



Private Peaceful by Michael Morpurgo

Subjects: Single-parent families—Juvenile fiction; Poverty—Juvenile fiction; Soldiers—Juvenile fiction; People with mental disabilities—Juvenile fiction; World War, 1914–1918—England—Juvenile fiction

Awards: Ten Best Books for Young Adults, Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People

Book List: Europe

Props: Picture of military graveyard



1914 to 1918, World War I—the most destructive war the world has ever known. Four terrible years during which over ten million men died. In one day alone, July 1st, 1916, the British lost 60,000 men. One day, 60,000 men gone. Most killed by the enemy, but some killed, executed, by their own. 300 British soldiers were shot at dawn, by a firing squad, accused of various crimes: cowardice, desertion, two for sleeping at their posts. Their trials, or court marshals, were short, most less than twenty minutes. Imagine, twenty minutes to determine a man's life. No one spoke on their behalf, no witnesses were called. Judges thought them to be “worthless.” The author of this book met and talked with veterans of the war, he heard their stories. He saw telegrams sent to mothers, he studied trial transcripts. (*Show picture of military graveyard*) On a gravestone in Belgium is the name of one of those soldiers, Private Peaceful. His gravestone inspired this story.

The story begins at five past ten in the evening with Private Tommo Peaceful waiting. He's waiting for 6AM. He has an entire night to wait and he's not going to waste a minute. He's not going to sleep, he's going to remember. He has almost 18 years of memories and he wants to remember everything before 6AM comes. He wants to remember his childhood spent deep in the countryside; of the first day he wore a collar that felt like it would strangle him and boots that were too big and heavy and how Charlie had taken his hand and led him to school. It was his first day of school and he didn't

want to go: didn't want to meet Mr. Munnings, with his raging tempers and long whipping cane. That was one memory. But he wanted to remember more.

He wanted to remember his father and how he died. It had been just the two of them out in the forest. The tree fell and his father died. He wanted to remember his mother, how she loved him and sacrificed for him. He wanted to remember his older brothers: Charlie who was his friend and protector and Big Joe who was always happy, always laughing, staying home with Mother, and sitting up in a tree singing Oranges and Lemons. He wanted to remember his first love, Molly. How kind she looked on that first day of school. He wanted to remember how, at age 16 he lied about his age and followed Charlie to France to fight. Men, in shiny uniforms had marched through the town. They said that the King needed him, that his country was calling and it was every man's duty to answer that call and fight. So he did and in the last two years he had fought for his country and watched friends battle lice, rats, mud, sheer exhaustion and he had seen friends die.

But there are more, many more memories. So he will remember one memory at a time and wait for 6AM. The sun will rise in a few short hours and it will bring the dawn of a new day. But it will be the end, by firing squad, for Private Peaceful. In a war of death, read about the life of one of its soldiers. (*Hold up book*) *Private Peaceful* by Michael Morpurgo.

