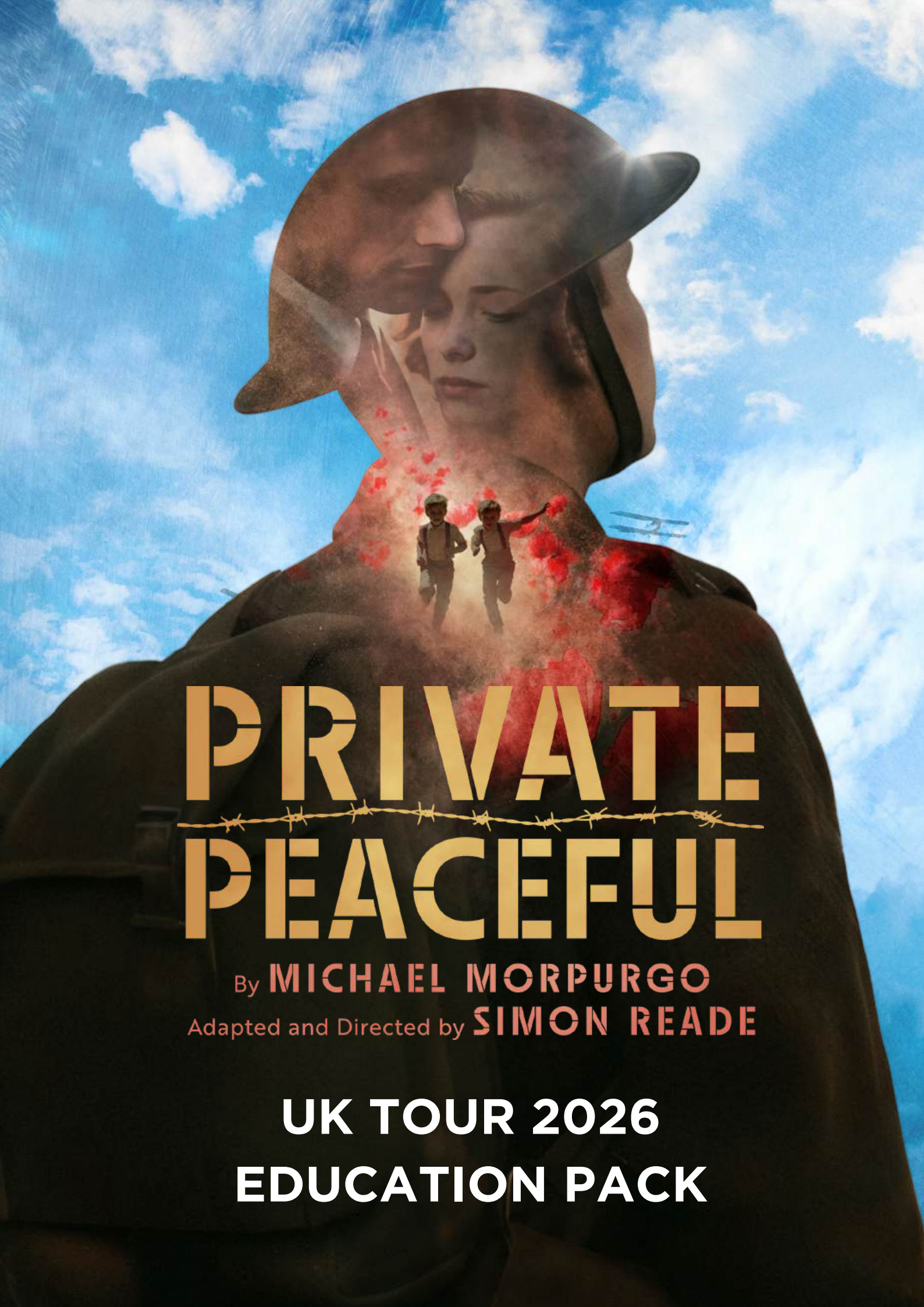
PRIVATE
PEACEFUL
By MICHAEL MORPURGO
Adapted and Directed by SIMON READE
UK TOUR 2026
EDUCATION PACK

PRIVATE PEACEFUL

By MICHAEL MORPURGO

Adapted and Directed by SIMON READE

UK Tour — Learning Guide

Based on the novel by **Sir Michael Morpurgo**

Adapted for the stage by **Simon Reade**

Produced by Joshua Beaumont and Matthew Emeny for **The Production Garden**, in association with **Exeter Northcott Theatre**

Education Resource by **Carl Woodward**

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CONTENTS

- **Introduction**
- **Cast and Creative Team**
- **Plot Summary and Character Breakdown**
- **France in the First World War: The Real Story Behind Private Peaceful**
- **Interview with Director Simon Reade**
- **Q&A with the Lighting Designer Adam Foley**
- **Interview with Sir Michael Morpurgo (Unused Material)**
- **Word Search**
- **Five x 60-minute Classroom Activity Worksheets (Drama, English Literature and History - KS3 to KS5)**
- **Further Resources (Multimedia and Digital)**
- **Bibliography**

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INTRODUCTION

Private Peaceful is produced by Joshua Beaumont and Matthew Emeny for The Production Garden, presented in association with Exeter Northcott Theatre.

This Learning Guide is designed to support students, teachers and young theatre-makers in their engagement with the production. It will be particularly useful for those using *Private Peaceful* as a stimulus for devised or scripted work, preparing evaluative responses for GCSE and A Level Drama examinations, or exploring theatrical design elements such as music, sound, lighting, set and costume.

Written by Media and Learning Specialist Carl Woodward, with the support of the cast and creative team, the guide offers insight into the creative processes behind the production.

Please note that several activities include plot spoilers, so teachers and workshop leaders may wish to use the resource selectively.

We hope you find this pack useful, inspiring and thought-provoking. Like the production itself, it is a living resource that will continue to grow and develop over time. We welcome your feedback and reflections.

Private Peaceful tours the UK from September 2026, opening in Exeter before travelling to venues across the country. If you would like to be involved in future projects, workshops or educational initiatives, please contact us E: INFO@THEPRODUCTIONGARDEN.CO.UK

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Welcome Note from Joshua Beaumont, Producer

It is a pleasure to welcome you to Private Peaceful and to this accompanying Learning Resource.

At The Production Garden, we believe that theatre has the power not only to entertain but also to educate, challenge and inspire. Michael Morpurgo's Private Peaceful is one of the most important stories of the First World War ever written, reminding us that history is not simply a collection of dates and battles, but the lived experiences of ordinary people whose courage, sacrifice and humanity continue to resonate today.

This stage adaptation by Simon Reade brings fresh life to Morpurgo's remarkable novel while remaining faithful to the emotional heart of the story. It invites audiences to consider the devastating impact of war, the enduring strength of family and friendship, and the importance of compassion in the face of injustice.

We have created this resource to support students, teachers and anyone wishing to explore the production in greater depth. Alongside the story itself, it offers insight into the historical events that inspired it, the creative decisions behind bringing it to the stage, and a range of activities linked to Drama, English and History curricula.

We hope this guide enriches your experience of the production and encourages meaningful discussion long after the curtain falls. Above all, we hope Private Peaceful reminds us why stories like Tommo's remain as vital today as ever.

Joshua Beaumont
Producer
Private Peaceful UK Tour 2026
The Production Garden Ltd

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THE COMPANY AND CREATIVE TEAM

Tommo Peaceful – Benjamin Cain

Writer – Michael Morpurgo

Adaptor and Director – Simon Reade

Design – TPG

Lighting Design – Adam Foley

Sound Design – Jason Barnes

Company Stage Manager – Chloe Harwood

Producer – Joshua Beaumont for The Production Garden

Associate Producer – Matthew Emeny for The Production Garden

Associate Producer – Exeter Northcott Theatre

Production Co-Ordinator – Samuel Freeman for The Production Garden

Head of Marketing – Holly Salewski

Head of Press – Alison Duguid

Graphic Design – Steph Pyne

Tour Print – Goldups Lane

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PLOT SUMMARY

Devon, the years before the First World War. Brothers Tommo and Charlie Peaceful grow up in a world shaped by hardship: the death of their father, a family scraping by on too little money, and a landlord whose cruelty looms over their childhood home. What carries them through is each other — a fierce, unshakeable loyalty between brothers that survives every blow life throws at them. It survives, too, almost everything except the one thing neither of them sees coming: they fall in love with the same girl.

Then the Great War arrives, and nothing about that loyalty, or that love, is simple again.

We meet eighteen-year-old Private Tommo Peaceful in the trenches of northern France, on a night that may be his last. As dawn approaches, he relives his entire life in his head — the games, the secrets, the grief, the longing — piecing together how a boy from a quiet Devon village ended up here, waiting for morning, fighting a war he doesn't understand on behalf of people he cannot respect. It is a story of courage and devotion, but just as much a story of brothers: the rivalries, the protectiveness, the unspoken competition that war strips down to its rawest form.

Private Peaceful was shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal and won both the Red House Children's Book Award and the Blue Peter Book Award. Michael Morpurgo — author of War Horse and The Butterfly Lion — has named it his favourite among his own work.

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CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

Thomas "Tommo" Peaceful
Tommo is the central character of the play. He is a boy who grew up in Devon with his two older brothers and his mother, who raised her children largely alone after their father died when Tommo was young. The play follows Tommo as he reminisces over his childhood as a soldier in his late teens at an army camp in France during the First World War. While Tommo is more cautious, his brother Charlie is adventurous and courageous, which often leads him into difficult situations.

Charlie Peaceful
Charlie is Tommo's older brother and has spent his life protecting others, especially his little brother. While still a boy, he leaves school to work for the Colonel, in order to support his family and help keep their house. He is adventurous and caring, looking after both Tommo and his mother. His romance with Molly leads to her being thrown out of her parents' home.

Hazel Peaceful
The mother of three sons, Hazel Peaceful is a nurturing woman devoted to her children. After her husband's death she is left to care for the family alone, but is forced to leave them to work so that they can stay in their home.

Molly
Molly is a young girl from Charlie and Tommo's school. The three grow up together, with Molly joining in on all the boys' games. She is loved by both brothers, but her romance with Charlie leads to her being thrown out of her parents' home. She is adventurous, like Charlie, but is also caring and looks after both brothers.

Anna
While fighting in France, Tommo meets Anna, a sixteen-year-old girl working at a pub where Tommo drinks. The two share a romance, but an exploding shell makes Anna another tragedy of the war.

Big Joe
Joe, the eldest Peaceful son, caught meningitis as a child, which affected his mental development. As a result, Joe did not go to school with Tommo and Charlie, and has kept the sweet, emotional and innocent disposition of a child.

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FRANCE IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The Real Story Behind Private Peaceful

When Sir Michael Morpurgo and his wife Clare paused beside a headstone in Bedford House Cemetery on the outskirts of Ypres some twenty years ago, they had no way of knowing that a single misread name — Private T.S.H. Peaceful of the Royal Fusiliers — would shape one of the most widely read war novels in British schools. The real soldier behind that name, Thomas Peacefull, was just 21 when he died of wounds in 1915, one of millions of young men drawn into a conflict whose origins lay not on the Western Front but in the tangled alliances of early twentieth-century Europe.

Why the War Began

By 1914, Europe's major powers were locked in a web of rivalry and obligation. Germany had been eager to provoke France into renewed conflict, hoping to consolidate the gains of its victory in 1871. France, still smarting from the loss of Alsace and Lorraine, wanted those territories back. Russia feared growing German and Austrian dominance, while Britain, uneasy about German ambition, still believed diplomacy could hold the peace.

That fragile balance collapsed on 28 June 1914, when a Serbian-sponsored assassin killed Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, in Sarajevo. Within weeks, the alliance system dragged nation after nation into war: Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia; Russia mobilised in Serbia's defence; Germany, treaty-bound to Austria-Hungary, declared war on Russia and then France; and Germany's invasion of neutral Belgium brought Britain into the conflict on 4 August 1914, honouring a decades-old treaty obligation. Soon Britain's colonies and dominions — Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand and the Union of South Africa — were committing troops and resources of their own.

For France, the stakes were immediate and existential. German forces aimed to reach Paris by the shortest possible route, sweeping through Belgium and into northern France. It was here, across Flanders and the Somme, that hundreds of thousands of British, Commonwealth and French soldiers would dig in for four years of attritional warfare — the trenches, the mud, the relentless artillery that would come to define the war in the popular imagination.

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FRANCE IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Where Fiction Meets Fact

It was against this backdrop that Morpurgo set Private Peaceful, the story of brothers Thomas and Charlie Peaceful, sent from a Devon childhood into the horror of the front line. The novel's emotional core — Charlie's execution for "cowardice" after disobeying orders to stay with his wounded brother in No Man's Land — was inspired by a discovery Morpurgo made at the In Flanders Fields Museum: a framed letter informing a family that their son had been shot at dawn.

Researching court martial records, Morpurgo learned that some 306 British and Commonwealth soldiers were executed for desertion or cowardice during the war — men whose mental state, in many cases, was barely considered before sentencing. His novel became part of a broader reckoning with that history. Three years after publication, in 2006, the government formally pardoned all 306 men, with then defence secretary Des Browne acknowledging "grave injustices" had been done. Morpurgo had written to Cherie Blair in support of the campaign; while he is careful not to overstate his influence, he believes the book added to the pressure for change.

The real Thomas Peacefull's story, uncovered decades later by his great-niece Maxine Keeble, adds a strange resonance to the fiction. Peacefull was wounded near Ypres in June 1915 and died at an advance dressing station hours later — not executed, but killed in action, one of four brothers from a working-class London family who served. His eldest brother, Henry, was killed on the first day of the Battle of the Somme, just as the fictional Charlie Peaceful marches toward that same battle at the novel's close. Morpurgo says he knew none of this when he wrote the book.

Why It Still Matters

For the thousands of schoolchildren who now visit Bedford House Cemetery each year, the misspelled headstone — corrected in 2023 to read "Peacefull" — offers a rare bridge between literature and lived history. As Morpurgo puts it, the challenge for any war story is making the past feel real to those who never lived it:

"It's impossible for young people to look at these graves and care. Somehow you have to bring one of those stones alive."

France's fields, cemeteries and museums remain the places where that work continues — turning the abstract causes of 1914 into the irreplaceable loss of one family, one brother, one name.

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INTERVIEW WITH SIMON READE

"I first heard about *Private Peaceful* on the radio: the BBC's then Arts' Correspondent, Rebecca Jones, was on Radio 4's Today programme interviewing the then Children's Laureate, Michael Morpurgo, about his forthcoming book, *Private Peaceful.* Michael talked about some First World War soldiers, these young boys who signed up underage, often with the collusion of the people who signed them up. They went to the Front, got shellshock and some were tried and sentenced to be shot at dawn for cowardice in the face of the enemy, or desertion or insubordination. Technically now, we realise that this was illegal, even according to army rules then, but they had still not been granted a pardon in Britain when Michael's book was published in 2003. France had granted posthumous pardons, as had New Zealand.
Our government had always refused.

"Michael was talking about the book from this political perspective, but then he began to read from it, and as he read, I thought: "*This is amazing! This is a dramatic monologue, all from the point of view of this young soldier".* Unusually for First World War literature, it's from the point of view of a Private rather than an Officer. We think of Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen – even Sebastian Faulks' Birdsong – their writing is from the point of view of the Officer class; and *Private Peaceful* is from the point of view of a very simple person and not even an urban person but a rural one.

"When you take a novel and put it into the theatre, you have to make it work as a piece of theatre. So, of course, you are faithful to the original spirit of a work, but the first thing that you look for are all the dramatic arcs and journeys and when there are hurdles to jump. *Private Peaceful* is a rites of passage story with lots of dramatic vignettes along the way. It is about a young boy growing up; it's also about the little man fighting against, or fighting within, something that the state and the world order is imposing upon him.

"The changes that you make in adapting are that you take out anything that doesn't serve the essential dramatic purpose. The most important aspect that people will notice I have changed in this adaptation is the ending. What Michael does very cleverly in the novel is to pull off a great literary conceit. [SPOILER ALERT:] All the way through you think it's Tommo who is going to die, but of course it is Tommo's brother, Charlie, and it's only right at the end that there's this twist. In the theatre, my first instinct in adapting the novel was that this ending might prove disappointing in the sense that we will have lived with this one person, Tommo, all the way through the evening – one actor playing all the parts – and in the end he should pay the ultimate sacrifice to complete the most extreme dramatic journey."

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INTERVIEW WITH SIMON READE CONT.

Why the Story Still Matters

For Reade, the play's power lies in its simplicity: one actor, an army uniform, an empty stage, and an audience's imagination doing the rest.

"You can create theatre from nothing. It doesn't need bells and whistles and a West End musical budget."

He compares it to the oldest traditions in theatre — Greek amphitheatres, Shakespeare's Globe — where performers conjured entire worlds with nothing but words, "painting pictures in your mind's eye." In an age of constant digital connection, he finds it striking that the play strips all of that away: characters who can only communicate by letter, with long delays.

He is also keenly aware of the play's historical weight. *Private Peaceful* helped shine a light on the more than 300 British soldiers executed for offences like "desertion" — many, it is now understood, suffering from what we would today call PTSD. Posthumous pardons for these soldiers were not granted until 2006, two years after the play first opened. Reade is unequivocal about what that delay represented:

"This is a state responsibility... it's a state thing that we should all atone for and take responsibility for."

It is a reminder, he argues, that institutional injustices — whether about war, race, or gender — can take shockingly long to be acknowledged, and that *"you've got to keep challenging them."*

Advice for Young Audiences

Asked what he hopes audiences — particularly young people — take from the play, Reade points to two things: an emotional journey alongside Tommo, the story's narrator, as he is transformed by war; and a broader revelation about theatre itself. He hopes at least one person in every audience realises that genuinely powerful theatre doesn't need elaborate sets or a West End budget — just a performer, a story, and a willing imagination.

As the current UK tour heads into rehearsals, Reade has found that essential ingredient: an actor with what he calls "classical heft" rather than naturalistic screen-acting style.

He concludes: *"Earlier this summer I saw a young actor in his graduating show at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School: Benjamin Cain, a performer of such wit and integrity, with both strength and vulnerability, that I sensed at once here was our new Peaceful. This will be Benjamin Cain's professional debut. He was raised in a Dorset village so, for Ben, this really is close to home. What an opportunity, for me as much as Ben, to revive Michael's contemporary classic story of love and loss, of deadly war, of a truth-telling, theatrical, celebration of life."*

Q&A WITH LIGHTING DESIGNER ADAM FOLEY

Lighting designer Adam Foley discusses the creative choices behind illuminating Private Peaceful for the stage — from marking the passage of Tommo's final night, to lighting sensitive subject matter for school audiences, to the practicalities of a UK-wide tour.

Hello! How did you get into a career in theatre - specifically lighting design?
I got into a career in lighting design slowly, I worked my way up into this role and I'm really glad I went that route.

As a teen I was pretty sure that theatre was going to be in my future but I wasn't sure it was going to be my career. I was visiting universities that had both drama and biology departments trying to make a decision on what course I thought was the most inspiring and was lucky enough to have given Hull a chance. At this point I thought a career in theatre meant acting and was really excited to discover that Hull's course involved doing every role in a working theatre from flys and carpentry to voice-work and scriptwriting and that all of these were potential full-time careers in the outside world. I got both feet in it from the start, lighting and video were the disciplines that I connected with most but I did everything relentlessly for my three years. By the end me and two friends had started our own production company while we all worked as casual technicians at our local producing house. We spent a couple of years in a tiny house together eating beans on toast and not using the heating but scraping by with just theatre work which felt amazing. I started working as a touring re-lighter off the back of meeting touring companies as receiving crew shortly after this and worked back-to-back tours on the mid-scale circuit for 4 years while fitting studio shows of my own design work in the gaps. Then in time for Hull's city of culture year in 2017 I put touring on hold to concentrate on my own work, a lot of which I was making with Hull based company Silent Uproar where I later became head of production. I still do odds and ends of touring as well as relights but 90% of my work these days is my own lighting (and sometimes video) design. I don't think I'll ever go to 100%, there are too many interesting opportunities out there as a relighter or production electrician whether that's a dance show touring Italy or re-lights in the US, I still like to keep my hand in.

The play deals with intense, often traumatic subject matter — shell-shock, execution, grief. How do you approach lighting these moments sensitively, especially for school audiences who may be seeing this material for the first time?
It's key that we don't shy away from these key moments in the text, however we are also not here to get into the gruesome gory details as you might in something like Saving Private Ryan or 1917. We are dealing in the story-teller mode of a one person show, the perspective is of Thomas considering the past events rather than us living through them with him, we are dealing in the emotions and effects of these events rather than the horrors of their reality. My approach is therefore that of an impressionist not a naturalist; I am trying to evoke the feeling of Thomas's experience not show what it would have really looked like. This lets us leave a little more to the imagination which helps keep the show suitable for a school's audience while still keeping the events impactful.

Q&A WITH LIGHTING DESIGNER ADAM FOLEY

This production is staged as a solo show rather than an ensemble piece. How does lighting a single performer change your approach compared to designing for a larger cast?

Lighting for a solo show gives you some unique opportunities but comes with other challenges. Grand stage pictures will leave your lone actor looking dwarfed and especially when you have a minimal a set, like we do, there is a lot for the lighting to accomplish in terms of defining space. However it also allows you to be more detailed and specific than when you are dealing with a large crowd. (One small special can provide enough facelight for the entire cast!) You are often only dealing with a very small part of the stage which means you can achieve a greater number of transformations with less equipment than you would when lighting an expansive chorus-worth of space. This does mean you have to be more precise in that you aren't going to be using full stage washes that will cover the performer anywhere, I have to know exactly where they are going to move and be prepared for it. This kind of work is a lot of fun but it certainly isn't more relaxed than dealing with a large cast.

Touring productions often have to adapt to very different venues, from large regional theatres to smaller spaces. What are the biggest challenges in making your lighting design work consistently across a UK tour?

The challenge of touring to such a variety of spaces is how elastic and adaptable the design has to be, scaling up from a 5m wide studio to a 15m wide main space like Hall for Cornwall requires planning from the very start. I use modular systems for each aspect of the design so that my re-lighter can more easily scale up and down the quantity of lights used for each look or effect depending on the size of stage. One of the major challenges is that we are using in-house equipment at each venue meaning different brands and styles of lights that have to be used to create the same effect in every space. Re-lighting is a highly technical job as you have to know how swapping from X brand to Y brand will effect the output, whether that is different dimmers or swapping to LED fixtures; you have to adjust for all these differences to keep the look of the show consistent throughout the tour.

For students studying lighting design or theatre technology at GCSE or A Level, what's one piece of advice you'd give about how to start thinking creatively about light as a storytelling tool, rather than just illumination?

I would always advice a young designer to try and think about the show as a whole rather than being trapped in scene by scene/cue by cue thinking. If you were to put a swatch of every colour you are using in the show whether gel or LED mixed in a line would it look like a considered pallet or do you have every colour under the sun? Also your show will take the audience on a journey, things will have changed from the beginning to the end; this should be reflected in the look of the show. This might be a colour journey where pink hues slowly disappear or the colour temperature shifts through the course of the show. Or we could be looking at the use of angles, does the show become more filled out with multiple balanced sources after a certain event in the plot, contrasting where it started starkly with only two bright sources for instance. Zooming out like this lets you consider whether the choice you are making in this scene has a place within the wider piece, you sometimes find on watching a full run that one moment in particular feels like it has come out of a completely different show. You then either have to massage the rest of your show to make this moment make sense or you have to pull that moment into the style of the wider piece of art you have made and it is your taste as a designer that will decide which is the best way forwards.

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INTERVIEW WITH SIR MICHAEL MORPURGO

Unused Material — The Roots of Private Peaceful
Morpurgo's connection to this story is not abstract. He lives, he explains, in a cottage down the lane from where it is set — a one-up, one-down with a privy in the garden and a shed where the cow was once kept. A young man left that cottage during the First World War, walked to Okehampton, and took the train to Exeter to join the Devon Regiment. He never came back.

"So, I live in a way with the echoes of these people all around me."

Though born in Hertfordshire — *"no one comes from Hertfordshire and admits to it"* — it is Devon, after sixty years, where he has put down roots: "*This is where I put my roots down."*

That sense of place feeds his conviction that touring theatre matters. The South West, he points out, is too often overlooked: *"People think Bristol is the West Country... but actually, there's a place called Cornwall, and a place called Devon."* Every child, he believes, deserves *"the right... to be able to go to a theatre and not spend a fortune."* He adds, *"When our arts are defined in terms of worthwhileness by the money you spend on them, then we have a problem."*

The novel's origins lie in a museum, not a library. Researching the book in Ypres, Morpurgo visited In Flanders Fields, which he calls *"probably the best First World War museum,"* precisely because *"it looks at the war from all sides."* Leaving the building, he saw a framed letter on the wall: an official notice informing a family that their son had been shot at dawn. The torn envelope above it stayed with him.

"I was looking at a moment of unbelievable tragedy for some family, and some person."

A museum historian later told him more than 300 British soldiers were executed during the war — two simply for falling asleep on sentry duty. Reading a court martial transcript took him, he says, *"less than 20 minutes for a man's life."* He concluded: *"There was a quality of mercy was not there at all... This was a political military judgement."*
The name itself came from chance. Wandering through Bedford Cemetery near Ypres with his wife Clare, she called him over to a headstone: Private Peaceful.

"Well, that's the most brilliant name for this story I'm working on." — Michael Morpurgo, to his wife Clare

She replied, *"That's why I called you over."* Years later, filming an interview at the same cemetery, Morpurgo met a school party from Epsom who had just visited the grave themselves, writing letters to "their" soldier, wrapped in cellophane and left with flowers. Eventually a real Peaceful family came forward — relieved their ancestor hadn't been executed, but glad of the story regardless. *"It doesn't really matter,"* they told him, *"because they'd spelt the name wrong anyway."* The cemetery authorities later corrected the headstone to the proper spelling, with two L's.

"It's like visiting Auschwitz. It's almost something we should all do — not something one can enjoy, but it's important to see the way the world can go if we don't care," says Morpurgo.

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PRIVATE PEACEFUL — WORD SEARCH

H	G	E	F	O	A	R	M	I	S	T	I	C	E	L	J	Z	H	H	A
C	V	O	G	L	M	K	I	C	Y	I	L	U	Q	M	A	V	R	K	A
O	D	J	I	F	A	R	E	G	I	M	E	N	T	S	N	I	B	D	T
U	N	G	L	X	Z	N	K	N	T	Q	N	D	M	S	N	G	I	B	W
R	N	I	A	Q	Z	R	D	V	X	X	O	X	V	G	A	L	N	C	V
T	K	B	D	E	V	O	N	E	T	K	I	S	V	S	O	M	M	E	D
M	X	N	B	J	Q	J	V	N	R	K	T	E	M	W	J	R	S	E	G
A	N	O	A	V	M	V	X	F	T	S	R	H	S	N	J	M	H	R	A
R	M	I	Y	J	J	G	N	Z	S	T	E	C	U	O	K	O	R	O	O
T	O	T	O	V	G	Q	P	Z	Z	X	S	N	F	M	V	C	A	J	Q
I	L	P	N	L	V	U	T	B	K	C	E	E	Y	A	H	V	P	J	H
A	L	I	E	U	Z	G	E	A	A	B	D	R	H	N	P	T	N	Y	C
L	Y	R	T	F	O	N	U	T	S	G	W	T	W	S	M	P	E	M	H
E	U	C	W	E	A	Y	Y	T	Y	D	Y	N	H	L	F	Z	L	W	Q
O	B	S	R	C	H	P	D	A	O	E	Z	O	V	A	Q	R	T	K	Y
O	T	N	X	A	R	Q	N	L	R	O	F	X	P	N	O	I	Y	H	U
I	Y	O	Y	E	Q	P	U	I	H	I	O	C	W	D	T	O	M	M	O
J	H	C	S	P	I	K	M	O	R	P	U	R	G	O	K	R	C	E	E
H	E	I	L	R	A	H	C	N	M	W	E	W	G	C	N	N	K	R	O
N	B	G	N	M	Y	S	W	A	Y	S	E	X	E	C	U	T	I	O	N

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITY WORKSHEETS

Five 50–60-minute activities spanning Drama, English Literature, English Language and History, designed for Key Stage 3 through to Key Stage 5.

Worksheet 1: Drama
Key Stage 3 | "Twenty Minutes for a Man's Life"
Curriculum link: Devising drama, hot-seating, status and physical theatre. Time: 50–60 minutes. Group size: Whole class, working in groups of 4–5.

Context for Teachers
Michael Morpurgo has described reading a real court martial transcript that took less than twenty minutes to condemn a man to death. Of the 306 British and Commonwealth soldiers executed in the First World War, two were shot simply for falling asleep on sentry duty. This worksheet uses that historical fact as a springboard for devised drama exploring power, fear and silence.

Starter: Status Walk (10 mins)
Pupils Walk around the room. On the teacher's command, they must walk as someone with very high status (chin up, slow, confident), then very low status (eyes down, small steps, apologetic). Freeze and discuss: how does status show in the body, without a single word spoken?

Main Activity: The Court Martial (25 mins)
In groups of 4–5, devise a frozen image (tableau) of a court martial scene with these roles:

- The accused soldier (traumatised, exhausted, possibly suffering from shellshock)
- Two or three officers seated as judges
- A guard

Bring the tableau to life for 60 seconds only — the time limit mirrors the brevity of the real trials. Each character may speak one line only, when tapped on the shoulder by the teacher.

Discussion prompts before performing:

- What is your character thinking but not saying?
- How does the soldier's body differ from the officers'?
- Is anyone in the room uncomfortable with what is happening? How do they show it, if at all?

Hot-Seating (15 mins)
One pupil from each group remains in role as the accused soldier. The rest of the class ask questions in role as the court. The soldier may only answer honestly, in character, using what they know about shell-shock and trench conditions from the background material in this pack.

Discussion

- Was justice served in your tableau?
- Private Peaceful gives a voice to a soldier who, historically, had almost none. Why might that matter for an audience watching today?

Extension Task
Write a short monologue (150–200 words) from the silent guard's point of view, describing what they witness and how it affects them in the years after the war.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITY WORKSHEETS

Worksheet 2: English Literature
Key Stage 4 | Comparing Voices of War
Curriculum link: Comparative analysis of poetry and prose; GCSE-style comparison question; AO1, AO2, AO3. Time: 50–60 minutes.

Context for Teachers
This worksheet pairs an extract from Private Peaceful with Wilfred Owen's Dulce et Decorum Est (1917). Both works confront what Morpurgo calls "the old Lie" — that dying for one's country is sweet and fitting. Owen wrote from direct experience of the trenches; Morpurgo wrote nearly a century later, giving voice to a private soldier rather than an officer.

Texts for Comparison

1. The extract from Private Peaceful in which Tommo describes the German attack:

"I can see their wild eyes as they reach our wire... I feel a surge of triumph welling inside me, not because we have won, but because I have stood with the others. I have not run."

2. Wilfred Owen, Dulce et Decorum Est (full poem provided in the Education Pack).

Task 1: Close Reading (15 mins)
Annotate both texts individually for:

- Language relating to the body and physical sensation
- First-person pronouns and what they reveal about the narrator's state of mind
- Moments of irony or contradiction between expectation and reality

Task 2: Comparison Grid (15 mins)
Complete the grid comparing the two texts on: Narrative perspective; Tone; Attitude to courage; Use of physical detail; Effect on the reader.

Task 3: Exam-Style Question (20 mins)
"Compare how the writers present the experience of fear in battle in these two texts. Refer closely to language, structure and form in your answer."

Write a structured response of 3–4 paragraphs, using the PEEL method (Point, Evidence, Explain, Link) and including at least one embedded quotation from each text.

Discussion
Owen called the idea that it is sweet to die for one's country "the old Lie." Morpurgo has said his novel exists partly to correct historical injustice. Do you think fiction can change how a society remembers real events? Why or why not?

Extension Task (Higher Tier / A Level Bridging)
Research the term "literary conceit" (see Director Simon Reade's interview). Identify and explain one literary conceit used in Private Peaceful and evaluate its effectiveness.

DULCE ET DECORUM EST
BY WILFRED OWEN

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime.—
Dim through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
Pro patria mori.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITY WORKSHEETS

Worksheet 3: English Language (Creative Writing)
Key Stage 3 | The Telegram
Curriculum link: Narrative writing, viewpoint, tone, descriptive technique. Time: 50 minutes.

Context for Teachers
While researching Private Peaceful, Michael Morpurgo read a real letter on display at the In Flanders Fields Museum: an official notice to a mother informing her that her son had been shot at dawn for cowardice. He has described being struck by the torn envelope above the letter — visible evidence of the exact moment a family's world fell apart. This task asks pupils to imagine that moment from the inside.

Stimulus
"I knew that the mother or someone in the family had opened up that letter, and in that moment, their whole world had shattered." — Michael Morpurgo

Task 1: Word Bank (5 mins)
Before writing, build a bank of at least 10 words or phrases associated with each of the following: shock, grief, denial, silence. Share as a class and add to your own list.

Task 2: Descriptive Writing (20 mins)
Write a description (300–400 words) of the moment a family receives news that a son has been "shot at dawn." You do not need to explain the political context — focus entirely on the sensory and emotional experience of the moment: the sound of the door, the texture of the envelope, the silence in the room afterwards.
Success criteria:

- Use of the five senses
- At least one extended metaphor or simile
- Variation in sentence length for effect (short sentences for shock; longer sentences for spiralling thought)
- A controlled, ambiguous ending — do not resolve the emotion neatly

Task 3: Diary Entry (20 mins)
Now switch perspective. Write a diary entry from Tommo's point of view, written in the barn on the night before his brother Charlie's execution, addressed to no one but himself. Use Morpurgo's technique of returning to a ticking watch as a structural device — include at least one moment where Tommo glances at the time and tries not to.

Discussion
Which was harder to write — the moment of loss for the family at home, or the moment of waiting for the soldier in the trench? Why?

Extension Task
Redraft your Task 2 description as a short newspaper announcement of the kind that would have appeared in a 1916 local paper — no more than 40 words, formal in tone, omitting all the emotional detail you included in your original piece.
Discuss as a class: what is lost when grief is reduced to official language?

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITY WORKSHEETS

Worksheet 4: History
Key Stage 3 / Key Stage 4 | Justice, Shell-Shock and the Pardons of 2006
Curriculum link: Source analysis, causation, significance, historical interpretation. Time: 50–60 minutes.

Key Facts
In the First World War, between 1914 and 1918, over 290 soldiers of the British and Commonwealth armies were executed by firing squad — some for desertion, some for cowardice, two for simply sleeping at their posts. Many of these men were suffering from shell-shock. Courts martial were brief, and the accused were often unrepresented. This injustice was only officially recognised by the British Government at the start of the 21st century, when the men were granted posthumous pardons — some 90 years after their deaths.

Source A
"They knew then about shell-shock... They knew even as they sentenced these men (they called them 'worthless' men), that most of them were traumatised by the terrors they had endured." — Michael Morpurgo, on his research at the In Flanders Fields Museum

Source B: The Case of Harry Farr
Harry Farr collapsed with convulsions in May 1915 but was sent back to the front and fought at the Somme. When he later asked for medical help, he was refused. He was court-martialled, and his death warrant was signed by General Sir Douglas Haig. He was shot on 16 October 1916. His family campaigned for decades; in 2006, he was granted a posthumous pardon.

Task 1: Source Analysis (15 mins)
1. What does Source A suggest about how the military justice system viewed mental trauma in 1914–1918?
2. What does the case of Harry Farr reveal about the relationship between rank, medical knowledge, and punishment?
3. Identify one similarity and one difference between Harry Farr's case and the fictional case of Charlie Peaceful.

Task 2: Causation Diagram (15 mins)
Create a diagram showing the chain of events that led to the 2006 pardons. Include at minimum: early 20th-century attitudes to shell-shock → campaigning by families → changing medical understanding of PTSD → political pressure → the Armed Forces Act 2006.

Task 3: Significance Debate (20 mins)
"The 2006 pardons were primarily a political decision, not a moral one."
In pairs, prepare arguments for and against this statement. Hold a structured class debate, with each pair given 90 seconds to present their strongest point.

Discussion
Why do you think it took nearly 90 years for these men to be pardoned? What does this suggest about how governments handle uncomfortable parts of their own history?

Extension Task (KS4 Stretch)
Research how France and New Zealand handled pardons for their own executed soldiers, and the dates on which these were granted. Write a short comparative paragraph evaluating whether Britain's response was unusually slow, and suggest possible reasons why.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITY WORKSHEETS

Worksheet 5: History & English Literature
Key Stage 5 | Memory, Justice and Adaptation: A Seminar
Curriculum link: Historical interpretation, literary adaptation theory, extended writing, independent research (A-Level enrichment / EPQ-linked). Time: Two 50–60 minute sessions, or one extended seminar.

Context for Teachers
This worksheet is designed as a seminar-style discussion for sixth-form students studying either History (20th-century conflict, military justice) or English Literature (adaptation, war writing, narrative perspective). It asks students to engage critically with the relationship between historical fact, fictional adaptation, and public memory — using Private Peaceful as a case study.
Pre-Seminar Reading

- Michael Morpurgo's own account, "Finding Private Peaceful"
- The director's interview with Simon Reade on adapting the novel for stage
- Background material on shell-shock and the case of Harry Farr

Question 1: The Ethics of Naming
Morpurgo discovered the name "Private Peaceful" on a real headstone in Bedford House Cemetery and used it, without initially seeking permission from any surviving family. Years later, a descendant came forward; the headstone's spelling was subsequently corrected from "Peaceful" to "Peacefull."

Discuss: What are the ethical responsibilities of a novelist who borrows a real name, a real grave, or a real historical injustice for fiction? Does the eventual correction of the headstone change your view?

Question 2: Adaptation and Truth
In adapting the novel for the stage, director Simon Reade changed the ending so that Tommo, not Charlie, is the one under sentence of death — a significant departure from the novel's central literary conceit.

Discuss: Reade argues this change "wouldn't at all harm his novel because his novel is always there for people to read." Do you agree that adaptations have a different set of obligations to truth and structure than the source text? Use at least one other example of literary adaptation to support your argument.

Question 3: Delayed Justice
It took until 2006 — some 90 years after the events — for the British Government to grant posthumous pardons to the executed men, despite France and New Zealand having done so earlier.

Discuss: To what extent can a novel or play function as a form of historical campaigning? Consider Morpurgo's own claim that he wrote to Cherie Blair in support of the pardon campaign.

Independent Writing Task (1,200–1,500 words)
Choose one of the following essay titles:

1. *"Fiction cannot correct history, only illuminate it."* Discuss with reference to Private Peaceful and at least one other text or historical case study of your choosing.
2. Evaluate the significance of shell-shock as a turning point in how Western militaries understood psychological trauma, using the case of Harry Farr and the wider context of WW1 courts martial.
3. *"The most powerful war narratives are written from the perspective of the powerless, not the powerful."* Discuss with close reference to Private Peaceful and at least one other First World War text studied this year.

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CLASSROOM ACTIVITY WORKSHEETS

Suggested Independent Research

- The Armed Forces Act 2006 and its parliamentary debate
- Commonwealth War Graves Commission records for Bedford House Cemetery, Ypres
- Comparative pardon timelines: UK, France, New Zealand, Canada
- Contemporary psychiatric understanding of PTSD versus WW1-era classifications of "shellshock" and "malingering"

Discussion

As a final reflection, ask each student to write a single sentence answering: what does Private Peaceful ask its audience to remember — and what does it ask them to do?

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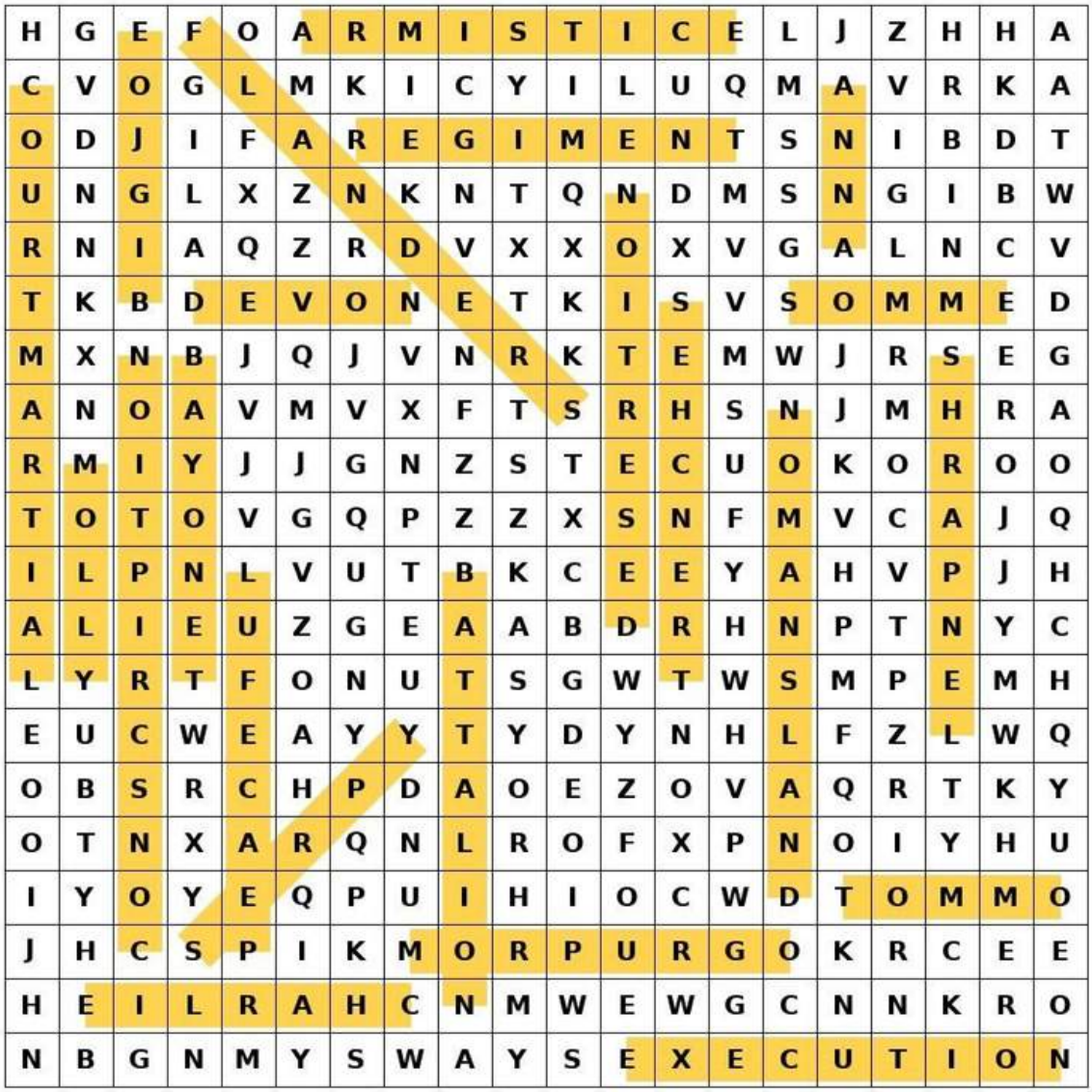
PRIVATE PEACEFUL — ANSWER KEY



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FURTHER RESOURCES (MULTIMEDIA AND DIGITAL)

Official Production & Author Sites

Michael Morpurgo — Official Website (www.michaelmorpurgo.com): biography, full backlist, articles, and background on Private Peaceful, War Horse and the author's work with Farms for City Children.

The Production Garden (www.theproductiongarden.co.uk/private-peaceful/) - production details, casting, tour dates and venue information.

National Theatre — War Horse (www.nationaltheatre.org.uk): production history and learning resources, useful for comparative study.

Museums & Archives

Imperial War Museums (www.iwm.org.uk): First World War collections, including the Scamp Theatre presents: Private Peaceful partnership page and research material on military executions.

In Flanders Fields Museum, Ypres (www.inflandersfields.be): the museum that directly inspired Morpurgo's research, including material on soldiers executed for cowardice and desertion.

Commonwealth War Graves Commission (www.cwgc.org): searchable database of WW1 service records and cemetery locations, including Bedford House Cemetery, Ypres.

National Army Museum (www.nam.ac.uk): resources on British Army life, conscription, and the soldiers executed during the First World War.

Audio & Video

BBC Teach — The Great War (www.bbc.co.uk/teach): short films and classroom-ready clips on trench warfare and soldiers' daily life, suitable for KS3/KS4.

Desert Island Discs — Michael Morpurgo (BBC Radio 4 / BBC Sounds): Morpurgo's own reflections on storytelling, childhood, and the books that shaped him.

War Horse — National Theatre Discover (YouTube): behind-the-scenes footage on puppetry design and stagecraft.

Pardons & Historical Context

UK Parliament — Armed Forces Act 2006 (www.parliament.uk): official record of the 2006 pardon of all 306 British and Commonwealth soldiers executed for cowardice or desertion.

The National Archives (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk): digitised court martial records and service files for First World War soldiers.

Press & Author Interviews

The Telegraph — "Private Peaceful: the real story behind Michael Morpurgo's novel": an account of the headstone correction at Bedford House Cemetery.

mrcarlwoodward.com — Sir Michael Morpurgo Interview: in-depth interview discussing Private Peaceful, storytelling, War Horse, and Farms for City Children.

Charity & Outreach

Farms for City Children (www.farmsforcitychildren.org): founded by Michael and Clare Morpurgo in 1976; resources on the charity's work bringing city children to working farms in Devon, Gloucestershire and Pembrokeshire.

Teachers are advised to preview all external sites and video content before classroom use, in line with school e-safety policy.

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Farms for City Children. About Us: 50 Years of Farms for City Children. Available at: www.farmsforcitychildren.org

Suggested Further Reading for Students
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Owen, W. The Poems of Wilfred Owen. London: Chatto & Windus.

Film
Private Peaceful available on Amazon.co.uk

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PRIVATE PEACEFUL

By MICHAEL MORPURGO

Adapted and Directed by SIMON READE

THE INTERNATIONAL SMASH HIT PRODUCTION TOURS THE UK THIS AUTUMN!

8th - 10th Sept	Exeter Northcott Theatre
11th - 13th Sept	Lichfield Garrick Theatre
15th Sept	Lowther Pavilion, Lytham St Annes
16th Sept	The Victoria Wood Theatre, Cumbria
17th - 19th Sept	The Royal Lyceum, Edinburgh
21st - 23rd Sept	Wilton's Music Hall, London
24th - 26th Sept	Harrogate Theatre
28th - 30th Sept	Theatre Royal Winchester
1st - 3rd Oct	Hull Truck
6th - 7th Oct	Hall For Cornwall
8th - 9th Oct	Theatr Brycheiniog, Brecon
13th - 15th Oct	Belgrade Theatre Coventry
21st - 25th Oct	Malvern Theatres
27th - 28th Oct	Theatre Royal Wakefield
11th Nov	Connaught Theatre, Worthing
12th - 14thNov	Bristol Old Vic
17th - 19th Nov	Leicester Curve
27th - 30th Jan	Royal & Derngate, Northampton
2nd Feb - 6th Feb	The Grand Theatre, Blackpool

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO DISCUSS WAYS THAT WE CAN ENGAGE BETTER WITH SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS CONTACT:
INFO@THEPRODUCTIONGARDEN.CO.UK