This powerful story set during WWI is a perfect way of exploring the realities of war and the experiences of the soldiers who fought in the trenches. It can also be a wonderful catalyst for children’s own storytelling. This teaching sequence gives children the chance to enjoy the book, explore some ideas raised by the story, and then create their own graphic novels and dramatic recreations of key moments.

**Discussion and booktalk**

1. After reading *Private Peaceful* together as a class (either in English lessons, whole-class reading sessions or as a class novel), use PowerPoint slide 3 to discuss ideas and themes from the book together, using these questions as prompts:
   - What have you learnt about the experiences of soldiers fighting in the First World War from *Private Peaceful*?
   - Why do you think Michael Morpurgo chose to tell Tommo and the other soldiers’ stories?
   - If you could change the ending of the story for one of the characters, which one would you choose? What would happen to them? Why?
2. Next, organise the class into an even number of small groups (with 4-6 children in each group). Using PowerPoint slide 4, share the following statement with the children:

“Sometimes it is braver not to fight than to fight”

Ask the children whether they agree with this statement with a show of hands, then tell them they will be debating the statement. Tell half of the groups they will be supporting the statement and tell the other half they will be challenging it. Give the children time to work as a group to compose their arguments. The children can then debate the statement, either as a whole class or with two opposing groups debating against each other.

Once the debate is over, ask for another show of hands. Ask the children if they have changed their minds. If they have, can they explain which arguments persuaded them to think differently?

3. Finally, ask the children how they think this debate relates to the story of Private Peaceful. Ask them which character chooses not to fight in the story. Do they exhibit true bravery? Are they rewarded for their bravery?

Creativity and the arts

1. As a class, read the extract on PowerPoint slides 5 and 6, where Charlie Peaceful returns to the trench. Work through the text line by line, discussing what is happening. Ask the children to imagine what Tommo and Charlie’s body language and facial expressions might be at each point in the scene.

2. Either go to the hall or move the furniture to the side so there is space for a drama session. Divide the children into groups of three and ask them each to choose the role of Charlie, Tommo or the director. Then give them a short amount of time to create a tableau (a freeze frame) of one moment in the scene. Remind them to pay attention to:
   • Where the characters are positioned
   • How they are standing in relation to each other
   • Their body language and facial expressions (drawing on your previous discussion)
2. Once they are finished, ask the two actors from each group to remain frozen and the directors to walk around the room looking at the work of other groups. Ask them to share anything they have seen that they think is particularly effective. Then give them the chance to change their own tableau if they wish. You could then go around and photograph the children's work.

3. Next, choose one or two groups to share their work at the front. Ask for volunteers to come and add a narration for the scene, telling the story of what is happening. Ask the children what they think the two characters might be saying or thinking. Children could then come to the front and stand behind one of the actors, saying the words they are thinking or saying.

5. Mix the groups up and ask the children to go and create another tableau for any other key moment in the story. As well as creating the physical picture, they could add voices and narration. Each group should share their results and the rest of the class should guess the scene. Then take feedback on what the children like about one another’s work.

**Creative writing**

1. Tell the children they are going to create a page of a graphic novel based on a scene in the story.

2. Read the extract from *Private Peaceful* (see PowerPoint slides 7 and 8) and ask children if they were creating a tableau of this scene what it might look like. Look again at the line the old woman says to Tommo. Ask the children:
   - Why does she say this to him? What is she hoping to achieve?
   - What sort of expression might she have on her face?
   - What expression might Tommo have when he hears her say it?

3. Ask the children if they were going to choose one short part of her speech to include in a panel of a graphic novel, which line would they choose? Why? Explain how the combination of a short line of speech (“Y’ain’t a coward, are you? Y’ain’t a coward?”) along with showing the
characters’ expressions and body language can illustrate exactly what is happening in a scene and how the characters are feeling.

4. Ask the children to sketch the scene and add speech bubbles for any dialogue. Then compare how different children have chosen to depict the scene.

5. Next, ask children to choose one other scene in the story (this could be the same scene they chose for the drama session) and create a short page from a graphic novel telling the story.

6. Once they have finished, ask the children to share their work with a partner, identifying strengths and possible areas for development. Then, give children an opportunity to return to their work and make changes in the light of this feedback.

**Putting it all together**

Finally, the graphic novel pages and any pictures you have taken of the children’s tableaux can be displayed together, either as a wall display or in a class book or webpage. As a follow up activity, children could choose another child’s graphic novel page and write a version of the scene as prose, using their friend’s work as inspiration.