



All Quiet on the Western Front, by Erich Maria Remarque

In A Nutshell

All Quiet on the Western Front tells the story of six German soldiers who volunteered to fight in World War I, and it chronicles their demise intellectually, spiritually, and physically. The novel is told from the perspective of one incredibly observant young soldier, Paul Bäumer, who exposes details of life on the Western Front – from gas attacks, to fatal illnesses, to rat infestations. Best known for its portrayal of the horrors of trench warfare, *All Quiet on the Western Front* explores the necessity and purpose of war. In America, *All Quiet on the Western Front* remains one of the most popular novels addressing WWI, even in spite of the fact that the story is told from the perspective of America's WWI enemy's – a German soldier. American journalist Henry Louis Mencken described the novel as "unquestionably the best story of the World War" (source).

Author Erich Maria Remarque himself had fought on the Western Front (take a look at a map of the front lines here) when he was eighteen years old, and he suffered several injuries (source). The horrors of what he witnessed as a soldier stuck with him. Some passionate emotions were stirred on November 10, 1928, when Remarque published the first installment of the novel in *Vossische Zeitung*, a German magazine. Many readers immediately noticed that the novel called into question the values set forth by Nazi Germany's "fatherland" propaganda. *All Quiet on the Western Front* was banned and burned in Germany along with hundreds of other books with similar themes.

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Over one million copies of *All Quiet on the Western Front* were sold in Germany when it was published in its entirety in 1929. The Nazis, who were rising in power, hated its grim portrayal of war. They publicly burned it. Gangs of Nazis descended upon the theater where the 1930 film premiered in Berlin. In 1938, Remarque lost his German citizenship. He eventually moved to Switzerland and, later, to the United States. Over time the novel was translated into twenty languages, provoking a range of emotions and discussions on war around the world (source).

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Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 Who do you suppose is speaking at the end of the novel?
- 2 Does this novel change how you view war?
- 3 If the same story had been written today but set in the current war, how would it be different?

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