Concept Analysis

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Organizational Patterns

This text is divided into 12 chapters. All are somewhat equal in length except the last chapter is only two and a half pages. This short chapter is very important and poignant. Its length adds to its emptiness and seems to symbolize the robbed/shortened life of our narrator. It is fairly easy to follow; the story is chronological, except for a few flashback stories that the narrator tells to help the reader understand he and his fellow soldiers better.

The reader gets inside the mind of the main voice and character Paul Baumer. The book is written as a narrative and has a stream of consciousness-type feel to it. We hear his graphic descriptions of the atrocities of war, the dialogue between he and others; we get inside his mind as he sits in the trenches and watches his life become as hollow and destroyed as the shell-holes that pock the face of the Western Front of World War I.

Issues Related to this Study of Literature

Theme(s):
1. The entire novel is filled with a feeling of void—of nothingness felt by the soldiers and especially Paul, as he is the one narrating. Loneliness and being alone is symbolized by the quietness—just as the title suggests. The irony is that there never is quiet on the front, there are bombs going off night and day. Yet Paul often speaks of this quietness he feels inside himself. He hates to be alone, yet it is something he craves. The war has isolated him from his life at home and from any hope of living a full and abundant life after the war is over. The quietness ties into death too. The dead do not speak or make noise. Paul both fears death and feels death. (Examples found on pgs: 13, 31, 60, 61, 64, 67, 71, 95, 97, 118, 121, 123, 155, 160, 165, 168, all of chapter 12).
2. The Earth is a powerful symbol used by the author. While it provides shelter, stability, and it innately familiar (Mother Earth), it is also being cratered and stripped of beauty by the bombs. There is a beautiful scene where Paul almost serenades the Earth while he is in the midst of flying shrapnel, blood, clods of dirt. Over half of the novel is spent sitting in the mud, dirt, craters or earth. (Examples pgs: 55, 67, 69, 71, 80, 115, 286)

3. There is utter degradation and with it dehumanization because of the War. The entire book is about this desensitization of these once-sensitive boys who are now hopeless, spiritually-dead figures. The way the men are treated in the make-shift hospitals, in the shell holes when they have been blown apart. There is no compassion offered in war. (Examples pgs: 56-57, 86-87, 88, 106, 115, 133, 134, chapter 12.)

4. The last major theme is that as the war goes on Paul and his comrades begin to realize that this war is being fought by fathers, brothers, husbands, uncles. It has been started by political leaders who are not even fighting physically. There is a scene on pages 223-225 where Paul is trapped with a French soldier in a shell-hole. He sees that soldier as a human being and no longer as “The Foe.” He becomes a “Comrade” and Paul finds personal attachment to this fellow soldier. It expands his entire view of humanity.

Setting:
This story is primarily set in the western countryside of France during the First World War. Providing a map of this area will be important to students understanding even the title of the novel.

Point of View; Narrative Voice:
The Story is told entirely through the eyes of a young German soldier named Paul Baumer. He has such an honest tone and the reader can really feel the numbness, fear, loneliness, etc, etc, that Paul goes through. The reader even gets to know the other comrades and characters all through the eyes of Paul.

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Foreshadowing:
Death is the main thing foreshadowed in this novel. It is on every page almost, here are a few powerful examples:

1. p. 9: Paul describes a beautiful summer day. They are not yet on the front lines, but they hear the bomb shells in the distance. This eerie echo is a type and shadow of what is to come. Soon those shells will not be far away, nor can blue summer skies last.
2. p. 100: Paul is in the Second Company and they are called to fight the front lines. There are 100 new coffins prepared. The soldiers try to joke around and shrug it off, but they all know that the coffins are for them.
3. p. 121: The dreams of these young soldiers are gone. Paul eloquently and hopelessly describes how their dreams are dead and that they, the soldiers are dead inside only to have a physical death soon to follow.
4. p. 130: A company of new recruits comes to the front lines with Paul’s company. Paul can already see that they are dead, that they too will lose their dreams, sanity, and hope and then die in the wretched trenches with everyone else. He calls them “dead children.”

Character Sketches:
The reader can tell Paul is a very sensitive young man as he truly takes time to describe his comrades. Here are several examples:

1. p. 37: Paul’s description of his closest comrade Katczinsky. He goes on for another three pages telling flashbacks of Kat (nickname of Katczinsky) to support his personality.
2. p. 41: A description of Kropp, another comrade of Paul's. Following this initial description, Paul has another flashback of Kropp that helps the reader see Kropp in action.
3. p. 95: Another sketch of Kat. A very intimate description of Kat and it tells us very much about the comradery they have and the loneliness Paul feels at war.
4. p. 152: A paragraph about several of the soldiers. In this section Paul gives one-sentence sketches that capture each of his comrades that are present.

Flashback:
Paul flashes-back several times in the novel as he fits the puzzle pieces into place for the reader:
1. p 37: Paul retells of a time that Katczinsky finds food and also hay for bedding while at war. Paul often flashes-back when describing his comrades. He reminisces almost it seems about the times he and his fellow-soldiers have shared.

2. pp. 119-120: This is an instance where Paul does not share a specific story, but he explains that after a heavy day of fighting when he tired, he no longer has much control over his mind and he has flashbacks that are haunting.

**Irony:**

There are two major examples of irony in the story. On page 134 for example, Paul talks of how all the new recruits are learning the strategies for survival and how to avoid death. Yet on that very same page he says that life is at an end in the war zone. Throughout the entire novel Paul writes of how its all about chance (p. 101), he knows that the war will not end and that all the lives of those he knows and loves will be taken.

Another instance of irony was on the time of leave that Paul took. He visits home and his mother is deathly ill, he will most likely outlive her (p. 159). Here is this soldier, home for only days from the bloody front lines, and he is healthier than his mother. How very sad and ironic.

**Affective Issues Related to the Work:**

**Friendship:** The comradery of Paul and his friends is very powerful. They all began their service together and last 3 years until the final classmate is killed (Paul). Students may certainly find themselves close to certain friends and classmates the same way. The way that the boys in the text stick together and help each other, they stand up against the evil Himmelstoss. Their relationship with their teacher Kantorek is one that they may relate to now being in school themselves.

**Loneliness:** This is a huge theme of the book, and the students cannot help but feel the fear and isolation that the men feel, especially from Paul’s point of view. How do my students deal with loneliness? To whom do they confide? Do they too feel misunderstood by others as did these war-torn soldiers?

**Definition of Oneself/Identity:** High school is a time of self-discovery and definition of one’s individual worth and talents. These boys in the text are not much older than they are, and are facing their own sense of worth and individuality. Paul’s visit home is jarring.
because he sees what used to define him, but now he has changed so much. What things define my students? What are their talents and abilities? How can they make plans to make something of their lives (and not throw it away as Paul feels they have by going to war)?

**Bullies:** The issues the character’s face with Himmelstoss are horrific and degrading in every way. I will not encourage my students to backlash as Tjadjen and others did, but I will address the issue of being picked on or bullied. Have my students ever felt mistreated by others? What is the best way to respond when this happens? How can they overcome bad feelings they may have for those bullies?

**Vocabulary Issues:**

There is a lot vocabulary in this novel pertaining to war that will need to be addressed and explained for the students to fully grasp the meaning, setting of the text.

**War related:**
- Haricot beans, quids of chew, mess-tin, queue, pushing up daisies, non-com, Dixie (p. 6), blubber-sticker, throws up the sponge, billets, helter-skelter, morphia, bright button, Schopenhauer, kneading boots (p. 23), esprit de corps, comradeship, trenches, bayonet, shell-hole, brothel, lorries, barrage.

**Just difficult:**
- Requisitioned, ostracized, uncanny, laudable, hemorrhages.

**Background Knowledge:**

I think it will be hard for my students to understand the culture of war as it was in this era and country. I find it important to do a section on the culture and history of the Germans and French during this time period. I think it will be important to help students relate a bit more to the text. We are in a war now that is far removed from us, I think that will be a strong parallelism. We need to understand that our soldiers today face the same issues as these men from World War I did. Having maps of the locations of war and pictures will help bridge the gap for students as well. I want to find authentic war pictures to help them get an idea of what war is/was. I want to find pictures and even paintings of the landscapes—the red poppy fields referred to.
Implications for Students of Diversity

One issue that is significant in the text that I want to bring up to my students is that Paul finally realizes the enemy isn’t the individual men he shot at and fought hand-to-hand. He realizes that the enemy are the people not even fighting the war—the political leaders. The French men they fight against are fathers, brothers, sons just as they are. This is important because so often we discriminate simply because someone is different or on another “team”. There is similarity to be found and appreciated.

As far as students with special needs, an idea that comes to mind is to read aloud as a class. I would like to read to them and cover the themes within the text as we go. This will help students who may not otherwise know how to get the tone and themes from the book by themselves.

Gender Issues

Gender is addressed in the novel. War is very much an experience of males, as far as the fighting is involved. There are only two kinds of women in this novel: family members—mothers and Paul’s sister—and there are the French girls and prostitutes in the officer’s brothels that the soldiers sleep with at war. There is certainly a detachment and major divide that occurs between the men and women we read of in this piece. Paul and the other men never confide in these women, they love their mothers, but they cannot be pacified by them. The women they sleep with are unable to quench that loneliness either and are not much more than objects to them. No names or personal attachment is spoken of.

Teaching this to my students will be interesting! I think I will explain what a brothel is as I would any unknown vocabulary. I would like to address the issues the men face with their mothers. Even the hardened soldiers love their mothers and seem to have respect even though they can’t confide in them. As interesting topic would be to talk about why there are not women fighting in the war.

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The Central Question or Enduring Issue

The enduring issue is one that all soldiers face, but is personified through Paul Baumer, the narrator and main character. It is that of facing complete isolation, of being alone. Throughout the novel we see the fear that the soldiers face of being alone, cut off, left out or left behind. Their lives are so shattered, as desolate and shelled as the terrain they fight the war on. Because of this they cannot find connection and “their place” anywhere. Loneliness is compared to silence many times; even the very title of the novel suggests this—All Quiet on the Western Front.

This intense loneliness ever-deepened in Paul and the others as the war wears on. When Paul takes leave to visit his hometown there is no longer a connection, he is so far past that old life and he feels the isolation like he will soon feel death on the front lines. No one understands and no one can comprehend the atrocities that have eaten the heart and soul out of Paul. This loneliness, quietness, is a death in and of itself. Perhaps it is the worst death these soldiers face.

Research Issues/Project Ideas

1. Research the areas that the war was fought in during the years 1916-1918. Find out what the landscape looked like, what the towns and villages were like in France. Research what cities were destroyed and the casualties involved. What was the climate like and what did the soldiers have to face as they fought as far as terrain and harsh weather conditions.

2. Put together a scrapbook based on one of the character’s personalities in the book. Choose a character such as Paul or Kat and either draw or find pictures online to create a visual memory book of the years they spent in the war. Include character sketches of at least 10 characters in the novel. Include pictures and commentary on the areas and activities they participated in. Be sure to make the tone of the commentary match that of the character you have chosen. What were there interests and what would they remember from the war? What were their favorite things, pastimes, what specific things happened to them and their comrades?

3. Do a PowerPoint project or research project on the weapons Paul and his comrades used in the war. Provide pictures and explanations of each one. Focus on the World War I warfare and include a 3-5 page analysis on how war tactics of that war contrast with the tactics today. How were the weapons, artillery, and gassing different? How are they still the same today?
4. Interview someone who has served in a war or is currently active duty military and has been deployed. (Either bring a scribe, video tape, or tape record the interview and turn it in with your finished project.) Before you go, think of a list of questions appropriate and respectful, remember the feelings that Paul expresses about feeling misunderstood and alienated. Some examples of good questions are:
   - What war(s) have you served in?
   - What was your relationship with your comrades in arms?
   - Were you ever on the front lines?
   - What did you learn from your experience that you could share with my class?
   - What kinds of weapons did you use?
   - What was the food like at war?
   - Where did you sleep? In the barracks?
   - What experiences can you share with my class and I?

   This is ONLY a start, come up with at least 20 questions altogether. Be sure to listen carefully and allow the interviewee time to talk and share experiences with you. Be sure to thank them for their service and for allowing you to interview them. Always show great respect.

5. In class we have discussed many themes of *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Paul, as we have read, had an interest in poetry and writing. Choosing 3 or more themes from this novel, write a book of poems surrounding the issues and struggles Paul and others on the front lines faced. Your poetry packet must include at least 12 poems. Pictures, original drawings and other aesthetically pleasing tactics will greatly enhance the quality of your book/packet.

**Information/Functional Texts**

1. Maps of France and Germany  
2. History Books on World War I  
3. Texts on weaponry of World War I Era  
4. German Army Books; how the army functioned and the hierarchy of it.  
5. Newspapers from 1916-1918  
6. Pictures taken of World War I: From the barracks to the battlefield.  
8. Website full of World War I poetry, literature, other writings, and artwork:  
   [http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/education/tutorials](http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/education/tutorials)  
9. The famous poem “In Flanders Fields” by John McCrae  
   [http://www.worldwar1.com/heritage/rpoppy.htm](http://www.worldwar1.com/heritage/rpoppy.htm)