

# The Butterfly Lion

SECTION

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## About the book

The book consists of a series of closely interwoven stories that cover a wide span of historical periods and geographical locations. The stories are told in the first person by two narrators. The first of these narrators, looking back at his boyhood, describes how he ran away from boarding school and met Millie, an old lady living on her own in a big dilapidated house. In the long central part of the book she becomes narrator, telling her visitor about 'her Bertie': about his childhood on a farm in Africa; how he brings an orphaned white lion cub to live with the family; how he is sent to England and, like the first narrator, runs away from school; his bravery on the battlefields of France during the First World War; how he is reunited with the white lion and returns with it to England. In the last two chapters, the first narrator resumes the story, recounting how Millie persuaded him to return to school, where he learns more about Bertie and about Millie herself.

Throughout, much is left for the reader to puzzle out, in particular the relationship between Bertie and Millie (they were husband and wife), the identity of the boy/narrator (he is named late on as 'Morpurgo'), and the nature of the 'butterfly lion' (the figure of a lion carved by Bertie and Millie on a chalk hillside and sometimes covered with a cloud of blue butterflies). At the end of the story, the boy learns that the old lady has been dead for some time – a discovery that throws into question the reality of his meeting with her. What remains clear is that her story has a special power for him and changes his life.

The novel combines elements of adventure

and mystery in thought-provoking and engaging ways. At its centre are themes of loneliness, freedom and commitment. It offers ideal material for use in the Year 3 unit on adventure and mystery and Year 4 units focused on stories with historical settings and stories that raise issues or dilemmas.

## About the author

Michael Morpurgo was born in St Albans in 1943. He attended schools in London, Sussex and Kent and studied English and French at London University. Before taking up a career as a writer, he taught in a primary school. He was awarded the MBE in 1999 and the OBE in 2006, and served as Children's Laureate from 2003 to 2005.

He is the author of over a hundred books for children. Among the most well-known and well-loved are *The Wreck of the Zanzibar*, *Out of the Ashes*, *Kensuke's Kingdom* and *Private Peaceful*. In 1976, Michael and his wife Clare set up Farms for City Children, a charity that aims to provide children from inner-city

areas with an experience of the countryside and rural life.

Michael Morpurgo is a high-profile and active figure in the world of children's literature and in children's lives and education more generally.

### Facts and figures

*The Butterfly Lion*:

First published: 1996

Available as an audio book read by the author and Virginia McKenna, whose work was an inspiration for the book.

Winner the Smarties Prize and the Writer's Guild Award for children's fiction.



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