

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## All Quiet on the Western Front

by

### Erich Maria Remarque

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### Book Information

Erich Maria Remarque, All Quiet on the Western Front  
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Bewildered German soldiers fight and suffer through the chaos of World War I.

**Award:** NCTE Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts

**Topics:** Adventure, Trials/Tribulations; Community Life, Ethics/Morality; Community Life, Violence; Family Life, Death; Popular Groupings, College Bound; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 9-12; Recommended Reading, YALSA Popular Paperbacks; Wars, World War I

### Main Characters

Albert Kropp, Muller, Leer Baumer's classmates, who are in the same army unit

Paul Baumer a young soldier who serves on the front-line during World War I

Stanislaus Katczinsky (Kat) an older soldier to whom Baumer feels very close

Tjaden, Haie Westhus, Detering older men who are serving in the war with Baumer

### Vocabulary

**annihilation** the act or process of destroying all traces of something

**barrage** a rapid, concentrated discharge of projectiles, as from small arms

**comradeship** friendship between people who share an activity

**quixotic** idealistic in a romantic and impractical way

Paul Baumer, a young soldier in the German army, relates his experience on the front-line in World War I in France. His story includes accounts of his memories of his school days, military training, and early days on the front-line. He relates stories of losing friends in battle, making new friendships, and strengthening old ones. As his story proceeds we see his gradual transition from being a "young" soldier to being a war-hardened "old" soldier. Many times he contemplates the effect the war is having on himself and other young soldiers who have not had the chance to establish themselves outside of school and war.

Over a year into the war he receives leave to go home to see his family. The visit is disheartening for him, since he finds that no one understands him, and he no longer feels "at home" in the home where he grew up. After his leave, he is sent for further training where he encounters Russian prisoners of war. Face to face with his enemy, he can't help but feel sympathy for them since they, too, are just defending their country's honor.

On returning to the front-line, Baumer finds he has lost some of his soldiering instinct and temporarily becomes lost on the front-line. He panics and cannot find his way back to his trench. While lost, he defends himself against a young French soldier by stabbing the man, but ironically, finds himself tending to the man as he dies. Once back with his friends, he realizes that he is only comfortable with his fellow soldiers, since they understand each other.

Later in the war Baumer is wounded, as is one of his friends. He manages to stay in the same hospital as his friend until his recovery. He then returns to the front-line where eventually he loses all his friends to either death or severe injury. Baumer comes to the conclusion that his generation has been ruined by the war but, tragically, does not survive the war in order to do anything about it.

### Synopsis

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### Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

#### Initial Understanding

On numerous occasions Baumer decides he cannot tell someone the truth, no matter how much they think they can handle it. Find some examples in which he didn't tell someone the truth. Explain why he didn't.

*He lies to Kemmerich about his legs, his mother about the war, and Kemmerich's mother about his death. Generally, he is lying to spare their feelings.*

#### Literary Analysis

When Himmelstoss is sent to the front-line to serve and comes into contact with his previous trainees, he tries to assert his power as he did during training. Baumer describes Himmelstoss as a "raging book of army regulations." Discuss what he means by this and why the soldiers resent his old ways.

*Since Himmelstoss has never seen live combat, his only experience as a military officer is based on textbook definitions and regulations. The soldiers resent his ideas because they know that military units in war zones are not so strict.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

While Baumer is on leave, he meets a man who insinuates that the soldiers are treated better than the civilians because they receive better food. Describe how life is for civilians compared to the soldiers.

*While soldiers may have had a little more to eat at times, there were times when they could go days without eating because they were pinned by enemy fire. The food they had was usually the same. The civilians had to stand in lines for hours just to get food, but they could usually eat hot meals. More importantly, the soldiers were in battle, being wounded and killed daily. Food, though an issue, is inconsequential relative to survival.*

### Constructing Meaning

How does the author use vivid descriptions in the scenes and events of the story?

*Good examples of vivid descriptions include battle scenes, especially when Baumer is pinned under enemy fire with his dying enemy; Baumer and other men being sent to the abandoned town; Kemmerich lying in bed without his leg; Tjaden and the others beating up Himmelstoss. They are used to support the author's sense of the reality and brutality of war for the combat soldier.*

### Teachable Skills

**Comparing and Contrasting** While on leave, Baumer encounters a man trying to explain the war. When Baumer tries to tell him the truth about war, he tells Baumer that he knows nothing. Review the text to see the differences between the men's views. Lead the class in a discussion of the political decision leading to war versus the realities of fighting, which Baumer experiences. Explore the possibility that citizens would not so readily support war if they truly experienced it. How does, or should, the actual brutality of war affect the political decision to engage in war?

**Recognizing Feelings** As Baumer moves from the front-line to home and then back to the front-line, he experiences feelings of "not belonging" and hopelessness. He questions whether his war experience will ever allow him to fit into and function in a peace-time world. Interestingly, he never truly stops trying to survive, and there are many moments when survival is his only motivation. Explore the ideas of hopelessness and survival in the context of the current concerns about the increase in violent crimes and/or the problem of teen suicide.

**Responding to Literature** At one point the soldiers discuss the purpose of wars, and Kat states he believes they are started in order to make someone (a military or government leader) famous. Explore and discuss this idea. Also explore the idea that the military is based on one

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man having power over another. Find examples in this book or others to prove or disprove these theories.

**Understanding the Main Idea** Throughout the book, Baumer questions himself and his fellow soldiers about what the future holds for them after the war. Eventually he reaches the conclusion that the war has ruined his generation and that the young soldiers will have no place in the world. Have the students discuss what he means by this and why he feels that way. Have the students divide into groups to research the return of war veterans to learn what life was like for them after combat.