



A Creative Collaboration

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Michael Morpurgo and **Michael Foreman** on their **Joan of Arc**.

Writer **Michael Morpurgo** and illustrator **Michael Foreman** describe how they worked together on their latest book, **Joan of Arc**.

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Michael Morpurgo

Michael and I have worked together on many books now, and they just get better and better. I think this is because we are both involved in the collaborative process from the outset, from the concept even, but then leave each other entirely alone to get on with our respective roles. **Joan of Arc**, like **Arthur**, **Robin** and **Farm Boy**, was not my idea, so the blame or the credit for instigating these books goes to Michael and Pavilion, the publishers. Michael seems to know unerringly what it is that I do best, and suggests it. He then reads my text and responds almost intuitively it seems to the spirit of the story. It is one of the signs of a great illustrator that he gives himself up to the text, soaks himself in it, and then comes up with his vision of it. Michael's vision always surpasses my expectations.

I went about writing **Joan** in the same way I did **Arthur** and **Robin**. I researched avidly, seeking all the while to discover the girl behind the saint and the legend. To me there has been no life and no death more moving, and in a way more uplifting than that of Joan of Arc. I came to know her and love her as well as anyone can do across the chasm of the centuries. Together with Michael I hope we have brought her to life for thousands of people so many years after her terrible death in Rouen.

Michael Foreman

Joan of Arc is the fourth Michael Morpurgo book I have illustrated. After **Arthur**, **High King of Britain** and **Robin of Sherwood** we thought of various other characters for future books. There were several possibilities, but as soon as ?Joan? was mentioned we knew she was the one.

At the time we were already working on **Farm Boy**, a very different book, set in Michael Morpurgo's home village in Devon. The book follows the lives of a family and a remarkable horse from the First World War to the present day.

While drawing the Devon landscape, I was also stockpiling information and pictorial reference for **Joan of Arc**. Eventually Michael sent me the first chapter of **Joan**. It was handwritten in spidery writing on his usual thin, faded

paper. I think Michael bought a ton of it from Army Surplus years ago. The chapter sets the scene in the present day and opens the door to History.

Before we really get down to work Michael and I like to go on a little trip. For **Arthur** we went to the wonderful Isles of Scilly, and for **Robin** we went, of course, to Sherwood.

For **Joan** we went to France, and journeyed to Orléans ? the scene of some of Joan?s epic adventures ? and where there is a Joan of Arc Archive and a Museum. The Museum, in addition to armour, artifacts, banners and weapons, has detailed panoramic models of the great battles ? the Siege of Paris, and the battles of Orléans, Jargeau, Beaugency etc. The details were invaluable to me ? the kind of boats used to carry hundreds of war horses across the wide river, and how did they transport cannon and cannon balls and scaling ladders? What kind of helmets did the various sections of the opposing armies wear? Often helmets would be relics of earlier battles, the dents beaten out and handed on, down the generations.

We walked the banks of the Loire, wide and dotted with small islands with scrub which would have provided cover, and also mudflats which caused treacherous currents. So many little details which make the big picture.

Late one evening we were sitting outside the Bar Shakespeare in a narrow, cobbled street lined with tall, thin medieval houses. It was dark, with no traffic, just a few drinkers and cats slinking around in the shadows. It was the very street along which Joan had lead her triumphant army to raise the siege of Orléans.

I know nothing of all the events which must have happened here during the past 500 years. To me, it felt like Joan had only recently passed by at the head of her army. Past these same houses, clattering over these same cobbles, armour glinting in the torch light, and cats slinking in the shadows. It was no longer ?long ago and far away?. It felt close, personal, and very bloody.

Joan of Arc by Michael Morpurgo and Michael Foreman is published by Pavilion (1 86205 131 3) at £14.99 hbk, and available from all good bookshops or call 01403 710851.

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