About the Author

Michael Morpurgo

Michael Morpurgo is a poet and playwright and is also one of Britain’s best-loved writers for children. He has won numerous prizes, including the Blue Peter Book Award for his novel, *Private Peaceful*, which has also had two successful runs as a play devised by Bristol Old Vic. He was the Children's Laureate, from 2003 to 2005, a role which took him all over the UK to promote literacy and reading. In 2005 he was named the Booksellers Association Author of the Year. His many books include *The Butterfly Lion*, *War Horse*, *Shadow* and *Beowulf*. Do the children know any books written by him?

About the Book

‘No one wants a monster for a husband. No one wants a half man…’

Michael is fascinated and afraid of his solemn, disfigured grandfather, who lives far away on the Isles of Scilly and was in the merchant navy during the Second World War. Whenever his quiet, withdrawn grandfather comes to visit, Michael is warned not to ask any questions, not to stare at his face, not to make too much noise and not to upset him. It is on a Summer holiday with his grandfather that Michael finally learns about the mental scars behind the old man’s injuries and the tragic tale that led to his ‘forbidden face’.

This is a beautifully and simply written tribute to the battle-scarred men who fought, and were injured, in the Second World War, to their families and to the pioneering doctors who worked tirelessly to rehabilitate them. Morpurgo writes with grace, warmth, honesty and sensitivity. The illustrations are brought to life with vivid oranges, stark blacks and calm blues, and powerfully highlight the violence, sadness, alienation and pain caused by war. This is a poignant, moving tale that older, mature readers will appreciate.

Note: includes description that sensitive readers might find upsetting. Please read before using with your class.
Before Reading

Cover the title of the book. Ask the children what they think the title might be and why. Reveal the title.

Using the front cover, ask the children to make a list of what they see, on whiteboards.

Ask the children:

- What genre of book do you think this story belongs to?
- What do you think the story might be about?
- Who is it intended for?
- What feeling/mood is evoked by the cover illustration?

Read the strapline. Does this give any clues to what you might expect from the story? Check the children's understanding of the word 'poignant'. Have they heard it used before? In what context? Poignant came into the English language via Old French. The literal meaning is 'pricking'. What could the 'physical and mental scars' refer to?

Before reading *Half a Man*, write down everything you think you know about the Second World War in a Circle Map (David Hyerle, 2008). Write where you learned this information in the rectangle (the frame of reference). Share your ideas with your partner and add any new ideas to your diagram.

**First Encounters**

Allow some time for the children to explore the book up to the page 19. You can use a paperclip to secure the pages so the children don't read past this page. If it is possible for the children to have their own copy, they can read at their own pace and write down their responses. Give a few open-ended prompts to support note making.

- Is there anything that puzzles them about the book?
- Do they have any questions?
- Is there an image they like or dislike?

Use the children's questions to initiate a discussion – they will be more engaged if it is something they are genuinely interested in. Some questions might be answered easily, whilst others may need to be explored at a later date or after further exploration of the book.

You may wish to discuss the context of this book further with your children by looking at:

- The outbreak of the Second World War
- The propaganda used to encourage young men to join the war effort and enlist
- The countries involved in the fighting
- Life at sea for those in the navy during the war
- Refer to a globe or world map to show the areas of conflict and engagement.
- Introduce some of the technical vocabulary from the story e.g. Convoy, torpedo, dreadnought
During Reading

At all stages, invite the children to share their ideas and responses. Avoid asking too many leading or closed questions. The prompts below are merely intended to be used as supplementary questions. Select or adapt the questions which you think are most appropriate for the children you are working with. They will ask and answer many of their own questions, if they are encouraged to look closely at the pictures and discuss their ideas.

Pages 8-12 The Nightmare
This is a powerful and shocking opening to the story. You might use freeze-frame with mine and slow-motion movement to recreate the nightmare. Read the opening to accompany the drama.

• What sort of atmosphere is created at the beginning of this story? Encourage the children to use words and phrases from the text to support their ideas.
• Why does Michael try to ‘force’ himself awake? What does this verb suggest?
• What image of the ship does the author try to create? Think about words and phrases such as ‘the whole ship groaned like a wounded beast in her death throes’, ‘great ship’ and ‘gasping’. Introduce the term simile, if appropriate.
• Look at the illustration on page 11. Why are the men shown as faceless, black blobs? What are the men doing?

Pages 13-19 The Visit
This section focuses on grandpa’s infrequent and awkward visits. Talk about the difference between thoughts and behaviour. How might the characters be feeling? Encourage an open response before using some of the more focussed prompts below, if needed.

• Why do you think grandpa only comes to visit a couple of times a year?
• Why do you think Mother and Father warn Michael not to stare at Grandpa?
• How does the image on page 14 showing grandpa at the front door make you feel about him? Consider the drab colours, the shadow, the cat’s body language, the empty hallway (except for the cat).
• Do you think grandpa has good reasons for not liking noise?
• Do you think grandpa really doesn’t want anyone to look at him?
• How do mother and father inadvertently show their embarrassment on page 16?
• Why do you think the story of Annie makes everyone ‘tight-lipped’? What might have happened?
• Mother and father are more embarrassed by grandpa’s face than grandpa is. Do you agree or disagree?

Pages 20-29 The Summer Holiday
Michael is a bit older and is now able to visit grandpa on his own. He discovers that they have a lot in common.

• Look at page 20. Use a thought-shaped post-it note to record what Michael might be thinking and feeling at the start of his visit.
• Draw a picture of what you think grandpa’s house looks like inside. Share and explain your ideas.
• What is it about grandpa’s lifestyle that appeals to Michael? Why do you think this is?
• Do you think you would enjoy living on Bruner? Why? Why not?
• Michael is amazed that grandpa makes a living by fishing, despite his hands being disfigured. What might this tell you about grandpa and how Michael feels about him?
• Does Michael learn anything new about grandpa in this section of the story.
• Grandpa leaves Michael to do whatever he wants during the day. What do you think about this? Would you be allowed to roam freely and do the things that Michael does? Why? Why not?
• Look at the double page spread on pages 26-27. Why do you think the landscape is so empty and quiet? Why hasn't the illustrator shown any birds, people or other boats?
• What image does the verb ‘spearing’ create on page 28?
• What is special about the gannets?
• What does grandpa especially like about Michael?

Pages 30-41 The Story
Grandpa tells Michael the story of what really happened the day his ship was torpedoed. In pairs, as the children to consider why he hasn't told anyone this story before and why he chooses to tell Michael. Share ideas.

Use some of the following prompts to support deeper analysis, as appropriate.

• Why does grandpa tell Michael that he used to be ‘a handsome devil’? Why do you think this is important to grandpa?
• Why do you think grandpa wipes his face with the back of his hand when retelling his story?
• What impression is created by some of the phrases that grandpa uses to describe what happened? E.g. ‘the day we copped it’ and ‘cooked me like a sausage’.
• Imagine what Jim might have said to grandpa to convince him to jump from the ship? Talk with a partner.
• How does the illustration on page 33 show the enormity of the explosion?
• Look at pages 34-35. Use thought-shaped post-it notes to record what Jim and grandpa might be thinking and feeling as they swim away. Compare the colours used in this illustration to the colours used on pages 26-27.
• Why were the people on the lifeboat reluctant to let Jim and grandpa on?
• What do you think happened to Jim? Does the illustration on page 37 give you any clues?
• Does this scene remind you of any other stories or films you know?
• What keeps grandpa going during the weeks he is abandoned at sea?
• If you dream and hope for something hard enough, it will come true. Do you agree with this? Discuss.
• Look at pages 40-41. How does the illustrator capture the size of the destroyer? Why do you think only one man on the lifeboat is waving?

Pages 42-45 The Hospital
This section describes grandpa’s recovery in the special hospital. With a partner discuss what this experience was like for grandpa. Why do you think the nurses treat him differently to the way Annie treats him. Do you think things will return to normal once grandpa is home again?

Use some of the following prompts to support deeper analysis.

• Can you find any words or phrases that indicate the extent of grandpa’s injuries?
• How does grandpa feel about Dr McIndoe? Use evidence from page 43 and 44.
• How does the illustrator show the disconnect between Annie and grandpa on page 45? Look at the colours used and their body language.
• What do you think will happen between Annie and grandpa when they return home?
Pages 46-51 The Return Home
In this section grandpa returns home to Bryher. Consider how Grandpa and Annie feel. From the behaviour they exhibit, what can you infer about their feelings. Use this table to help you think about this

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>Inferred Feelings.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grandpa starts drinking</td>
<td>He is unhappy and frustrated because Annie doesn't look at him the way she used to.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Why do you think grandpa starts to drink?
- How does Annie let grandpa know she has left?
- Why does grandpa feel he is a ‘half-man’?
- Annie should have been more supportive. It was cruel to leave grandpa. Do you agree?

Pages 52-61 The Letter
- Why do you think Michael waits until after dinner to continue the conversation?
- Why is Michael’s mother so angry? Does your opinion of mother change towards the end of the story? Is she really as heartless as we might originally believe?
- Grandpa says: ‘Time’s come to forgive and forget’ (page 54) Why do you think Grandpa says this?
- Read up to page 57. What do you think the letter might say? Tell a partner.
- Look at the illustration of grandpa’s mantelpiece. What does it tell you about grandpa and what was important to him?
- What does the narrator mean when he says: ‘But he wasn’t half a man.’?

After Reading
- What do you think grandpa’s legacy will be?
- Why do you think the illustrator chooses to never show grandpa’s face?
- How does Michael’s opinion of grandpa change throughout the story? Can you use evidence from the text to show this?
- Encourage the children to discuss what they think will happen next? What do they think Annie, Mother and Michael will be doing six months after scattering Grandfather’s ashes?

Vocabulary Journal
Identify a set of target words for teaching. Suggestions are given below, but chose those most appropriate for your class or group.

Get the children to read through the list of words with their partner. Find each of the words or phrases in this chapter. Write down the sentence in the story in which each word appears.

Discuss in pairs what they think each word means.

Share their ideas, directing attention to where they may have heard or seen the words before.

Next, they use a dictionary to check ideas, then write down a definition. Use more than one dictionary to check for nuances of meaning.
Reread the text and decide which meanings make the best sense to the story. Finally ask them to write their own sentence.

Best printed in landscape.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Word</th>
<th>Sentence in story</th>
<th>What I think it means</th>
<th>Looks like or sounds like</th>
<th>Dictionary definitions</th>
<th>My own sentence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Puckered (page 9)</td>
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<td>Endure (page 10)</td>
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<td>Gouts (page 10)</td>
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<td>Apprehensive (page 20)</td>
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<td>Moored (page 52)</td>
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Themes
After reading ‘Half a Man’, organise the children into groups or partners. Encourage the children to talk to each other and share which of these themes they feel are most important in the story and why. Ask the children to use evidence from the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental scars are more damaging than physical scars</th>
<th>Family is the most important thing in the world</th>
<th>Don’t judge a book by its cover</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you love someone, it doesn’t matter what they look like</td>
<td>You must forgive others to be truly happy</td>
<td>Treat everyone equally, no matter what they look like</td>
</tr>
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Wish you were here
Ask the children to use maps, books and the internet to research the Isles of Scilly and Bryher. They could create their own travel brochure, using publishing software, persuading people to visit the Isle of Scilly and explore some of the famous beauty spots there.

The Guinea Pig Club
Find out about Sir Archibald McIndoe and the work he did in the Guinea Pig Club in WWII. Ask the children to create a fact file about the doctor and his work.
Writing opportunities
Write a diary as if you are Grandfather, returning home to Annie after the war.

Can you re-tell the story from another character’s point of view?

Write a conversation between Mum and Dad, warning Michael about how to act in front of Grandfather.

Write a poem, using metaphors and a range of figurative language, to describe the sinking of the ship.

Grandpa and Jim
Share some of the stories grandpa and Jim retell on the lifeboat, including the Just So Stories and Peter Rabbit. You could also learn the songs they sing to each other, such as Ten Green Bottles and Orange and Lemons.

If you liked this book, you might enjoy..

There are a number of books, aimed at this age group, set during the Second World War, which highlight the devastation caused by war. These include Number the Stars by Lois Lowry, Carrie’s War by Nina Bawden, Blitzcat by Robert Westall and Goodnight Mr Tom by Michelle Magorian.