

## **More on Michael Foreman**

**Michael Foreman and Michael Morpurgo have collaborated on many books. Here's what they say of each other:**

Michael Morpurgo on Michael Foreman: 'Michael is quiet and calm I don't think he even shouted when I sat beside him at a football match. He's also a bit older than me he remembers the war from when he was a boy while I don't. I envy him for that. We are of the same generation although we've come from different backgrounds and different homes. It's nice growing old together; we have a sort of comradeship. Michael loves to travel and we have a lot of fun travelling together; we're a couple of kids we go on adventures together. But not all of the trips are fun. We went to Ypres in Belgium and went to a museum in Flanders Field. There was a letter written on the wall from the War Office to a mother whose son was shot for cowardice. I just imagined how awful it would have been for that mother at that moment. It moved me enormously. Normally Michael and I are chatty but neither of us could speak we just walked off in separate directions. It sounds bizarre, but that moment, as we walked away from each other, I felt closest to him because we were dealing with the same stuff. We share silences well maybe that's the secret. It's the test of true friendship when you don't always have to talk'.

Michael Foreman on Michael Morpurgo: 'My friendship with Michael the "other one", as I call him was immediate. We've been close friends ever since that first book; in fact, more like brothers. Michael is warm, generous and has a tremendous spirit. He has a hand-on-heart warmth. That's why children like him so much'. Michael has worked on more than 170 books, over 20 of which he wrote himself, including some autobiographical stories of his childhood during and just after World War Two. These are wonderful books to share with your children. He has two children and lives with his wife Louise in London and Cornwall.

### **THE BOOKS**

Michael Foreman was born in the fishing village of Pakefield. His father had died a month before he was born but "during the war the other boys' fathers were away, and that helped me; not having a father didn't seem unusual".

His mother ran the newsagents. "We didn't have any books at all when I was a child," Michael remembers, "although I did read all the magazines we used to get in. My favourite was John Bull because it always had a drawn cover."

Michael delivered the newspapers. One of the houses on his round belonged to a teacher at the Lowestoft Art School. He asked Michael and his friends to dig clay from the cliffs for his sculpture class and, when he started a Saturday morning class for children, he invited Michael to come along. Michael showed such promise that his teacher encouraged him to ask at school if he could go to the Art school for one afternoon a week. His supportive headmaster said that he should go for two! Michael went full-time from the age of 15.

Michael studied commercial art at St Martin's College in London. During this time, he began looking for freelance work. But he had nothing to show potential employers so he "made up a theme and drew some pictures". This material was so impressive that it became his first published book – The General.

Michael also took the Graphics course at the Royal College of Art where he received a first class honours degree and a silver medal. He also won a travel scholarship to America. He worked in the USA and on his return to England as a magazine Art Director. He also continued working on books for children. His early works had unusually strong political themes – pacifism (War and Peas), inequality (All The King's Horses), conservation (Dinosaurs and All That Rubbish).

In addition to creating his own picture books, Michael has illustrated the work of many famous writers, including Shakespeare (check out Shakespeare Stories and Shakespeare Stories II),

Charles Dickens, Oscar Wilde (The Selfish Giant), Ernest Hemingway and Angela Carter. He has even illustrated the Old Testament! Michael has often worked, to great effect, with Terry Jones. Their latest collaboration is The Knight and the Squire.

Amongst Michael's most personal creations is his trilogy of books War Boy, War Game and After The War Was Over. These much-loved, award-winning books draw on Michael's own experience of World War Two (War Boy) and its aftermath (After The War Was Over), and his family's experience of World War One (War Game). In the words of Publishers Weekly, there is a "heartbreaking clarity" to these books which are as powerful as any Great War literature.

Michael makes journeys, often to far-flung places, to prepare for specific books. He travelled to Denmark, for example, to find inspiration in the old ships and fjords for The Saga of Erik The Viking – a classic Foreman/Jones collaboration. Michael was once invited by the Queen of Sikkim to stay at the royal palace and illustrate the Sikkimese folk stories she had collected. "I stayed in the palace compound which was on a plateau above the clouds," Michael remembers, "Miles and miles in any direction was above the clouds. You could look to the next mountain peak and there would be another community. It was a fantastic experience."

Michael is equally passionate about Cornwall, where he now lives for part of the year. "At the first sight of the real Cornwall, the land beyond Hayle, a washed clean coast, I felt I had come home. This was where I wanted to grow old."

#### **WHAT HE SAYS...**

"I usually work on three books at once. If there's a big project on I like to have a couple of simpler books on the go at the same time. If you come up against a hiccup in the bigger book then sometimes working on something simpler helps to clear the mind."

"I have to be drawing otherwise I'm wasting my time. I love writing but it has to be done in situations where I couldn't possibly be doing anything else – on planes, or waiting for people."

"People often ask me whether I try out my ideas on children. But people forget we have all been a child. Being able to cope with having the child in us and use it in a creative way is very important."

"I do a lot of research when I'm travelling – I find it thrilling to discover the particular 'art' of different landscapes and work them into a book. But I find I have to travel by myself, otherwise I'm constantly getting involved in other people's impression of a place... I try to be invisible when I'm travelling, so I tend to listen in on conversations rather than participate in them – I just want to look and draw."

"Pictures offer a way of looking at and interpreting the text from a different angle. What you do is provide an image that makes the book work better rather than necessarily illuminating the text."

"I love the sea because its colour can show different times of the day. I like to put in one or two night scenes, which again give you dark blue – and, of course, there are days with blue skies. Sometimes, amid all this blue, I have to go out of the way to put in differently coloured pictures – just to make that surprise when you turn the page."

"I'm always conscious of putting in things a child hasn't yet understood or experienced. That way, they ask questions of adults and then it becomes a shared experience."

"You really need a break from the pictures, to see them fresh and be able to do bits again. But you never get it. In my own books I'd like to change things. I think the idea often deserved better than it got. Perhaps if I live long enough everyone will have forgotten and I can do them again."

“The thing that gives me most pleasure in being an illustrator now is that almost everything I do in the normal course of life has a bearing on the work in progress. It’s all totally enmeshed, and anything that affects you in the newspapers or on television or in your own personal experience can be a jumping off point.”

### **WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT MICHAEL FOREMAN...**

“One of the outstanding creators of children’s picture books working today... He combines a distinctive style of flowing watercolour with a genius for conveying atmosphere, and the visual richness of his work is always a feast for the eye.” Jennifer Taylor, Twentieth Century Children’s Writers

“Of all the author-illustrators who have dominated English children’s books, Michael Foreman is perhaps the master of the philosophical story – as well as being a superb illustrator.” Books For Your Children

“Michael moves effortlessly across the genres, his skills encompassing the classics, picture books and story books. In each case, he distils their special magic, translating it into delicate colours and imagery... Michael’s work has had a profound influence on book illustration, not least because of his ability to encapsulate themes both past and present and fix them into powerful images of unparalleled beauty.” Junior Education

“When he illustrates a book you can be sure it will be full of humour and surprising twists.” Sainsbury’s The Magazine

“Michael Foreman is one of the most prolific and sought after artists in the children’s book world.” Children’s Books in Ireland

“What Arthur Rackham did for children’s books early in this century Michael Foreman is doing for those of today.” Scotland on Sunday

“Foreman’s book illustrations are mostly done on ‘cheap watercolour paper’ which, with mists and washes of colour, develops a luminosity against which his drawings stand, slightly comic, finely-detailed but not pedantic.” Sydney Morning Herald

“Michael Foreman’s picture books are a profile of an era.” Wilson Library Bulletin

“His pictures are full of strange and eerie landscapes, seen mostly at dawn or dusk; moons glimmer through mist, and seas are full of luminous fish while the shores team with exotic animals and birds.” Books & Bookmen

“Rich in universal truths.” The Bookseller on After The War Was Over

“A fascinating yarn, whose value for historical awareness as well as for sheer entertainment is enhanced by the author’s wistfully nostalgic illustrations and the inclusion in the text of a range of realia.” Books For Keeps on After The War Was Over

“This is a book which children can grow up with.” Books For Your Children on Dinosaurs and All That Rubbish

“A beautiful and thoroughly modern fable that gets its message across very effectively.” Picture Books To Read Aloud (CLPE) on Dinosaurs and All That Rubbish

“Michael Foreman has set the pace in conservation books.” Nursery World on Dinosaurs and All That Rubbish

“Brilliant illustrations.” Nanette Newman, Sunday Express on Fantastic Stories

“An irresistible collaboration between well-known author Madhur Jaffrey and acclaimed illustrator Michael Foreman... Foreman’s illustrations have a lightness of touch which children will love.” East on Seasons of Splendour: Tales, Myths and Legends of India

“War Boy is one of the important literary events of 1990. This chronicle of war-torn England is one of the rare autobiographies by a major figure in contemporary children’s literature, and it’s a moving memoir of wartime and its unique madness in the life of a child... The artist’s strong, honest aesthetics works to imbue everything with feelings suitable to the times and events. Whether he draws the tensions of war or the restfulness of the English countryside, he dazzles us with his beautiful line work, atmospheric watercolours and explicit architectural designs.” Wilson Library Bulletin

“Unforgettably moving. Every school, primary and secondary, should have a copy – so should all Humanities departments.” Books For Keeps on War Game

“A superb blend of the horrors of war and of the surprising moments of humanity within it.” The Bookseller on War Game

“Michael Foreman has always been a consistently good writer and illustrator. This book is more than good – it is a classic of its kind.” The Independent on War Game

“A sensitive, poignant picture of the meaninglessness of war.” Northern Echo on War Game

“Foreman draws the many sides of war with heartbreaking clarity as he transmutes the personal experiences of his uncles into a universal story.” Publishers Weekly on War Game

“Although it is essentially a children’s book many adults might also be able to understand it. It was the last book I read this year, and the best.” Times Educational Supplement on War Game

“Simply told, with poignant illustrations, War Game joins the ranks of classic books which tell the truth about war.” Time Out

## **AWARDS**

Runner-up for The Mother Goose Award for The Selfish Giant  
Victoria & Albert Museum Francis Williams Prize 1971 for Horatio  
Victoria & Albert Museum Francis Williams Prize 1977 for War and Peas  
Children’s Choice for The Smarties Prize for Fantastic Stories  
The Kate Greenaway Medal 1983 for Long Neck and Thunderfoot  
The Kate Greenaway Medal 1990 for War Boy: A Country Childhood  
The Smarties Prize 1993 for War Game

## **PLACE & DATE OF BIRTH:**

Pakefield, Suffolk

## **FAVOURITE BOOK:**

The Wind in the Willows

## **FAVOURITE SONG:**

Over the Rainbow

## **MOST TREASURED POSSESSION:**

My one remaining toy soldier from childhood. He has lost his head.

## **FAVOURITE FILM:**

Field of Dreams

When did you start writing?

My first book, *The General* was published in 1961 when I was 21 years old. I was still an art student and had been at art school since I was 15.

Where do you get your ideas and inspiration from?

From life, what I read, where I go, what I see and the people I meet. From history, from dreams, from daydreams, from an object, an old coin, a stone, the sea.

Can you give your top 3 tips to becoming a successful author?

1. Write everyday, and get into the habit of seeing ideas in everything.
2. Make working at writing and illustrating a way of life, not just a job.
3. Really love what you are doing. If you don't love doing it, don't spend your life doing it.

Favourite memory?

Days on the beach with my boys.

Favourite place in the world and why?

It used to be the island of Bali because it was so beautiful, but now my favourite place is St Ives in Cornwall because it is not only beautiful, but it is home.

What are your hobbies?

I only have time for one hobby. Football.

If you hadn't been a writer what do you think you would have been?

A fisherman.