

# Michael Morpurgo

Sir Michael Morpurgo is one of Britain's most popular children's authors. During his career so far, he has written over 100 books and been awarded with a knighthood for his many achievements. As well as being a successful author, Morpurgo is a dedicated charity worker, family man and inspiration to both adults and children alike.



## Early Life

Michael Morpurgo was born on 5<sup>th</sup> October 1943 in St Albans, Hertfordshire. When the Second World War broke out, Michael and his brother, Pieter, were evacuated to Northumberland to keep them safe from the **Blitz**. Once the war ended, Michael and his brother returned home to find that their mother had fallen in love with a man called Jack Morpurgo. She eventually divorced Michael's birth father and married Jack who then became Michael's stepfather.

Morpurgo attended two boarding schools before starting a very brief career in the Army. He enjoyed parts of army life but disliked being shouted at and so decided to leave and go to university instead. In 1963, Morpurgo married the love of his life, Clare Lane. Clare is the daughter of Allen Lane, the founder of the famous **publishing house**, Penguin Books (Penguin Books published large numbers of children's books). Clare and Michael went on to have three children together; Sebastian, Horatio and Rosalind. After university, Michael became a school teacher in Kent and particularly enjoyed reading stories to his class. However, when he ran out of stories to read to them, he decided to start writing his own! In 1974, Morpurgo wrote his first book entitled 'It Never Rains: Five Stories'. Morpurgo has reported that the years he spent teaching were some of the happiest of his life.

## Charity



Ten years later, Michael Morpurgo wanted a change and so, he and his family moved to Devon. They bought a large house next to a farm and set-up the charity, Farms for City Children. Farms for City Children is a charity for disadvantaged children who live in cities and big towns. The charity gives them the opportunity to stay at one of the charity's three farms for a week. Children learn from hands-on experience learning about where

their food comes from, how to care for animals and about working as part of a team. The charity is still running today and over 90 000 children have stayed at the farms since it began in 1976.

### Books

Since writing 'It Never Rains', Morpurgo has written many more children's books and stories. The list of titles includes: Friend or Foe, War Horse, The Butterfly Lion, Kensuke's Kingdom, Private Peaceful and An Elephant in the Garden. War Horse is one of Morpurgo's most famous books and was made into a stage show in 2007 and then into a film in 2012 by director Steven Spielberg.

### Achievements

Morpurgo enjoyed working with his neighbour and friend, poet Ted Hughes, and together they set-up the position of **Children's Laureate** in 1999. In 2003, Morpurgo was given the title himself, following on from Quentin Blake and Anne Fine. In 2007, Morpurgo was awarded with an **OBE** and then in 2018, he was given a knighthood in recognition of his services to literature and charity work. Despite all of this, Michael Morpurgo himself says that starting the Farms for City Children charity with his wife is still his greatest achievement.



#### Did You Know...?

Michael Morpurgo does not write his books sitting at a desk or on a computer. Instead, he prefers to write in an exercise book, lying on his bed propped up by pillows! Despite being a fan of Mozart, Morpurgo writes in a silent room as he finds the music distracting.

### Glossary

**The Blitz:** the period between 1940 and 1941 when German planes bombed London and surrounding cities.

**Publishing house:** a company that prints and publishes books.

**Children's Laureate:** an award given to a writer or illustrator of children's books.

**OBE:** an award presented by the Queen that stands for Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.

# Questions

1. Where was Michael evacuated to? Tick one.

- London
- Hertfordshire
- Northumberland
- Devon

2. What was the name of Michael's stepfather?

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3. What are the names of Michael's three children?

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4. Number the events below to show the order in which they happened in Morpurgo's life.

- Michael and Clare started Farms for City Children.
- Michael and Clare got married.
- 1 Michael was born.
- Michael wrote 'It Never Rains: Five Stories'
- Michael went to university.

5. Fill in the missing words.

Four years later, Morpurgo was \_\_\_\_\_ with an OBE and then in 2018, he was given a knighthood for his services to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ work.

6. Why do you think so many of Morpurgo's books are based in war time? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

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7. Why do you think Morpurgo was given the title of Children's Laureate? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

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# Questions

8. Look at the first paragraph. What adjectives are used to describe Michael Morpurgo and what do they tell us about him?

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9. Michael Morpurgo himself says that starting the Farms for City Children charity with his wife is still his greatest achievement.

What do you think is Morpurgo's greatest achievement and why?

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# Answers

1. Where was Michael evacuated to? Tick one.

- London  
 Hertfordshire  
 **Northumberland**  
 Devon

2. What was the name of Michael's stepfather?

**Jack Morpurgo**

3. What are the names of Michael's three children?

**Sebastian, Horatio and Rosalind**

4. Number the events below to show the order in which they happened in Morpurgo's life.

- 5** Michael and Clare started Farms for City Children.  
 **3** Michael and Clare got married.  
 **1** Michael was born.  
 **4** Michael wrote 'It Never Rains: Five Stories'  
 **2** Michael went to university.

5. Fill in the missing words.

Four years later, Morpurgo was **awarded** with an OBE and then in 2018, he was given a knighthood for his services to **literature** and **charity** work.

6. Why do you think so many of Morpurgo's books are based in war time? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

**Pupil's own responses, such as: I think that so many of Morpurgo's books are set in war time because Morpurgo has lots of experience of war. He and his brother were evacuated to Northumberland when they were children so they know what it feels like to be sent away from home. Michael also spent a short time in the Army so he knows a little about being a soldier.**

7. Why do you think Morpurgo was given the title of Children's Laureate? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

**Pupil's own responses, such as: I think that Morpurgo was given the title of Children's Laureate because it says in the glossary that the award is given to a 'significant' children's author and Morpurgo has written over 100 books. One has even been made into a stage show and film.**

# Answers

8. Look at the first paragraph. What adjectives are used to describe Michael Morpurgo and what do they tell us about him?

**Pupil's own responses, such as: In the first paragraph, Michael Morpurgo is described as a popular, and successful author and a dedicated charity worker. These adjectives tell us that lots of people enjoy reading his books and that his books sell well and that he works hard for his charity.**

9. Michael Morpurgo himself says that starting the Farms for City Children charity with his wife is still his greatest achievement.

What do you think is Morpurgo's greatest achievement and why?

**Pupil's own responses, such as: I think that Morpurgo's greatest achievement is The War Horse because not only is it a really popular and famous book, but it has also been made into a stage show and into a film by Steven Spielberg.**