

'Private Peaceful' by Michael Morpurgo

Tommo Peaceful is a normal young lad, until war is declared and Tommo, along with his brother Charlie, sign up to fight on the front line. But as the battle progresses they realise this is not just another adventure - it's a matter of life and death...

Here, we see Tommo and his company come under fire from a gas attack. Tom struggles to get his gas mask on to protect himself - let's look at how Michael Morpurgo portrays this...



The awakening came suddenly. "Gas! Gas!"

"Fix bayonets!" Hanley's yelling while we're still trying frantically to pull on our gas masks. We grab our rifles and fix bayonets. We're on the firestep² looking out into no-man's-land³, and we see it rolling towards us, this dreaded killer cloud we have heard so much about but have never seen for ourselves until now. Its deadly tendrils are

searching ahead, feeling their way forward in long yellow wisps, scenting me, searching for me. Then finding me out, the gas turns and drifts straight for me. I'm shouting inside my gas mask. "Christ! Christ!" Still the gas comes on, through our wire, swallowing everything in its path.

The gas is only feet away now. In a moment it will be on me, around me, in me. I crouch down, hiding my face between my knees, hands over my helmet, praying it will float over my head, over the top of the trench, seek out someone else. But it does not. It's all around me. I tell myself I will not breathe, I must not breathe. Through a yellow mist I see the trench filling up with it. It drifts into the dugouts, snaking into every nook and cranny, looking for me. I see men running, staggering, falling. I see Pete shouting out for me. Then he's grabbing me and we run. Half-blinded by my mask I trip and fall, crashing my head against the trench wall, knocking myself half-senseless. My gas mask has come off. I pull it down, but I have breathed in and know already it's too late. My eyes are stinging. My lungs are burning. I am coughing, retching, choking. I don't care where I'm running so long as it is away from the gas. At last I'm in the reserve trench⁴ and it is clear of gas. I'm out of it. I wrench off my mask, gasping for good air. Then I am on my hands and knees, vomiting violently. When at last the worst is over I look up through blurred and weeping eyes. A Hun⁵ in a gas mask is standing over me, his rifle aimed at my head.

What are your initial thoughts about this bit of the novel? How does it make you think, feel and react? Discuss with a partner or write your ideas down.

¹ A gun with a knife on the end.

² Where the men would fire their guns from to the enemy's territory.

³ The land between the British and German trenches over which the battle was fought.

⁴ A trench behind the front line.

⁵ A term in the war for a German soldier.

Can you highlight...

All of the dramatic verbs, the adverbs and adjectives?

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- 1. Get rid of all your highlighted words - how does the text sound now?**
- 2. What do all of your highlighted words have in common? Group them by meaning, feelings or categories and see what the overall effect of these choices might be.**
- 3. Swap your highlighting for different words - these can be synonyms or different word types (e.g. you could use an adjective instead of an adverb). What effect does this create instead of the original word?**

Can you label...

All of the imagery used by Morpurgo is highlighted - can you label the highlighted words with the correct technique?

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1. Choose two of the images and draw what they would actually look like - what does the author want us to visualise?
2. Now make it literal instead of imagery-based - what's the difference between the straightforward words compared to the imagery? Link this to the author's purpose and the effect upon the reader.
3. Add all the images together - what do they all do to the whole extract? How do they make it sound and feel? Link this to your opinion as well!

Can you change the structure...

Your job now is to change the way this bit of the story is structured - underneath the chosen sentences, can you change the sentence types and/or punctuation to see what the effect is?

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But it does not. It's all around me. I tell myself I will not breathe, I must not breathe.

I see men running, staggering, falling.

When at last the worst is over I look up through blurred and weeping eyes.

Final Ideas

You've done a lot of messing with this extract, well done!

Now, can you answer the questions to show your understanding of how the extract was built and constructed for audience, purpose and effect?

1. **Purpose:** What is Michael Morpurgo's intention during this extract? You must refer to at least **two** pieces of evidence to support your decision.

2. **Effect:** What is this extract supposed to do to a reader? Consider how it might make readers think, feel and react - again, use **two** pieces of evidence for support.

3. **Audience:** How can you tell this is meant for a young adult audience? Think about the language choices made by Morpurgo, and what you've said the intended effect of the extract was.

Creative Writing Ideas!

You're an expert reader - but what about your writing?

Pick from the tasks below to show you can write for purpose, audience and effect!

You are Tommo writing a letter home to his mother explaining and describing his experiences during the war so far - what will you say?



Many poems were written during the First World War expressing sadness and loss - using Tommo's experience, can you construct a poem for the public on this?



You are an author writing a short story about a man's experiences in the war - you are aiming to make your readers feel sympathy and pride in the man. You can decide on what the man experiences, as long as it is no more than one A4 page long.

