

# 1984 by George Orwell

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### 1 Author

George Orwell is the pseudonym of Eric Arthur Blair (\* 1903 † 1950), who is well-known for his works concerning social injustice and totalitarianism.

Eric described his family as "lower-upper-middle-class". In his unhappy time at school, he wrote the book "Such, Such Were the Joys", which documentates his childhood at school. Because of his great marks, he could attend the Eton college. At this time, he got in touch with several publisher and editors. After college he joined the Indian Imperial Police in Burma. But he gave up his job and as a result he lived as a homeless person in England. In 1929 he got seriously ill and in 1936 he had too less money to buy wedding rings for his wife Eileen. During the Spanish Civil War he fought for the Marxist Unification, but returned after a while because of his wounds. Somebody shot him through his neck. He wrote reports about his experiences and some of his colleagues did not return from that War. Because he was suffering from tuberculosis he did not participate in World War, the second.

In 1941 he was taken on full time by the BBC's Eastern Service. There he got in touch with english, german and russian propaganda. But some of his work was censored. Even though he could recover his health and earned a lot of money, he didn't accept the censorship and so he quit his job. Another reason for his resignation was his work on "The Animal Farm". Now he worked as a war correspondent. His wife Eileen had not

given much notice about her hysterectomy operation because of worries about the costs. But she died in 1945 during the operation. Eric returned from the USA too late and after her death he published "The Animal Farm" five years before his own death and he got famous for a book the first time. Now it was no longer a problem for him to work as a journalist for political and literary magazines. He continued to write different novels and essays.

In 1949 he published his second important novel "1984". This novel had an significant impact on the society. "1984" is a wordplay on the year 1948. 1984 is not such a distant future. Another important thing is Newspeak. Newspeak is the language of Oceania in "1984" and its vocabulary is often used to blame the other in political discussions. Eric also defined several notes, which are nowadays used to analyse totalitarian systems.

In 1950 Eric died of tuberculosis he suffered from a long time of his life.

## 2 1984

Winston Smith is the protagonist and works for the Ministry of Truth in Oceania. The story consists of three parts. The first one describes the world. Oceania is the fictional world Winston Smith lives in and is one of the three totalitarian super-states. Oceania is fighting against the two other super-states, but in the book sometimes a super-state is an enemy, sometimes an ally. However... the people have to accept their destiny, because they know they are in war and the INGSOC ("English Socialism") is not able to increase their level of living. But basically the people don't really know the truth. Maybe the rockets targeting Oceania are fired off by the INGSOC themselves, but that would be criminal thought... a "thought crime". So the people are not allowed to think about it, because they have to fear the execution of the "Thought Police". The head of Oceania is "Big Brother", a man who appears on all the posters on the wall. The caption says "Big Brother is watching you".

However... Winston is surrounded by telescreens all the time. They are recording whatever he does and at the same time it can send information to the people. Only one little alcove behind the telescreen in his room allows him to make notes in a notebook. On that day he writes down the famous phrase "April 4th, 1984". In his notes he describes his life and feelings like in a diary.

At work he has to revise historical records and censor them, so they conform the real history; defined by The Party. But Winston is a weak person and can't accept The Party's rules any longer. One day a woman hands him a note in an unremarkable way (so that Big Brother does not recognize it). In secret they start a romantic relationship. Winston chats with a shop owner and after a while the shop owner shows Winston a room without a telescreen. Winston accepts the shop owner's offer and Winston leases it. Winston bought it for his relationship with Julia. According to Big Brother sex is a crime (so-called "sexcrime") if it is for love and not for reproduction of The Party. Julia

and Winston think themselves alone and safe.

As their romance deepens, Winston's views change, and he questions Ingsoc. He believes that he has got in touch with The Brotherhood, which are opponents of The Party. But Winston has to accept that each person he meets, can be an agent of the Thought Police. So he is not able to talk to anybody about it. He does not even know if there are opponents of The Party. On telescreens they only show the execution of the proletarians each day. For 2 minutes each day the people are manipulated by The Hate for 2 minutes. The Hate tries to show the people how bad Oceania's opponents are and what beautiful place Oceania is. O'Brien – a member of the Inner Party – gives him a copy of The Book ("The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism" by Emmanuel Goldstein). The Book is a criticism of INGSOC and so it is forbidden. But Winston does not know who the author Emmanuel Goldstein is. Maybe it is The Party itself. He is also afraid of O'Brien because O'Brien now knows, that Winston is interested in such literature. After a few days Winston and Julia are captured in their bedroom. The shop owner is an officer of the Thought Police and so the Thought Police was able to spy all of Winston's and Julia's activities with a tiny camera behind a picture on the wall. Winston wakes up in the Ministry of Love ("miniluv"), where all The Party's opponents are tortured and killed. In Miniluv he discovers the aims of The Party. The Party wants to outline anything which may come between one's love of INGSOC or Big Brother. Miniluv wants to alter his way of thinking. He has to accept reality as The Party describes it unquestioningly. After that he will be executed.

Room 101 is the worst place in the world. For example Winston hates rats. So they put several rats into a small cage, which fits over Winston's face like a mask. A few seconds before they open the last door before his face, he shouts "Do it to Julia!". This was the sign, that his heart has broken up with Julia. Now he has to be brainwashed. Bonded on a rack (torture device, Streckbank in German) he has to accept that  $2 + 2$  can be 4 or 5; or even both at the same time ("doublethink"). The Party can define as they would like to.

Now he returns to society and meets Julia in a park again. But because of the manipulation he distastes her now (Julia does also). He seems to be happy about the fact, that he got separated from her by The Party. That's the first time he loves Big Brother. . . The book ends with the phrase "He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother"

### 3 1984: interpretation

George Orwell loved to documentate his thoughts on his essays. In a separate essay "Why I write" (1947) he made a link between his essays and his hate for imperialism. He believed in socialism and wanted to warn society against totalitarianism. It's well-known that 1984 is based on his experiences in the Spanish Civil War. With 1984 he created a new sort of science fiction.

Newspeak is a politicised and obfuscatory language designed to make independent thought impossible. So "thoughtcrime" will get impossible when using this language. It is a critical satire on Simple English; a reduced form of English vocabulary and grammar. In 1984 Orwell included an appendix, which explains "the principles of Newspeak". The normal English language is called Oldspeak in Orwells novel. There are different versions of Newspeak and it is expected to replace Oldspeak with Newspeak until 2050 in all historical documents and common language. George Orwell himself tried to use a very simple form of English in his novels. He abolishes all kinds of figures of speech, uses the shortest word to express things and prefers the passive voice (as described in "Politics and the English Language" 1946).

Some vocabulary of Newspeak is well-known. "Big Brother" became a synonym for security cameras and the name of the TV show "Big Brother" is based on that term. The terms "thoughtcrime" and "Thought Police" are simply references to the right of free expression of opinions, we will lose in a surveillance society. "Doublethink" is a term describing the way to accept two opinions as the truth at the same time. For example Winston had to accept 2 plus 2 is 4 and 5 at the same time. The superlatif of good is plusgood and doublegood. Goodsex is any form of sexual contact considered acceptable by the Party and according to the Party sex is only for reproduction of the Party.

There are a lot of important quotes:

- Big Brother is watching you
- It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen
- War is Peace, Freedom is slavery, Ignorance is Strength
- $2 + 2 = 5$
- He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother