

Tuesday 20th April

LO: Comprehension

Michael Morpurgo



Much ado about... me

I was born a really long time ago, 5th October 1943, in St Alban's in Hertfordshire. My mother was there too, strangely enough, but my father was away at the war, in Baghdad. I had one older brother, Pieter. We both were evacuated to Northumberland when we were little, away from the bombs. After the war it was all change at home, not that I remember much of it. My mother wanted to be with a man she had met while my father was away in the army. He was called Jack Morpurgo. So my father came home to find there was no place for him. There was a divorce. Jack Morpurgo married my mother, and so became our stepfather. We lived in London then. We went to primary school at St Matthias in the Warwick Road, then were sent off to boarding school in Sussex - the Abbey, Ashurst Wood.

I was there for six years, hated being away from home, loved rugby and singing. Then I went off to a school in Canterbury, The King's School, where I got more used to being away from home and still loved rugby and singing. We wore strange uniforms, wing collars, black jackets, boaters. And when I was older I got to wear a scarlet gown which made me feel very important.

I went into the army, to Sandhurst, where officers are trained. Liked the uniforms and the good food and the friends I made, but hated being shouted at. Decided the army life was not for me. Met a girl called Clare who agreed with me and we got married, really young, because we loved one another. Had children really young; three of them. Went off to university at King's College, London to start all over again. I got my degree, just, and decided to be a teacher. I had done a little bit before and liked it. So found myself in front of a class of children for the first time. Scary! But I loved reading stories to them. They seemed to like that too. We moved around a lot from school to school, which was quite unsettling for everyone, but finally ended up teaching in a little village primary school in Kent, at Wickhambreaux, where I ran out of other writers' stories to read, so started making up some of my own.

Then Clare and I decided to start all over again, again ! She was a teacher too by this time. We thought that what children needed most were wonderful and memorable experiences that would really help them find out about the world around them and find out more about themselves too. So we set up a charity called *Farms for City Children*, moved to Iddesleigh, bought a big house called Nethercott where the children could stay, made a partnership with a farming family we had got to know and invited our first city children down to the farm. The charity has been running now for forty years. Over 90,000 children have come to the three farms where the charity now runs, in Wales at Lower Treginnis Farm, in Gloucestershire at Wick Court, and of course where we started it all, at Nethercott in Devon.

Clare and I worked at this for over twenty-five years, before handing it over to younger, more energetic people, all wonderful people who run it now. The three farms still go on, with about 3,000 city and town children coming to stay with their teachers for a week working down on the farm. Clare and I remain involved, but not out on the farm any more.

During all this time our children were growing up, of course. We now have eight grandchildren, with a great-grandchild on the way! And during all this time I was writing away, becoming a writer, a storyteller. Here in Devon I wrote nearly all my books, 130 I think, not that numbers count, *War Horse*, *Private Peaceful*, *Why the Whales Came*, *The Butterfly Lion*, *Kensuke's Kingdom*. And with all of them, I was much helped in my writing by many friends and writers, but especially by Ted Hughes, the great poet, who lived nearby and fished on the river that runs through the farm. He became a good friend, and was a great inspiration to me to keep writing when I was finding it hard. And he and his wife Carol were always a source of great support to *Farms for City Children*.

Well, that's just about all the much ado of my life, summed up in nutshell. If you do want to find out more, then read Maggie Fergusson's biography of me, called *War Child to War Horse*.

Retrieval

1. To where was Michael evacuated ?
2. How long has the charity *Farms for City Children* been running and how many children have visited the farms ?
3. True or false ?

	True or False
Michael loved rugby and singing in both of the schools he attended.	
Michael has 4 children and 6 grandchildren.	
Michael's friend, the poet, Ted Hughes, lived in London and came to visit.	

Words in context

4. Find and copy a word which means 'fuss - often about nothing'.
5. *Then Clare and I decided to start all over again, again !*
Why does Michael repeat again in this sentence ?
6. Explain what '*summed up in a nutshell*' means.

Inference

7. What do you think Michael means when he says '*I got my degree, just*'