



Passchendaele (2008)



About the Movie:

Sergeant Michael Dunne fights in the 10th Battalion, a.k.a. The "Fighting Tenth" with the 1st Canadian Division. In 1917, he is wounded at the front. He is sent to his hometown, Calgary, to recover and nursed by Sarah Mann. He is diagnosed as neurasthenic, and helps with recruiting. Sarah's asthmatic brother, David, is finally able to enlist in the Army, and Sarah blames Michael for her brother's actions. Michael re-enlists, using his mother's last name, in order to protect David, and they are sent to the front line of the Battle of Passchendaele, in October, 1917.

The Main Characters:

Michael Dunne	- the soldier
Sarah Mann	- the nurse
David Mann	- Sarah's brother

Inspiration for the Film:

The Battle of Passchendaele was a real battle in which Canadian soldiers participated. However, this film was inspired by Paul Gross's relationship with his maternal grandfather, Michael Joseph Dunne, who served in the 56th, 5th, 14th and 23rd Reserve Battalions, C.E.F., in the First World War. Like many veterans, he was not willing to talk about his experiences with his family. In a rare conversation on a fishing trip, Dunne told Paul about how he killed a young German soldier, who had "eyes like water." A long time later, as Dunne lay in a hospital bed in the last days of his life, his family was mystified by Dunne's behaviour, asking forgiveness over and over. Only Gross knew that he was speaking to the young German he had killed.

He went completely out of his mind at the end. He started telling me about a hideous event that happened during a skirmish in a little ruined town in World War I. He'd killed someone in a miserable, horrible way and that had obviously haunted him throughout the rest of his life. As my grandfather died, in his mind he was back in that town, trying to find a German boy whom he'd bayoneted in the forehead. He'd lived with that memory all his life – and he was of a time when people kept things to themselves. When he finally told the story, it really affected me and I've not been able to get it out of my head.

Questions:

1. a) What did Michael Dunne do, after he was wounded, to get into trouble with the military?

b) Why did he do this?
2. What work does Dunne do while in Calgary?

3. Think about the scene in the recruitment tent. How would you feel if you were left standing?
4.
 - a) David wants to join the Canadian Army. Why doesn't he?
 - b) Why is he so eager to join?
 - c) Later in the movie, he's finally able to join. Why?
5.
 - a) Sarah Mann is a nurse. What do we find out about her father?
 - b) What happens to Sarah when her family history is revealed?
 - c) Do you think Sarah was treated fairly? Why/why not?
6.
 - a) What should have happened to Michael when his lie is exposed?
 - b) What happens instead, and why?
7. Michael tells Sarah that he would have ended up back in the war, one way or another. What do you think he means by this?
8. Do you think all Grade 10 History students should watch this movie? If "yes," explain what students can learn by watching this movie. If "no," then explain why the movie does not contribute to student learning.