

Advanced Placement in  
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

**All Quiet on the Western Front**

by Erich Maria Remarque

written by Eva Richardson

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# All Quiet on the Western Front

## Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. outline the psychological impact of plot event on character development.
2. analyze the the author's attitude toward war.
3. explore the evolving role of—and changing attitudes toward—authority.
4. discuss the novel as a critical commentary on the futility of war.
5. analyze the novel as a Bildungsroman.
6. trace the development of symbols through the novel.
7. examine the language of *All Quiet on the Western Front* and analyze the impact the first person narrative viewpoint has on the reader.
8. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
9. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
10. offer a close reading of *All Quiet on the Western Front* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the novel.

## Introductory Lecture

### THE “GREAT WAR”—WORLD WAR I:

World War I, also known as the “Great War,” engulfed many of the world’s powerful nations between 1914 and 1918. It remains one of the most deadly military conflicts in world history, having taken the lives of more than 15 million people.

The events that led to World War I are varied and complex. Europe’s long history of imperialism and a series of territorial disputes challenged the balance of power within Europe. An arms race throughout Europe also contributed to competition between the different colonial powers, further threatening the power equilibrium between nations. Moreover, a network of alliances in Europe that had evolved since the mid-nineteenth century had become increasingly complex, and European nations struggled to keep up with shifting diplomatic allegiances.

The two significant alliances in Europe consisted of the Triple Alliance (also known as the Central Powers) comprising Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy and the Triple Entente, formed by France, the United Kingdom, and Russia. After the beginning of the war, the United States, Japan, Portugal, Australia, and a host of other nations also became associated with the Triple Entente.

Historians generally agree that the War was ultimately triggered by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife Sophie on June 28, 1914 in Sarajevo, Serbia. Austria had long hungered for an opportunity to eliminate the Serbian state, and the assassination of the Archduke proved to be an ideal opportunity to declare war on Serbia. Due to the network of alliances, the Austria-Hungarian Empire relied on support from Germany, but, at the same time, knew that declaring war on Serbia would spark a conflict with Russia. When Austria-Hungary, supported by Germany, invaded Serbia, the complicated system of treaties within Europe triggered a European-wide, and soon worldwide, military conflict—World War I.

By the summer of 1918, the Central Powers had collapsed, and an armistice was signed on November 11, 1918.

## Literary and Narrative Techniques:

### INTRODUCTION

Erich Maria Remarque prefaces his novel with a brief introductory paragraph that expresses his purpose in presenting a story of war.

“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.”

The introduction warns that the novel does not follow the conventional format of a war novel. Remarque simply and directly outlines his purpose for telling the story of Paul Bäumer and his companions and announces to his readers that *All Quiet on the Western Front* is a book that aims to describe the unspeakable effects war has had on a generation of young men.

### NARRATIVE VIEWPOINT

*All Quiet on the Western Front* is written from the perspective of a first-person narrator. Events are told from the perspective of a young soldier, Paul Bäumer. In the last paragraph of the book, the narrative viewpoint switches from first person to third person. In this closing paragraph, the death of Paul Bäumer is recounted by a third-person narrator.

### SYMBOLISM

The image of Kemmerich's boots functions as one of the most powerful symbols throughout the novel. The boots come to signify the dehumanization of the soldiers and their loss of identity. When Kemmerich is in the hospital, one of his comrades, Müller, expresses his desire to take the boots, since his own shoes are worn and tattered. Müller believes that Kemmerich no longer benefits from having the beautiful boots, because he is close to death and unlikely to return to the battlefield.

Paul Bäumer gives the boots to Müller after Kemmerich's death. As the novel progresses, the boots move from one soldier to the next—as one man dies, another takes his boots. Hence, the boots become a powerful symbol for the disposability of the individual soldier. Only the soldier's skills and endurance are needed in the war; his individual character and humanity, however, are expendable and replaceable.

### ELEMENTS OF BILDUNGSROMAN

*All Quiet on the Western Front* contains elements of the **Bildungsroman** genre. In a typical **Bildungsroman**, the hero embarks on a journey that will lead him away from his familiar surroundings in his quest for experience. Paul Bäumer and his comrades enlist in the war and leave their hometown when they are merely teenagers, barely out of school. As the war progresses, Paul and his friends are forced to abandon the world of their childhood and learn how to survive in a world marked by war and destruction.

### Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. What is the significance of Kemmerich's boots throughout the novel?
2. What attitudes toward the war are expressed by the soldiers?
3. What psychological effect does the war have on the soldiers at the front line?
4. In what ways does the novel function as a war novel? As an anti-war novel?
5. What is the importance of comradeship for the soldiers?
6. How does the novel represent and criticize the role of teachers?
7. How is Paul Bäumer a character who is representative of all soldiers?
8. Why is Paul Bäumer unable to relate to his family when he returns to his hometown?
9. How does the novel address the question of responsibility with regard to the war?
10. How does life on the front line differ from life during training?
11. What characterizes the relationship between Paul Bäumer and Kat?
12. How does the novel describe the challenges faced by the "Lost Generation"?
13. How does the novel provide commentary on the futility of war?
14. How does the novel represent the notion of guilt for the soldiers fighting in the war?

# All Quiet on the Western Front

## Chapter One

1. What is ironic about the additional rations made available to the soldiers at the start of chapter one?

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2. How does the use of the latrines illustrate that definitions of privacy have changed for the soldiers who are well-established with their companies?

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3. According to the narrator, which character provided the motivation for the young men to enlist in the army?

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**Chapter Five**

1. What is the soldiers' attitude toward the knowledge they learned in school?

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2. What do the soldiers discover about their purpose in life?

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3. How has the soldiers' relationship with Himmelstoss changed when he finally appears on the front line?

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4. Why does Paul claim that he "loves" Kat? What does his claim contribute to the theme of comradeship?

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## Chapter Ten

1. What do Paul and his fellow soldiers consider to be an “idyll” when they are ordered to guard an abandoned village?

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2. Why does Paul resolve not to allow the doctors to administer chloroform after he is injured on the battlefield?

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3. Why does Paul suddenly pretend to be in excruciating pain on the train to the hospital?

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4. How does Paul evaluate his treatment by the nuns in the Catholic hospital?

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5. What theme is reinforced by Paul’s observation that the nuns at the hospital treat a soldier “exactly like a civilian”?

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6. How has the concept of privacy changed for the soldiers?

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