

# Penguin Readers Factsheets

## Teacher's Notes

## 1984

By George Orwell



Level 4 – Intermediate 1984

### Summary

Winston Smith lives in an imaginary future where the government ('Big Brother') watches and controls the actions and thoughts of all citizens. He lives in London – a dirty city destroyed by an on-going war. There is no good housing or food for ordinary citizens and things that break down are rarely repaired. Winston works for the Ministry of Truth where he rewrites facts about history and politics. The Ministry uses this propaganda to brainwash its citizens and prevent any criticism. But Winston is different from the people around him: he is still able to think for himself. He instinctively hates the system under which he is forced to live and he is desperate to express his own opinions and feelings.

Winston starts a relationship with an attractive young woman, Julia, who also works at the Ministry. In a world where sexual love is not allowed, their relationship is as much an act against the party as it is an expression of emotion. They rent a room above a shop where they believe nobody can see them and their relationship develops.

O'Brien, an Inner-Party member from the Ministry, invites Winston to his home and tells him about the 'Brotherhood', an anti-governmental organization lead by Emmanuel Goldstein. O'Brien invites Winston and Julia to become members and to join in a larger fight against Big Brother. But when Julia and Winston are reading Goldstein's book in their room they are caught by the Thought Police, taken away and separated.

Winston wakes up in prison. O'Brien visits him, and Winston realizes that he has been tricked and betrayed. O'Brien tortures Winston systematically and he is forced to confess to crimes he has not done. Finally, he begs O'Brien to kill Julia rather than himself. His abilities to think independently or to feel genuine emotion are completely eroded – he loves Big Brother.

### About George Orwell

George Orwell was born in India into a middle-class English family in 1903. He went to private school in England where he learnt to distrust the British class system, and in 1922 he started work as a policeman in Burma. In 1927 Orwell returned to Europe, choosing to live among the poorest people in order to challenge his own middle-class viewpoint. He wrote *Down and Out in Paris and London* about his experiences. From this point Orwell became a passionate supporter of socialist ideals and his politics is strongly represented in everything that he wrote.

In 1936 Orwell went to Spain to report on the Spanish Civil War. He joined forces against General Franco's Fascist rebellion. He wrote about his experiences and his hope for the future of Spanish socialism in *Homage to Catalonia* (1938).

Orwell worked as a reporter during the Second World War (1939–45). In 1943 he started writing *Animal Farm*, his celebrated political satire about the communist regime in Russia. He wrote his other world-famous masterpiece, *1984* in 1948–49 and died only a year later.

### Background and themes

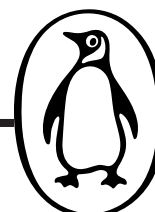
*1984* was written shortly after the end of the Second World War, when many European countries were establishing new political systems. Orwell was a socialist, believing strongly that individuals should be treated fairly and equally by their governments. However, his in-depth knowledge of European history and contemporary politics meant he was aware that socialist ideals were not easily put into practice.

In *1984* Orwell shows how and why a government can become all-powerful and all individual freedom completely eroded. As Goldstein's book explains (Chapter 8), absolute equality in society is impossible. There will always be different social classes, and it is human nature for humans to exert power over weaker people.

One way in which the government maintain and strengthen their power is manipulating language. Just as clever advertising slogans and political messages might persuade us today, Big Brother uses language to plant new ideas in peoples' minds and erase old ones. As Syme explains in Chapter 3, if a word like 'freedom' does not exist, then the whole idea of freedom also ceases to exist. Orwell stresses this point by inventing a whole new language, 'Newspeak' for *1984*.

Similarly, Orwell exemplifies the importance of historical documentation. If an event is not documented it ceases to exist in the present. But it is only by understanding the past that we can judge and make informed decisions about our future. At the ironically named Ministry of Truth, Winston and his colleagues work on re-writing and erasing history so that citizens remain ignorant and the Party is always in the right. Winston records history by writing in his diary too – itself an act of rebellion.

When all else fails, the Party maintains power by using brute force. Those who do not conform are killed ('vaporized') or tortured until fear prevents them from opposing the government in any way. Orwell's experiences in Spain exposed him to human brutality of



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the worst kind. *1984* warns us that ignoring the violent side of human nature can cost us our individual freedom.

In *1984* difficult political ideas are expressed in a very simple and elegant style. Almost all the language associated with the Party is extremely ironic (Big Brother is a cruel tyrant, not a loving, protecting friend; the Ministry of Truth manufactures lies; and the Ministry of Love tortures, kills and destroys). Similarly, the contradictory Party slogans reflect the inherent absurdity of the Party policy itself (War is Peace; Freedom is Slavery; Ignorance is Strength).

Essentially, *1984* is about the balance between personal liberty and social order. It is a warning of what *could* happen under a government that takes more and more responsibility for social order upon itself.

## Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the reader, and supplement those exercises. Further supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book can be found on the photocopiable Student's Activities pages of the Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers, but with the exception of pair/group work questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

### ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

*1984* was published soon after the end of the Second World War in Europe. It is a story about an imaginary world in the future. Ask students what they know about the Second World War. In what ways was life difficult in European cities after the war? How did people feel about politics in Europe at this time in history? Did they feel confident about the future?

### ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

#### Chapters 1–3

Students work in small groups. They work for the Ministry of Truth in the dictionary section. Ask them to define the following words for the new eleventh edition of the dictionary:

*the Brotherhood facecrime minitruie prole telescreen thoughtcrime unperson vaporize*

#### Chapters 4–6

Students write Winston's diary about his experiences with Julia (covered in Chapters 5 and 6). How does he feel before he meets Julia and how does he feel afterwards? How do his opinions of Julia, sex and love change during this time? How has Winston changed from his last diary entry, in Chapter 4?

#### Chapters 7–9

Students write a report by O'Brien for the Inner Party. The report is about Winston and Julia at the beginning of Chapter 7. As O'Brien, they should explain why Winston and Julia are dangerous. The report should explain O'Brien's plan for catching Winston and Julia and his plans for their futures.

#### Chapters 10–12

Students work individually or in groups. Across the top of a piece of paper they write 'learning', 'understanding' and 'acceptance'. Now ask them to read the first paragraph of Chapter 11. Under each word students write what it means in the context of *1984*. How does O'Brien put each of these three stages into effect?

### ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

- 1 Ask students to look at the book's front cover. What does it tell you about the book? Is it a good cover? Why/why not? In groups, students think of a different cover design for the book. Finally, one student from each group draws their cover on the board and the other members explain the ideas behind the design.
- 2 Much of the language in *1984* is ironic. Ask students to explain the irony of the name 'Big Brother'. Students then choose three more ironic words or phrases and explain them in a similar way.
- 3 Ask students to change the chapter headings in the book. They should choose short, clear titles which reflect the meaning and content of the chapter they describe. Finally, choose some good examples from the class and write them on the board. Students look at the board and guess which chapters are which.

## Glossary

### Chapters 1–3

**brotherhood** (n) a group of people who believe the same things about something

**canteen** (n) place in a school or office where people eat and drink

**comrade** (n) a friend – especially in the same army/political party as you

**edition** (n) the copies of a book or newspaper that are all the same

**freedom** (n) living your life freely, as you want to

**gin** (n) strong clear alcoholic drink

**hang** (v) to kill someone by dropping them with a rope round their neck

**ignorance** (n) having no knowledge or information about something

**league** (n) a group of people or organizations that join together because they have similar ideas

**mansion** (n) very big and expensive house

**ministry** (n) a government section/department

**overalls** (n) clothes that cover the whole body

**party** (n) a group of politicians with the same ideas

**poster** (n) a large picture, usually in a public place

**razor blade** (n) small, flat, sharp piece of metal for removing hair

**slavery** (n) using people to work for no money

**slogan** (n) short, clever sentence – usually used by politicians and businesses to sell ideas or things

**sweat** (n) liquid that comes through your skin when you are hot

**truth** (n) true facts about something

**victory** (n) when a player/party/army wins a game/war etc

### Chapters 4–6

**betray** (v) to do something that hurts someone who loves and trusts you

**vaporize** (v) to turn something into gas (to make it disappear)

### Chapters 7–9

**article** (n) piece of writing in a newspaper or magazine

**cell** (n) room in a prison

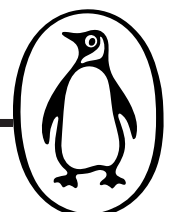
**individual** (n) single, separate from the rest of a group

### Chapters 10–12

**dial** (n) part of a machine that you turn to make it work

**lever** (n) part of a machine that you push or pull to make it work

**stamp** (v) to step on something very heavily

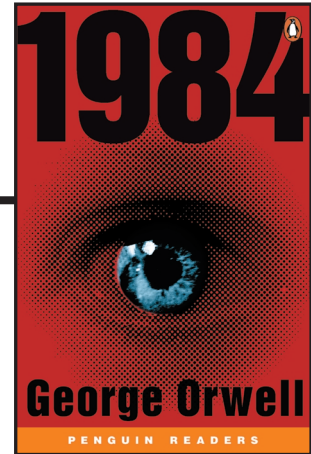


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## Student's activities

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Level 4 – Intermediate 1984 Photocopiable

These activities can be done alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only activities are marked.

### ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

*1984* is a book about power and freedom. What power does your country's government have over individual people? What freedoms do individual people have? Do you agree with this balance? Why/why not?

### ACTIVITIES WHILE READING THE BOOK

#### Chapter 1

- How does Winston feel about
  - the *telescreen* in his room?
  - writing a diary?
  - the girl with thick, dark hair?
  - O'Brien?
  - the future?
- How does Orwell tell the reader that this story takes place in the future? Make a list of words and sentences.

#### Chapter 2

- Answer these questions:
  - Why isn't Tom Parsons at home?
  - How does Winston repair the sink?
  - How often does the government hang Eurasian prisoners?
  - How many bombs fall on London every week?
  - Why does Winston feel pain in the back of his neck?
- What is London like in *1984*? Write a few sentences to describe the city.

#### Chapter 3

- Use one of these words to finish the sentences (a)–(e) below. carefully clearly intelligent noisy openly proud
  - The canteen is full of people and very \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Winston thinks that Syme will be vaporized because he's too \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Syme sees too \_\_\_\_\_ and speaks too \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Parsons writes very \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Parsons is \_\_\_\_\_ of his children.
- The Ministry of Truth uses the media to control people's ideas. How does it do this?

#### Chapter 4

- When do these things happen? Put them in the right order (1–6) starting with the thing that happened first (1).
  - Winston married Katherine and lived with her.
  - Winston sees the girl with the dark hair again.
  - Winston's parents were vaporized.

- Winston visits Charrington and looks at the room above the shop.
- Winston paid a prole woman for sex.
- Winston bought a diary from Charrington.

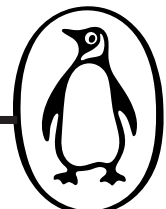
- Winston thinks about some of the women he has known at the beginning of this chapter. How does he feel about them, do you think. Does he love any of them?

#### Chapter 5

- Match the first half of the sentences (a)–(g) with the second half (i)–(vii)
  - As Winston helped Julia up
  - In the afternoon Winston looked at the words *I love you* again and
  - With the crowd still around them, Julia's hand touched Winston's –
  - It's easier to get good chocolate if
  - Julia saw something in Winston's face and
  - Julia says she is good at finding people
  - Winston and Julia's love is
  - though they did not dare look at each other.
  - thought she'd take a chance.
  - who don't belong.
  - life seemed better.
  - she put a note in his hand.
  - a political act.
  - you seem to be a good Party member.
- In your own words explain how Winston's feelings towards Julia change in this chapter.

#### Chapter 6

- Read the sentences (a)–(e) below. They are all about Julia. Which sentences are true and which are false? Write T for true and F for false next to each sentence.
  - She likes reading and she is interested in books.
  - She has bought real sugar, bread, jam, coffee and tea for her and Winston.
  - She puts on make-up and a pretty dress for Winston.
  - She sings a song with deep feeling for Winston.
  - She loves Winston.
- Julia says 'They can make you say anything ... but they can't make you believe it.' Who are 'they'? Is Julia right do you think? Can anyone or anything make you change your feelings and beliefs?



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## Student's activities

### Chapter 7

- Who are these people? Write the correct name.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ is afraid of the guards in O'Brien's building.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ thinks that everybody secretly hates the Party.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ invites Winston to his home.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ enjoys organizing Hate Week.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ does not come to work because he has been vaporized.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ is the leader of the Brotherhood.
- What things are Julia and Winston willing to do for the Brotherhood? What are they not willing to do?

### Chapter 8

- Put these numbers in the correct sentences below. Change the figures to words.

5	6	6th	18	20th	85%
90	2000	1930s	6,000,000		

  - In the last \_\_\_\_\_ days of Hate Week Winston worked more than \_\_\_\_\_ hours.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ people were hanged in the park just after the \_\_\_\_\_ day of Hate Week.
  - The clock's hands said six, meaning \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Winston has Goldstein's book for \_\_\_\_\_ days before he reads it.
  - In the \_\_\_\_\_ the High group tried to stop equality.
  - In the \_\_\_\_\_ century equality became possible for the first time.
  - There are \_\_\_\_\_ people in the Inner Party.
  - The proles make up about \_\_\_\_\_ of the Party.
- In your own words explain *blackwhite*, *crimestop* and *doublethink*.

### Chapter 9

- Who says these sentences? What are they talking about?
  - 'We shall meet in the place where there is no dark.'
  - 'There was no other word. So I left it.'
  - 'Of course I'm guilty!'
  - 'Uncover your face.'
  - 'You don't have to take me to that place!'
  - 'They got me a long time ago.'
- Describe *Miniluv* in your own words. What does it look like? What can you hear? What can you smell?

### Chapter 10

- Answer these questions:
  - Why does Winston tell the guards what they want to know before they touch him?
  - How long do the Party men ask questions before Winston can sleep?
  - What did Winston write in his diary?
  - Why does the Party bring people to the Ministry of Love?
  - What has happened to Julia?
  - What is the first question that Winston asks?
  - What is the first question that Winston thinks of?
- What is in Room 101 do you think?

### Chapter 11

- Finish these sentences in your own words.
  - The proles will never attack the Party because ...
  - The Party is ruling because ...
  - One man shows power over another by ...
  - Winston hears two voices because ...
  - O'Brien tells Winston to look in the mirror because ...
  - When Winston looks in the mirror he feels...
- Winston says 'If a society were built on hate, it would fall to pieces.' Do you agree? Why/why not?

### Chapter 12

- Read this paragraph about Chapter 12. There are ten wrong words. Circle the wrong words and write the correct word instead.

Winston has moved to a more uncomfortable cell. He eats meat three times a day and he is getting fatter and stronger every day. O'Brien takes Winston to Room 101 because he must love Big Brother. On the floor there is a big metal box full of rats – the worst thing in the world for Winston. O'Brien puts the narrow end of the tube over Winston's face and Winston can see the first rat. So Winston protects Julia. Finally, Winston sits in the Chestnut Tree Café and drinks some coffee. He has met Julia again, in a café on a warm day in March, but he only cares about himself now. He loves Big Brother.
- Room 101 is different for everyone. What is in *your* Room 101?

### ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

- Write a different ending for the story. Winston does not betray Julia. What happens?
- Look at the pictures in the book. Use them to write a summary of the book in your own words.
- Do you think that a future like *1984* could happen? Why/why not?

