Name: _____ **Date:** _____ **Class Period:** _____

War Horse Film & History Study Guide



PG-13 · 2011 · Drama/War · 2h 26m

BACKGROUND TO WORLD WAR I

World War I was considered "the war to end all wars", but the results of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 which ended the war caused more problems than it cured.

Its casualty totals were unprecedented, soaring into the millions. World War I is known for the extensive system of trenches from which men of both sides fought. Lethal new technologies were unleashed, and for the first time a major war was fought not only on land and on sea but below the sea and in the skies as well. The two sides were known as the Allies or Entente—consisting primarily of France, Great Britain, Italy, Russia, and later the United States—and the Central Powers, primarily comprised of Austria-Hungary (the Habsburg Empire), Germany, and the Ottoman Empire (Turkey). A number of smaller nations aligned themselves with one side or the other. In the Pacific Japan, seeing a chance to seize German colonies, threw in with the Allies. The Allies were the victors, as the entry of the United States into the war in 1917 added an additional weight of men and materiel the Central Powers could not hope to match.

The war resulted in a dramatically changed geo-political landscape, including the destruction of three empires: Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman and Russian. New borders were drawn at its conclusion and resentments, especially on the part of Germany, left festering in Europe. Ironically, decisions made after the fighting ceased led the War to End War to be a significant cause of the Second World War.

Prime Minister of Germany Otto von Bismarck had prophesied that when war again came to Europe it would be over "some damn foolish thing in the Balkans." Indeed, the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir apparent to the Habsburg throne of Austria-Hungary, and his wife, Sophie, by a Serbian nationalist on June 28, 1914, was the match that lit the fuse—but it didn't create the powder keg. The outbreak of war between European nations was the result of many factors:

- **Militarism** - Concern over other countries' military expansion leading to an arms race.
- **Alliances** - entangling alliances used for protecting each country from another.
- **Imperialism** – the need to continue to maintain and build empires.
- **Nationalism** - Long-standing ethnic differences and rising nationalism in the Balkans.
- **Spark** – the assassination of the Austria-Hungary Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo by a Serbian nationalist was the immediate cause of the start of the war.



Film Summary

Albert (Jeremy Irvine) and his beloved horse, Joey, live on a farm in the British countryside. At the outbreak of World War I, Albert and Joey are forcibly parted when Albert's father sells the horse to the British cavalry. Against the backdrop of the Great War, Joey begins an odyssey full of danger, joy and sorrow, and he transforms everyone he meets along the way. Meanwhile Albert, unable to forget his equine friend, searches the battlefields of France to find Joey and bring him home.

Horses in World War I

World War I was primarily the last time horses were used in major combat. The realism of no man's land, the mud and muck of trench warfare, the gas, the barbed wire, the stories where men from both sides would meet up at times under a flag of truce within no man's land were all part of the real war. There are many facets of *War Horse* that would help students key in on content they have learned in the classroom regarding the Great War.

One aspect of the war that is rarely taught is the use of horses. One million horses died on the British side alone. Most folks learn World War I was the first war with modern technology. This is true since it was the first war where the tank, motorized vehicles, poison gas, etc., were used, but it was actually a war where warfare was in transition.

Cavalry units were used as portrayed in the movie, and as more and more machine guns were utilized the cavalry units were phased out. In fact, trench warfare had made the cavalry almost extinct.

VOCABULARY:

Enclosure Acts - were a series of Acts of Parliament that empowered enclosure of open fields and common land in England and Wales, creating legal property rights to land that was previously held in common.

Cavalry – soldiers on horseback used to fight mainly with swords.

Trench Warfare – a style of warfare in which both sides dig trenches and face each other and come out to fight in the middle which is called no-mans land. This type of fighting usually leads to a draw in which no side could advance.



Directions: Answer the following questions in detail on a separate piece of paper.

1. What kind of farmers are Albert's family?

2. How did Albert's father get injured?

3. Where is Albert and his family from?

4. When does the beginning of the movie take place?

5. When the war is announced, what happens next?

6. Why does the Army (Cavalry) purchase Joey?

7. What was Joey's new role as a horse in the cavalry?

8. Why is there a person with a head-covering instructing men on how to proceed in the coming battle? Where do you believe he is from?

9. Why do you believe that the British could fight the Germans in this manner?

10. What caused the Germans to win the battle? Was this obvious?

11. Why were the two brothers shot by a firing squad? Was this fair?

12. Why do you believe both sides thought they could win by building trenches?

13. What kind of new technology for the time is present in this film?

14. Why do you believe that the British and German soldier tried to help Joey? What is the purpose of showing this cooperation?

15. When Joey is brought to the hospital, why do you believe the doctor saves his life after threatening to kill him?

16. When Albert goes home with Joey why do you believe they are both heroes?

17. How are other modern wars similar and/or different?

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