

Press release

Michael Morpurgo: A Lifetime in Stories

Exhibition for *War Horse* author

22 July 2017 – 25 February 2018

The life and exceptional writing power of one of Britain's best-loved storytellers, Michael Morpurgo, will be celebrated in a new, free exhibition at the V&A Museum of Childhood this summer. *Michael Morpurgo: A Lifetime in Stories* will look at Morpurgo's life and writing process as well as the lives he has created for some of his remarkable characters. The Museum is delighted to announce that Joey, the original life-size West End horse puppet from the National Theatre's award-winning stage adaptation of *War Horse*, will be on display at the exhibition.

This unique exhibition will showcase the notebooks and manuscripts that have become the classics we know today, including *War Horse* (1982, Egmont), *Private Peaceful* (2003, Harper Collins), *Kensuke's Kingdom* (1999, Egmont) and *The Butterfly Lion* (1996, Harper Collins). The exhibition is devised by Seven Stories, The National Centre for Children's Books, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Michael Morpurgo said: *'I value greatly this exhibition around my writing life, because it gives young people insights into the making of stories they may know and love, and gives them an understanding of how one writer tells his tales, which may well encourage them to feel that this storytelling is for them too, that we can all find our writing voice. It is an enabling exhibition, and enlightening for me too, opening old dusty memories. I had forgotten so much!'*

Rhian Harris, V&A Museum of Childhood director, said: *"Michael's writing has captivated the imaginations of millions of children and we are delighted to have an exhibition that will bring some of his most inspiring worlds to life."*

The exhibition will display draft manuscripts, photographs, notebooks and correspondence that chronicle Michael's creative process and writing career. Artwork loaned by some of Britain's greatest illustrators, including Sir Quentin Blake, Patrick Benson and Michael Foreman, will also be on display. The exhibition will show material relating to adaptations, in particular *War Horse*, first published in 1982 by Egmont. The stage show had its premier at the National Theatre in 2007 and almost 5 years later Steven Spielberg made it into a blockbusting film. The stage production has been enjoyed by over seven million people worldwide and will be on tour in the UK from September 2017; Joey was donated to the V&A by Handspring Puppet Company in 2013.

A handwritten draft of *War Horse* will be on display, showing how the story evolved from first draft to publication of the book, to adaptation for the National Theatre and Steven Spielberg film scripts. Props from stage and film including a goose puppet, on loan from the National Theatre, and a World War I painting that inspired *War Horse*, by war artist F. W. Reed will also be on show.

The exhibition will include an atmospheric soundscape to introduce the various and familiar themes in Michael's storytelling - war, the countryside and farming, the Scilly Isles and friendship. A replica of Michael's creative caravan will be reconstructed, so that visitors can imagine, daydream and pen story ideas inspired by Michael's beloved Devon. Morpurgo writes by hand, and vast amounts of orange school notebooks will reveal themselves as an important repository for Michael's first ideas and drafts.

Michael's writing style is inspired by fact and real events: "*Before you find a voice for a story, you have to find a voice as a writer. Before you find a voice as a writer there is something even more important – you have to find something to write about.*"

"*It's no good trying to write about what you don't care about. You only find out what you care about when you discover what really motivates you to write. The more time you spend in "dream time" living in your head where the story is, imagining how the people involved would feel - then you can lose yourself utterly in the story. That's what I try to do.*"

Michael Morpurgo is one of Britain's greatest living authors for children. His work spans 40 years and a career that has seen the publication of over 150 books for children, traversing wide-ranging topics that explore historical events, natural history and the environment, adventure and family life. Morpurgo is a true champion of children and young people's culture, creativity and their right to read and enjoy stories. He was instrumental in setting up the Children's Laureateship in 1997, and his services to children's literature were recognised in 2006 when he was awarded an OBE. In 2015 he donated his entire archive to Seven Stories, The National Centre for Children's Books.

Additional exhibition highlights include:

- Replica shipwrecked boat, featured in *Wreck of the Zanzibar* (1995, Egmont).
- A multi-sensory sculpture of *Billy the Kid* (2002, Harper Collins).
- A playful under 5 area inspired by *Mudpuddle Farm Series* (Harper Collins) and *It's a Dog's Life* (2004, Egmont) with dress up and props.
- Original material showing handwritten drafts of *Private Peaceful* (2003 Harper Collins), *Why the Whales Came* (2011, Egmont) and *Kensuke's Kingdom* (1999, Egmont).
- Documents from Morpurgo's time working as a teacher and from his time as an army cadet at Sandhurst.

For further press information please contact Rebecca Ward on 07977 071450 or email Rebecca@rebeccaward.co.uk. Press images can be downloaded, after registering, at <http://pressimages.vam.ac.uk>.

Notes to editors

V&A Museum of Childhood, Cambridge Heath Road, London E2 9PA

Nearest tube: Bethnal Green. Open daily: 10.00 – 17.45, last admission 17.30.

Admission FREE.

www.vam.ac.uk/moc

The V&A Museum of Childhood is the UK's National Museum of Childhood. It is the largest institution of its kind in the world. Its mission is to hold in trust the nation's childhood collections and to be an international leader in engaging audiences in the material culture and experiences of childhood.

Michael Morpurgo OBE was born in 1943; he attended schools in London, Sussex and Canterbury before joining Sandhurst to complete his officer training. Later he went on to King's College London to study English and French, followed by a step into the teaching profession and a job in a primary school in Kent. It was there that he discovered what he wanted to do.

Michael, who sees himself as a storyteller more than as an author, began his career in writing when a school colleague spotted the potential in the stories he told his pupils and sent a collection of them to HarperCollins; this became his first publication, *It Never Rained* (1974, Macmillan). Since then Michael has found success both in the UK and abroad, publishing over 150 titles including *War Horse* (1982, Egmont), *Private Peaceful* (2003, Harper Collins), *The Dancing Bear* (1994, Harper Collins) and *Kensuke's Kingdom* (1999, Egmont). He is a fixture on the national curriculum in both the United Kingdom and France and has won multiple literary awards including the Whitbread Children's Book Award and the Prix Sorcieres, which he has been awarded three times.

In 1976 Michael and his wife, Clare, founded their charity Farms For City Children, to relieve the poverty of rural experience of young children from inner city and urban areas by providing them with a week's holiday in which they work actively and purposefully on farms in the heart of the countryside. There are three Farms for City Children – Nethercott in Devon, Treginnis in Wales and Wick in Gloucestershire. In the last 30 years over 50,000 children from cities and towns throughout the UK have spent a week of their lives living and working on one of the three farms.

www.michaelmorpurgo.com

Seven Stories – The National Centre for Children's Books. The only place in Britain dedicated to saving, celebrating and sharing our rich literary heritage for children.

Seven Stories' home is a carefully converted listed warehouse in Newcastle upon Tyne in North East England. The museum opened in 2005 and visitors can explore seven floors of galleries, creative spaces, a specialist children's bookshop and a café. Everything Seven Stories does uses children's books to inspire children and grown-ups to be curious, imaginative and creative. It strives to encourage people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to enjoy a lifetime of reading for pleasure through inventive and immersive exhibitions and lively events and learning programmes.



War Horse

The National Theatre's production of *War Horse*, adapted from Michael Morpurgo's book by Nick Stafford is co-directed by Marianne Elliott and Tom Morris, puppet design is by Adrian Kohler, set and costume and video drawing designed by Rae Smith, lighting by Paule Constable, and movement and horse choreography by Toby Sedgwick. The puppetry directors are Basil Jones and Adrian Kohler, video design is by 59 Productions Ltd,

songmaking is by John Tams, music by Adrian Sutton and sound by Christopher Shutt.

War Horse begins its second UK tour in Canterbury on 15 September 2017, then continues its journey to: Bristol, Liverpool, Oxford, Brighton, Bradford, Nottingham, Edinburgh, Southampton, Salford, Cardiff, Plymouth, Milton Keynes and Glasgow with further dates to be announced.

More information on www.warhorseonstage.com