

King of the Cloud Forests

During the Second World War, Ashley and Uncle Sung flee across the icy landscape of the Himalayas. Food is scarce and they are trapped by a terrible storm. Once the storm ends, Uncle Sung leaves to find help. When a strange visitor finds Ashley and takes him higher into the mountains, he wonders if he will ever see his family again.

Author

Michael Morpurgo was born during the Second World War. Morpurgo and his brother were evacuated to Northumberland to escape enemy bombing. As an adult, he was briefly in the army and then became a teacher. He also opened farms with his wife for children to stay and work with the animals. As an author, he has written over a hundred books for children. He has won many prizes for fiction and some of his books have been adapted for film or television.



Michael Morpurgo

Historical context

King of the Cloud Forests is set in 1941 during the Japanese invasion of China in the Second World War. Ashley and his Uncle Sung escape from China soon after a Japanese bombing raid, fearing the approach of Japanese troops and further bombing. They aim to cross the treacherous Himalayas, through Tibet and Nepal, to reach India. From there, they plan to travel back to England, where Ashley's mother was born.

Characters

Ashley

Ashley is the main character in the novel. He suffers many hardships, losing family members and friends as well as having to survive the harsh climate of the Himalayas. The book is about Ashley trying to discover where he belongs.

Ashley's father

Ashley's father is a loving but stern parent. He is a Christian who sets up a mission in China where he builds a hospital compound and chapel. He makes the difficult decision to send Ashley away when the bombing starts.

Uncle Sung

Zong Sung is a Tibetan man who is known to everyone as Uncle Sung. He comes to the mission with Ashley's mother and is her medical assistant. Uncle Sung is a brave, supportive character who is loved very much by Ashley and willing to make sacrifices for him.

Little Red

Little Red becomes Ashley's closest friend in the new community where he lives in the Himalayas, after initially taking time to trust Ashley. He is a loyal, supportive friend. They teach each other new skills and Little Red helps Ashley communicate with other members of his community.



Settings

Charlotte Anderson Mission

The story begins in this mission named after Ashley's mother. It is a Christian mission where people can receive medical treatment, worship and learn about the Christian faith.



Yak herders' hut

Ashley and Uncle Sung stumble into a disused yak herders' hut in the middle of a blizzard. Although there is no food, they set fires to keep warm and so the simple hut saves their lives.



Cave

Ashley is taken from the hut by two mysterious visitors. They carry him to their community in a cave, where the members eat, sleep and live together.



Themes

- belonging
- friendship
- grief
- horror of war
- survival
- trust



Story timeline

These are some of the key chapters in the novel. When you read the chapters, use the questions as starting points for discussion.

Chapters 1–2

The mission where Ashley and his father live is bombed. Ashley's father decides to send him away from the bombing with Uncle Sung. What do you think of his father's decision?

Chapter 4

Ashley and Uncle Sung travel across the icy landscape of the Himalayas and become very close. A blizzard and then a pack of wolves trap Ashley and Uncle Sung in a hut. Uncle Sung leaves for help and Ashley has an intriguing visitor. Who or what do you think the visitor is?

Chapter 5

Ashley is settling into his new home in the cave. What are his first impressions of this environment? What are yours?

Chapter 8

Ashley takes on a caring role for members of the community, much like his father and mother. What qualities does he have that make him suited to this role?

Chapter 12

At the end of the story, Ashley is in a very different location. Living in his new home takes some adjustment. On the last page, Ashley reveals that he has made a crucial decision. What do you think he will do next?

Language

The novel is written using challenging language, describing each character and setting in great detail. This helps readers imagine the hostile conditions and interesting characters that Ashley encounters. The book also describes vividly how hard the journey is on the characters' bodies, particularly Ashley's. For example, Ashley's foot is '*blistered and raw*'.

First person

King of the Cloud Forests is written in the first person, from Ashley's point of view. He reflects on events that happened when he was younger. The first-person technique allows readers to understand a character's thoughts and feelings but readers can only know what the main character knows. For example, when Ashley is separated from various characters, he believes that he won't see them again and shares this with the reader.

Genre

The novel is historical fiction and believably describes some aspects of the Second World War. For example, young men are expected to fight and some characters are injured or killed. There are also elements of fantasy in the novel. Ashley meets characters from a popular myth but they are described realistically.

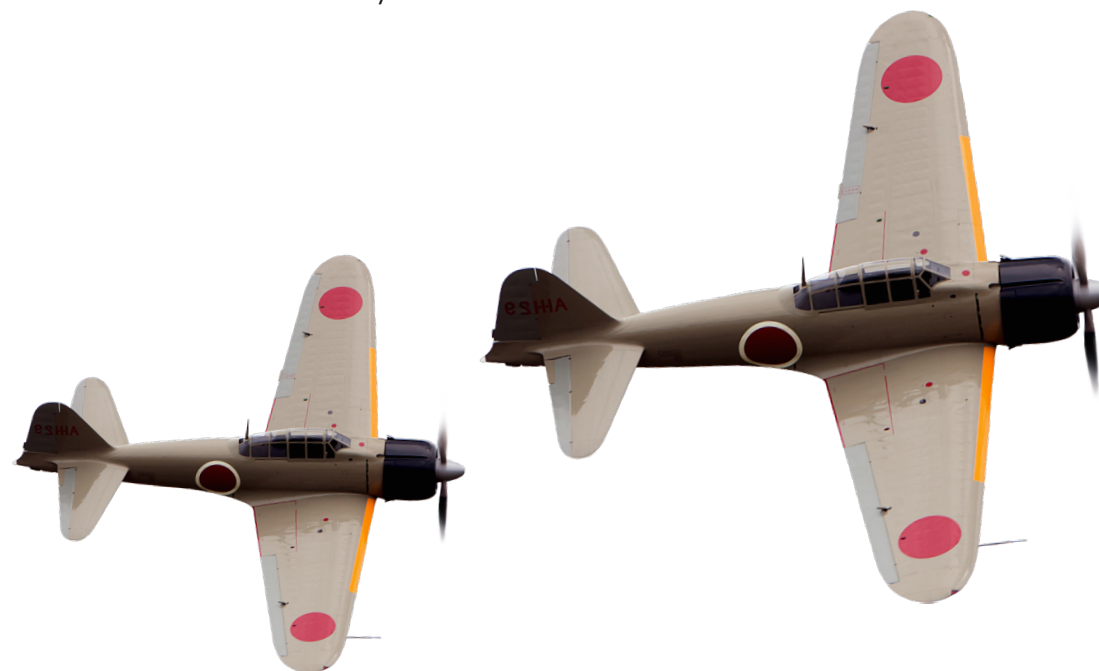


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Literary terms

fantasy

Fantasy stories involve magic, good and evil characters and adventures. This novel is based around Ashley's adventures and features mythological characters.

first person

A text that is written from the point of view of the main character. The novel is written from Ashley's point of view so readers can see the world how he does.

historical fiction

Historical fiction stories take place at a real time in the past but the events might not have really happened. Though Ashley's story takes place during the Second World War, the events are fictional.

myth

A myth is a traditional story that often tries to explain something about nature. The characters are usually gods or supernatural creatures. Ashley meets fantastical characters in the book.

narrator

The narrator of a novel is the character who tells the story. Ashley is the narrator of *King of the Cloud Forests*.

