

Before You Read

All Quiet on the Western Front Chapters 9–12

FOCUS ACTIVITY

When your life seems difficult, what keeps you going and gives you hope?

List

Think of some situations in which people might feel depressed or paralyzed by their troubles. What thoughts, feelings, or ideas might help them to see things more positively and keep from giving up? In a chart, list some troubling situations and some possible sources of strength that could help people endure or see beyond their troubles.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out whether Paul Bäumer survives the war.

BACKGROUND

Time and Place

During most of the period of the novel (1916–1918), Germany was fighting on two fronts. By late 1917, Russia had withdrawn from the war after accepting harsh terms for peace with Germany. German troops in the east were then sent to the Western Front to try to break the stalemate there. Earlier that year, however, the United States had entered the war on the side of the Allies. Strengthened by American troops, Allied forces stopped a massive German offensive launched in the spring of 1918. By October the Allies had driven the German Army back to Germany's pre-1914 borders and crushed morale. German troops were exhausted and replacements, many younger than fourteen years of age, were too inexperienced to fight a major war. The armistice ending World War I was signed on November 11, 1918.

Did You Know?

The Allies, as well as the Germans, designed new weapons to try to break the deadlock of trench warfare. The British thought that tank warfare would be the solution. Tanks could easily roll over barbed wire and cross trenches up to ten-feet wide, clearing the way for advancing infantry. Tanks were prone to breakdowns, however, and often got stuck in the mud. Noisy, cramped, and hot inside, tanks could travel at only six miles per hour and were stressful for the crew to operate. British tanks were first used in 1916 at the Battle of the Somme. Looking like “mysterious monsters” that nothing could stop, tanks incited fear in the enemy, but there were too few of them to make a significant impact. Later in the war, the Allies launched two massive tank attacks. Both attacks used over three hundred units and were successful in breaking through German lines. Great Britain deployed almost three thousand heavy tanks between 1916 and 1918, while the Germans used only twenty. Although tanks proved increasingly helpful to the war effort, their full potential would not be realized until World War II.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

banal [bə nal'] *adj.* ordinary; lacking originality

convalescent [kən'və les'ənt] *adj.* recovering health and strength gradually after a sickness

forlorn [fôr lôrn'] *adj.* sad and lonely

idyll [id'əl] *n.* carefree episode

invulnerable [in vul'nər ə bəl] *adj.* unable to be harmed or wounded

repulse [ri puls'] *v.* to fight off an attacker

shrewdly [shrōod'lē] *adv.* wisely; cleverly

surreptitiously [sur'əp tish'əs lē] *adv.* sneakily; secretly