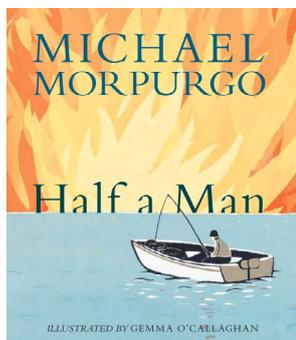




Walker Books Classroom Ideas



Half a Man

Author: Michael Morpurgo
Illustrator: Gemma O'Callaghan
ISBN: 9781406351330
ARRP: \$19.95
NZRRP: \$22.99
October 2014

*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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Outline:

Revered author Michael Morpurgo remembers the post-war Britain of his childhood in this unflinching and deeply poignant tale of the physical and mental scars of war.

From a young age, Michael was both fascinated by and afraid of his grandfather. Grandpa's ship was torpedoed during the Second World War, leaving him with terrible burns. Every time he came to stay, Michael was warned by his mother that he must not stare, he must not make too much noise, he must not ask Grandpa any questions about his past. As he grows older, Michael stays with his grandfather during the summer holidays, and as he finally learns the story behind Grandpa's injuries, he gets to know the real man behind the solemn figure from his childhood. Michael can see beyond the burns, and this gives him the power to begin healing some of the scars that have divided his family for so long.

Author/Illustrator Information:

Michael Morpurgo was 2003-2005 Children's Laureate, has written over 100 books and is the winner of many awards, including the Whitbread Children's Book Award, the Smarties Book Prize, the Blue Peter Award and the Red House Children's Book Award. His books are translated and read around the world and his hugely popular novel *War Horse* is now both a critically acclaimed stage play and a highly successful film.

How to use these notes:

This story works on many levels. The suggested activities are therefore for a wide age and ability range. Please select accordingly.

These notes are for:

- Primary years 4-6
- Ages 9+

Key Learning Areas:

- English

Example of:

- Novel
- Illustrated fiction

Themes/Ideas:

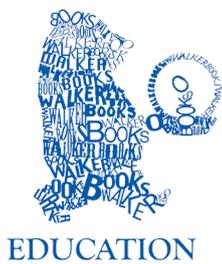
- War
- Family
- Relationships
- Disability

National Curriculum Focus:*

English content descriptions include:

Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
ACELA1490	ACELA1502	ACELA1518
ACELA1496	ACELA1504	ACELA1525
ACELA1498	ACELA1512	ACELT1614
ACELT1602	ACELT1608	ACELT1615
ACELT1603	ACELT1609	ACELT1616
ACELT1605	ACELT1795	ACELT1617
ACELY1689	ACELT1610	ACELY1708
ACELY1690	ACELY1701	ACELY1709
ACELY1691	ACELY1703	ACELY1711

*Key content descriptions have been identified from the Australian National Curriculum. However, this is not an exhaustive list of National Curriculum content able to be addressed through studying this text.



Walker Books Classroom Ideas

Discussion Questions and Activities

Before reading *Half a Man*, view the cover and title of the book. Identify the following:

- The title of the book
- The author
- The illustrator
- The publisher
- The blurb.

Based on the cover, what do you think this story is about? How do you think it will begin/end?

What is the purpose of this novel (i.e. to entertain, inform or persuade)? How can you tell? Who do you think is the intended audience?

What are the themes in this novel? As a class or in small groups identify and list the themes. Individually write a statement of belief about each theme.

Keep a “Vocab Journal” while reading the novel. Make a note of any words you come across that you don’t know and look up their meaning. Also keep track of any words or phrases that you particularly like and write a note next to each explaining why you like that word/phrase.

How does the narrator’s opinion of grandpa change throughout the novel? Use evidence from the text to show key moments where the narrator grows to understand grandpa.

Why do you think the author chooses to follow the narrator from a young age when he dreaded seeing his grandpa and slowly move through the following years, rather than simply explaining what happened to his grandpa during the war from the beginning of the novel? How does the structure of the novel reflect the narrator’s changing view of his grandpa?

Examine the narrator’s nightmare at the beginning of the novel. What atmosphere or mood is the author trying to create in this part? Find examples of verbs, adverbs, similes, metaphors and alliteration that he uses to create the mood. Write a short story using similar techniques to create a strong atmosphere or mood (i.e. scary, tense, happy, funny, etc.)

Half a Man is written in the first-person. How do you think the novel would be different if it were written in the third-person?

Why does grandpa think he is “half a man”? Why does the narrator think his grandpa was not half a man by the end of the novel?

Discuss the use of colour in the illustrations. How does the illustrator capture the mood of the text and add to the reader’s experience with her choice of colour? How do you think the novel would be different without the illustrations?

Why do you think the illustrator chooses to never show grandpa’s face?

The illustrations in the novel vary between being small, taking up a whole page and taking up a whole spread. Choose several illustrations from the novel and discuss how its size affects the reader’s experience.

War affects people in many ways. Discuss how war has affected grandpa throughout his life. Does it only affect him, or his family as well?

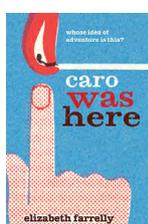
Find another novel about the effects of war in your school library. Compare the two texts and list how the authors have handled similar subjects in different ways. Which novel did you find more powerful? Why?

The author has given his protagonist his own name (Michael). Why do you think he has done this? What clues might this give you about where the author got his inspiration for the story?

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