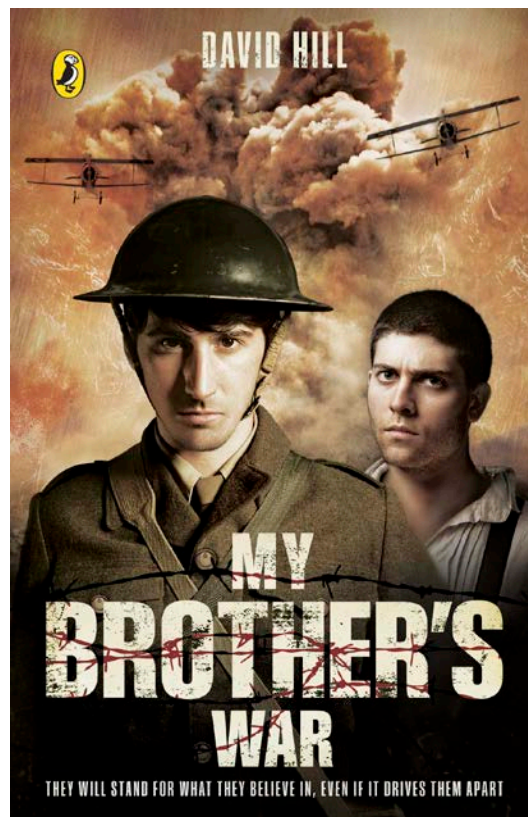


Teachers notes for

MY BROTHER'S WAR

By David Hill



PUFFIN BOOKS

For the teacher

My Brother's War by David Hill is the story of two brothers who have very different perspectives and experiences of World War I. William eagerly volunteers to go to the front line while Edmund is a conscientious objector and refuses to fight. Both young men will end up on the bloody battlefields of France, but their journeys there, while parallel, are completely different. While William learns to throw hand grenades at training camp, Edmund is arrested, and when William travels to France as a soldier, Edmund is transported as a prisoner and forced to work on the front line.

Through experiences both brothers have in England and France, they begin to see the war from different perspectives. In a terrifying culminating battle their beliefs are put to the ultimate test.

Introductory Exercises

- **Discussion:** What do you know about the First World War? When did it happen? Why was New Zealand involved?
- **Research:** What is a conscientious objector? On page five David Hill acknowledges Archibald Baxter's memoir *We Will Not Cease*. Can you find out who Archibald Baxter was and anything about what happened to him during the First World War?

Close Reading

Part 1: At First

1. The book begins with two letters, one from William and one from Edmund. What do these letters tell us about the two brothers? Think about what the characters tell us, but also *how* they tell us this information. How would you describe the two brothers' different voices?
2. What do different characters think of Edmund's refusal to fight? Look at Mr and Mrs Hansen, Mr Yee, Tim, the older policeman, Mrs Twigg, Captain McGregor.
3. How would describe the mood at the beginning of William's section on page 25?
4. What doubts and fears does William have as he enlists and starts training for war?

Part 2: Before Sailing

1. Why would Archie have been asked to leave his church after the sermon he preached? (page 39)
2. How is Edmund treated in prison? Do you think the authorities treat him fairly?
3. What are some of the reasons that the men in William's training camp give for having joined the army?

Part 3: On Ship

1. Do you think soldier who grabs Edmund's collar and shouts at him on page 77 is against his views as a conscientious objector? Why or why not?
2. How do Edmund and Archie deal with boredom while they are on the ship?
3. How is William's departure to England different from Edmund's?
4. Why won't the restaurant in Cape Town serve Jack Kahui?
5. On page 90 William sees a warship that has been in a battle. How does the author use language, especially verbs and adjectives, to describe it? Do you think this creates any particular atmosphere?

Part 4: Getting Ready

1. What reasons does Colonel Brabin give Edmund to join the army? Why does Edmund try to remain so calm and polite?
2. Why do you think Corporal McKean wants Edmund to be paraded around the camp every day?
3. What facts of his life in the English training camp does William not mention in his letter to his mother? Do you think the tone of the letter reflects how he is really feeling?
4. How does the author use humour on pages 108–109? Why do you think a writer might include funny parts in a book about war? Why do you think this passage might end with the paragraph that begins 'But they didn't laugh at other . . .'?

Part 5: The Trenches

1. Find two examples in the text between pages 119–123 that describe destruction caused by the war. What do these tell you about warfare and how it affects communities and landscapes?
2. Is William's experience of the trenches what he expected it to be? Why/why not?
3. What is the punishment Edmund is given by Corporal McKean? How do different soldiers around Edmund react to it?

Part 6: First Attack

1. On page 166 Edmund describes his letter as 'another letter I'm glad you'll never get'. Why do you think he is relieved that his mother will never see it?
2. Why does Edmund decide to help the stretcher bearers?
3. What do you think is William's reason for preventing Jerry shooting the German soldier?

4. How would you describe the atmosphere of battle? Choose six words that you think describe it and use them in a short paragraph.

Part 7: Second Attack

1. What is the cause of the conflict that arises between Edmund and Archie? How do you think this shows that Edmund's attitude is changing?
2. What do you think Edmund means when he asked himself, 'Why were they trying to do this? What was the use of it?' Is he thinking about the incident that just happened or war in general?
3. At the end of the book William and Edmund write a letter together. How do you think the characters have changed since the beginning of the book?

Character

Pretend you are either William or Edmund as they are at the start of the novel. Write your brother a letter explaining why you don't agree with his views on the war.

Choose a character in the novel who is not William or Edmund and gather extracts from the text that describe them. Use these extracts to write a description of the character in your own words.

Do you think William or Edmund is the braver of the two brothers? Or do you think they are equally brave? Give reasons for your opinion.

Read Wilfred Owen's famous World War I Poem 'Anthem for Doomed Youth'. Once you have discussed the poem, talk about what both William and Edmund might have thought of it. Do you think they would see it differently?

Discussion and Debate

William is eager to fight in the war, but Edmund is opposed to all wars. What is your opinion? Do you, like Edmund, think war is always wrong? Or do you think, like William, that sometimes it is justified?

Edmund encounters considerable hostility because he is a conscientious objector. Do you think the treatment he received was unfair? Why do you think the government dealt so harshly with conscientious objectors? Can you think of any other times in history or the present day where people have been badly treated because of their beliefs?

Creative Writing

William and Edmund both write letters to their mother and their sister Jessie. Choose one of the letters in the novel and write either their mother's or Jessie's reply to it.

Imagine you are a soldier or conscientious objector in World War I. Write a short story based on one of the following:

- The night before the battle
- Escape!
- Meeting the enemy
- Going home

History

Divide the class into groups and give each group a World War I related topic to research. Groups must create a short presentation on their topic for the rest of the class.

Possible topics include:

- The Gallipoli Campaign
- Trench warfare
- Aviation in World War I
- The Battle of Passchendaele
- Submarines and the navy
- The Battle of the Somme