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Teaching with Movies & Literature

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT

Good for the following school subjects:

- ✓ World History
- ✓ American History
- ✓ World War 1

Directed by Lewis Milestone
1930; Rated NR; Drama; 130 minutes; Black & White;
Available from www.OwlTeacher.com bookstore

Synopsis: All Quiet on the Western Front is based on the classic novel by Erich Maria Remarque. Remarque fought in World War One for the Germans and his novel is based on his experiences as a young German soldier. This film was the first anti-war film ever produced with sound and was banned in many countries, along with the novel, during World War Two. The story follows young idealistic boys rushing to enlist in the war, only to realize the true horrors and costs of war. The film follows the novel faithfully. The only difference is that in the novel, the story starts on the battlefield with flashbacks to the past. The movie, on the other hand, begins with the boys in school hearing news of the war, enlisting, and then going off to fight. The film opens with a prologue that was taken word-for-word from the novel:

"This story is 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 its shells, were destroyed by the war..."

Educational Benefits of this movie: This film offers students the ability to understand World War One from the perspective of a young soldier. It forces students to see things from the eyes of those who experienced it. War is not glorified in this film, it is stark and real. Students come away with a solid understanding of the cost of war in terms of humanity; not only the loss of life, but the loss of innocence and psychological well-being on the part of the soldiers who survive. Throughout, the film offers accurate, detail-specific history on the war, giving students a solid understanding.

Historical Background: The film is firmly based on Erich Maria Remarque's book All Quiet on the Western Front (1929) in which the author recounts his experiences as a young German soldier in World War One.

World War One was known as the war to end all wars. Prior to 1914, Europe was gripped in a web of suspicion and paranoia. Competition for colonization of Africa and other lands as well as competition in military prowess caused tension among the rival nations. In an effort to ensure strength and protection in case of conflict,



nations began allying with each other which only reinforced suspicion and paranoia among their opponents. Europe was like a sensitive time bomb just waiting for an excuse, any excuse to explode. That excuse came in the form of an assassination in Serbia. Serbia, wanting independence from the Austrian Hungarian Empire, was not too excited to have the Austrian Hungarian Empire's arch duke visiting their country. Nationalists, in no way connected to the government, shot the arch duke in broad daylight on a busy street. This event sent shockwaves through Europe. Austria-Hungary was convinced that the Serbian government was behind the assassination & demanded that they confess to the crime. Serbia, of course, would do no such thing. An ultimatum was presented: confess and take full responsibility or face war. Here is where it gets interesting: Russia came to Serbia's side and said, "If you declare war on Serbia, you are thus declaring war on us because Serbia is our Ally!" Germany promptly stepped up beside Austria-Hungary and declared: "Well if you are Serbia's ally, you might as well know that we are Austria-Hungary's ally and we will fight alongside them if need be!" From here, a domino effect takes place with different countries rushing to defend and declare allegiance to each other. The result: a war in Europe that spreads like gangrene ultimately pulling non-European countries like the United States into the conflict; a war that would last for four long, gruesome years. World War One would not be the war to end all wars. In fact, it would become the war to lead right into World War Two!

Map Activity:

On a [blank map of Europe in 1914](#), neatly label the following:

- ✓ The Western Front (lightly shaded in red & labeled)
- ✓ The Entente Alliance nations (lightly shaded in purple & labeled)
- ✓ The Central Powers (lightly shaded in orange & labeled)
- ✓ The Neutral nations (lightly shaded in gray & labeled)
- ✓ All bodies of water (lightly shaded in blue & labeled)
- ✓ A black dot where Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated with a clear label of the assassination as the SPARK that set off the war
- ✓ Create a color coded key for your map

Study Questions:

1. What is the significance of the title *All Quiet on the Western Front*? In other words, what do you think the title means?
2. Why does Paul Baumer feel betrayed by the adults in his life? Has there ever been an instance when you have felt betrayed by the adults in your life?
3. Which advancements in science and technology during World War I were depicted in the battle scenes in *All Quiet on the Western Front*?



4. Why is Paul Baumer alienated from his family and the people in his town when he goes home to visit? Give examples from the film to prove your answers.
5. Define the term "Lost Generation" as it is used in the film. Who were the members of the "Lost Generation"?

Project:

Pretend you are a soldier fighting on the Western Front in World War One. Based on what you have learned from the film, write a letter to your family back home. Write about your experiences, what you see, how you feel, etc. Use accurate historical facts to make your letter authentic. Make sure your letter looks old, used, and dirty. (You can dip it in coffee or tea & let it dry overnight, you can crinkle it and burn the edges with adult supervision, you can blot it with dirt and/or red marker to make it look bloody, etc. Use your imagination & make it look genuine!) Do the same with an envelope and make sure the return address is in France. Research postage stamps in 1914 and draw it on the envelope. Students may wish to read their letters aloud in class and/or display them inside their envelopes on a World War themed bulletin board that they help create. The possibilities are endless.