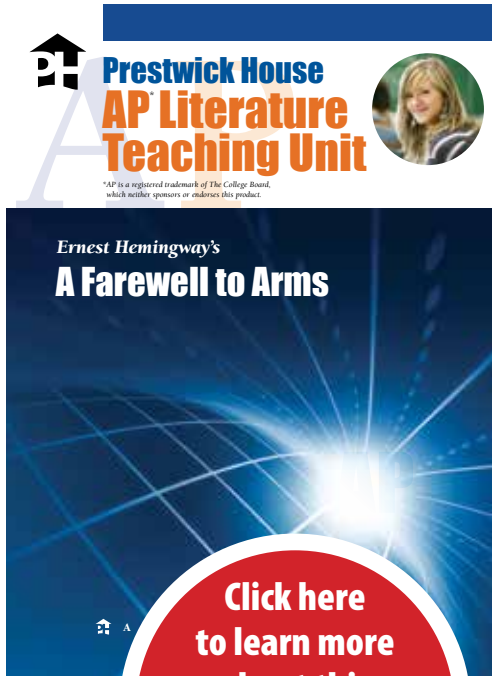




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Teaching Unit

# A Farewell to Arms

by Ernest Hemingway

written by Frank Hering



# Prestwick House

Item No. 307632

# A Farewell to Arms

## Objectives

*By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:*

1. examine the function of a first-person-protagonist narrator.
2. explain the function of scenes that echo each other (“echo-scenes”).
3. analyze the use of foil characters.
4. discuss the novel in relation to historical and literary-historical contexts.
5. examine Hemingway’s view of war, including such issues as camaraderie, loyalty, medals, disillusionment, injury and death.
6. examine the issue of gender roles in the development of characters and their relationships.
7. identify, examine, and discuss the use of imagery and figurative language (simile, metaphor, and symbolism).
8. examine the author’s use of tone, diction, voice, and perspective in the narration and in the dialogue.
9. examine the use of Modernist and Imagist techniques in the text.
10. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement Exam in English Literature and Composition exam.
11. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement Exam in English Literature and Composition exam.

## Introductory Lecture

### WORLD WAR I

*A Farewell to Arms* is narrated by Frederic Henry, an American ambulance driver in the Italian army during World War I, what contemporaries called the “Great War.” Lasting from 1914 to 1918, this war was shockingly different from those that had come before it. Never before had so many countries taken up arms at the same time. Never before had the fighting been so gruesome. During these battles, the world saw the first use of chemical weapons, the first mass bombardment of civilians from the sky, and the twentieth century’s first genocide (the Turkish ethnic cleansing of over one million Armenians). The two sides pitted against each other were the Allies (mainly Russia, France, and Britain) and the Central Powers (chiefly Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey). Italy joined the Allies in 1915, and the U.S. joined by declaring war on Germany in 1917. Each side believed the war would be over in less than a year, but by Christmas of 1914, these countries had created something else that was new: a total war-producing stalemate. Trenches, filled with millions of soldiers, soon stretched along the War’s Western Front, which ran from the Swiss Alps to the English Channel. The War lasted for 1,500 days before an official Armistice was declared on the 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month of 1918. By then, eight to nine million people had died on the battlefield.

When Frederic first meets Catherine, in Chapter IV of the novel, she is carrying a rattan riding crop that had belonged to her fiancé, who died at the Battle of the Somme in 1916. Catherine reveals that his death and the manner in which he died shattered the optimistic expectations, Victorian morals, and rationalist thinking she was raised to believe in. Many soldiers went through a similar loss, and the year 1916 certainly gave them good reason to do so. In this year, some of the most appalling battles were fought. After nine months of fighting at the Battle of Verdun, 300,000 Germans and French had been killed and over 750,000 had been injured. At the Battle of the Somme, 20,000 were killed, and over 40,000 injured on the first day alone. By the end of this battle, British and French losses numbered nearly three-quarters of a million men. In neither the Battle of Verdun nor the Battle of the Somme had the original positions appreciably changed.

### EXISTENTIALISM

Whether as soldiers on the battlefield, noncombatants behind the lines, or interested witnesses following the battles in newspapers, many of those who survived the Great War found their assumptions about life blown to pieces. The generation of men and women who came to adulthood during the years of the War, the population that Gertrude Stein characterized for Hemingway as the “Lost Generation,” were stripped of their romantic visions of proving one’s manhood on the field of battle, racist assumptions about civilized motherlands and uncivilized colonies, beliefs in the basic humanity of a people created in the image of a benevolent God, meliorist views of technology as beneficial, and Victorian expectations that remaining chaste before marriage—especially for women—would result in a loving home filled with a spouse and children. Feeling that life was meaningless and purposeless, this generation produced the philosophy of existentialism, which reflected on how existence itself—all action, suffering, and feeling—is ultimately senseless and empty.

# A Farewell to Arms

## Chapter I

1. What effect does Hemingway achieve by opening his novel with such unclear references and pronoun use?

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2. Hemingway begins his novel *in medias res*, in the middle of things. Why is this a particularly modernist way of opening the book?

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3. How does the imagery change in the second half of the first paragraph? Why?

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4. Why does Hemingway repeat words and phrases within the last sentence of the first paragraph?

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6. Discuss the impact of the language in the paragraph beginning “I ate the end of my piece of cheese ...” Provide examples.

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7. What seems to be surprisingly missing from that same paragraph? What effect does this absence have on the meaning of the passage?

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8. Describe Hemingway’s style of writing about this important event (from “I ate the end of my piece of cheese ...” to “The Britisher leaned over”).

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9. Discuss the ironic effect created by the simile used to describe the blood from the other soldier that is dripping down onto Frederic in the ambulance.

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**Chapter XXIX**

1. Why does Frederic shoot at the two sergeants? How does his doing so affect our understanding of his character?

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2. Does Hemingway seem to approve or disapprove of Frederic's reaction? How can the reader tell?

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**Chapter XXX**

1. What is Frederic's attitude toward the war in this chapter? How does his attitude here help us to better understand the development of his character?

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2. How does the scene at the edge of the Tagliamento River conclude the development we've seen Frederic go through in the last few chapters?

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### Chapter XXXIX

1. Describe the tone of Frederic's and of Catherine's comments on her plan to cut her hair after the baby is born. What do their comments and each of their tones suggest about the nature of their relationship?

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### Chapter XL

1. What might the diction in the first paragraph foreshadow?

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2. How might the spilling of the whiskey contribute meaning to Frederic's feelings about this relationship?

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3. What might Frederic's comments about boxing suggest about his character and his feeling about the relationship with Catherine?

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