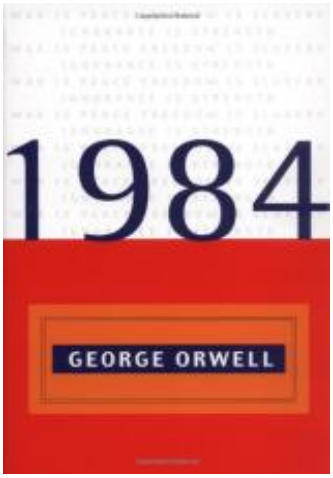
1984

by George Orwell



About the Book

In 1949, on the heels of another literary classic, **Animal Farm**, George Orwell wrote **1984**, his now legendary and terrifying glimpse into the future. His vision of an omni-present and ultra-repressive State is rooted in the ominous world events of Orwell's own time and is given shape and substance by his astute play on our own fears.

As the novel opens, we learn that in year 1984, the world has been divided into three states: Oceania, Eastasia and Eurasia, all of which, it is said, are almost continually in battle with one another. This world structure has come about following a nuclear war which took place sometime in the 1950's. In the state of Oceania, a revolution has resulted in the rise of an all-seeing figurehead known only as Big Brother, and a secretive group of individuals referred to as The Party. Under this regime, basic freedoms of expression-even thought-are strictly forbidden. History and memory are actively erased and rewritten so as to support the omnipotence and infallibility of The Party and its pronouncements. To this end, the State even employs its own language, Newspeak, and its own thought process, Doublethink.

It's against this background that we are introduced to Winston Smith, a low-level Party member (not to be confused with the elite group which surrounds Big Brother) who works in the Ministry of Truth. His job here, paradoxically, is to destroy and rewrite news articles and State facts and figures so as to align them with the most current views of The Party. A resident of Airstrip One-formerly London, England-Smith lives in a world devoid of even the simplest liberties. In this repressive society, where thoughts themselves can be ascertained and monitored, Winston finds himself alone and in quiet "revolution" against Big Brother. Boldly, he even goes as far as to write his own thoughts down on paper- a crime worthy of abduction by the Thought Police.

Early in the novel, Winston meets Julia, another worker at the Ministry of Truth, whom he has been watching from afar. Secretly, the two begin a love affair. This liaison inspires Winston to indulge his ever-growing obsession with revolution, and he and Julia begin to discuss, however implausible, ideas for the overthrow of The Party. Winston's eventual (and inevitable) capture at the hands of the Thought Police leads to his purification and re-education by inner

Party members.

Orwell's strict attention to detail and realistic description of a world thirty-five years ahead of his own add validity to **1984**, and make its larger conclusions all the more frightening. Even today, the novel remains a bleak and shadowy forewarning of what might someday occur.

Discussion Guide

1. The world within which Winston lives is replete with contradictions. For example a, major tenet of the Party's philosophy is that War is Peace. Similarly, the Ministry of Love serves as, what we would consider, a department of war. What role do these contradictions serve on a grand scale? Discuss other contradictions inherent in the Party's philosophy. What role does contradiction serve within the framework of Doublethink? How does Doublethink satisfy the needs of The Party?

2. In the afterword, the commentator describes **1984** as "a warning." Indeed, throughout the text, Orwell plants both subtle and overt warnings to the reader. What do you think are some of the larger issues at hand here?

3. Describe the role that O'Brien plays in Winston's life. Why do you think that initially, Winston is drawn to O'Brien? Why does he implicitly trust him, despite the enormous dangers involved?

4. Discuss the significance and nature of Winston's dreams. Deconstruct the dream wherein O'Brien claims that they "shall meet in a place where there is no darkness" (page 22), and the dream in which Winston's mother and sister disappear (page 26). What are the underpinnings of these dreams? What deeper meanings do they hold? Why do you think the author devotes as much time as he does to Winston's dreams?

5. Discuss Winston as a heroic figure. What qualities does he posses that could define him as one?

6. Compare and contrast some of the other characters in Winston's world: Parsons, Syme, O'Brien. How does Winston view each one? How do they differ from Winston? What opinion do you think each one has of Winston?

7. On pages 147-148, Winston reflects on the omnipresence of The Party: "He thought of the telescreen with its never-sleeping ear. They could spy upon you night and day, but if you kept your head you could still outwit them?.Facts at any rate, could not be kept hidden. They could be tracked down by inquiry, they could be squeezed out of you by torture. But if the object was not to stay alive, but to stay human, what difference did it ultimately make?" What, in essence, is Winston saying about the lone individual in relation to The State? Does this contention remain true throughout the novel?

8.Early on in the novel, we learn of Winston's belief in the proles as a liberating force. What accounts for Winston's almost blind faith in the proles? What are some of the characteristics of the proles that, in Winston's eyes, make them the ultimate means for overthrowing Big Brother?

9. From her first appearance as "the dark-haired girl," through to the end of the novel, Julia is a key figure in **1984**. Trace the path of Julia in relation to Winston's life; in what ways does she influence him? Did you trust her, initially? Overall, do you feel she had a positive or negative impact upon him?

10. After his first formal meeting with O'Brien, Winston receives a book, ostensibly written by Emmanuel Goldstein. In reading passages from this book, Winston is further enlightened as to "how" the current society came into being. Focus on these passages, and in particular, on the theory of the High, Middle and Low classes (page 179). If true, what does this theory hold for the proles? Is Winston's plan for the proles now altered? Why or why not?

11. During Winston's interrogation, O'Brien explains that whereas preceding totalitarian regimes had failed, The Party was truly successful in its consolidation of power (page 226). How, according to O'Brien, does the The Party as an oligarchy differ from Nazism or Russian Communism? How does he define the role of the martyr, both in terms of The Party and the other totalitarian systems?

12. Following his capture in Mr. Charrington's spare room, Winston undergoes a process of "philosophical cleansing" and re-education against which he valiantly, but unsuccessfully fights. Discuss Winston's "capitulation" at the hands of O'Brien. How is Winston brought to "love Big Brother?" In sacrificing Julia, how has Winston, in essence, signaled his own end?

13. How would you describe the author's tone in **1984**? Does it add to or detract from the character's discourse?

14. Discuss the role of sex and intimacy in **1984**. What specific function does the Party's directive on sexual interaction serve?

15. In the final analysis, how accurate was Orwell in his vision of the future? In what ways does our contemporary society compare to his idea of society in **1984**? Are there examples in which he was correct? What is most opposite? Do you see a potential for aspects of Orwell's "vision" to come true?

16. During his final encounter with O'Brien, Winston argues that, if all else fails, the inherent nature of the individual-the "spirit of man"-is strong enough to undermine a society such as that created by The Party. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Is Winston's belief applicable to the world we live in today? Can you cite examples in our own recent history that support or dismiss Winston's belief in the resiliency and righteousness of the human spirit?

17. Prior to meeting her, Winston fantasizes about Julia in violent, humiliating ways. Later, he describes in his diary an encounter with a middle-aged, toothless prostitute. How do you account for these thoughts? How does Winston's understanding of women change after his first liaison with Julia?

18. Given Winston's own acknowledgment that he is under constant surveillance, and that it would only be a matter of time before the Thought Police caught him, no one in his world could be trusted. Prior to his capture, which character or characters did you envision as betraying Winston? How did you foresee his ultimate demise? Did you, on the contrary, feel that by some chance he would overcome the forces aligned against him, and fulfill his wish to conquer The Party?

19. Imagine yourself as Winston Smith at the beginning of **1984**. What would you do to undermine The Party? Knowing what you know now, how would you extricate yourself from the fate that awaits you?

20. Refer back to Winston's conversation with the old man at the pub (page 78). Why is Winston so determined in his approach to the old man? What is Winston hoping to learn from him?

Author Bio

Eric Arthur Blair (George Orwell) was born in 1903 in India, where his father worked for the Civil Service. The family moved to England in 1907 and in 1917 Orwell entered Eton, where he contributed regularly to the various college magazines. From 1922 to 1927 he served with the Indian Imperial Police in Burma, an experience that inspired his first novel, **Burmese Days** (1934). Several years of poverty followed. He lived in Paris for two years before returning to England, where he worked successively as a private tutor, schoolteacher and bookshop assistant, and contributed reviews and articles to a number of periodicals. **Down and Out in Paris and London** was published in 1933.

In 1936, he was commissioned by Victor Gollancz to visit areas of mass unemployment in Lancashire and Yorkshire, and **The Road to Wigan Pier** (1937) is a powerful description of the poverty he saw there. At the end of 1936 Orwell went to Spain to fight for the Republicans and was wounded, and **Homage to Catalonia** is his account of the civil war. He was admitted to a sanatorium in 1938 and from then on was never fully fit. He spent six months in Morocco and there wrote **Coming Up for Air**. During the Second World War he served in the Home Guard and worked for the BBC Eastern Service from 1941 to 1943. As literary editor of the *Tribune* he contributed a regular page of political and literary commentary, and he also wrote for the *Observer* and later for the *Manchester Evening News*. His unique political allegory, **Animal Farm**, was published in 1945, and it was this novel, together with **Nineteen Eighty-Four** (1949), which brought him world-wide fame.

George Orwell died in London in January 1950. A few days before, Desmond MacCarthy had sent him a message of greeting in which he wrote: 'You have made an indelible mark on English literature . . . you are among the few memorable writers of your generation.'

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