher to collate the responses, drawing on similarities between them. Display on a grid.</p> <p>Additional questions to discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you read a book by Michael Morpurgo before? • If so, what kinds of books does he generally write? • Genre? • What clues are in the blurb? | <p>Shared Reading of first chapter up to 'but you'll be eating out of my hand quick as a tick'. What kind of a place is this? How do we know? What are the feelings? Why is Joey so scared? Highlight words in the passage that indicate how Joey is feeling (confusion, terror, terrible, wild, desperate, struggled). Put the words up on your working wall on a vocabulary bank. Compare the written text with the depiction of 'Auction Day – 5 August 1912' in the play. This is a Key Scene to watch in the play.</p> <p>Focus on the theme of 'fate' and the relationship between the Narracott brothers. Recall the scene and compare to the description in book, then add to the list of words taken directly from text using a Zone of Relevance to activate dormant vocabulary identifying an atmosphere of fear. Suggested words: <i>menacing, horrifying, frightening, uncomfortable</i>.</p> | <p>Independent writing</p> <p>Using the talk, ask the children to answer the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What war do you think this is about? • Why would there be such a painting (of the horse mentioned in the author's note) and what could be its significance? <p>Ensure children are aware that 'significance' means importance. It would be useful to watch the play at this point, taking note of the key scenes to focus on within this unit of work.</p> | <p>Share responses and start collating work on a working wall specifically for the text and play.</p> | <p>Identify what children know of war and WW1; build this into a later session to ensure gaps in knowledge are addressed.</p> |
| <p>SESSION 2</p> <p>To draw upon a bank of words to accurately describe places and feelings</p> <p><i>I can choose relevant words and phrases</i></p> | <p>Shared Reading of first chapter up to 'but you'll be eating out of my hand quick as a tick'. What kind of a place is this? How do we know? What are the feelings? Why is Joey so scared? Highlight words in the passage that indicate how Joey is feeling (confusion, terror, terrible, wild, desperate, struggled). Put the words up on your working wall on a vocabulary bank. Compare the written text with the depiction of 'Auction Day – 5 August 1912' in the play. This is a Key Scene to watch in the play.</p> <p>Focus on the theme of 'fate' and the relationship between the Narracott brothers. Recall the scene and compare to the description in book, then add to the list of words taken directly from text using a Zone of Relevance to activate dormant vocabulary identifying an atmosphere of fear. Suggested words: <i>menacing, horrifying, frightening, uncomfortable</i>.</p> | <p>Role play. In groups of three, using information from text, construct the Narracott family, perhaps in the kitchen preparing a meal. What might the conversation be about, what might they be eating etc. Create a still image to portray the moment when the dad announces he has brought a horse home. (In the play Joey is already there) Use thought tracking to understand what each character is thinking at each moment in time.</p> | <p>Role play. In groups of three, using information from text, construct the Narracott family, perhaps in the kitchen preparing a meal. What might the conversation be about, what might they be eating etc. Create a still image to portray the moment when the dad announces he has brought a horse home. (In the play Joey is already there) Use thought tracking to understand what each character is thinking at each moment in time.</p> | <p>Discuss characters in the book and what is known so far of them. Who is the most important character? Albert/Joey/ Mum / Dad or his brother (play version only). Who has power?</p> | <p>Identify use of vocabulary – is it used appropriately and linked to context?</p> |
| <p>SESSION 3</p> <p>To write in role using a character's perspective</p> <p><i>I can use verbs to describe movement and adjectives to describe appearance</i></p> | <p>'Joey meeting Albert' is a Key Scene in the play. Children to recall and identify the way Albert moves around Joey and what his motive is to answer question 'How is trust built?' Focus on how Albert does not use eye contact and how he uses his body in a non-threatening manner.</p> <p>Visual images. Use pictures of horses to generate an adjective bank to describe the way they move, look, feel etc. Discuss word choices which show positives and negatives to maximum effect – use a language continuum – trot to canter. Identify which words have the best effect.</p> | <p>Modelled writing in role. Teacher to model writing a paragraph from the point of view of Albert meeting Joey for the first time. Focus on vocabulary. What words can we draw upon to describe the movement and feeling of horses at the auction? Children to write in role as Albert writing his diary for the first time. Focus on the use of language appropriate for the time. Use images on tables and language continuum from first session generated to convey these feelings.</p> | <p>Modelled writing in role. Teacher to model writing a paragraph from the point of view of Albert meeting Joey for the first time. Focus on vocabulary. What words can we draw upon to describe the movement and feeling of horses at the auction? Children to write in role as Albert writing his diary for the first time. Focus on the use of language appropriate for the time. Use images on tables and language continuum from first session generated to convey these feelings.</p> | <p>Read rest of chapter 1 and focus on the theme of 'fate' and how Joey and Albert have been drawn together. Why do they need each other so much? Share vocabulary and place language continuum onto working wall.</p> | <p>Collect evidence on sentence structure – can children use first person consistently?</p> |

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| <p>SESSION 4</p> <p>To understand how to paragraph an argument</p> <p><i>I can organise sentences into sections</i></p> | <p>Shared Reading Read <i>War Horse</i> chapter 2 up to page 15, father's speech <i>'if that animal is not ploughing straight as an arrow inside a week, he'll be sold on'</i>. Explore what would happen either way. What should Albert do? Explore feelings – use corridor of conscience to present arguments and counter arguments with a child as Albert walking down it. Eg, 'if he doesn't plough your Dad will send him back'. He's a young thoroughbred – he's not meant to pull carts'.</p> | <p>Modelled writing</p> <p>Teacher to use connectives – eg 'on the other hand', 'however', 'despite the fact' – to organise information into paragraphs and to support presenting the arguments and counter arguments.</p> | <p>Independent writing Children to write a short passage of 2 paragraphs where they present a balanced argument for why it would be important for Albert to get Joey to plough the field and what would be the implications if he did not. Look at reasons associated with what it means to the family and for the long term if Joey helps them win the bet. Children to present their information to each other in pairs giving an argument and a counter argument. Each person to present a different paragraph.</p> | <p>In the play Mum says <i>'You've done well with him, proud of you son'</i></p> <p>Discuss the relationship between Albert and Mum – why can she say this and Dad can't?</p> <p>Read to end of Chapter 2.</p> | <p>Can children use however and appropriately to counter information?</p> |
| <p>SESSION 5</p> <p>To infer information from the text (by identifying the arrival of war and its effect on family and community)</p> <p><i>I can read between the lines to gather evidence</i></p> | <p>Recap end of chapter 2 'it's War Mother' Shared Reading chapters 3 and 4. Model completing a table of life before war arrived for the family and Joey and what life is like now. Reference specific characters and how life has changed them. Use both play and book.</p> <p>Ask children to mind map what they know of war already, and where possible, to identify anything factual about WW1. Work in pairs.</p> | <p>Questioning using 'Talk to the hand' Children to work in pairs again compiling a list of questions using who/what/why/when from the talk to the hand visual about what they would like to find out about World War 1 that they can then find out from the visit to the Imperial War Museum (IWM). Whilst doing this, children to have pictures on tables depicting parts of the War and to be listening to songs from WW1, <i>'Pack up your troubles in your old kitbag', 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary', 'Oh it's a Lovely War', 'Take me Back to Dear Old Blighty', 'The Rose of No Man's Land'</i>.</p> | <p>Questioning using 'Talk to the hand' Children to work in pairs again compiling a list of questions using who/what/why/when from the talk to the hand visual about what they would like to find out about World War 1 that they can then find out from the visit to the Imperial War Museum (IWM). Whilst doing this, children to have pictures on tables depicting parts of the War and to be listening to songs from WW1, <i>'Pack up your troubles in your old kitbag', 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary', 'Oh it's a Lovely War', 'Take me Back to Dear Old Blighty', 'The Rose of No Man's Land'</i>.</p> | <p>Children to share questions and identify which are best to find out specific facts. Each child to have a clipboard to record 5 key questions that they will take to the IWM. What questions can be answered by using the text? Do we need more factual evidence?</p> | <p>Identify children who have inferred information from text – Reading Assessment Focus 3 – and question them on which parts of the text they have used.</p> |
| <p>SESSION 6</p> <p>To develop understanding of the causes, effects and resolution of war and conflict</p> <p><i>I can use sources and artefacts to answer questions</i></p> | <p>At this point try and make a visit to the Imperial War Museum. This is vital if children have not had the opportunity to look at WW1 in detail within the curriculum provision. It is important to clear up any misconceptions between WW1 and WW2 that may exist. Children to fact gather using the questions produced from yesterday.</p> | <p>Share facts on return – were there any questions unanswered? How can we research the answers? What counts as 'evidence'? What 'sources' did you look at? Look at map of Europe. Where is the story set? Mark on where trenches were and where you can imagine parts of the story taking place using the references from Captain Nicholls' sketch book in the play. Ask children to make notes of these when watching the play and discuss what role they play in scene setting and providing a narrative.</p> <p>Add information to working wall.</p> | <p>Share facts on return – were there any questions unanswered? How can we research the answers? What counts as 'evidence'? What 'sources' did you look at? Look at map of Europe. Where is the story set? Mark on where trenches were and where you can imagine parts of the story taking place using the references from Captain Nicholls' sketch book in the play. Ask children to make notes of these when watching the play and discuss what role they play in scene setting and providing a narrative.</p> <p>Add information to working wall.</p> | <p>Who could use a source or artefact to answer a question, who just relied on text and being told?</p> | <p>Who could use a source or artefact to answer a question, who just relied on text and being told?</p> |

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| <p>SESSION 7 To identify how an author and/ or director create atmosphere in a production</p> <p><i>I can understand how an author and or director builds tension and atmosphere</i></p> | <p>Start session with discussing the separation of Joey and Albert. (end of chapter 4) Why do you think that Albert's father treats Joey so badly? In play this takes place on 5 August 1914 (as stated by Captain Nicholls's sketches)</p> <p>Paired writing Ask children to write another entry in the diary of Albert in pairs, taking it in turns to write a sentence each. Focus on the emotions between Albert and Joey and Albert and his father.</p> | | <p>Read chapters 5 and 6 to page 48, and there was not a single man in the squadron who seemed prepared for it.' Focus on the Key Scene in the play of the Ferry crossing and recreate it partly using rope and 4 people standing inside a square held by the class. Children on outside to whisper words describing the atmosphere and activity. Draw upon vocabulary used in the Zones of Relevance activity from session 2.</p> | | |
| <p>SESSION 8 To write an imaginary account using another perspective</p> <p><i>I can write emotively and descriptively</i></p> | <p>Read remainder of chapter 6 if you were reading the story from Captain Nicholls' point of view, what would be the differences in the description of the first battle? Put children into pairs and focus on the description in the text when they go into battle. One child then to be Captain Nicholls and they other to be a prompter. The child who is Captain Nicholls starts with a description, and the other child says 'Tell me more about.'</p> | | <p>Use the retelling of going into battle to write an account entitled 'Captain's Nicholls's final words'. Ask children to write in their own words what happened that day from the first moment they were given the message to move forward. Comment on the feeling of panic and noise around them.</p> | | <p>Can they use a range of vocabulary to describe the chaos and the emotions around them?</p> |
| <p>SESSION 9 To write a vivid descriptive passage drawing upon the 5 senses</p> <p><i>I can use my senses to make my writing come to life</i></p> | <p>Return to the text. Shared reading to Page 60 (chapter 7) Discuss the importance of letters to and from home in a world without email, mobile phones and television. How did news filter through? Albert and Joey are still separated. What would Albert write to Joey about life back home if he could? Teacher to model writing a letter with news back home.</p> <p><i>Dear Joey, How are you my old friend? I am missing you more day by day. Mother is frantic with worry about the war, she is convinced that no-one will come back alive. Life has changed a little on the farm since you have left – Father rarely drinks anymore as we have so little money, he has to work all day for us to survive. Reports come back daily about deaths on the warfront – we have found out Captain Nicholls has died in battle, I wonder if you were with him at the time? Next week I am 16. Although I am not old enough, I am planning to sign up, and then I can come and find you! I believe we will be together again. Your best friend and master, Albert.</i></p> | | <p>Read to page 63 'Do me proud, Joey, do me proud'. Independent writing – children to write a response in the voice of Joey to Albert, what has he seen / heard / felt? Ask children to plan using a sensory grid using page 62. Children to highlight the language used by Michael Morpurgo on page 62 where there is a heavily descriptive passage before just going into battle.</p> | <p>Children to read out their imaginary responses to Albert from Joey with class to peer assess and evaluate what sensory devices they have used.</p> | |
| <p>SESSION 10 To use commas and semi-colons to demarcate complex sentences</p> <p><i>I can use a comma or a semi-colon to extend my simple sentence</i></p> | <p>Ask the children to return to the facts from session 6. Show them how to make them into simple sentences, eg,</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) World War 1 started on 28 July 1914 2) Armistice was on 11 November 1918 3) The introduction of the tank happened in WW1 4) There were 19,240 dead on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. | <p>Model writing complex sentences using the simple sentences. Highlight on IWB how to extend sentences using 'as' or 'as a result of this'; and identify how to use a semi-colon. <i>As the war progressed, the fatalities increased; on the first day of the Battle of the Somme there were 19,240 deaths.</i></p> | <p>Children to write complex sentences in mixed ability pairs picking up two simple sentences from strips on the table and identifying how to join them through use of connective phrases on table and a comma and/or a semi-colon.</p> <p>Children to write their own non-chronological report on World War 1 using the complex sentences they had created. Children to work in groups with each member having responsibility for each sub-section.</p> | <p>Teacher to collate the facts with the complex sentences and display on the board. Play 'sentence doctor' – can these be improved upon? Children to identify layout – title, subtitles etc within their writing. Explain it is a non-chronological report.</p> | <p>Collect evidence for Writing Assessment Focus 6</p> |

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| <p>SESSION 11 To infer information about characters</p> <p><i>I can write a character description</i></p> | <p>Shared reading chapters 8, 9 and 10. Explore the theme of 'Friendship' at this point and stress the importance of acts of kindness during the war, where normally you would only believe that people are hostile to each other. Children to discuss 'what conditions make people want to fight one another, and how can we prevent it?' Children to discuss in circle, speaking in turn and using phrases, 'I agree with you but...' or 'as well as that I think...'. Encourage all to speak and take in turns.</p> | <p>List the characters introduced in the text since Joey has been at war. Tophorn, Herr Hauptmann, Emilie etc. Ask the children to pick one and complete a role-on-the wall using an adjective bank to describe the characters. Children to then refer back to the text and pick out lines from the text which prove that word through action or speech. One side of the character collate information that we know about a character and on the other side information we can guess/ infer using evidence from play or text.</p> | <p>What are similarities between the characters in Joey's life? What are the differences? Does nationality matter? Discuss - Why were Joey and Tophorn such a comfort to the wounded men? What can give you comfort in tough situations?</p> | <p>Read up to Chapter 14</p> <p>Children to share and peer assess using a great and 'even better if...'</p> | <p>Identify what information was inferred (AF3 – Reading) without being explicitly written.</p> |
| <p>SESSION 12 To write in the first person and to use adjectives and powerful verbs</p> <p><i>I can write an account of life in the trench using descriptive vocabulary</i></p> | <p>Shared reading up to end of chapter 12. 'It was the mud that was killing us one by one, the mud, the lack of shelter and the lack of food'. If children have had the opportunity to visit the Imperial War Museum then they should have visited the trench. Discuss from the exhibition what life was like in the trenches. Show pictures and give facts about where they were situated and what purpose they had.</p> | <p>Independent writing Children to write an account of life in the trenches in the first person as Albert. What is he thinking? What could he describe – again, refer to sensory grid. Also focus on emotions and thoughts about home and Joey.</p> | <p>Ask children to complete an emotions graph with a line running along an axis to represent the changing emotions of Joey throughout the story. Ask children to refer back to play (key scenes) and text, and alter line accordingly to how Joey is depicted to have felt. Use another colour to plot on Albert's story as told by the play.</p> | <p>Children to write the ending from Albert's perspective as told by the play rather than the book</p> | <p>Compare and contrast Joey's journey with the one that Albert might have made</p> |
| <p>SESSION 13 To identify how an author uses description to depict how emotions change throughout a story</p> <p><i>I can identify different feelings and how they change according to events in the play or text</i></p> | <p>Shared reading chapters 15 and 16 and focus on Key Scene from play – No Man's Land</p> <p>Use paired talk to discuss the questions in pairs – How did Joey feel when he was trapped in No Man's Land? When both the Welshman and the German were trying to help Joey, whom did you want to take the horse? Why? What did the event say about how the soldiers on both sides really felt about the war?</p> | <p>Shared reading chapters 17 and 18 and focus on Key Scene from play Joey and Albert reunited. In the play, Albert is blinded. What clues did he have to identify that Joey was near?</p> <p>Teacher to model writing the ending from Albert's perspective and when he first started to see and identify it was Joey.</p> | <p>Children to write the ending from Albert's perspective as told by the play rather than the book</p> | <p>Children to write the ending from Albert's perspective as told by the play rather than the book</p> | <p>Compare and contrast Joey's journey with the one that Albert might have made</p> |
| <p>SESSION 14 To write an alternative ending using a different perspective</p> <p><i>I can change the perspective but keep the facts the same</i></p> | <p>Children to write the ending from Albert's perspective as told by the play rather than the book</p> | <p>Children to write the ending from Albert's perspective as told by the play rather than the book</p> | <p>Children to write the ending from Albert's perspective as told by the play rather than the book</p> | <p>Children to write the ending from Albert's perspective as told by the play rather than the book</p> | <p>Children to write the ending from Albert's perspective as told by the play rather than the book</p> |

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| <p>SESSION 15</p> <p>To write critically about a text identifying the author's style and summarising the story</p> <p><i>I can write a book review</i></p> | | | <p>Book review Children to write a book review on <i>War Horse</i>. Ensure children know how to write one, briefly summarising story (main plot and characters) whilst commenting on author's use of language rather than telling everything that happens. Questions to support writing the review –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Were the predictions made before reading the book correct? • Why do you think that Michael Morpurgo wrote the book from the horse's point of view? • Joey had relationships with several people in the book and play – Albert, Captain Nicholls, Warren, and Emilie. Joey was a confidante to these people. Why do you think that it was so easy for these people to talk to Joey so openly? In what way was this comforting to them? • Would you recommend it to others? If so, why? | <p>Children to share what their favourite part of the book has been and why.</p> | |
| <p>Additional session</p> | | | <p>Play review</p> | | |