

George Orwell • 1984

THE AUTHOR

GEORGE ORWELL

George Orwell is the **pen name** of the British author Eric Arthur Blair, born in India in 1903. In 1904 his family moved to England where he attended St. Cyprian's School and later, Eton College. From 1922 to 1927 Orwell served in the administration of the Indian Imperial Police in Burma. He resigned from this job because he wanted to become a writer and because of his political views, critical of British imperialism.

Orwell returned to Europe and lived in England and France doing **poorly paid** jobs. In 1933 he assumed his pseudonym "George", the name of the patron saint of England and "Orwell", the name of the River Orwell, one of his favourite places. Orwell was a socialist and volunteered as a soldier for the United Workers Marxist Party in the Spanish Civil War.

In 1938 Orwell published *Homage to Catalonia*, an account of his experiences and reflections he matured while fighting for the Republican army during the Spanish civil War.

Later, during World War II, he worked as a script writer for the BBC's weekly news commentary on the War.

However, he resigned from this job in 1943 because he was critical about the Allied "official" versions of history.

In 1945 Orwell published *Animal Farm*, his most popular book, an anti-Stalinist allegory, where he described the **betrayal** of the Russian Revolution. In 1946 the author settled on the island of Jura, in Scotland, and wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. This novel was intended as a warning against the dangers of a totalitarian regime whose power was based on the control of people's minds and memories through the use of a restricted language ("newspeak") and the constant alteration of the truth. Many of Orwell's phrases from this book, such as "memory hole", "Big Brother" and "thought police" have now entered the English language. Orwell died from tuberculosis in 1950.



betrayal: *tradimento*
pen name: *pseudonimo*
poorly paid: *mal pagato*

THE NOVEL

1984

The setting of 1984 is a dystopia: an imagined world that is far worse than our own, as opposed to a utopia, which is an ideal place or state. The year is 1984 and the world is divided into great totalitarian systems, always at war with each other. England is ruled by Big Brother, a dictator who is the personification of an oppressive Party that controls everyone's private life through a "telescreen" placed in their homes. The Party controls everything in Oceania, even people's history and language. Currently, the Party is forcing the implementation of an invented language called Newspeak, which **attempts** to prevent political rebellion by eliminating all words related to it. Even thinking rebellious thoughts is illegal. Such thought crime is, in fact, the worst of all crimes, punished by the thought police.

Winston Smith, the protagonist of the novel, is a **low-ranking** member of the ruling Party in London, in the nation of Oceania. He works in the Records Department of the Ministry of Truth; his job is rewriting and distorting history. Winston is determined to remain human under inhuman circumstances, that's why he begins a diary, an act punishable by death, to escape Big Brother's tyranny. Yet telescreens are placed everywhere: in his home, in his cubicle at work, in the cafeteria where he eats, even in the bathroom **stalls**. His every move is watched. No place is safe.

One day, while at the **mandatory** "Two Minutes Hate", Winston catches the eye of an Inner Party Member, O'Brien, whom he believes to be an ally. He also catches the eye of a dark-haired girl from the Fiction

Department, whom he believes is his enemy and wants him destroyed. A few days later, Julia, the dark-haired girl, secretly hands him a note that reads, "I love you." Winston wants to meet her, and when they finally do, they make love and begin a relationship against the Party and Big Brother.

Winston and Julia fall in love, and, while they know that they will someday be caught, they believe that the love and loyalty they feel for each other can never be taken from them, even under the worst circumstances. However, Winston and Julia are discovered some time later by a telescreen. They are **dragged away** and separated. When O'Brien comes, initially Winston believes he has been caught too, but he soon realizes that O'Brien is there to torture him and break his spirit. The Party had been **aware** of Winston's "crimes" all along; in fact, O'Brien has been watching Winston for the past seven years. After months of torture, O'Brien takes Winston to Room 101, the most **dreaded** room of all in the Ministry of Love, the place where prisoners meet their greatest fear, and here Winston renounces his last signs of humanity by betraying Julia.

Winston is now a different man. He sits in the Chestnut Tree Café, watching the telescreens and worrying over the results of daily wars on the front lines. He has seen Julia again. She, too, is changed, seeming older and less attractive. She admits that she also betrayed him. Winston now loves Big Brother.

attempt: *tentativo*
aware: *consapevole*
dragged away: *trascinato via*
dreaded: *temuto*
low-ranking: *di basso rango*
mandatory: *obbligatorio*
stall: *bancarella*



THE TEXT

PART 1, CHAPTER 4

[...] As soon as Winston had dealt with each of the messages, he **clipped** his speak written corrections to the appropriate copy of *The Times* and pushed them into the pneumatic tube. Then, with a movement which was as nearly as possible unconscious, he **crumpled up** the original message and any notes that he himself had made, and dropped them into the memory hole to be devoured by the flames.

What happened in the unseen labyrinth to which the pneumatic tubes led, he did not know in detail, but he did know in general terms. As soon as all the corrections which happened to be necessary in any particular number of *The Times* had been assembled and collated, that number would be reprinted, the original copy destroyed, and the corrected copy placed on the files in its **stead**. This process of continuous alteration was applied not only to newspapers, but to books, periodicals, pamphlets, posters, leaflets, films, sound-tracks, cartoons, photographs -- to every kind of literature or documentation which might conceivably hold any political or ideological significance. Day by day and almost minute by minute the past was brought up **to date**. In this way every prediction made by the Party could be shown by documentary **evidence** to have been correct, nor was any item of news, or any expression of opinion, which conflicted with the needs of the moment, ever allowed to remain on record. [...]

to clip: ritagliare
crumpled up: accartocciato
to date: aggiornare
deed: atto
due: dovuto
evidence: prova
forgery: falsificazione
to get rid of: sbarazzarsi di
reissued: ristampato
scraped: raschiato
stead: posto
superseded: sostituito
uttered: pronunciato



All history was a palimpsest, **scraped** clean and reinscribed exactly as often as was necessary. In no case would it have been possible, once the **deed** was done, to prove that any falsification had taken place. The largest section of the Records Department, far larger than the one on which Winston worked, consisted simply of persons whose duty it was to track down and collect all copies of books, newspapers, and other documents which had been **superseded** and were **due** for destruction. A number of *The Times* which might, because of changes in political alignment, or mistaken prophecies **uttered** by Big Brother, have been rewritten a dozen times still stood on the files bearing its original date, and no other copy existed to contradict it. Books, also, were recalled and rewritten again and again, and were invariably **reissued** without any admission that any alteration had been made. Even the written instructions which Winston received, and which he invariably **got rid of** as soon as he had dealt with them, never stated or implied that an act of **forgery** was to be committed: always the reference was to slips, errors, misprints, or misquotations which it was necessary to put right in the interests of accuracy.

COMPREHENSION

1  Choose the word from the text that corresponds to the definition.1st paragraph

1. A cylinder of metal or plastic sealed at one end used for conveying or containing small items:

.....

2. The mental capacity of retaining and reviving facts, events, impressions, or of recalling previous experiences:

.....

2nd paragraph

3. A complicated irregular network of passages or paths in which it is difficult to find one's way:

.....

4. The action or process of modifying or being modified:

.....

5. Placards or bills in a public place, as for advertising:

.....

6. Pictures produced by a camera:

.....


3rd paragraph

7. A manuscript on which the original writing has been deleted to make room for later writing but of which traces remain:.....

8. The action of changing correct information into incorrect:

9. To find by tracking or pursuing:

10. The quality or state of being correct or precise:

2  Choose T if the sentence corresponds to the content of the passage, F if it doesn't. Indicate the lines in the text that correct the incorrect sentences.

1. When Winston destroys each original text, he is aware of what he is doing.

T F

2. He is working at re-writing some news in *The Times*.

3. Winston knew what happened to the texts he sent along the pneumatic tube.

4. This alteration process was just reserved to *The Times*.

5. Winston's alterations made every prophecy ever made by the Party correct.

6. When necessary, history was rewritten.

7. Winston was the only one working at destroying copies of books and newspapers at the Record Department.

8. Winston was given only oral instructions to perform his job.


ANALYSIS

3  Choose the best option.

1. The first lines introduce...
 - a. Winston's job tasks.
 - b. Winston's life.
 - c. Winston's workplace.
2. Newspapers were continuously reprinted because...
 - a. news was always changing.
 - b. there had to be no traces left of old versions of the stories.
 - c. the Party had to occupy people's time.
3. The alteration and falsification procedure was reserved to...
 - a. all newspapers.
 - b. all entertainment literature.
 - c. all kind of documents containing political ideas.
4. The job of the many people working at the Record Department was...
 - a. to alter every document according to the Party's wishes.
 - b. to destroy every political document.
 - c. to read all newspapers and books to find any mistakes.
5. Big Brother's incorrect political sentences or prophecies are...
 - a. destroyed and rewritten.
 - b. stored for future reference.
 - c. quoted in newspapers.

4  Answer the questions.

1. What does Winston's job consist in?
2. What happens to the original copies of *The Times* once Winston has corrected them?
3. What kinds of documents and publications are usually changed or re-written?
4. Why are all publications changed in this way?
5. How often is the past brought up to date?

5  According to Orwell, politics, power and the use of mass media are inextricably connected. Do you think this is still relevant today? Why or why not?

DISCUSSION

6  **GROUP WORK** Read this short text and answer the questions.

In 1949, George Orwell wrote of a future where a global despotic power controlled the people of Oceania with surveillance and propaganda. This was *1984*. It depicted a dark future where information and propaganda would rule people and where technology existed in the public realm only as a tool for the elite to control society. But while the book is a work of dystopian fiction, some of his concerns and predictions related to information manipulation, fake news, and the creation of fake influencers are very relevant issues in our society.



1. Can information be manipulated? Can you think of some examples?
2. What is your opinion about news presented differently in different newspapers?
3. Have you recently been witness to any fake news? How has it been spread?
4. Have you ever seen any famous films dealing with this topic?