

private peaceful KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

Context – *Private Peaceful* was written by Michael Morpurgo and was first published in 2003.

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



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



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



'Desertion' and 'Cowardice' in WWI – Soldiers were expected to stand and follow orders (even die for their country) irrespective of their own beliefs/ ideas. As the war, however, quickly became the bloodiest in history, for many the horror proved too much. Shellshock and insanity ran rife, and some abandoned their posts. Throughout World War I, the British military executed 306 of their own soldiers for desertion and cowardice. In 2006, the British government announced that all 306 soldiers would receive posthumous pardons.



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

Thomas 'Tommo' Peaceful – Tommo is the young narrator and central character in the novel. As he narrates, he is an underage soldier, fighting in France in WWI. He is scared and alone. He looks back on his earlier childhood memories, in which he has relied on his brother for guidance and protection. They have a joint-love of their childhood friend: Molly. It appears Tommo may have early PTSD or shellshock.

Charlie Peaceful – Charlie is Tommo's older brother, and also acts as his protector. As a child, he always looked out for his brother, and he now continues to do so as a soldier. By putting family loyalty first, Charlie faces the death sentence through a military court. Charlie is tough, strong, brave and righteous, caring for others (such as Molly and Tommo) before himself. He deserves better than the fate he is given.

Quote: "I am so proud of him for that. I have the bravest brother in the world"

Quote: "He sees the tears in my eyes and knows how it is. Charlie always knows how it is."

Mrs Peaceful – She is the mother to the three sons, and does this job alone (after her husband's death) very well. She stands up for her boys at numerous times in the novel, and takes hard jobs to ensure that they are provided for.

Big Joe – Big Joe, the eldest Peaceful brother, has learning difficulties which stemmed from early childhood meningitis. He is highly sensitive and unable to adequately communicate his thoughts. His brothers adore him and help to care for him.

Quote: Mother said that now she was home she wouldn't stand for it any more."

Quote: "gazing up at the tower and singing Oranges and Lemons at the top of his voice"

Molly – Molly is the girl with whom Charlie and Tommo have grown up. As a young girl, she is a bit of a tomboy, and engages in all of the activities that the boys do. She is thrown out of her house by her parents when she becomes pregnant by Charlie, which forces her to grow up quickly. She seems to hold strong feelings for both of the Peaceful brothers.

Sergeant Hanley – Hanley demonstrates all that is wrong with the outlook and attitudes of many people at war. He lacks empathy or sensitivity, and his bullying of Tommo becomes worse when he realises that Tommo is underage. When Charlie addresses this with him, he is written up for insubordination, rather than Hanley ceasing his behaviour.

Quote: "From that moment on Molly became one of us. It was as if she had suddenly joined our family and become our sister."

Quote: "Sergeant Hanley had done what all the bloody attrition in the trenches had never done. He had...destroyed our hope."

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

Relationships – Despite the cruelties and inequalities that the Peaceful family face, they remain resolute in their togetherness and their care for one another. Tommo quickly learns that he cannot truly trust anyone except his family, and in particular Charlie. In a world that seems determined to divide and break them, the brothers remain sheltered by their relationships with one another. In the end, Charlie pays the ultimate price for this, as he puts his family bonds ahead of military commands. Tommo tries to ensure that his bravery is not forgotten.




The Futility of War – Morpurgo aims to capture the harshness of war and the terror faced by the soldiers. Through Tommo and Charlie's experiences, a generation of young men are pressurised into enlisting, trained inadequately, and sent off to face horrors which the world had never seen before. Morpurgo makes clear that the reasons for fighting in the war were lost at the front lines, as progressively younger men are wiped out.



Chapter-by-Chapter Summary – with key quotations

Five Past Ten	The narrator, 'Tommo' Peaceful is young, alone and determined to stay awake whilst shells explode around him. He begins to recollect his childhood experiences, beginning with his first day at school. Charlie, his older brother, protects him. Big Joe, his eldest brother, is different in some way. Tommo explains how he feels responsible for his father's death.	<i>'I won't dream it away. I mustn't, because every moment of it will be far too precious... Tonight, more than any other night of my life, I want to feel alive.'</i> 
Twenty to Eleven	In the present, Tommo has food, but doesn't want it. He reminisces about Big Joe's kind nature, despite his disabilities. Molly, a school friend, becomes like a member of the family. The house they live in is tied to the Colonel's estate, so their mum works at his house. A mean vicious lady called Grandma Wolf looks after them whilst she is away.	<i>'when it's Charlie's turn, all we hear are the whacks, and then the silence in between. I am so proud of him for that. I have the bravest brother in the world.'</i> 
Nearly Quarter Past Eleven	Tommo continues to recollect about his and Charlie's battles with Grandma Wolf. Their mother then loses her job at the Colonel's house - the family go hungry. Miraculously, the Colonel gives her another job. Molly, who they both care about deeply, falls ill with scarlet fever.	<i>'then Charlie would be there beside me, and everything would be all right again. Charlie always made things all right again.'</i> 
Ten to Midnight	In the present, Tommo ponders the existence of God/an afterlife. He then tells how they got caught poaching, and had to clean out the Colonel's kennels until Christmas as a sanction. They become fond of a hound called Bertha. Molly returns, looking more grown up. They see an aeroplane for the first time. Charlie steals Bertha to prevent her being shot.	<i>'Charlie could have left me there. He could have made a run for it and got clean away, but Charlie's not like that. He never has been.'</i>
Twenty-Four Minutes Past Twelve	Tommo refers to 'no man's land' – it is clear that he is a WWI soldier. In his recollections, mother negotiates with the Colonel and pays sixpence for Bertha. However he must now work on Cox's Farm, so Tommo sees less of him. Tommo hears for the first time about the impending war. Charlie and Molly's relationship is revealed. Bertha is shot by the Colonel.	<i>I couldn't believe what he was saying. They hadn't told me. They'd been meeting in secret and neither of them had told me.'</i>
Nearly Five to One	Tommo recalls how Big Joe went missing after Bertha was shot, and the whole village looked for him. Eventually they found him at the top of the church bell tower (he associates it with heaven) asleep.	<i>'we both knew enough hurt had been done already, that more would only widen the rift between us and neither of us wanted that.'</i>
Twenty-Eight Minutes Past One	In the present, Tommo thinks of the decimated church steeples all around him. He remembers how, just before war broke out, Molly was kicked out of her home as she was pregnant with Charlie's baby. The two were quickly married and she moved in. Tommo and Charlie were both heavily pressurised into signing up to fight in the war.	<i>'I was going to fight in the war with Charlie. Nothing and no one could stop me now.'</i> 
Fourteen Minutes Past Two	Tommo recalls the awful trip to France and the bullying that he received from Sergeant Hanley in training – when he realised that Tommo is underage, he bullied him. Charlie stands up to Hanley and receives a brutal punishment as a result. Tommo feels immensely proud of him. Charlie is warned that the ultimate punishment for insubordination is death.	<i>'Charlie was stirring Hanley up unnecessarily, and was making things difficult for the rest of us.'</i>
A Minute Past Three	Tommo regrets drifting off and the lost time. He recalls the time his company was moved up to the front line. Their Captain – Wilkes – is a kind man, but they see the horrors of war and the misery of the trenches for the first time. On sentry duty, Charlie saves Wilkes' life.	<i>'I'm not particularly worried. Charlie's going with me.'</i>
Twenty-Five Past Three	Tommo recalls the move to Ypres, the vile state of the trenches, and the feeling of going 'over the top.' Charlie does not return for some time, and is assumed to be dead. When he does arrive, injured, it is thought he will be sent home to recuperate. The men find out that their new leader will be Sergeant Hanley.	<i>'I was numb inside, as void of all feeling as the hands that clutched my rifle.'</i> 
Nearly Four O'Clock	In the present, morning arrives with the fear of death, but for whom is not yet clear. Tommo then recalls a gas attack, and a German soldier who let him live. Tommo receives a letter from home—Charlie and Molly have named their baby 'Tommo.' Charlie soon returns to the trenches.	<i>'I know whose death it will be and how it will happen.'</i> 
Five to Five	In the present, Tommo reveals that in 65 minutes time, a <i>Private Peaceful</i> will be shot for cowardice. Tommo recollects being rescued by Charlie on no man's land. The group are surrounded by the enemy. Hanley orders them to continue the attack, despite near-certain failure. Charlie knows Tommo is too weak and refuses. The others leave. Charlie realises he now won't make it home and gives Tommo the watch. Later, Charlie is arrested. Tommo reveals how he heard brother's death sentence only the day before the execution. He is given 20 minutes to speak with him. Charlie tells him of the injustice of the court martial. Tommo promises to look after Molly and the baby. As Tommo leaves, he hears that Hanley has died in a freak accident. At one minute past six, the past catches the present, and the execution takes place. Tommo vows to stay alive in order to keep his promises to Charlie.	<i>'even if I wanted to, I can't go with you because I'd have to leave Tommo behind, and I can't do that.'</i>
One Minute to Six		<i>'I must survive. I have promises to keep.'</i> 

Morpurgo's Language Devices | **The Writer's Influences**

Varied Verbs	<i>"My eyes are stinging. My lungs are burning. I am coughing, retching, choking."</i>	<p><i>"As I grew up, I soon learned how war had torn my world apart. I lived next to a bombsite, played in it... But I soon learned that much more than buildings was destroyed by war. My parents had split up because of it. I knew my uncle Pieter, killed in 1940 in the RAF, through a photograph, through the stories I heard of him, through the grief my mother, his sister, lived every day of her life. All I knew was what I'd been told, that he'd given his life for our freedom. War continues to divide people, to change them forever, and I write about it both because I want people to understand the absolute futility of war, the "pity of war" as Wilfred Owen called it." <i>The Guardian</i>, 2nd March 2011.</i></p> 
Simile	<i>"A gas mask is like God, son. It'll work bloody miracles for you, but you've got to believe in it."</i>	
Interesting Adjectives	<i>"blurred and weeping eyes."</i>	
Metaphor	<i>"For a moment we are frozen with panic."</i>	