

All quiet on the western frontanalysis flashcard



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Context→Erich Maria Remarque was born in Osnabrück, Germany, in 1898 into a lower-middle-class family. In 1916, he was drafted into the German army to fight in World War I, in which he was badly wounded. Ten years after the war ended, he published *Im Westen Nichts Neues*, translated into English a year later as *All Quiet on the Western Front*, a novel about the experiences of ordinary German soldiers during the war.

Though other books, most notably Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), had explored the violence and brutality of war in a realistic light, the literary tradition of war stories still tended overwhelmingly toward romanticized ideals of glory, adventure, and honor. In presenting his grimly realistic version of a soldier's experience, Remarque stripped the typical romanticism from the war narrative in the staunchly antiwar *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The novel instantly became an international, critically acclaimed success. An American movie based on the book was released in 1930.

After Adolf Hitler's rise to power in Germany in the early 1930s, the fiercely nationalistic Nazi regime attacked *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Remarque as unpatriotic. Remarque made no attempt to resist the Nazis' attacks on his reputation because he feared retaliation. Despite Nazi hostilities toward him, in 1931 Remarque published a sequel to *All Quiet on the Western Front*, entitled *The Road Back*, which details the postwar experience of German citizens. This work provoked further Nazi opposition, and Remarque fled to Switzerland with his wife, Jutta Zambona, in 1932. In 1933, the Nazis banned Remarque's two novels and held a bonfire to burn copies of the books.

Remarque and his wife divorced in Switzerland but eventually remarried so that she could retain her Swiss residency. In 1939, he followed the path of many persecuted German intellectuals and immigrated to the United States, where he obtained citizenship in 1947. His family was not so lucky: the Nazis killed his sister during World War II, in part because of her relationship to him. Remarque and his wife had separated; in 1951, they finally ended their estranged marriage.

In the United States, Remarque had a tempestuous affair with the actress Marlene Dietrich, which inspired his novel *Arch of Triumph*. In 1958, he married another film star, Paulette Goddard. They eventually left the United States and moved to Porto Ranco, Switzerland, where Remarque died on September 25, 1970.

Most of Remarque's novels deal with political and social upheaval in Europe during the First and Second World Wars. Several of his novels were adapted to film. However, *All Quiet on the Western Front* remains his masterpiece; none of his other works approaches its critical acclaim and popularity. The novel and its first film adaptation are still influential as antiwar works and important chronicles of World War I. One of the remarkable aspects of the book's success in England and America is that, unlike most other works dealing with World War I, *All Quiet on the Western Front* deals with the experiences of German soldiers—detested enemies of the English and Americans during World War I and World War II. That American and English reception of the book was so positive from the outset testifies to its ability to speak for all soldiers who suffered through the horrors of World War I.

Plot Overview→All Quiet on the Western Front is narrated by Paul Bäumer, a young man of nineteen who fights in the German army on the French front in World War I. Paul and several of his friends from school joined the army voluntarily after listening to the stirring patriotic speeches of their teacher, Kantorek. But after experiencing ten weeks of brutal training at the hands of the petty, cruel Corporal Himmelstoss and the unimaginable brutality of life on the front, Paul and his friends have realized that the ideals of nationalism and patriotism for which they enlisted are simply empty clichés. They no longer believe that war is glorious or honorable, and they live in constant physical terror.

When Paul's company receives a short reprieve after two weeks of fighting, only eighty men of the original 150-man company return from the front. The cook doesn't want to give the survivors the rations that were meant for the dead men but eventually agrees to do so; the men thus enjoy a large meal. Paul and his friends visit Kemmerich, a former classmate who has recently had a leg amputated after contracting gangrene. Kemmerich is slowly dying, and Müller, another former classmate, wants Kemmerich's boots for himself. Paul doesn't consider Müller insensitive; like the other soldiers, Müller simply realizes pragmatically that Kemmerich no longer needs his boots. Surviving the agony of war, Paul observes, forces one to learn to disconnect oneself from emotions like grief, sympathy, and fear. Not long after this encounter, Paul returns to Kemmerich's bedside just as the young man dies. At Kemmerich's request, Paul takes his boots to Müller.

A group of new recruits comes to reinforce the company, and Paul's friend Kat produces a beef and bean stew that impresses them. Kat says that if all

the men in an army, including the officers, were paid the same wage and given the same food, wars would be over immediately. Kropp, another of Paul's former classmates, says that there should be no armies; he argues that a nation's leaders should instead fight out their disagreements with clubs. They discuss the fact that petty, insignificant people become powerful and arrogant during war, and Tjaden, a member of Paul's company, announces that the cruel Corporal Himmelstoss has come to fight at the front.

At night, the men go on a harrowing mission to lay barbed wire at the front. Pounded by artillery, they hide in a graveyard, where the force of the shelling causes the buried corpses to emerge from their graves, as groups of living men fall dead around them. After this gruesome event, the surviving soldiers return to their camp, where they kill lice and think about what they will do at the end of the war. Some of the men have tentative plans, but all of them seem to feel that the war will never end. Paul fears that if the war did end, he wouldn't know what to do with himself. Himmelstoss arrives at the front; when the men see him, Tjaden insults him. The men's lieutenant gives them light punishment but also lectures Himmelstoss about the futility of saluting at the front. Paul and Kat find a house with a goose and roast the goose for supper, enjoying a rare good meal.

The company is caught in a bloody battle with a charging group of Allied infantrymen. Men are blown apart, limbs are severed from torsos, and giant rats pick at the dead and the wounded. Paul feels that he must become an animal in battle, trusting only his instincts to keep him alive. After the battle, only thirty-two of eighty men are still alive. The men are given a short

reprieve at a field depot. Paul and some of his friends go for a swim, which ends in a rendezvous with a group of French girls. Paul desperately wishes to recapture his innocence with a girl, but he feels that it is impossible to do so.

Paul receives seventeen days of leave and goes home to see his family. He feels awkward and oppressed in his hometown, unable to discuss his traumatic experiences with anyone. He learns that his mother is dying of cancer and that Kantorek has been conscripted as a soldier, from which he derives a certain cold satisfaction. He visits Kemmerich's mother and tells her, untruthfully, that her son's death was instant and painless. At the end of his leave, Paul spends some time at a training camp near a group of Russian prisoners-of-war. Paul feels that the Russians are people just like him, not subhuman enemies, and wonders how war can make enemies of people who have no grudge against one another.

Paul is sent back to his company and is reunited with his friends. The kaiser, the German emperor, pays a visit to the front, and the men are disappointed to see that he is merely a short man with a weak voice. In battle, Paul is separated from his company and forced to hide in a shell hole. A French soldier jumps into the shell hole with him, and Paul instinctively stabs him. As the man dies a slow, painful death, Paul is overcome with remorse for having hurt him. He feels again that this enemy soldier is no enemy at all but rather a victim of war just like himself. Paul looks through the soldier's things and finds that his name was Gérard Duval and learns that Duval had a wife and child at home. When he returns to his company, Paul recounts the incident to his friends, who try to console him.

Paul and his friends are given an easy assignment: for three weeks, they are to guard a supply depot away from the fighting. When the next battle takes place, Paul and Kropp are wounded and forced to bribe a sergeant-major with cigars in order to be placed on the hospital train together. At the hospital, Paul undergoes surgery. Kropp's leg is amputated, and he becomes extremely depressed. After his surgery, Paul has a short leave at home before he returns to his company.

As the German army begins to give in to the unrelenting pressure of the Allied forces, Paul's friends are killed in combat one by one. Detering, one of Paul's close friends, attempts to desert but is caught and court-martialed. Kat is killed when a piece of shrapnel slices his head open while Paul is carrying him to safety. By the fall of 1918, Paul is the only one of his circle of friends who is still alive. Soldiers everywhere whisper that the Germans will soon surrender and that peace will come. Paul is poisoned in a gas attack and given a short leave. He reflects that, when the war ends, he will be ruined for peacetime; all he knows is the war. In October 1918, on a day with very little fighting, Paul is killed. The army report for that day reads simply: "All quiet on the Western Front." Paul's corpse wears a calm expression, as though relieved that the end has come at last.

Character List→Paul Bäumer – A young German soldier fighting in the trenches during World War I. Paul is the protagonist and narrator of the novel. He is, at heart, a kind, compassionate, and sensitive young man, but the brutal experience of warfare teaches him to detach himself from his feelings. His account of the war is a bitter invective against sentimental, romantic ideals of warfare. Read an in-depth analysis of Paul Bäumer.

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Stanislaus Katczinsky – A soldier belonging to Paul’s company and Paul’s best friend in the army. Kat, as he is known, is forty years old at the beginning of the novel and has a family at home. He is a resourceful, inventive man and always finds food, clothing, and blankets whenever he and his friends need them. Albert Kropp – One of Paul’s classmates who serves with Paul in the Second Company. An intelligent, speculative young man, Kropp is one of Paul’s closest friends during the war. His interest in analyzing the causes of the war leads to many of the most critical antiwar sentiments in the novel. Müller – One of Paul’s classmates. Müller is a hardheaded, practical young man, and he plies his friends in the Second Company with questions about their postwar plans. Tjaden – One of Paul’s friends in the Second Company. Tjaden is a wiry young man with a voracious appetite. He bears a deep grudge against Corporal Himmelstoss. Kantorek – A pompous, ignorant, authoritarian schoolmaster in Paul’s high school during the years before the war. Kantorek places intense pressure on Paul and his classmates to fulfill their “patriotic duty” by enlisting in the army. Read an in-depth analysis of Kantorek. Corporal Himmelstoss – A noncommissioned training officer. Before the war, Himmelstoss was a postman. He is a petty, power-hungry little man who torments Paul and his friends during their training. After he experiences the horrors of trench warfare, however, he tries to make amends with them. Read an in-depth analysis of Corporal Himmelstoss. Franz Kemmerich – One of Paul’s classmates and comrades in the war. After suffering a light wound, Kemmerich contracts gangrene, and his leg has to be amputated. His death, in Chapter Two, marks the reader’s first encounter with the meaninglessness of death and the cheapness of life in the war. Joseph Behm – The first of Paul’s classmates to die in the war.

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Behm did not want to enlist, but he caved under the pressure of the schoolmaster, Kantorek. His ugly, painful death shatters his classmates' trust in the authorities who convinced them to take part in the war. Detering – One of Paul's close friends in the Second Company. Detering is a young man with a wife and a farm at home; he is constantly homesick for his farm and family. Gérard Duval – A French soldier whom Paul kills in No Man's Land. Duval is a printer with a wife and child at home. He is the first person that Paul kills in hand-to-hand combat, one of Paul's most traumatic experiences in the war. Leer – One of Paul's classmates and close friends during the war. Leer serves with Paul in the Second Company. He was the first in Paul's class to lose his virginity. Haie Westhus – One of Paul's friends in the Second Company. A gigantic, burly man, Westhus was a peat-digger before the war. He plans to serve a full term in the army after the war ends, since he finds peat-digging so unpleasant. Kindervater – A soldier in a neighboring unit. Kindervater is a bed wetter like Tjaden. Lewandowski – A patient in the Catholic hospital where Paul and Kropp recuperate from their wounds. Lewandowski desperately wants to have sex with his visiting wife but is confined to bed because of a minor fever. Mittelstaedt – One of Paul's classmates. Mittelstaedt becomes a training officer and enjoys tormenting Kantorek when Kantorek is conscripted as a soldier. Analysis of Major Characters→Paul Bäumer

As the novel's narrator and protagonist, Paul is the central figure in All Quiet on the Western Front and serves as the mouthpiece for Remarque's meditations about war. Throughout the novel, Paul's inner personality is contrasted with the way the war forces him to act and feel. His memories of

the time before the war show that he was once a very different man from the despairing soldier who now narrates the novel. Paul is a compassionate and sensitive young man; before the war, he loved his family and wrote poetry. Because of the horror of the war and the anxiety it induces, Paul, like other soldiers, learns to disconnect his mind from his feelings, keeping his emotions at bay in order to preserve his sanity and survive. As a result, the compassionate young man becomes unable to mourn his dead comrades, unable to feel at home among his family, unable to express his feelings about the war or even talk about his experiences, unable to remember the past fully, and unable to conceive of a future without war. He also becomes a “human animal,” capable of relying on animal instinct to kill and survive in battle. But because Paul is extremely sensitive, he is somewhat less able than many of the other soldiers to detach himself completely from his feelings, and there are several moments in the book (Kemmerich’s death, Kat’s death, the time that he spends with his ill mother) when he feels himself pulled down by emotion. These surging feelings indicate the extent to which war has programmed Paul to cut himself off from feeling, as when he says, with devastating understatement, “Parting from my friend Albert Kropp was very hard. But a man gets used to that sort of thing in the army.” Paul’s experience is intended to represent the experience of a whole generation of men, the so-called lost generation—men who went straight from childhood to fighting in World War I, often as adolescents. Paul frequently considers the past and the future from the perspective of his entire generation, noting that, when the war ends, he and his friends will not know what to do, as they have learned to be adults only while fighting the war. The longer that Paul survives the war and the more that he hates it, the

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less certain he is that life will be better for him after it ends. This anxiety arises from his belief that the war will have ruined his generation, will have so eviscerated his and his friends' minds that they will always be "bewildered." Against such depressing expectations, Paul is relieved by his death: "his face had an expression of calm, as though almost glad the end had come." The war becomes not merely a traumatic experience or a hardship to be endured but something that actually transforms the essence of human existence into irrevocable, endless suffering. The war destroys Paul long before it kills him. Kantorek

Though he is not central to the novel's plot, Kantorek is an important figure as a focus of Remarque's bitter critique of the ideals of patriotism and nationalism that drove nations into the catastrophe of World War I. Kantorek, the teacher who filled his students' heads with passionate rhetoric about duty and glory, serves as a punching bag as Remarque argues against those ideals. Though a modern context is essential to the indictment of Kantorek's patriotism and nationalism, Kantorek's physical description groups him with premodern evil characters. The fierce and pompous Kantorek is a small man described as "energetic and uncompromising," characteristics that recall the worried Caesar's remarks about Cassius in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*: "Yon Cassius has a lean and hungry look. / He thinks too much. Such men are dangerous" (I. ii. 195-196). Napoleon also springs to mind as a historical model for Kantorek. The inclusion of a seemingly anachronistic literary type—the scheming or dangerous diminutive man—may seem out of place in a modern novel. Yet this quality of Kantorek arguably reflects the espousal of dated ideas by an older generation of leaders who betray their followers with

manipulations, ignorance, and lies. “ While they taught that duty to one’s country is the greatest thing,” Paul writes in Chapter One, “ we already knew that death-throes are stronger.” As schoolboys, Paul and his friends believed that Kantorek was an enlightened man whose authority derived from his wisdom; as soldiers, they quickly learn to see through Kantorek’s rhetoric and grow to despise him, especially after the death of Joseph Behm. That Kantorek is eventually drafted and makes a terrible soldier reflects the uselessness of the ideals that he touts. Corporal Himmelstoss

Like Kantorek, Himmelstoss does not figure heavily in the novel’s plot, but his thematic importance makes him significant to the book as a whole. One of the themes of All Quiet on the Western Front is that war brings out a savagery and hunger for power that lie latent in many people, even if they are normally respectable, nonviolent citizens. Himmelstoss is just such a figure: an unthreatening postman before the war, he evolves into the “ terror of Klosterberg,” the most feared disciplinarian in the training camps. Himmelstoss is extremely cruel to his recruits, forcing them to obey ridiculous and dangerous orders simply because he enjoys bullying them. Himmelstoss forces his men to stand outside with no gloves on during a hard frost, risking frostbite that could lead to the amputation of a finger or the loss of a hand. His idea of a cure for Tjaden’s bed-wetting—making him share a bunk with Kindervater, another bed wetter—is vicious, especially since the bed-wetting results from a medical condition and is not under Tjaden’s control. At this stage of the novel, Himmelstoss represents the meanest, pettiest, most loathsome aspects of humanity that war draws out. But when he is sent to fight at the front, Himmelstoss experiences the same terror and

trauma as the other soldiers, and he quickly tries to make amends for his past behavior. In this way, Remarque exhibits the frightening and awesome power of the trenches, which transform even a mad disciplinarian into a terrorized soldier desperate for human companionship.

Themes, Motifs & Symbols→Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work. The Horror of War

The overriding theme of *All Quiet on the Western Front* is the terrible brutality of war, which informs every scene in the novel. Whereas war novels before *All Quiet on the Western Front* tended to romanticize what war was like, emphasizing ideas such as glory, honor, patriotic duty, and adventure, *All Quiet on the Western Front* sets out to portray war as it was actually experienced, replacing the romantic picture of glory and heroism with a decidedly unromantic vision of fear, meaninglessness, and butchery. In many ways, World War I demanded this depiction more than any war before it—it completely altered mankind's conception of military conflict with its catastrophic levels of carnage and violence, its battles that lasted for months, and its gruesome new technological advancements (e. g., machine guns, poison gas, trenches) that made killing easier and more impersonal than ever before. Remarque's novel dramatizes these aspects of World War I and portrays the mind-numbing terror and savagery of war with a relentless focus on the physical and psychological damage that it occasions. At the end of the novel, almost every major character is dead, epitomizing the war's

devastating effect on the generation of young men who were forced to fight it.

The Effect of War on the Soldier

Because *All Quiet on the Western Front* is set among soldiers fighting on the front, one of its main focuses is the ruinous effect that war has on the soldiers who fight it. These men are subject to constant physical danger, as they could literally be blown to pieces at any moment. This intense physical threat also serves as an unceasing attack on the nerves, forcing soldiers to cope with primal, instinctive fear during every waking moment. Additionally, the soldiers are forced to live in appalling conditions—in filthy, waterlogged ditches full of rats and decaying corpses and infested with lice. They frequently go without food and sleep, adequate clothing, or sufficient medical care. They are forced, moreover, to deal with the frequent, sudden deaths of their close friends and comrades, often in close proximity and in extremely violent fashion. Remarque portrays the overall effect of these conditions as a crippling overload of panic and despair. The only way for soldiers to survive is to disconnect themselves from their feelings, suppressing their emotions and accepting the conditions of their lives.

In Remarque's view, this emotional disconnection has a hugely destructive impact on a soldier's humanity; Paul, for instance, becomes unable to imagine a future without the war and unable to remember how he felt in the past. He also loses his ability to speak to his family. Soldiers no longer pause to mourn fallen friends and comrades; when Kemmerich is on his deathbed, at the beginning of the novel, the most pressing question among his friends

is who will inherit his boots. Among the living soldiers, however, Remarque portrays intense bonds of loyalty and friendship that spring up as a result of the shared experience of war. These feelings are the only romanticized element of the novel and are virtually the only emotions that preserve the soldiers' fundamental humanity.

Nationalism and Political Power

In many ways, the precipitating cause of World War I was the ethic of nationalism, the idea that competing nation-states were a fundamental part of existence, that one owed one's first loyalty to one's nation, and that one's national identity was the primary component of one's overall identity. The ethic of nationalism was not new, but it had reached new heights of intensity in the nineteenth century, and this fervor generally carried over into the start of World War I.

In its depiction of the horror of war, *All Quiet on the Western Front* presents a scathing critique of the idea of nationalism, showing it to be a hollow, hypocritical ideology, a tool used by those in power to control a nation's populace. Paul and his friends are seduced into joining the army by nationalist ideas, but the experience of fighting quickly schools them in nationalism's irrelevance in the face of the war's horrors. The relative worthlessness on the battlefield of the patriots Kantorek and Himmelstoss accentuates the inappropriateness of outmoded ideals in modern warfare. Remarque illustrates that soldiers on the front fight not for the glory of their nation but rather for their own survival; they kill to keep from being killed. Additionally, Paul and his friends do not consider the opposing armies to be

their real enemies; in their view, their real enemies are the men in power in their own nation, who they believe have sacrificed them to the war simply to increase their own power and glory.

Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, and literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes. The Pressure of Patriotic Idealism

Many of the novel's harshest critiques of nationalism are reserved for the character of Kantorek, the teacher whose impassioned speeches convinced Paul and his friends to join the army at the onset of the war. Kantorek uses an idealistic, patriotic, and poetic rhetoric to convey the concepts of national loyalty and glory. In his letter to the young men, for instance, he calls them "Iron Youth," implying that they are hard, strong, and resilient, a description that fails to consider the horror of the war, which traps the men in a constant state of panic and despair. As Kantorek and his speeches are recalled throughout the novel, Paul and his friends become increasingly disgusted by them; their experience of war has made them increasingly cynical about patriotism and nationalism. Even at the start of the novel, they blame Kantorek for Joseph Behm's untimely death, claiming that the teacher failed to understand that no lofty ideal can possibly offer physical or emotional protection or comfort in the heat of battle.

Carnage and Gore

The novel's main weapon against patriotic idealism is simply its unrelenting portrayal of the carnage and gore that the war occasions. Every battle scene (roughly every other chapter) features brutal violence and bloody descriptions of death and injury. Hospital scenes portray men with grisly wounds that go untreated because of insufficient medical supplies. Paul carries the wounded Kat on his back to safety, only to discover that Kat's head was hit by a piece of shrapnel while Paul was carrying him. As part of the overall exploration of disconnection from one's feelings, death is treated with impersonal efficiency: the cook wonders whether regulations permit him to give the surviving soldiers the dead men's rations; when Kemmerich dies, he is hauled away with the tears still wet on his face so that another soldier can have his bed. Amid this horrific violence and numbness, the overblown phrases of nationalistic rhetoric quickly lose their persuasive power and take on a loathsome quality of hypocrisy and ignorance.

Animal Instinct

Remarque indicates throughout the novel that the only way for a soldier to survive battle is to turn off his mind and operate solely on instinct, becoming less like a human being and more like an animal. Paul thinks of himself as a "human animal," and the other soldiers who survive multiple battles operate in the same way. The experience of battle is quite animalistic in this way, as the soldiers trust their senses over their thoughts and sniff out safety wherever they can find it. This motif of animal instinct contributes to the larger theme that war destroys the humanity of the soldier, stripping away his ability to feel and, in this case, making him act like a beast rather than a man.

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, and colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts. Kemmerich's Boots

All Quiet on the Western Front doesn't employ a great deal of symbolism, but one important symbol in the novel is Kemmerich's boots. Kemmerich's high, supple boots are passed from soldier to soldier as each owner dies in sequence. Kemmerich himself took them from the corpse of a dead airman, and as Kemmerich lies on his own deathbed, Müller immediately begins maneuvering to receive the boots. Paul brings them to Müller after Kemmerich dies and inherits them himself when Müller is shot to death later in the novel. In this way, the boots represent the cheapness of human life in the war. A good pair of boots is more valuable—and more durable—than a human life. The question of who will inherit them continually overshadows their owners' deaths. The boots also symbolize the necessary pragmatism that a soldier must have. One cannot yield to one's emotions amid the devastation of the war; rather, one must block out grief and despair like a machine.

Important Quotations Explained→1. This book is to be neither an accusation nor a confession, and least of all an adventure, for death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it. It will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped shells, were destroyed by the war. This passage is the epigraph to the novel, telling the reader what the book is intended to be and mapping out some of its basic stylistic and thematic ground. The statement that the book is not “ an

adventure” separates it from most war novels in that it will dispense with elements of romance and excitement in favor of a stark, unsentimental presentation. The clarification that “ death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it” suggests that books that tell stories of war as though they were exciting adventures do not do justice to the actual experience of soldiers. Death may be an adventure to the reader, sitting comfortably at home, but it is anything but that to the soldier who is actually confronted with the possibility of being blown to pieces at any moment. The epigraph also declares that the book will be the story of an entire generation, one “ destroyed by the war” even if not actually killed off by it. The epigraph thus opens the novel’s exploration of the effect of the war on those who fought it; war is a transforming force that not only injures and traumatizes but also annihilates selfhood. There is friction, however, between the claim that the book will attempt “ simply” to depict this annihilation and the claim that the book is not an accusation. All Quiet on the Western Front certainly takes a strong critical position against the war and against nationalist and ignorant figures like Kantorek and Himmelstoss. Perhaps the meaning of the epigraph is that the book will let events speak for themselves since they have not been embellished for the sake of some political goal. Still, it is hard to see the one-dimensional Kantorek as anything other than the object of accusation. The friction between realism and antiwar fervor found in the epigraph parallels an aesthetic tension in the novel, as Remarque tries to reconcile his hatred of the war with a need to create realistic characters who are more than mere punching bags. 2. For us lads of eighteen they ought to have been mediators and guides to the world of maturity . . . to the future . . . in our hearts we trusted them. The idea of authority, which they

represented, was associated in our minds with a greater insight and a more humane wisdom. But the first death we saw shattered this belief. We had to recognize that our generation was more to be trusted than theirs. . . . The first bombardment showed us our mistake, and under it the world as they had taught it to us broke in pieces. This quotation from Chapter One constitutes Paul's first and most direct exploration of how the older generation betrays the younger generation by convincing them to sacrifice their lives for the empty ideals of patriotism and honor. Paul says that authority figures from the older generation—parents, leaders, teachers such as Kantorek—should have been wise guides to the future and that, as boys, the young soldiers all assumed that they would be. But after the war began, the soldiers realized that the older generation had failed them, and Paul reacts to this failure with anger and disdain. He emphasizes that the older generation, which is constantly ready to criticize and ostracize young men for signs of cowardice or unpatriotic behavior but has not itself experienced the war, has no understanding of what the fighting is actually like. The younger generation must look to themselves to determine what is true and right because the older generation has proved itself incapable of teaching them. 3. At the sound of the first droning of the shells we rush back, in one part of our being, a thousand years. By the animal instinct that is awakened in us we are led and protected. It is not conscious; it is far quicker, much more sure, less fallible, than consciousness. . . . It is this other, this second sight in us, that has thrown us to the ground and saved us, without our knowing how. . . . We march up, moody or good-tempered soldiers—we reach the zone where the front begins and become on the instant human animals. With these words, Paul describes, in Chapter Four, the psychological

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transformation that soldiers undergo when heading into battle. Paul observes this phenomenon as he and his comrades near the front on their mission to lay barbed wire. They cease to become men (“moody or good-tempered soldiers”) and instead become beasts (“human animals”). To survive, it is necessary for the soldiers to sacrifice the thoughtful and analytical parts of their minds and rely instead wholly on animal instinct. Paul describes men who have been walking thoughtlessly along and suddenly thrown themselves to the ground just in time to avoid a shell, without having been consciously aware that a shell was approaching and without having intended to leap to avoid it. Paul calls this instinct a “second sight” and says that it is the only thing that enables soldiers to survive a battle. In this way, Paul implies that battles are animalistic and even subhuman, a large aspect of the devastation that the war wreaks on a soldier’s humanity.

4. Just as we turn into animals when we go up to the line . . . so we turn into wags and loafers when we are resting. . . . We want to live at any price; so we cannot burden ourselves with feelings which, though they may be ornamental enough in peacetime, would be out of place here. Kemmerich is dead, Haie Westhus is dying . . . Martens has no legs anymore, Meyer is dead, Max is dead, Beyer is dead, Hammerling is dead . . . it is a damnable business, but what has it to do with us now—we live. In this grim passage from Chapter Seven, Paul discusses the psychological process of how a soldier disconnects himself from his feelings in order to survive the terror of the war. After the bloody fighting, Paul and his friends are lying about enjoying a moment of relaxation and leisure, and have pushed their recent horrific experiences out of their minds. Paul says that terror can be survived only if one avoids thinking about it; otherwise, feelings of grief, fear, and despair would drive a man mad. Paul

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even looks upon those feelings with contempt, calling them “ornamental enough during peacetime” and implying that they are superfluous luxuries rather than essential components of the human experience. To help the reader understand the pressure that is always upon the soldier, Paul presents his appalling list of recent casualties, friends, and comrades who were either killed or badly injured in recent fighting. There is even a grotesque poetry to the list with the alliteration and rhyme of the names Martens, Meyer, Max, and Beyer, demonstrating the stoic attitude that Paul claims is necessary for survival. 5. Comrade, I did not want to kill you. . . . But you were only an idea to me before, an abstraction that lived in my mind and called forth its appropriate response. . . . I thought of your hand-grenades, of your bayonet, of your rifle; now I see your wife and your face and our fellowship. Forgive me, comrade. We always see it too late. Why do they never tell us that you are poor devils like us, that your mothers are just as anxious as ours, and that we have the same fear of death, and the same dying and the same agony—Forgive me, comrade; how could you be my enemy? Paul utters these words in Chapter Nine to the corpse of Gérard Duval, the French soldier whom he has just killed. Paul realizes for the first time that, despite the dictates of nationalism, Duval is fundamentally no different from him. As Duval becomes a fully realized person in Paul’s mind, as he thinks beyond the man’s weapons to “your wife and your face and our fellowship,” Paul observes, as he does in Chapter Eight among the Russian prisoners, that the war has forced men who are not enemies to fight each other. The propaganda campaigns waged by the opposing governments have convinced many men that their opponents are evil; as such, Paul initially conceives of the French soldier as “an abstraction”—the enemy.

Once he understands Duval as a human being, the artificial divisions between the two men become irrelevant. Paul's sympathy for Duval's suffering is evident in his address of him as "comrade" and his reference to himself and Duval as "we" and "us," in opposition to the "they"—those in power, who attempt to deny the essential sameness of men such as Paul and Duval.

Study Questions & Essay Topics→Study Questions

1. What are the main themes of ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT?

Remarque's novel is a profound statement against war, focusing especially on the ravaging effects of war on the humanity of soldiers. Throughout Paul's narrative there are attacks on the romantic ideals of warfare. The novel dramatizes the disjunction between high-minded rhetoric about patriotism and honor and the actual horror of trench warfare. Remarque continually stresses that the soldiers are not fighting with the abstract ideals of patriotic spirit in mind; they are fighting for their survival. The matters of acquiring food, shelter, and clothing, in addition to avoiding gunfire and bombs, constitute their foremost concerns. Nothing in this novel makes the actual experience of war look attractive. Even the intense friendships between Paul and his fellow soldiers are tempered with the sobering reality that their bonds come at the high price of relentless suffering and terror. Remarque also explores the gulfs in age and power that are widened by war; he portrays the war as the older generation's profound betrayal of the younger. Men of Paul's age entered the war under the heavy pressure of people they regarded as trusted authority figures. The very people who are supposed to guide them to their adulthood instead send them to their deaths with empty

slogans of patriotic duty. 2. How does Remarque portray the technological and military innovations of the war? How do those innovations affect the lives of the soldiers?

Technological and military innovations such as poison gas, the machine gun, and trench warfare revolutionized combat during World War I, and Remarque effectively dramatizes how these innovations made the war bloodier, longer, and more costly. In almost every case, military innovations make the soldiers' lives more dangerous, while medical innovations lag increasingly far behind. Kemmerich, for instance, dies from complications from a relatively light wound. Glory and patriotism cease to be rational ideals in the conflict because advanced technology limits the effect that an individual soldier can have on the conflict and alienates him from the consequences of his actions. Life and death thus become meaningless. Whether or not a soldier dies in a bombardment is determined by chance or animal instinct and has nothing to do with the soldier's attitude toward the conflict.

3. Think about the concept of enemies in war. Whom do Paul and his friends regard as their enemies?

When Paul and his friends talk about enemies, they do not speak of the soldiers on the other side. Instead, they concentrate their hostility on Kantorek and Himmelstoss, their superiors and fellow countrymen. Paul and his classmates view Kantorek and other formerly trusted authority figures like him as the origin of their pointless suffering. These authority figures have sent them to war with the tragically false illusion that they were embarking on an exciting journey to fight for honor and glory. They view all

common soldiers who are forced to fight in the trenches, regardless of their national origin, as victims. When Paul meets the Russian prisoners, he can hardly believe that they are his enemies—it is only the word of their respective leaders that has made them enemies. Because of the conflicts between more powerful men, Paul and the Russians are forced to kill and maim one another, even though they have more in common with one another than they do with their respective leaders.

4. Why do Paul and men of his age group fear the end of the war as much as they fear the war itself?

When Müller persistently questions his friends about their postwar plans, the younger men can give only vague answers. Older men mention their jobs and their families; they had concrete identities and social functions before the war. Younger men like Paul and his classmates had no such concrete identities. They entered the war when they were on the threshold of their adult lives and thus gained their identities as soldiers. Paul cannot even imagine any definite postwar goals. Many young men like him cannot view the war as a temporary interruption in their lives. Their experiences of the war are so shattering that they regard the prospect of functioning in a peacetime environment with a vague anxiety. For them, peace represents the unknown; the war, on the other hand, as terrible as it is, offers them some minimal comfort by virtue of their intimate familiarity with it. Whereas they know how to function as soldiers, Paul and the other young comrades cannot imagine functioning in civilian jobs. They have no experiences as adults that do not involve a day-to-day fight for survival and sanity.

Suggested Essay Topics

1. According to the text, how does war empower petty, power-hungry men? Think especially about Himmelstoss. How do the other characters cope with their forced subordination?
2. In what ways does the novel critique the romantic rhetoric of war, honor, and patriotism? How might this critique extend to nineteenth-century ideas of nationalism? Think especially about the soldiers' reaction to Kantorek's letter.
3. What is Paul like as a character? Has the brutality of war completely stripped away his humanity, or does he retain vestiges of his old self?
4. Discuss how the goals of the novel, as stated by the epigraph or suggested by the text, affect the work's form and style. Does Remarque compromise his realistic style in order to deliver a message? Is Kantorek too one-dimensional a character?