

Childhood

Michael Morpurgo is one of Britain's greatest living authors for children. His work spans forty years and a career that has seen the publication of over 150 books for children, exploring a vast range of topics from historical events, natural history and the environment, to adventure and family life.

Born in 1943, Michael spent his early years in London with his brother Pieter, mother Kippe and stepfather Jack. His happiest memories are of his mother reading to him at bedtime from *Aesop's Fables* and Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*, and from poets like Walter de la Mare and John Masefield. At the age of seven, Michael was sent to boarding school and his life was turned upside down.



Michael as a young child, circa 1945.
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Homesickness and academic struggles made Michael miserable for much of his primary school life, but by the time he moved to secondary school he had discovered great personal attributes of charisma and friendliness. A natural leader and keen sportsman, he became Captain of School and seemed perfectly suited for a career as a British Army officer. He began his training at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst in 1962, only to find it was absolutely not for him. By 1964 Michael had quite a different future ahead of him - as a husband, a father and a teacher.



Michael with the rugby team, second from right, King's School Canterbury, circa 1958.
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Michael Finds his Voice

Clare was twenty and Michael just nineteen when they met and fell deeply in love. For over fifty years they have steadfastly supported each other to realise their dreams.

The daughter of Allen Lane, founder of Penguin Books, Clare grew up with an eager social conscience. When she received a valuable inheritance from her father's estate she knew it was a chance for her and Michael to make a real difference to children's lives. They both believed that children who were stuck in inner city classrooms all day were missing out, so, in 1975, Michael gave up formal teaching and the couple bought Nethercott Farm in Devon. With sheer determination and hard work they set up the charity, Farms for City Children.

Michael found his voice as a story-maker in Devon. There he became friends with poets Ted Hughes and Sean Rafferty who taught him to be true to himself and write from the heart. There he worked the land, cared for the farm animals

and watched the seasons turn. There, too, he welcomed thousands of children to share his experiences.

'From this total immersion in a place, I was finding that, at last, I had a story of my own to tell and a voice of my own with which to tell it.'

Michael Morpurgo



Great friends:
Ted Hughes, Clare Morpurgo, Carol Hughes, Michael Morpurgo.
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The river running past the stores, so when I got down off
I go store skimmer. There are two or three of the most...

From Teacher to Story-maker

Teaching provided Michael with opportunities: he reflected on the results-driven education that had deprived him of the joy of reading and writing; he examined what inspired the children he taught; he criticised the system that prevented children from exploring the world just outside the classroom door.

Despite constant clashes with old fashioned teaching styles and rigid curriculums, Michael was an enthusiastic teacher. At one school he was encouraged to read to the children at the end of each day. Remembering how he had enjoyed his mother reading to him as a child, he soon discovered that he could fire the children's imaginations best with stories he made up himself. The headmistress asked Michael to write

his stories down and she sent them to the publisher Macmillan. *It Never Rained* was published in 1974 and Michael hasn't stopped writing since.

From these first, tentative steps as a storyteller in a Year 6 classroom in Kent, Michael has become a true champion of children and young people's culture, creativity and right to read and enjoy stories. He was instrumental in setting up the Children's Laureateship in 1997, and he himself was appointed Laureate from 2003 to 2005. His services to children's literature were recognised in 2006 when he was awarded an OBE.

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