

WarHorse

Introduction Pack



About War Horse

Production History

Since *War Horse* opened at the National Theatre in 2007, 11 million people have seen the production – worldwide. The journey of creating, staging and developing *War Horse* has been astonishing, and as further productions open across the world, the National Theatre intends that the production should travel with the NT's ethos and values for learning and participation. This ambition stems from the production itself – as a piece of theatre made for adults and children together, and an extraordinary stimulus for creative and cross-curricular learning. The major challenge with turning a book into a play is usually one of structure. A novel will often be reliant on a narrative made up of short episodes, the author can take time to describe certain elements in minute detail because the reader is free to dip in and out of the story – we don't normally expect to read a book in one sitting. However, for a playwright, the audience is captive – they need to feel that the story is progressing at every step and with every dramatic beat that is revealed. This led Nick Stafford, the adaptor, to create several drafts of the script and to use the rehearsal process to refine and adapt as needed. This process continues throughout the run and each production has its own unique personality. Handspring Puppet Company came on board through a previous collaboration with Director Tom Morris, there was a keenness to do something on an epic scale and when Tom's mum suggested Michael Morpurgo's book, that was the springboard to many years of workshopping and development that has led to the production that is on tour now. The fact that some of the key characters in the play are puppets and these are operated by up to three puppeteers each sounds like it might be confusing but after a short time most people stop looking at the puppeteers and just see the characters. Because the play takes place during war, the subject needed to be handled with great sensitivity and authenticity so there was a great deal of research into the facts of the historical period and of World War One. There are lots of resources on the War Horse website to help you to find out more about WW1.



The play lasts 2 hours and 20 minutes including a 20-minute interval

World War 1 Timeline

The timeline includes the real events from World War I referred to in the play. Fictional events from War Horse are in italics.

1912

Albert's father buys Joey in an auction

1914

28 June

Archduke Franz Ferdinand is assassinated

July

Albert teaches Joey to plough

28 July

Austria declares war on Serbia

1 August

Germany declares war on Russia

3 August

Germany declares war on France and invades Belgium

4 August

Great Britain declares war on Germany

Albert's father sells Joey to the British Army.

Albert's cousin Billy and other village men enlist in the British Army.

23 August

Germany invades France

November

Joey arrives in France with Major Nicholls

December

Albert runs away to enlist in the British army and search for Joey

1915

March

Albert arrives in France as a British soldier. Joey and Tophorn meet Emilie on her farm and are eventually captured by the Germans

1916

15 September

Britain and France use tanks for the first time

December

Joey and Tophorn are forced to pull artillery guns

1917

1 February

Germany resumes unrestricted submarine warfare

6 April

The USA declares war on Germany

31 July

Britain launches a major offensive on the Western Front

20 November

British tanks win a victory at Cambrai

1918

8 August

Advance of the Allies is successful

4 October

Germany asks the Allies for an armistice November Tophorn dies and Joey wanders into 'No Man's Land'

9 November

Germany's leader, Kaiser William II, abdicates

11 November

Germany signs an armistice ending World War I Joey and Albert reunite and head home to the village

1919

June 28

Treaty of Versailles is signed between Germany and the Allies



Synopsis

What is the play about?

SPOILER ALERT: This section explains most of the plot so please don't read or share this information if you don't want to know!

5 August 1912

The production starts with **CAPTAIN NICHOLLS** sketching the countryside of Devon. An auction begins, conducted by **AUCTIONEER CARTER**. The bidding quickly rises between **TED NARRACOTT** and his brother **ARTHUR NARRACOTT**. Ted, who has been drinking, finally makes the winning bid of 39 guineas. Back at their farm, **ROSE NARRACOTT** is furious that her husband has wasted the mortgage money. She puts their son **ALBERT NARRACOTT** in charge of bringing the horse on so that when he's grown they can sell him. Albert feeds the foal, and names him **JOEY** and teaches Joey a special whistle call.

July 1914

Two years pass and one night, Ted tries to put a collar on Joey because he has bet his brother Arthur 39 guineas that Joey can plough a furrow in seven days time. If he loses, Arthur gets the horse. Albert starts to train Joey, introducing him to the collar, the bridle, the reins, and finally the plough and Joey finally pulls the plough to victory.

5 August 1914

A peal of church bells means the war has begun. In the village they are enlisting men and offering to pay £100 for an officer's horse; Ted sees an opportunity to make money and sells Joey to Captain Nicholls. Albert is desperate when he discovers what his father has done, he offers to join up, but at 16 is too young. Nicholls promises that Joey will be well cared for. Albert says goodbye to his horse and solemnly swears they will be together again. Arthur gives his son **BILLY NARRACOTT** a knife that his grandfather used in war.

6 November 1914

Newly-promoted Major Nicholls and Joey are posted to France along with **CAPTAIN STEWART** and his horse **TOPTHORN**. They spot enemy infantry but just as they are ready to charge, machine-gun fire breaks out and Nicholls is blown off his horse.

Christmas Day 1914, Devon

Ted and Rose give Albert a bicycle for Christmas. Arthur brings a parcel for Albert that he has picked up at the post office.

Albert is at first thrilled to find Major Nicholls' sketchbook, with drawings of him and Joey; then Rose reads the letter telling him the Major has been killed in action and Albert realises Nicholls must have been riding Joey. He quickly tears a picture of Joey from the sketchbook and dashes off on his new bicycle to enlist.

March 1915

Captain Stewart tells Trooper Billy Narracott, who is shaking violently with nerves, to ride Joey into battle. Other horses run into barbed wire, but Joey and Topthorn keep going.

INTERVAL

March 1915, Calais

Albert has joined the Yeomanry. **SERGEANT THUNDER** tells him the Yeomanry has been disbanded, so he's now in the infantry. Captain Stewart and Billy have been taken captive by German soldiers, they are searched and Billy's knife is found. When he struggles to retrieve it, **KLAUSEN** kills him with it. **HAUPTMANN FRIEDRICH MÜLLER** calms the situation and speaks to the horse. At **PAULETTE**'s farm, Friedrich introduces the young French girl **EMILIE** to the horses and decides to take the ambulance orderly's uniform and pretend that Müller is dead.

Christmas 1916

Klausen leads on two exhausted horses pulling a huge gun. Friedrich recognises Klausen and knows he is dangerous. Karl realises the ambulance orderly is really Friedrich, and says Joey and Topthorn will have to help pull the gun.

SPOILER ALERT: If you don't want to know how it ends, stop reading here...

9 November 1918

Topthorn's cough gets worse, and he collapses and dies. A British tank appears, killing Friedrich; Joey is finally forced to flee and leave his dead friends. He gallops away and runs into barbed wire in No Man's Land. GEORDIE, a sentry in the British trench, sees **MANFRED**, a German in the opposite trench, also sees the horse and, waving a white flag, goes out to fetch him. Geordie doesn't want the Germans to take this prize, so he too goes out with a white flag. Together, they help Joey, and finally toss a coin for which side will take him. Geordie wins.

11 November 1918

Albert has been blinded by the gas, but is told he will recover his sight. Geordie and Sergeant Thunder lead Joey in and he is inspected by Veterinary Officer Martin who prepares to shoot him. Albert makes his special call and Joey reacts. Finally, the two are reunited. A bell chimes eleven times, signalling the war's end and Albert and Joey finally return to Devon.



Cast List



Photo: Brinkhoff/Mögenburg

Albert.....THOMAS DENNIS
 Billy/Heine/Klebb.....JASPER WILLIAM CARTWRIGHT
 Rose.....JO CASTLETON
 Ted.....GWILYM LLOYD
 Arthur.....WILLIAM ILKLEY
 Carter/Strauss.....MARCUS ADOLPHY
 Allan/ Brandt/ManfredCHRIS GARNER
 Grieg/Schweyk/Sgt Fine.....ADAM BARLOW
 Bone.....JONATHAN CHARLES
 Priest.....JACK LORD
 Nicholls.....BEN INGLES
 Stewart/Ludwig.....SIMON VICTOR
 Thunder.....ANDREW HODGES
 David.....TOYIN OMARI-KINCH
 Friedrich.....PETER BECKER
 Klausen.....JACK LORD
 Paulette.....ARINDER SADARA
 Baby Joey/Emilie.....JOELLE BRABBAN
 Goose/Schnabel.....BILLY IRVING
 Baby Joey/Matron Callaghan...ELIZABETH STRETTON
 Baby Joey/Annie Gilbert.....KIRAN LANDA
 Geordie.....MAX GALLAGHER
 Songman.....BOB FOX

Joey Head.....TOM STACEY
 Joey Heart.....LEWIS HOWARD
 Joey Hind.....LUCAS BUTTON
 Tophorn Head.....STEPHEN LOVE
 Tophorn Heart.....SEBASTIAN CHARLES
 Tophorn Hind.....ELAN JAMES
 Double Head.....TOM QUINN
 Double Heart.....DOMINIC RAMSDEN
 Double Hind.....NICKY CROSS
 Duo Head.....ANNA CHESSHER
 Duo Heart.....CHRIS CHARLES
 Duo Hind.....SAMUEL PARKER



War Horse Production Timeline

1982

Michael Morpurgo is inspired to write his fifth book War Horse by a painting given to his wife by his father-in-law. The painting depicts a horse cavalry charging up a hill.

2004

National Theatre Associate Director Tom Morris, in searching for new projects to develop in collaboration with South Africa's Handspring Puppet Company, has War Horse suggested to him by his mother.

2005

January: The War Horse project begins with a week-long workshop at the NT Studio. Tom Morris, along with Handspring artists Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones, work with a small group of actors to explore the dramatic potential of the novel and to experiment with simple puppetry.

In the months following the workshop, they continue to develop their ideas and new members join the team:

- Marianne Elliott becomes co-director with Tom Morris.
- Nick Stafford is commissioned to write the stage adaptation of the novel.
- Rae Smith becomes the production designer. She develops the overall design concept and designs the sets and costumes.

2006

November: The project returns to the NT Studio for a second workshop with Stafford's draft script and a horse puppet prototype built by Kohler. Led by Elliott and Morris, the actors explore the script and Stafford revises it. Watching the actors, Smith develops ways to sustain dramatic visual images through the story.

2007

March: The third workshop at the NT Studio involves staging the newest draft and further development of the production elements as the team move towards a full production.

August: The creative team, a cast of thirty actors, puppeteers and musicians and a full technical crew begin seven weeks of rehearsals.

October: War Horse opens at the NT's Olivier Theatre.

2009

March: War Horse opens at the New London Theatre in London's West End.

2011

February: The one-millionth patron to see the production in London meets with Michael Morpurgo and the puppets of Joey and Tophorn.

April: War Horse opens in New York at the Vivian Beaumont Theater at the Lincoln Center.

2012

January: Stephen Spielberg's film premieres after the director was inspired to create it by his visit to see the production in London.

February: War Horse opens at Princess of Wales Theatre, Toronto.

June: USA tour of War Horse begins in Los Angeles.

December: An Australasian production opens at Melbourne Arts Centre State Theatre and goes on to play Sydney, Brisbane and Auckland

2013

September: First UK tour starts in Plymouth and visits Birmingham, Salford, Edinburgh, Southampton, Dublin, Sunderland, Bradford and Cardiff.

October: A German language version of the production opens at Theater des Westens in Berlin.

2014

February: War Horse is broadcast to over 1000 cinemas worldwide by National Theatre Live on 27 February.

June: A Dutch language production premieres in the Netherlands at the Royal Theatre Carré in Amsterdam as part of the Holland Festival. It then tours around the Netherlands, before going to Antwerp, Belgium where it is performed in Flemish

October: The show tours to South Africa, playing in Johannesburg and Cape Town.



War Horse Production Timeline cont.

2015

A Chinese-language production of War Horse opens in autumn at the National Theatre of China's theatre in Beijing, followed by a tour to cities including Shanghai and Guangzhou.

2016

March: The West-End run closes after six years at the New London Theatre.

2017

September: The second UK tour begins, touring to Canterbury, Bristol, Liverpool, Oxford, Brighton, Bradford, Nottingham, Edinburgh, Southampton, Salford, Cardiff, Woking, Plymouth, Milton Keynes, Birmingham, Glasgow and Sunderland from 2017-2019.

2018

February: The National Theatre announce the return of War Horse to the Lyttleton Theatre as part of the centenary celebrations for the end of WWI in November.



Characters

Here are some pictures of the different characters from the play:

The Puppets

The main horses are operated by three puppeteers who are named the head, the heart and the hind.

There are other puppets in the play including other horses, crows, soldiers, swallows and even a tank!



Joey as a foal who is sold at auction.



Joey as a fully-grown horse on the battle field.



Topthorn, Captain Stewart's horse who, after working out their hierarchy, becomes a close companion of Joey's.



Joey as a foal who is sold at auction.

The People

Here are some of the main characters from the play. Sometimes one actor will play more than one person but it should be clear from their costume and the situation that they are playing someone different.



Albert Narracott
Ted and Rose's son, who trains Joey and develops a special bond with the horse.



Rose Narracott
Ted's wife who loves her husband but is distressed when her son goes to war.



Ted Narracott
A farmer who has never fought in a war but stayed behind to run the farm, sometimes he drinks too much.



Arthur Narracott
Ted's brother who fought in the Boer war and who has a long-lasting feud with his brother.

Characters cont.



Billy Narracott

Arthur's son who is jealous of Albert's relationship with Joey.



Songman

This character comments on the action of the play using folk songs.



Captain Nicholls

He is first fascinated by Joey when he sees him running with Albert on his back.



Friedrich Müller

A German soldier who looks after Joey and Tophorn during the war.



Emilie

A French girl who looks after Joey and Tophorn with Friedrich Müller.



Ensemble

There are lots of other characters in the play, including villagers and soldiers.

