



1984 by George Orwell

About the author:

Eric Arthur Blair (1903–1950), better known by his pen name George Orwell, was an English author and journalist whose best-known works include the dystopian novel 1984 and the satirical novella Animal Farm. He is consistently ranked among the best English writers of the 20th century, and his writing has had a huge, lasting influence on contemporary culture. Several of his coined words have since entered the English language, and the word "Orwellian" is now used to describe totalitarian or authoritarian social practices.

Source: Harper Collins Canada

[\(<http://www.harpercollins.ca/cr-176301/george-orwell>\)](http://www.harpercollins.ca/cr-176301/george-orwell)

About this book:

It is 1984, and the worlds' three major powers-Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia-are constantly at war. In Oceania, where the Party is in power, the thought police unearth every act of dissent, and Big Brother is always watching. Winston Smith, a dutiful citizen of Oceania, works for the Ministry of Truth as a propaganda writer who rewrites history to suit the needs of the authoritarian government. But when Winston falls in love with fellow worker Julia, they begin to question the very system they work for, placing them in immense danger. Pursuing their forbidden love affair, Winston plans a rebellion against the Party in order to regain the freedom to shape his own future. But the ever-watchful Big Brother will not tolerate opposition, and for those who speak up against the system or dare to think what the Party does not want them to think, Room 101 awaits them . . .

May 2017



1984 is George Orwell's haunting prophesy of the future, which has held multiple generations of readers spellbound in its chilling and terrifying vision of life under a totalitarian regime. Powerful and unforgettable, this still-relevant novel explores the obliteration of truth, individuality and liberty in a world where the ruling power seeks to control everything, from information to thought and memory.

Source: Harper Collins Canada

[\(<http://www.harpercollins.ca/9781443434973/1984>\)](http://www.harpercollins.ca/9781443434973/1984)

Discussion Questions:

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

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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 possess 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 Goldberg. 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?

Source: *Lit Lovers* (<http://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/13-fiction/746-1984-orwell?start=3>)



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May 2017