

National Theatre



War Horse

Learning Guide



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Introduction



This resource pack is intended to support Upper Key Stage 2 and Lower Key Stage 3 pupils, as well as teachers exploring War Horse and using the play as a springboard for learning.

The first part of the pack is an outline of the plot and characters, to aid pupils with their understanding of the play. This section also provides a glossary of theatre terminology and further resources, including suggested opportunities to incorporate British Sign Language (BSL) and Makaton, if desired.

The second part of the resource is a series of activities, each designed to engage pupils and to tie War Horse to national curriculum learning goals for Upper Key Stage 2 and Lower Key Stage 3. This resource is also intended to be inclusive of a range of learners, so each activity has multiple opportunities for differentiation and adaptation, including optional 'stretch' tasks throughout for pupils that require an additional challenge.

Due to the nature of this resource, there are spoilers for War Horse throughout.

Vocabulary List

*This is a list of definitions for the challenging words and phrases in the **Character List** and **Plot Summary** sections. This list has been arranged in alphabetical order.*

- **£100** – approximately £10,000 in 2026 money.
- **39 guineas** – approximately £4,000 in 2026 money. Guineas, coins worth 21 shillings or £1.05, were no longer in use as regular currency in 1912 but they were still used in auctions for luxury items like horses, art and land. Even today, some bids on racehorses are still made in guineas.
- **Ambulance orderly** – a non-medical ambulance attendant who assists medical staff.
- **Auction** – a sale where items go to the person who bids, or promises, the most money.
- **Barbed wire** – twisted wire with sharp metal points used as a fence or a barrier. In World War One, armies would use barbed wire to stop their enemy getting too close.
- **Cavalry** – soldiers who historically rode horses into battle and fought on horseback.
- **Clearing station** – also known as a casualty clearing station (CCS). This is a medical station very close to the fighting in a war where wounded soldiers are treated and doctors and nurses decide if they need to be sent elsewhere for more treatment.
- **Collar, bridle, reins and plough** – a **plough** is a farming tool used to cut, lift and turn over soil so that crops can be planted. **Ploughs** were traditionally pulled by animals, usually oxen or horses; modern **ploughs** are usually pulled by tractors. A traditional plough would be attached to the animal using a **harness**, made up of a **collar** that

¹ £100 in 1912 is £10,165.69 in 2026.
Source: Bank of England Inflation Calculator
[Accessed May 2026]

² 1 guinea is 21 shillings or £1.05 so 39 guineas would be 819 shillings or £40.95. £40.95 in 1914 would be £4,162.81 in 2026.
Source: Bank of England Inflation Calculator
[Accessed May 2026]

went around the animal's neck, a **bridle** that went around the animal's face and **reins** which are cords attached to the bridle and used to guide and direct the animal.

- **Devon** – a county in southern England.
- **Enlist** – to join the military. At the beginning of **World War One**, you had to be 19 years old to enlist but many younger boys – like **Albert** and **Billy** – lied about their age.
- **Foal** – a young horse, usually under one year old.
- **Harness** – a device that connects a horse to a vehicle, tool, or load to pull.
- **Heirloom** – an item handed down through generations, usually within families.
- **Mortgage** – a type of loan used to help buy houses and land.
- **Narrator** – a character or voice that tells you a story, guiding you through the plot.
- **NCO** – also known as a non-commissioned officer. A military leader between the ordinary enlisted soldier and the officers, responsible for managing and training.
- **No-Man's Land** – also called a **disputed territory**. The space between two opposing armies that does not really belong to either of them and is fought over. It is a very dangerous and deadly place to be!
- **Occupied** – under the control of another country, usually their military.
- **Over the top** – when soldiers climb out of their trenches and charge at the enemy.
- **Plough a furrow** – a **plough** is a farming tool used to cut, lift, and turn over soil so that crops can be planted. The cuts left behind in

the earth by the **plough** are called **furrows**. Strong, large horses called draught horses were bred specifically to pull ploughs – Joey's mother was a draught horse but his father was not, so he is a smaller horse meant for riding, not pulling a **plough**.

- **Prisoner of war** – a person, usually a member of the military, captured by the enemy.
- **Protagonist** – the main character.
- **Rural** – in the countryside, not a town or a city.
- **Sentry** – a soldier responsible for guarding **No-Man's Land**, watching for enemy movements and potential danger.
- **Tank** – a large, armoured vehicle with heavy guns.
- **Trenches** – long, narrow ditches dug into the ground that soldiers stayed in to protect themselves from enemy fire. **No-Man's Land** lies between both sides' trenches.
- **Veterinary** – relating to the medical care of animals. Vet is short for veterinarian, someone who looks after injured or sick animals.
- **White flag** – a sign of ceasefire or surrender in a war that tells the enemy not to attack.
- **World War One** – also known as the First World War, or The Great War. **World War One** was the world's first global conflict, meaning that it involved lots of different countries all around the world. The war lasted from **1914 – 1918** and an estimated 16 million soldiers and civilians, and around 8 million horses, were killed.

Note for Teachers:

The specific military ranks and titles used throughout War Horse have not been defined in this list. If you would like more information about military ranks and titles, please explore the resources here:

- [British Army Ranks - National Army Museum](#)
- [British, German, and French Army Ranks - Football and the First World War](#)



Character List



Albert Narracott and Joey

The Singer – a **narrator** who sings songs related to what is going on in the play.

Albert Narracott – a young farm boy and the proud owner of a horse called Joey. He is around 14 years old at the beginning of the play and he is around 19 or 20 years old by the end. Albert is one of the **protagonists** of the play.

Joey – a horse that Albert's father, Ted Narracott, wins in an **auction**. He is raised from a **foal** into an adult horse by **Albert**. Joey is one of the **protagonists** of the play.

Ted and Rose Narracott – Albert's parents and farmers in **rural Devon, England**. Ted is extremely competitive with his brother, **Arthur Narracott**. **Rose** is a loving mother and wife who tries her best to keep her family together, even when her son Albert and her husband Ted do not see eye to eye.

Arthur Narracott – Ted's brother and **Albert's** uncle. He is extremely competitive with his brother, **Ted Narracott**.

Billy Narracott – Arthur's son and Albert's cousin.

Villagers – there are many named and unnamed villagers, including Chapman and Sarah Carter, Allan and Nell Allan, and Thomas and Jenny Bone. Many of the men from the village go to war and the women are forced to stay at home and keep things going.

Lieutenant Nicholls – later **Major Nicholls**. A British army **officer** who buys **Joey**. He loves to draw.



Lieutenant Nicholls

Joey & Goose
All photos by Brinkhoff/Mogenburg



Captain Stewart – later **Major Stewart**. A British army **officer** who rides **Tophorn** into battle.

Sergeant Thunder – later **Sergeant-Major Thunder**. A British soldier who is an **NCO**.

Tophorn – an army horse that **Joey** spends a lot of time with during the war.

Captain Friedrich Müller – a German captain who loves horses and misses his family.

Private Klausen – later **Lance-Corporal**. A German soldier.

Dr Schweyk – a German army doctor.
Private Schnabel – a German **ambulance orderly**.

Paulette and Emilie – a Frenchwoman and her daughter. They are very upset when their farm is taken over by the German army.

Private David Taylor – A British soldier who **Albert** befriends.

Geordie – a British **sentry**.

Manfred – a German soldier.

Veterinary Officer Martin – a British army veterinarian who is responsible for the care of the horses.

Matron Callaghan and Nurse Gilbert – medical staff at an army **clearing station**.



Albert Narracott and Captain Friedrich Müller

Plot Summary



1912

5 August 1912

At an **auction**, **Ted** and **Arthur Narracott** bid to win a **foal**. **Ted** wins and pays **39 guineas**, money that was meant to pay for the **mortgage** on his farm.

Back at their farm, **Rose Narracott** **Ted's** wife – tells their son **Albert Narracott** to raise and train the **foal** until he is old enough to be sold to someone else. **Albert** names the **foal** **Joey**. He feeds him oats and teaches him a special whistle call.

August 1912 – July 1914

Joey and **Albert** grow up together and become best friends, learning tricks and playing games. Eventually, **Joey** grows into an adult horse.

1914

July 1914

Ted and **Arthur Narracott** make another bet; if **Joey** can be taught to **plough a furrow** in seven days, **Ted** will win **39 guineas** but, if he fails, **Arthur** will win **Joey**. Determined not to lose his best friend, **Albert** works hard and teaches **Joey** to accept the **collar, bridle, reins and plough**. **Joey** pulls the **plough** to victory, winning the bet.

5 August 1914

Ringling church bells announce the beginning of **World War One**. In the village, the army **enlists** men as soldiers and buys horses for the **cavalry**. **Albert's** cousin, **Billy Narracott**, **enlists** and his father, **Arthur**, gives him a **family heirloom**, his grandfather's knife. **Ted Narracott** sells **Joey** for **£100** to an **officer, Major Nicholls**. **Major Nicholls** promises to take care of **Joey** and **Albert** promises **Joey** they will be together again.

6 November 1914

Major Nicholls rides **Joey** into battle in France. Another **officer, Captain Stewart**, rides a black horse called **Tophorn**. **Major Nicholls** is killed but **Joey** survives.

Christmas Day 1914

Back home in **Devon**, **Ted** and **Rose Narracott** give **Albert** a bicycle for Christmas. **Albert** also receives a package containing **Major Nicholls'** sketchbook, full of drawings of **Joey**, and a letter informing him that **Major Nicholls** was killed in battle. **Albert** tears a drawing of **Joey** out of the sketchbook and rides off on his bicycle to **enlist** in the army.

1915

March 1915

Captain Stewart rides **Tophorn** and **Billy Narracott** rides **Joey** into battle. Other **cavalry** horses get stuck in **barbed wire** but **Joey** and **Tophorn** jump over it.

Interval

March 1915

Albert, has lied about his age to **enlist** and is now a soldier in France. He befriends **Private David Taylor** and meets **NCO Sergeant Thunder**, who mocks him for looking for his horse in the middle of a war.

Meanwhile, the German army has **occupied** a French farm belonging to **Paulette** and her daughter **Emilie**. **Billy Narracott** and **Captain Stewart** are taken to the farm as **prisoners of war**. They are questioned by German soldiers **Private Klausen** and **Captain Friedrich Müller**. **Billy** refuses to give up his **heirloom** knife so **Private Klausen** kills him.

Joey and **Tophorn** are forced to pull a German army **ambulance**. **Tophorn** refuses to accept the **collar** but **Joey** remembers the **plough** that **Albert** taught him to pull and allows himself to be **harnessed**. This calms **Tophorn** and he follows **Joey's** example.

Captain Friedrich Müller takes the horses and ambulance to the hospital, leaving an army doctor, **Dr Schweyk** and an **ambulance orderly, Private Schnabel**, on the farm.

After a surprise attack, **Albert** and his friend **Private David Taylor** are trapped in a small hole in **No-Man's Land**. **Albert** shoots an approaching German soldier and he and **Private David Taylor** flee under fire.

On **Paulette** and **Emilie's** farm, a bomb explodes and kills **Dr Schweyk** and **Private Schnabel**. **Captain Friedrich Müller** returns to the farm and, surprised, almost shoots **Emilie**. **Captain Friedrich Müller** tries to comfort **Emilie**, introducing her to the horses.

Captain Friedrich Müller decides to fake his own death, swapping jackets with **Private Schnabel's** dead body and pretending to be him to avoid going back into battle.



Photo by Brinkhoff/Mogenburg

1916

June 1916 (and part in September 1916)

In a trench, **Private David Taylor** helps **Albert** write a letter home. In **Devon (September 1916)**, **Ted** and **Rose Narracott** read the letter, concerned to hear that **Albert** is still looking for **Joey**. In France, **Captain Freidrich Müller** – still disguised as an **ambulance orderly** – hides from the war. He enjoys spending time with **Emilie**, **Paulette**, **Joey** and **Tophorn**.

Private Klausen, now **Lance-Corporal Klausen**, returns to the farm with two exhausted horses pulling a heavy gun. **Lance-Corporal Klausen** kills the horses and instructs **Captain Freidrich Müller** – still in disguise – to replace them with **Tophorn** and **Joey**. **Lance-Corporal Klausen** realises that **Captain Freidrich Müller** has disguised himself to avoid battle and accuses him of being a coward.

July 1916

Private David Taylor and **Albert** go over the top into battle. Men fall all around them. Everyone but **Albert** and **Private David Taylor** are killed.



Photo by Brinkhoff/Mogenburg

1918

October 1918

Joey and **Tophorn** struggle to pull the heavy gun through the mud into battle. **Tophorn** falls, very ill and weak, and **Joey** is forced to carry on pulling alone.

Albert, **Private David Taylor** and other British soldiers enter under gunfire. **Tear gas** is thrown at them. **Private David Taylor** tries to give **Albert** his gas mask, but **Private David Taylor** is shot and killed. **Albert** is blinded by the gas.

9 November 1918

Joey and **Tophorn** pull the gun. **Captain Freidrich Müller** takes off their harness to let them rest. **Tophorn**, growing sicker and weaker, eventually collapses and dies.

A tank enters and kills **Captain Friedrich Müller**. **Joey** is forced to run away. He gets stuck in **barbed wire** in **No-Man's Land**.

Geordie, a British sentry, and **Manfred**, a German soldier, both see **Joey** from opposite sides of the battle. Waving **white flags**, they both go out to rescue **Joey**.

Even though they are enemies and cannot speak the same language, **Geordie** and **Manfred** work together to free **Joey** from the **barbed wire**. **Manfred** and **Geordie** flip a coin to decide who keeps **Joey**; **Geordie** wins and takes **Joey** back to the British side.

11 November 1918

Albert has been blinded by the **tear gas**. He is told by **Matron Callaghan** and

Nurse Gilbert that he is very lucky and will, eventually, get his eyesight back.

Geordie and **Sergeant-Major Thunder** bring **Joey** in to be seen by **Veterinary Officer Martin**. **Joey** is exhausted and badly injured. Even though it will upset all of the people that **Joey** has inspired by making it out of **No-Man's Land**, **Veterinary Officer Martin** decides it is best to kill **Joey** and end his suffering.

Albert cannot see but, when he makes the special whistle call that he taught **Joey** as a foal, **Joey** reacts. **Albert** realises that **Joey** is there and the best friends are reunited.

The bell that rang to mark the start of **World War One** chimes once again, showing that the war has ended. **Albert** takes **Joey** back to **Devon**, just as he promised.

Note for Teachers:

This timeline could be turned into a comprehension task to develop pupils' ability to summarise and sequence a complex plot. Pupils could be given the key events as a shuffled set of cards and challenged to rearrange them into chronological order.



Photo by Brinkhoff/Mogenburg

Glossary of Theatre Terminology

This is a list of definitions for special terms used in the theatre which may be useful, especially when writing your theatre review. This list has been arranged in alphabetical order.

- **Act** – this word has several meanings in theatre. Here are the two main definitions:
1) To perform a part in a play, film, or television programme.
2) A large section of a play made up of smaller scenes, like a chapter in a book. Each act of a play might have a different goal or focus and may change the mood, atmosphere and tone.
- **Actor** – a person who performs a part in a play, film, or television programme.
- **Audience** – a group of people gathered to see or hear something. The audience also describes the seats facing the stage where people sit to watch a play or performance.
- **Costume** – the clothing that a performer wears on stage. Costumes can be a visual way to give the audience information, showing what time period the play is set in or what class a character is from, for example.
- **Duologue** – a dramatic performance written for two actors or voices.
- **Haze** – a theatre effect that creates a cloudy look on the stage using vapour.
- **Interval** – a short break in a live performance, usually in the middle.
- **Lighting** – the use of stage lights to illuminate the stage and create different effects.
- **Monologue** – a dramatic performance written for one actor or voice
- **Playwright** – a person who writes plays. The play may be the playwright's original idea or, like in *War Horse*, it may be an adaptation of a book into a play, or of an existing play into a different version (often this is for a play which was originally in a different language)

Stretch Task:

War Horse has two acts; Act One is the first half, before the interval, and Act Two is after the interval. What are the differences between the two acts? Why do you think the playwright has chosen this structure for the play? **Write a paragraph explaining the difference between Act One and Act Two of *War Horse*, thinking carefully about the changes in mood, atmosphere and tone.**

- **Programme** – a booklet given out to audiences or purchased at a play or performance, giving more information about the performers and the production.
- **Props** – moveable objects on stage, which actors may handle, such as telephones, handkerchiefs and cups. They often include items of furniture too.
- **Puppeteer** – a performer who uses a puppet (an object designed to look like a human, animal, or imaginary creature), making it move and appear to talk or make noises.
- **Scene** – a smaller section of a play that makes up an **act**. Each scene usually takes place in a single time period or location but this is not always the case.
- **Script** – a written version of a play or theatrical performance.
- **Set** – the scenery and backdrops on stage.
- **Sound effects** – sound effects are the artificial sounds used in a production or performance. Some sound effects are realistic, like the gunfire and bomb sound effects in *War Horse*. Along with music, other sound effects can be used to create atmosphere, change the mood and affect the audience's emotions.
- **Stage directions** – instructions written into a script for stage actions, character movements and other descriptions that can help bring the play to life.

Resources for Teachers:

British Sign Language (BSL)

- [A subtitled British Sign Language \(BSL\) summary of *War Horse* - Go Live Theatre](#)
- Online BSL dictionaries may be useful; [Sign BSL](#) and the [University College London BSL SignBank Dictionary](#) are just two of many options available

Makaton

- The [Makaton Charity](#) vocabulary resources may be useful for some learners

Videos

These videos can be used to supplement learning, helping pupils to visualise unfamiliar concepts and prepare for the movement part of the drama activity

- [Demonstration of a horse-drawn plough - Beamish Museum](#)
- [Becoming *War Horse*'s Joey in Five Easy Steps - WhatsOnStage](#)
- [Joey Meets Providence Mounted Command Horses - The Providence Journal](#)
- [British Artillery in France \(1914 - 1918\) - British Pathé](#)

Puppeteer & Goose
Photos by Brinkhoff/Mogenburg



Activity One:

War Horse

Drama Games



This section is all about exploring War Horse actively through play. Below are some drama games intended to help pupils explore storytelling, movement and early performance skills.

A. Commands

War Horse is a play with some very important horse characters called **Joey** and **Tophorn**. It was not possible for the National Theatre to have real horses on stage – can you imagine what it would be like if we could? Special **performers** called **puppeteers** work together as a team to bring the horses in our play to life. They have had to work very hard to learn how horses move and sound, so they can almost convince the **audience** that the horses on **stage** are real!

Can you move and sound like a horse?

Stretch Task:

Do you think the War Horse should include real horses on stage? Why? **Write a persuasive letter to the National Theatre to convince them one way or the other.**

Instructions for Teachers or Activity Leaders:

Pupils should walk around the space, listening carefully for commands from their teacher or activity leader. Begin with some simple commands, for example:

- **Trot** – move around the space like a horse at walking speed
- **Gallop** – move around the space like a horse at a faster speed
- **Whoa!** Or **Stop!** – stop where you are!
- **Neigh** – neigh like a horse

Further commands can be added, to make the game more complex and to explore key points in the play. This should be collaborative – pupils can suggest ideas for new commands and teachers/activity leaders might encourage them to think about commands that relate to important scenes and ideas from the play, for example:

- **Eat some oats** – **Albert** gets **Joey** to trust him by feeding him some oats. On this command, pupils should cup their hands up to their mouths and pretend to be a very hungry horse eating some very tasty oats!
 - This command could also be done in pairs, with one partner playing **Albert** and the other playing **Joey**. Pupils could be encouraged to think about how **Joey** and **Albert** feel in this scene and what finally makes **Joey** decide to trust **Albert**.
- **Owl/Whistle** – **Albert** makes a special whistle that is meant to sound like an owl. Can you whistle? Or make an owl noise?
 - **Joey** and **Albert** find each other again because **Albert** makes the owl whistle noise and **Joey** recognises it. A more challenging version of this command could be one partner making the noise and the other trying to find them.
- **Pull the plough** – **Albert** is challenged to teach **Joey** how to pull a **plough**. Pupils should get into pairs, standing one in front of the other with the person at the back putting their hands on their partner's shoulders. The person at the front is playing **Joey** and the person at the back is pretending to be **Albert** with the **plough**. How should they move around the space? Would moving this way be difficult or easy?
 - **Joey** and **Topthorn** have to pull a heavy war ambulance and, later, the horses have to pull an even heavier gun. Pupils could be encouraged to explore how the **pull the plough** command might change if they are tired, or the item they are pulling is heavier, or the ground is muddier.
 - **Jump** – **Joey** and **Topthorn** charge into battle and have to jump over some dangerous barbed wire. Pupils should jump forward over an imaginary barbed wire fence and think about how **Joey** and **Topthorn** – and the soldiers riding them – might have felt.
 - **No-Man's Land** – **Geordie** and **Manfred** have to move across dangerous **No-Man's Land** to rescue **Joey**. Pupils should be asked to consider how they would move through that space. Would they run? Or move very slowly and carefully?
 - This command could also be done in pairs or groups, with one person playing **Joey** and freezing when they hear the command. Their partner/s would then try to reach and unfreeze them, rescuing them from the imaginary **barbed wire**.

To add to the commands, teachers or activity leaders could also provide intensity levels, on a scale from one to ten, and link this back to the level of tension and characters' emotions.

B. Interviews/Hot Seat

Sometimes, when you watch a play, you might wish you could ask some of the characters questions about their experience in the story. Did they feel frightened? Or excited? What things do they want most in the world? What are they worried about? Who is their best friend? And, how do their answers change at the beginning of the play, in the middle, or at the end?

Instructions for Teachers and Activity Leaders:

In this game, one pupil chooses one of the characters in *War Horse* and pretends they are that character. The teacher, or activity leader, can act as an interviewer and ask them questions about their experiences. Once the game has been established, other pupils can ask questions and the character in the 'hot seat' can change.

It can be particularly useful to interview the same character at different points of the story eg some of the answers that **Albert** gives at the beginning of the play would be very different to the ones he might give in the middle or at the end, but some of the answers might stay the same throughout. Pupils should be encouraged to reflect on these answers and how they change.



Activity Two:

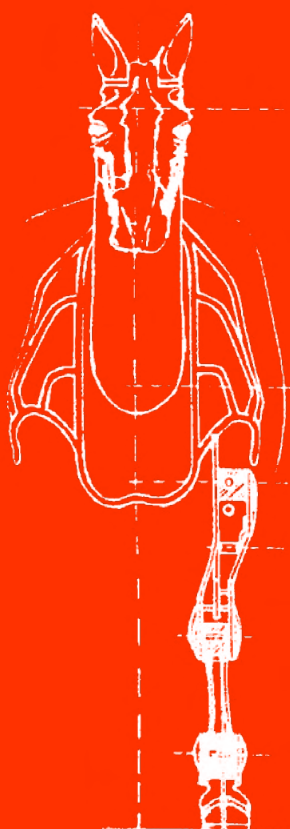
Non-Fiction Reading Comprehension

War Horse, the play, is based on a book written by Michael Morpurgo. This is an article he wrote in 2024, just before the play went on a new tour all around the UK and Ireland.

Please read this article carefully and then answer the comprehension questions below.

Glossary:

- **Iddesleigh** – a village in Devon, England – this is where *War Horse* begins.
- **Camaraderie** – a feeling of trust and friendship between people, usually those who have known each other for a long time or have gone through an important experience together.
- ***All Quiet on the Western Front*** – a book and film about a German soldier's experience in **World War One**.
- ***Oh! What a Lovely War!*** – a comedy musical about **World War One**.
- **Cavalry** – a group of soldiers who fight riding on horses.
- **Civilian** – a person who is not a member of the police or armed forces.
- **Berlin** – the capital of Germany, one of the countries England fought in **World War One**.
- **Ypres and Flanders** – a part of Belgium where many battles took place during **World War One**.



1 The story of *War Horse* was first conceived in front of the log fire in The Duke of York pub in
2 Iddesleigh in the winter of 1980, after (or was it during?) a conversation with an old soldier from
3 the First World War, Wilf Ellis, who told me how it was to find himself as a young man in the
4 trenches of Flanders. He spoke as if he was seeing it all again in his mind's eye, as if he
5 recalled the faces of friend and foe alike, the camaraderie, and the pity. I had read the great war
6 poems, seen *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Oh! What A Lovely War*, but here was
7 someone who had been there.

8
9 I told him that I'd come across an old painting of a cavalry charge in the First World War. The
10 British cavalry were charging up a hill towards the German position, caught up on the barbed
11 wire. 'I was there in 1916,' he told me, his eyes filling with tears, 'I was there with the horses
12 too.' He talked on for hours about the horse he'd loved and left behind at the end
13 of the war, how the old horse had been sold off to the French butchers for meat.

14
15 Other old men in the village – Captain Budgett, a cavalryman, and Albert Weeks – told me
16 more. The more I heard, the more I felt that any story I might want to write about this war had to
17 be written not from a British perspective, not even from a French or German or Belgian one. It
18 had to be the story of the suffering and grieving on all sides, military and civilian too. I needed to
19 tell a story that reflected the universal pity of war.

20
21 So I conceived the notion I might write the story of the First World War as seen through a
22 horse's eye, a horse that would be reared on a Devon farm, by the forebears of the village
23 people I knew, a horse that is sold off the farm to go to the front as a British cavalry horse, is
24 captured by the Germans and used to pull ambulances and guns, winters on a French farm. It
25 would be the horse's eye view of the universal suffering of that dreadful war in which ten million
26 people died, and unknown millions of horses.

27
28 When *War Horse* was published in 1982, the book was liked well enough by those who read it,
29 but sadly, not many did read it. The book was out to pasture on my backlist. Then one morning,
30 some 25 years later, Tom Morris – an Associate Director from the National Theatre – rings me
31 up saying he'd like to make a play of *War Horse*, with puppets! Absurd, I thought, but it's the
32 National Theatre, for goodness sake. Maybe they know what they're doing. Then they showed
33 me the work of Handspring Puppet Company. I heard the music of John Tams and Adrian
34 Sutton, saw the set design of Rae Smith, read the scripts, saw the rehearsals. Yes, they did
35 know what they were doing.

36
37 Over 8 million theatregoers have seen it now in London, on Broadway, in Australia, Canada and
38 on tour all over the world. The play garnered awards by the dozen – unlike the book! It has been
39 wonderful enough for all this to happen, but for the play to go to Berlin in 2014 was truly
40 momentous, and timely too. A hundred years since German soldiers marched away to fight in
41 France and Belgium, since British soldiers went across the Channel to confront them, a hundred
42 years after the beginning of arguably the most terrible of all wars, 'the war to end all wars', in
43 which over ten million soldiers on all sides perished, and ten million horses too. A British play

44 about the First World War, performed in Berlin
45 by German actors. A play which is, above all,
46 about our universal longing for peace and
47 reconciliation. It played in England and Germany
48 at the same time.

49

50 And now in 2024, it's returning to the stage after
51 five years, embarking on a major tour across
52 the UK and Ireland; to so many places from
53 which young men left all those years ago to go
54 to war, so many of them never to return. Their
55 descendants will see a play that has been called
56 'the greatest anthem to peace' ever performed.



1. Which narrative perspective is this text written from?

- A. First person
- B. Second person
- C. Third person

2. Which word is closest in meaning to ‘conceived’? (line 1)

- A. Understood
- B. Considered
- C. Imagined
- D. Explained
- E. Witnessed

3. When did Michael Morpurgo first come up with the idea for War Horse?

- A. 1982
- B. 1916
- C. 2014
- D. 1980
- E. 2024

4. ‘(or was it during?)’ (line 2) is an example of which literary device?

- A. Simile
- B. Metaphor
- C. Onomatopoeia
- D. Alliteration
- E. Rhetorical Question

Stretch Activity:
Why did the author use this literary device? What effect does it have on the reader? **Write two sentences explaining your answers**

5. Read lines 3 –13. Based on these lines, how does Wilf Ellis feel about being a soldier in World War One?

- A. He feels shocked and frightened
- B. He feels annoyed and infuriated
- C. He feels emotional and nostalgic
- D. He feels happy and enthusiastic
- E. He cannot remember anything

Stretch Activity:
Read lines 3 – 13. Which words and phrases in these lines tell you that Wilf Ellis feels this way? Why? **Copy down the words and phrases and write a sentence for each, explaining why you have chosen it.**

6. Which of the following words is the most opposite in meaning to ‘grieving’ (line 18)?

- A. Celebrating
- B. Mourning
- C. Anticipating
- D. Burying
- E. Forgetting

7. When was the book of War Horse first published?

- A. 1980
- B. 1916
- C. 2024
- D. 1982
- E. 2014

8. Read lines 28 – 35. Michael Morpurgo’s feelings about turning his book into a play changed over time. Which of these options best describes how his feelings changed?

- A. He is excited at first, then becomes nervous, and is now proud of the adaptation
- B. He is indifferent at first, then becomes enraged, and now regrets the adaptation
- C. He is proud at first, then becomes indifferent, and is now nervous about the adaptation
- D. He is sceptical at first, then becomes intrigued, and is now proud of the adaptation
- E. He is enthusiastic at first, then becomes sceptical, and now regrets the adaptation

Stretch Activity:
Read lines 28 – 35. Why do you think Michael Morpurgo changed his mind about turning his book into a play?

9. Which of the following words is the closest in meaning to ‘reconciliation’ (line 47)?

- A. Separation
- B. Unity
- C. Adoration
- D. Tranquility
- E. Reputation

10. Can you number these events 1 -5, in the order that they happened?

Event	No.
The book version of War Horse is published	
War Horse the play is performed in Berlin, Germany	
German soldiers marched to fight in France and Belgium in World War One	
Michael Morpurgo speaks to Wilf Ellis, an old man who was a soldier in World War One	
Michael Morpurgo speaks to Wilf Ellis, an old man who was a soldier in World War One	

Note for Teachers:
The answer sheet is provided at the end of the resource pack

Activity Three:

Planning a Theatre Review

In this section, you will go through the tasks step-by-step to plan your theatre review. In the next section, you will use your plan to help you write your review.

A. Synonyms and Antonyms Task

Synonyms are words with the same or similar meanings. **For example:** small and little, yummy and delicious, funny and humorous

Antonyms are words that mean the opposite of each other. **For example:** small and large, delicious and disgusting, funny and serious

Steps:

1. Choose a word that completes the sentence, in your opinion, and write it in the first column
2. Use a thesaurus to find **three synonyms** for that word and write them into the second column
3. Use a thesaurus to find **three antonyms** for that **adjective** and write them into the third column

Note for Teachers:

In addition to the planning tasks here, it is recommended that pupils are shown several real-world examples of theatre reviews before they begin planning and writing their own. Here are few examples from a range of sources, with a range of opinions and styles:

- [Ballet Shoes at the National Theatre – Guardian](#)
- [Paddington The Musical at the Savoy Theatre – Everything Theatre](#)
- [The Enormous Crocodile at Regent’s Park Open Air Theatre – London Theatre](#)
- [The Hunger Games at Troubadour Canary Wharf Theatre – The i Paper](#)

War Horse was...	Synonym	Antonym
interesting	fascinating, engaging, intriguing	boring, dull, unimpressive

National Theatre was...	Synonym	Antonym
huge	enormous, spacious, vast	miniscule, tiny, small

When I watched War Horse, I felt...	Synonym	Antonym
happy	joyful, ecstatic, glad	miserable, melancholy, sorrowful

B. Exploring Your Senses

Think back on your experience at War Horse. We are going to go through your **five senses** – **touch, taste, sight, smell** and **sound** – and see what you remember about the experience.

These could be things about the theatre, the actors, the characters, the audience, the lights, the sets, the music and sound effects, or anything else you experienced. Imagine you are trying to describe your experience to someone who was not there, what would you tell them about?

You can write as many things down as you like but try to think of **at least two** for each sense.

When you saw War Horse, what things could you **feel** or **touch**?
For example: I could feel the soft theatre seats. I could feel the smooth paper of my programme.

Design idea: spider diagram with each sense in the middle?

What things could you **taste**?
For example: I tasted a sweet, cold ice cream in the interval. I could taste the dust in the air.

What things could you **see**?
For example: I saw a huge horse puppet. I saw the dark green uniforms the soldiers were wearing.

What things could you **smell**?
For example: I could smell the haze from the stage. I could smell the sweet, flowery perfume of the person sitting behind me.

What things could you **hear**?
For example: I could hear the singer singing a very sad song. I could hear the announcement asking the audience to turn their phones off. I could hear how upset/excited/proud/afraid this character was when...

C. Metaphors and Similes Task

A **simile** is a figure of speech where something is compared to something else using *like* or *as*
For example: The horse was as shiny as a brand new penny. The trenches were like a nightmare

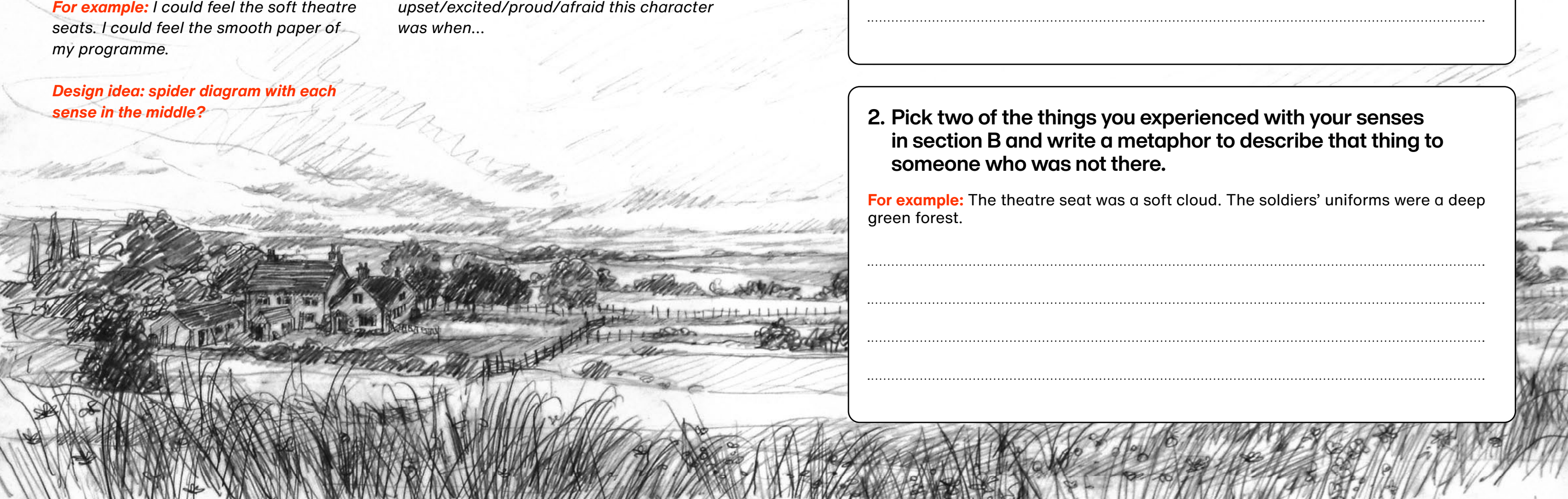
A **metaphor** is a figure of speech where something is compared to something else by saying it *is* that thing
For example: The theatre was a palace To Joey, the oats were a banquet

1. Pick two of the things you experienced with your senses in section B and write a simile to describe that thing to someone who was not there.

For example: The ice cream was as cold as an iceberg. The horse puppet was as huge as a mountain.

2. Pick two of the things you experienced with your senses in section B and write a metaphor to describe that thing to someone who was not there.

For example: The theatre seat was a soft cloud. The soldiers' uniforms were a deep green forest.



D. Writing for Purpose Task

The main purpose of a theatre review is to **evaluate** the performance.

Writing to **evaluate** means assessing something, forming an opinion about its value or quality, and expressing that opinion in writing. To **evaluate** a play, you will need to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the production, the sets, the performers, the music and sound, the story, how it made you feel, and other variables that you feel are important. Once you have evaluated the play, you can offer your opinion on it overall and support your answer with reasons and examples

The other purposes of a theatre review are to **inform**, **describe** and **persuade**.

Writing to **inform** means clearly communicating ideas and recounting events to a reader. In most theatre reviews, for example, the reviewer will **inform** the reader about the production, the plot of the play, and some details about the team involved. Theatre reviewers are always careful not to give away too much information and spoil the plot, though!

Writing to **describe** encourages the reader to imagine the sight or experience the writer is trying to convey to the reader. Theatre reviewers will describe key things about the production to give the reader an idea of what the reviewer’s experience was like at this play and what they should expect if they go to see it themselves

Writing to **persuade** encourages the reader to do something or agree with the writer’s point of view. People often read theatre reviews to decide whether they should go to a play or not. When writing your review, consider whether you want to encourage or discourage your reader from seeing this play and how you will achieve this.

A key part of evaluating is first deciding how you feel and what your overall opinion of the play is. Here are some questions to help you form your opinion:

- **Did you enjoy War Horse?**
- **What was your favourite part of War Horse?**
- **What was your least favourite part of War Horse?**
- **How did War Horse make you feel?**
- **Who was your favourite character? Why?**
- **Who was your least favourite character? Why?**
- **What did you like or dislike about the sets and costumes?**
- **What did you like or dislike about the lighting, sound and music?**

Note for Teachers:

These questions could be approached in a variety of ways. Pupils could be asked to write a one-sentence answer for each question, or asked to discuss them in pairs or groups, or each question could be written on a large poster and pupils could rotate from poster to poster, adding their opinion.

Now that you have thought about your overall opinion of War Horse, try to think of some specific examples of its strengths and weaknesses.

To help you to evaluate the play, think of at least **three strengths** – things that you liked or that the play did well, in your opinion, and why – and write them in the first column. Then, think of at least **three weaknesses** – things that you disliked or felt the play did not do well, and why – and write them in the second column.

An example has been provided for you below:

Strengths	Weaknesses
Puppetry – the puppets were very beautiful and made me feel like I was watching real animals	Sound – the sound effects were too loud and distracting
.....	
.....	
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.....	

Another purpose of your review is to **explain** and **describe**. Most reviews provide some information about the play and the experience of seeing it, but they are careful not to give too much away to avoid spoiling it for other people who might want to see it. To explain, you can give a brief introduction to the plot of the play and use any information from the National Theatre’s website or your programme to give the reader spoiler-free details about the play. When planning your review, remember all of the other activities you have completed that focus on metaphors, similes, synonyms, antonyms and exploring your senses to help you describe your experience.

Activity Four

Writing a Theatre Review

Now that you have done all of your planning, it's time to write your review!

You have been asked to write about your visit to the National Theatre to see War Horse for your school newspaper. Use all of the planning work you did in Activity Three and the examples of real-world theatre reviews you have looked at, to guide you.

Comprehension Answer Sheet

Activity Two: Non-Fiction Reading
Comprehension Answers

1. A
2. C
3. D
4. E
5. C
6. A
7. D
8. D
9. B
10. 3, 5, 1, 2, 4

Additional Resources

[Writing Tutorials Words from the Wild](#)

[War Horse | Interview with Michael Morpurgo](#)

[NT Learning Hub | Primary School Resources](#)

[National Theatre Collection | Full plays and Resources](#)

[War Horse | Further Resources](#)