

George Orwell • 1984

THE AUTHOR

GEORGE ORWELL

Eric Arthur Blair, known as George Orwell, was born in India on 25th June 1903. He was educated in England and, after he left Eton, a famous private school, he joined the Indian Imperial Police in **Burma**, which was then a British colony. Orwell **resigned** in 1927 and decided to become a writer and in 1928 he



moved to Paris. Orwell did not have much success as a writer in Paris and he was forced to do a series of humble jobs to survive, but this experience became a source of inspiration for his first work, an **essay** called *Down and Out in Paris and London*, published in 1933. This was followed by his first **novel**, *Burmese Days*, in 1934. In 1936, Orwell was commissioned to write an account of poverty among unemployed **miners** in northern England, which was published under the

title *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937). Late in 1936, Orwell travelled to Spain to fight for the Republicans against Franco's Nationalists, however he was forced to escape when the communists started to suppress revolutionary socialist **dissenters**; this experience made him an anti-Stalinist for all of his life.

Between 1941 and 1943, Orwell worked on propaganda for the BBC; in those years, he was very appreciated as a journalist and **reviewer**.

Orwell's hate for Stalin and his dictatorship can be found in his most popular novels: *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. *Animal Farm*, published in 1945, is a political fable set in a farm but based on Stalin's **betrayal** of the Russian Revolution. The characters are all animals, and they personify the different historical protagonists of the Russian Revolution. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, published in 1949, is set in an imaginary totalitarian future; the novel was a success and made a deep impression on its readers. Both novels ensured Orwell fame and financial stability; unfortunately, Orwell's unstable health deteriorated soon after and he died of tuberculosis on 21 January 1950.

betrayal: *tradimento*
Burma: *Birmania*
dissenter: *dissidente*
essay: *saggio*
miner: *minatore*
novel: *romanzo*
to resign: *dare le dimissioni*
reviewer: *critico*

THE WORK**NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR**

Written in 1948, the novel portrays a dystopian, future society. The story is set in London, the capital of Airstrip One, one of the provinces of Oceania. Oceania is constantly at war with the other two states of the world, Eurasia and Eastasia, which are also at war with each other.



Oceania is ruled by the Party, whose leader is Big Brother. Posters of Big Brother are everywhere in the city, and he controls the life of all of the citizens by different means. The first is the telescreen, a sort of television set in every home with a double function: broadcasting propaganda by the Party and at the same time catching images and sounds from people at all times, as it can never be turned off. The Party also controls the minds of the inhabitants of Oceania through Newspeak, a new language in which some words have been cancelled in order to reduce the ability to think, and through the Thought Police, who prevent crimes against the Party from even being thought of.

The protagonist of the novel is Winston Smith. Winston works at the Ministry of Truth, where he has to change historical documents according to the Party's new requirements. Winston secretly tries to resist the **dictatorship** of the Party, which **forbids** individual thought, free sexual relationships between men and women and tries to change people's memories

of the past. One day Winston meets Julia, an activist in the so-called Anti-Sex League, and he has an intense, secret (and prohibited) affair with her. Winston also approaches the Brotherhood, a group of dissenters whose leader, Goldstein, is a declared enemy of the Party thanks to O'Brien, a member of the powerful Inner Party, who **pretends** to hate the Party and convinces Winston to continue his secret activity as a dissenter. During one of their secret meetings in an apartment that Winston has rented **on purpose**, he and Julia are discovered by the police and arrested. O'Brien reveals himself to be a spy in charge of catching thought criminals. Winston and Julia are sent to the Ministry of Love for re-education, where O'Brien tortures and brainwashes Winston, who tries to resist. To make him surrender, O'Brien sends Winston to Room 101, where prisoners have to face their worst fears. Winston has a cage of rats on his head ready to eat his face; this makes him **surrender** to the Party and declare that he has changed his mind about Julia. After surrendering, Winston is released; he meets Julia again, but they are no longer interested in each other as Winston now agrees with the dictates of the Party and loves Big Brother.

to forbid: *proibire*
dictatorship: *dittatura*
on purpose: *apposta*
to pretend: *fingere*
to surrender: *arrendersi*



THE TEXT

THE TELESREEN

Nineteen Eighty-Four, Part one, Chapter one

(...) Winston Smith, his chin **nuzzled** into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a **swirl of gritty dust** from entering along with him.

- The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old **rag mats**. At one end of it a coloured poster, too large for indoor display, had been **tacked** to the wall. It depicted simply an enormous face, more than a metre wide: the face of a man of about forty-five, with a heavy black moustache and **ruggedly** handsome features. Winston made for the stairs. It was no use trying the lift. Even at the best of times it was seldom working, and at present the electric current was cut off during daylight hours. It was part of the economy drive in preparation for Hate Week. The flat was seven flights up, and
- 10 Winston, who was thirty-nine and had a varicose ulcer above his right ankle, went slowly, resting several times on the way. On each landing, opposite the **lift-shaft**, the poster with the enormous face gazed from the wall. It was one of those pictures which are so **contrived** that the eyes follow you about when you move. The poster with the enormous face gazed from the wall. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption beneath it ran.
- 15 Inside the flat a **fruity** voice was reading out a list of figures which had something to do with the production of **pig-iron**. The voice came from an oblong metal plaque like a **dulled** mirror which formed part of the surface of the right-hand wall. Winston turned a switch and the voice sank somewhat, though the words were still distinguishable. The instrument (the telescreen, it was called) could be **dimmed**, but there was no way of shutting it off completely. (...)
- 20 Behind Winston's back the voice from the telescreen was still **babbling** away about pig-iron and the over fulfilment of the Ninth Three-Year Plan. The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it, moreover, so long as he remained within the field of vision which the metal plaque commanded, he could be seen as well as heard. There was of course no way of knowing
- 25 whether you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was **guesswork**. It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time. But at any rate they could plug in your wire whenever they wanted to. You had to live – did live, from habit that became instinct – in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized.

to babble: *blaterare*
contrived: *concepito*
to dim: *abbassare*
dulled: *offuscato*
fruity: *(here) profonda*
guesswork: *congetture, supposizioni*
lift-shaft: *vano ascensore*
nuzzled: *premuta*
pig-iron: *ghisa*
rag mat: *zerbino di panno*
ruggedly: *irregolarmente*
swirl of gritty dust: *turbino di polvere granulosa*
to tack: *appiccicare*



COMPREHENSION


1  Read the text and find the words that describe:

- 1. the weather:
- 2. the hall and the building:
- 3. the physical appearance of Big Brother:
- 4. the size and features of the poster:
- 5. the shape and material of the telescreen:
- 6. what the voice from the telescreen is talking about:

2  Explain in your own words how the telescreen works.


TEXT ANALYSIS


3  The text describes the place where Winston lives. What sensations do you get from it? Support your answers by quoting from the text.

4  Answer the following questions about the protagonist, Winston Smith.

- 1. Winston was the name of a very famous British politician. Who was he and why was he important for Britain?
- 2. Smith is a very common British surname. What, in your opinion, is the reason for the choice of such a name and surname for this character?
- 3. How is Winston described in the text? Do you think he has the physical characteristics of a traditional "hero"?

DISCUSSION

5  **GROUP WORK** Newspeak, the new language invented by the Party, has cancelled some words from common English. Discuss how a lack of words can be a way of controlling people.

6  **GROUP WORK** A worldwide famous TV show is called "Big Brother". Can you guess why? What do you think about the control of media over people today? Share your experiences with the group.

