



KENSUKE'S KINGDOM Knowledge organiser



Context – *Kensuke's Kingdom* was written by Michael Morpurgo and was first published in 1999.

Michael Morpurgo

Michael Morpurgo is an author, poet and playwright who is known for his children's novels such as *War Horse* (1982) and *Private Peaceful* (2003). He is the author of over one hundred books in total. His skill in 'magical storytelling' and vivid description has often been widely celebrated. Morpurgo served as the Children's Laureate, from 2003-2005, and was made an MBE in 1999 for services to young people.



Japan in World War II – Japan entered World War II with a surprise attack on Pearl Harbour (a US military base) on December 7th, 1941. The Japanese fought on the side of the Axis powers with Nazi Germany and Italy, leading the fighting across Asia. The Japanese military culture of never accepting defeat meant that they were the last of the Axis to surrender – only after the losses suffered from two atomic bombs dropped on them by the USA.



The Hiroshima and Nagasaki Bombs - During the final stages of World War II, Japan was the final member of the Axis forces that had refused to surrender. To prevent a costly invasion (where many would die), the USA dropped two atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki within 3 days of each other, killing between 130,000 and 220,000 people. Japan surrendered to the Allies six days later, to end WWII.



Key information

Plot:

When Michael's parents lose their jobs, the family set off on a boat trip around the world. Michael falls overboard and wakes up on an island where he struggles to survive. He meets Kensuke, who lives on the island, but he stays away to being with. When Michael's life is threatened, Kensuke slowly lets him into his world and the pair develop a strong friendship.

Setting: An island in the Pacific ocean.

Key Vocabulary

Brackish – (of water) slightly salty, as in river estuaries.

Cacophony - a harsh, discordant mixture of sounds.

Flotsam – the wreckage of a ship found floating on or washed up by the sea.

Gesticulate – use gestures, especially dramatic ones, instead of speaking.

Obstinate – stubbornly refusing to change one's opinion.

Outrigger – beam, spar, or framework projecting from or over a boat's side.

Meliflous - (of a sound) pleasingly smooth and musical to hear.

Main characters

Michael – Michael is the lead protagonist of the novel. He shows great mental strength in order to remain positive. He also strikes up a strong friendship towards Kensuke, who he stays loyal to even after leaving the island.

Kensuke – Kensuke is an old Japanese former doctor and war veteran who became marooned on the island and chose to stay there. He is an intelligent man, who shows incredible craftsmanship and resourcefulness in order to survive on the island for so many years. He is also kind and generous, saving and looking after Michael (and the orang-utans) on the island.

Stella – Stella is Michael's family's dog who ends up on the island with Michael. Stella seems to have strong instincts that are beyond Michael's comprehension – for example, she seems to immediately recognise that Kensuke is a kind person, by following him.

The Orang-Utans – The orang-utans live on the island, which had been uninhabited by man until the arrival of Kensuke, and then Michael. The orang-utans appear to have accepted Kensuke as their leader, following him as he sings.

Key themes

Friendship crossing boundaries of age, nationality and culture, isolation, belief, hope, patience, courage, protectiveness, resilience and survival.

Key quotes

"Of course it was madness. They knew it, even I knew it, but it simply didn't matter. Thinking back, it must have been a kind of inspiration driven by desperation."

"For almost a year my mother and father had searched for me...Not a miracle, just faith."

"I was on a beach, a broad white sweep of sand, with trees growing thick and lush behind me right down to the beach."

"There was no howling anymore, but something infinitely more sinister: the shiver of leaves, the cracking of twigs, sudden surreptitious rustlings, and they were near me, all around me. I knew, I was quite sure now, that eyes were watching us. We were being followed."