



War Horse

Author: Michael Morpurgo
Genre: Drama and Literature
Publisher: London: Egmont Books, 2004
ISBN: 978-1-4052-1587-9
RRP: £8.99 (+£2.80 p&p)

Before the stage show of Warhorse – and the movie for that matter – there was the book; a simple children’s story that recounts the horror of war literally from the horse’s mouth.

Warhorse sees Michael Morpurgo remove the ‘grown-up’ element to tell the story of World War One in a way that younger readers will be able to understand. The narrator/protagonist of the tale is Joey, the half-thoroughbred horse whose friendship with Albert the farm-boy proves to be strong enough even to overcome the horrors of war.

At just under 200 pages (in a large-sized child-friendly font), and supported by many colour illustrations by Francois Place, the narrative is separated into 20 easy-to-read chapters, each of which would be just about the right length for a child’s reading session. The story begins with Joey the foal being separated from his mother at market and going off to live on a farm with Albert, a young boy who befriends the horse and protects him from his drunken father the Farmer. At the outbreak of the Great War, Joey is separated from Albert and sent off to the fields of France, where over the next four years he makes friends and enemies on both sides of the wire, and with the local civilians too. One of the most emotive scenes in the book occurs when Joey finds his way into No-Man’s-Land and a cease-fire is called, men from both sides meeting in the middle of the field to decide Joey’s fate not with weapons, but with the toss of a coin.

I’ve got to say, it’s not often one comes across a horse ‘autobiography’, but that doesn’t necessarily mean it’s a bad idea, nor is it a new one. George Orwell used a country fable to re-tell the story of the Russian Revolution in *Animal Farm*, and back in the Anglo-Saxon period somebody even wrote a story of the crucifixion from the perspective of the Cross. Taking the human element out, then, would appear to be a powerful method of telling a story to children... men can die in their thousands every day, yet they will not stop the carnage to save themselves, but will to help a ‘dumb’ animal. Powerful stuff.

10 sausages out of 10

RW July 2014