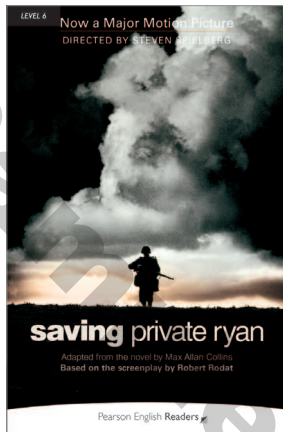


# Saving Private Ryan

Max Allen Collins



## Summary

**Chapter 1: A Family Visit** An American grandfather with his wife, his children and grandchildren visits a big cemetery in France. The grandfather prays, the grandson wonders why.

**Chapter 2: On the Landing Beach** American soldiers wait on boats to land on the beach in Normandy in June 1944. Some of the boats are blown to pieces at once, and those who survive see incredibly gruesome scenes. Landing on the beach, many are killed. Captain Miller saves a young private, Delancey.

**Chapter 3: Landing** Miller and Delancey get to the beach, then Delancey is killed, along with hundreds of others. Miller uses Delancey's body as a shield to protect himself. Some soldiers arrive at the sea wall, where it is harder for the enemy to shoot them, and they realize they are two kilometers from where they are supposed to be.

**Chapter 4: On the Beach** Using explosives, a number of soldiers force their way off the beach. Some of Miller's soldiers have survived. The doctor, Wade, takes risks to help a friend. A little further on, they attack a German machine gun position, and capture it. They are now safe for the moment.

**Chapter 5: A Problem** In Washington, secretaries are typing letters to families of dead soldiers. The colonel responsible realizes that three brothers, from the Ryan family in Iowa, have all been killed very recently. The fourth Ryan brother is in France. The colonel is worried about the effect on public relations. General Marshall, after reading a letter written by Abraham Lincoln several generations earlier decides they must save the fourth brother, even if it means other soldiers taking enormous risks.

**Chapter 6: The Mission** Captain Miller and his group are still in France. Miller is given the urgent job of finding the fourth Ryan brother, and has a squad of eight soldiers to help him. They will have to pass through enemy lines.

**Chapter 7: On the Road** The soldiers are more than a little skeptical about their mission. They wonder why they should risk all their lives to rescue one unimportant soldier who may in any case already be dead. Driving down a very dangerous road, their jeep is destroyed by a bomb and they have to continue on foot.

**Chapter 8: Neuville-au-Plain** The eight soldiers meet American soldiers in Neuville who were hoping for much bigger reinforcements and are disappointed to see such a small squad, on a mission which seems difficult to justify. The squad begin looking for Ryan. French civilians ask them to take their children to safety, but this is against orders. One of the soldiers, Caparzo, is killed while playing with the children.

**Chapter 9: Private Ryan** The Americans kill five Germans in a building. The squad find Private Ryan and tell him that all his brothers are dead. But it is the wrong Private Ryan! This Private Ryan only has brothers who are much too young to be in the army. They then try to find out where the company of the other James Ryan is stationed.

**Chapter 10: New Hope** They walk on in the night, discussing their mission with some cynicism. They meet up with more Americans, but they can't find Ryan. They sort through large numbers of identity tags belonging to dead soldiers, but there is none with the name of Private Ryan on. They finally find someone who knows where his company is – twenty-five kilometers away.

**Chapter 11: Germans** The squad comes across a German machine gun post and after an argument decides to take it before continuing. Some of the soldiers consider this to be an unnecessary risk, but Miller thinks that not to take the gun position would put other soldiers in great danger. The squad's medic, Wade, is hit by five bullets.

**Chapter 12: The Prisoner** Wade the medic takes drugs to kill himself, because he is dying. One of the German soldiers surrenders. Some of the squad want to kill him. They make him bury the dead American soldiers. Captain Miller allows the prisoner to go free. One of the soldiers, Reiber, is so angry about this he wants to mutiny and leave the group. Sarge threatens to shoot him, but Miller calms everyone down.

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**Chapter 13:** *Ramelle* Hiding from German tanks, the soldiers arrive in Ramelle. Just before they arrive, their lives are saved by ... Private Ryan! Miller delivers his message to Ryan and says they are taking him home. Ryan refuses to come, since the bridge his group is defending is too important, and because he does not want to abandon his fellow soldiers, who are already short of personnel.

**Chapter 14:** *The Bridge* The squad decides to help hold the bridge. They draw up a new plan, position the machine guns, and make some specially improvised "sticky bombs" to attack the tanks with. The German tanks attack, and the soldiers fight bravely and effectively. The German prisoner they had previously released is again fighting and is killed. Captain Miller dies, his last words to Ryan being "earn this."

**Chapter 15:** *Memories* Many years later James Ryan visits Captain Miller's grave with his wife, and asks him if he has indeed earned what Miller and his friends did for him. Ryan asks his wife, to whom he has told little of his terrible war experiences, to reassure him that he has lived a good life.

### Main characters

**Captain Tom Miller:** Thirty-eight-year-old leader of the group. In civilian life, Miller was a schoolteacher, something his soldiers find very difficult to believe when they finally find out.

**Sergeant Horvath:** Thirty-year-old, tough, experienced soldier whose priority is to protect his Captain even though he doesn't fully understand him. He is given the nickname "Sarge" by the squad.

**Private Reiben:** Twenty-four-year-old, smart New Yorker who doesn't hide the fact that he resents risking his own life to save Ryan.

**Private Caparzo:** Twenty-two-year-old tough Chicago Italian with a gentle side. He is killed being kind to some French children.

**Corporal Edward Wade:** Twenty-eight-year-old, from California: the unit's sensitive and dedicated medic. He takes great risks in order to save wounded soldiers, often with little success. He is wounded and once he realizes his wound is going to kill him, he takes drugs so as to die more quickly.

**Private Daniel Jackson:** Twenty-three-year-old, deeply religious man from Tennessee – a marksman whose shooting skills turn out to be invaluable.

**Private Stanley Mellish:** Twenty-one-year-old Jewish soldier who has personal reasons for fighting the Nazis.

**Corporal Upham:** Twenty-four-year-old map-maker and translator who joins Miller's group when their interpreter is killed. More accustomed to office work than to fighting, he initially asks Miller if he may take his typewriter with him, since he is writing a book based on his war experiences.

**Private Ryan:** The youngest of four brothers, brought up on a farm in Iowa. A simple soldier but with solid values of comradeship. He becomes a symbol for Miller and his men: if he goes home the whole group can go home.

### About the book and the film

*Saving Private Ryan*, published in 1998, is a novel by Max Allan Collins based on the screenplay by Robert Rodat.

The film *Saving Private Ryan* (1998) was directed by Steven Spielberg and starred Tom Hanks as Captain Miller, Ed Burns, Tom Sizemore, and Matt Damon as Private Ryan. Running almost three hours, the first twenty minutes realistically depict the Normandy invasion. The audience witnesses the most graphic, terrifying sequence ever made: a soldier in shock picks up his own severed arm, another dies before our eyes, screaming for his mother.

**Realism:** The realism of the battle scenes was generally praised, but some people criticized Spielberg for choosing a story where only Americans were involved (whereas in fact several other countries lost many more soldiers in the war), and for idealizing the general and the officers, who all appear to love their subordinates and show exceptional bravery.

**Military values:** *Saving Private Ryan* is about the heroism of soldiers doing what they believe is their duty in wartime, but as the plot develops readers and audiences are reminded that the physical combat of war is hell; that battlefield decisions made on the spur of the moment are often brutal; and that orders from the top can be absurd. Here, war is a sport played by commanders with too much power and too little understanding of human suffering.

At a personal level every man in Miller's unit has his beliefs challenged. Whatever their own feelings about what they are doing, they show bravery and courage as they take part in the war.

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**Europe 1944:** The story is set in the Europe of 1944. The Allied powers plan the greatest invasion in history – a crushing blow that they hope will hold up the German attack and force them into retreat. On 6 June 1944, D-Day, 3,000 landing craft, 2,500 other ships and 500 naval vessels left England for the French coast. Nearly 13,000 aircraft supported them as they arrived in France. Several hundred of these planes carried parachutists who were dropped behind enemy lines.

**Bombing:** Many French towns were completely destroyed by allied bombing during the invasion. In the 1930s, massive bombing of towns had been very controversial and large numbers of people had asked for such activities against civilian towns to be banned. However, once the Second World War got underway, all sides resorted to such bombing, and cities such as Coventry, Hamburg, and (even more so) Hiroshima were largely or completely destroyed.

**War films:** Spielberg's film joins a long series of films about war: about the First World War (*Paths of Glory*, *Gallipoli*), about the Second World War (*The Dam Busters*, *The Longest Day* or *The Eagle has Landed*) or about the Vietnam War (*Good Morning Vietnam*, *Platoon*, *Apocalypse Now*, or *Born on the 4th of July*). Films have also been made about earlier wars (*Zulu Dawn*, about the Anglo-Zulu war). Some of these films have been overtly opposed to the wars they describe, while others have tended to glorify the wars. Your students may be interested in discussing which category Spielberg's film falls into.

**Steven Spielberg:** Spielberg has always wanted to make films about important questions of history. He made the film *Schindler's List* about the Nazi extermination of Jews, *Amistad* about slavery, and many others. He has been praised for making films about key questions, and criticized for trivializing or being sentimental about important human experiences.

### Discussion activities

#### Before reading

- 1 **Discuss:** Ask your students to discuss the cover of the book in small groups. Guide them with the following questions: *What adjectives can you find which describe the soldier? What do you think has just happened? How does he feel? What image of war does the cover express?*

#### Chapter 1

- 2 **Write:** A letter. After the visit to the cemetery, the daughter of the old man writes a letter to a friend at home describing the visit and her father's reaction. Ask your students to write the letter.

#### Chapter 2

##### Before reading

- 3 **Discuss:** The Second World War. Ask your students what they know about the Second World War. Guide them with the following questions: *What happened in France at the beginning of the Second World War? What happened in Russia? What happened in France at the end of the Second World War? When did the United States join in the war? What was their most important action in the war?*

##### After reading

- 4 **Role play:** Have students improvise the scene about waiting on the boat. Put your students into groups of five. One is Miller; the others are the other soldiers. Ask them to discuss the subject and then improvise (without a written script) a role play of the situation in the last few minutes before they get off the landing boat. They discuss what is going to happen to them, and Miller tries to be encouraging. Ask the students to concentrate on the tone of voice used to express different emotions.

#### Chapter 3

- 5 **Debate:** Military values. It says in the book, "Boys became men as they crossed the killing zone of Omaha Beach." Divide your students into two groups. One group should find arguments to support the idea that military battles make boys into real men. The other group should find arguments that such situations brutalize men and make them more like animals. Then organize a debate between the two groups.
- 6 **Research and present:** Soldiers' songs. Soldiers have always written or adapted songs to help them survive in wartime. Ask your students to find on the Internet one of the following songs. In class, each student should present and explain the words of one of the songs, and if possible the history of the song: *We're gonna hang out the washing on the Siegfried Line; It's a long way to Tipperary; Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag; Hanging on the old barbed wire; When this lousy war is over; Oh what a lovely war.*

#### Chapter 4

##### After reading

- 7 **Role play:** Put your students into groups of five. Ask them to prepare and then act out the scene from where they first see the German dog (page 15), to the killing of the first four men who run out. They should try to do this without a written script.

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- 8 Write:** An article. Tell your students they are soldiers, but also journalists for American newspapers. Ask them to write an article, a day or two after the landings, about the landing at Omaha Beach. They should begin "Early yesterday morning, hundreds of boats began bringing American soldiers to the beaches. Many of them didn't make it alive ..."
- 9 Report by radio:** At the end of Chapter 4, the squad is at the top of a cliff, looking down on the beach. Tell your students they are surviving soldiers in this position. They are called by radio by a higher military authority and have to report what has happened and what they can see. Give them time to prepare, and then ask a few students to act out the radio call in front of the class.

### Chapter 5

- 10 Write:** An interview. Divide your students into groups of three. Tell them they are journalists. They are to prepare an interview with a representative of the War Department Office of Public Relations. They have heard about the Sullivan brothers and the three Ryan brothers. Each group should write questions for fifteen minutes. Then they should exchange their questions with those of another group, and write answers to the questions of the other group. Finally students should act out the interview in front of the class.
- 11 Discuss:** Presentation of hierarchy. Ask students to discuss in small groups the following questions. Then they should report back to the class. *How is General Marshall presented in this chapter? What are his values? Why does the writer talk about Abraham Lincoln in the chapter?*

### Chapter 6

#### Before reading

- 12 Discuss and predict:** Ask students to discuss what will happen when Captain Miller is told about his mission to rescue private Ryan. Guide them with the following questions: *How will Captain Miller react to his new mission? What arguments could he use against it? What would happen if he refused? What will be the first thing he does to prepare the mission?*

### Chapter 7

- 13 Role play:** Ask your students in groups of four or five to act out the scene where the soldiers are in the jeep. They should improvise a conversation in the jeep based on the conversation in the book, and then react when their jeep is destroyed and they have to continue on foot.

### Chapter 8

- 14 Writing and censoring:** A letter. Ask your students to imagine they are the soldiers in the squad, and that they have the chance to rest for a day and write a letter home. They should each write this letter. When they have finished tell them to give their letter to another student who will play the role of military censor (with scissors) and cut out anything they judge to be inappropriate, secret or bad for morale.
- 15 Research and present:** A parody. Ask students in pairs to research at home the use of comedy and parody in war films or war novels (they could begin with the films *Good Morning Vietnam*, *Life is Beautiful* and *Oh! What a Lovely War*). Ask each pair to present a film and its purpose to the class.
- 16 Discuss:** Comedy and war. Discuss with the class the use of comedy in fiction about war. Guide them with the following questions. *Why do people want to laugh at war? Can you think of songs, sketches, films or books that make us laugh about war? Do you think it is disrespectful to the victims? Can we laugh at anything we choose, or are there limits?*

### Chapter 9

- 17 Write:** A diary. Captain Hamill from San Diego keeps a journal of what happens every day. Ask your students to write his journal for the day he met Miller's squad. They should begin "A certain Captain Miller passed through with his squad on a rather unusual mission."

### Chapter 10

- 18 Write a parody:** Show your students examples of parody. Ask your students to write a parody of a scene from this part of the story, or a parody of the story of Private Ryan in song to a well-known tune.

### Chapter 11

- 19 Role play:** Put your students into groups of four. Ask them to role play the scene in the book from page 60, where they discover the bodies of some paratroopers, to page 64 where Wade is hit. They should invent their own words, not use the words in the book.

### Chapter 12

- 20 Write a letter:** The German prisoner, when he gets free, writes a letter to his parents where he tells them what has happened to him and what he intends to do next. Ask your students to write this letter. They should begin: "Dear Mum and Dad, I was very lucky not to be killed today. This is what happened ..."
- 21 Write a different version:** Ask your students in pairs to write a different version of a part of this chapter (from page 69). In the new version the German prisoner is not released. They should try to imagine the story, the dialogue, and the arguments between the soldiers.



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- 22 Research and present:** The treatment of prisoners. Split your students into two groups, A and B. Ask group A to research, on the Internet, into international laws and regulations concerning the treatment of prisoners of war. Group B should research into how prisoners of war were in fact treated in world war two. Then in class put the students into pairs (each student from group A with a student from group B). Each student should explain to their partner what they found. Then discuss with the whole class.

### Chapter 13

#### Before reading

- 23 Discuss and predict:** Put your students into small groups. Ask them to imagine what will happen when the squad finally discover where Private Ryan is. Guide them with these questions: *Do you imagine Ryan will be alive when they find him? What news do they have to give him? How will he react? How will the story end?*

#### After reading

- 24 Role play:** Ryan's refusal. Put your students into groups of four. Ask them to role play the story from page 78 just before they meet Private Ryan, to page 83, where Ryan definitively refuses to leave the bridge.
- 25 Write:** Ask your students to write a different version of this story. Ask them to imagine that just when the soldiers are ready for the German tanks to arrive, they receive the news that the war has ended.

### Chapter 14

- 26 Draw a map:** Put the students into pairs. Ask them to read Chapter 14 again and imagine and draw a map of the village showing the bridge, the machine gun positions, the main street, the bell tower and the mines.
- 27 Write:** A letter. When, at the Pentagon, they discover that Private Ryan is safe, a secretary writes a letter to Ryan's mother in Iowa. Ask your students to write the letter.
- 28 Role play:** Coming home. Put your students into pairs. Ask them to prepare and act out the scene when Private Ryan comes home to his mother's house.

### Chapter 15

- 29 Research and present:** War memorials. Ask your students to do research at home about the memorials, cemeteries and museums in France concerning the battles of 1944–1945. Ask some students to concentrate on British soldiers, some on Americans, some on Canadians, and some on the French Resistance.

- 30 Write:** The sign. At the end of the book, it says that in front of the school named after Captain Miller, there is a commemorative sign, which explains why the school is named after him. Ask your students to write this sign.
- 31 Role play:** A child's view. Divide your students into groups of three. One of them is the young boy who appears at the very beginning and the very end of the book, visiting the cemetery with his grandfather. The other two students are friends of the boys. They discuss what the boy saw when he went to France with his grandfather, and they try to understand what it all means.

#### Extra activities

- 32 Write:** A diary. Tell your students to imagine it is ten years after Ryan was saved by the squad. He writes a diary about his new life back in the United States. They should write the diary entry for the tenth anniversary of the day he was saved. They should begin: "It's hard to believe it is ten years since that day on the bridge. My life had changed so much ..."
- 33 Write:** An obituary. Tell your students they are journalists. Show them one or two obituaries from newspapers. Tell them that James Ryan has just died, and that they are to write his obituary for the local paper. They should begin, "James Ryan, veteran of the Normandy landings in the Second World War, died in hospital last week ..."
- 34 Artwork:** Ask your students to design a new cover. They may draw or paint it, or make a collage.
- 35 Role play:** Private Ryan and his wife. We get the impression that over the years, Ryan has not wanted to talk about his war experiences, even to his wife. Divide your group of students into pairs. One person in each pair is Private Ryan, the other is his wife. His wife encourages him to talk about his experiences during the Normandy landings and afterwards. Ryan tries to avoid saying very much, or answers only vaguely.
- 36 Research and present:** War films. In pairs, have students do research at home on the Internet on one of the following films, and then present the film to the class explaining the story, the message of the film, and the values it defends. Some should choose a film about the Second World War (such as *Bridge on the River Kwai*, *Stalingrad*, *The Dam Busters*, *Life is Beautiful*, *The Longest Day*, or others). Others should look at films about other wars (*Paths of Glory*, *Gallipoli*, *Platoon*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *Apocalypse Now* or others). Afterwards, ask them to discuss in groups a plan for a film about the Second World War which has never, to their knowledge been made. What would be the story? What would be different about their film? What actors would they choose? Would it be a very violent film? What would be the message?