

ANIMAL FARM

BY GEORGE ORWELL



Animal Farm is an allegorical novel from which the reader can learn a good deal about leadership. The leadership portrayed in *Animal Farm* could have benefited all, but benefited only the "leaders."

Why?

I don't know about you, but I always want to know why? when it comes to an author's intention for writing a story. Russell Baker, the author of the preface to *Animal Farm* and a George Orwell scholar, wrote the following:

"An attack on the myth of Soviet communism, *Animal Farm* became one of the century's most devastating literary acts of political destruction."

Wowza. Literature as a vehicle for political comment and change? You bet!

Baker also wrote that "*Animal Farm* is a political tract, a satire on human folly, a loud hee-haw at all who yearn for Utopia, an allegorical lesson, and a pretty good fable in the Aesop tradition. Orwell insisted on the truth when the truth was inconvenient."

Does this remind you of anything that you have read in the past?

George Orwell wrote *Animal Farm* as his warning to readers that unless we change the course of history and find or create good leaders, we will lose the freedoms we take for granted. Orwell wrote *Animal Farm* as a piece of satire - the use of ridicule, irony, and/or sarcasm and humor to expose and attack evil and human voices.

Orwell Stats

- **Eric Blair was born in 1903 in Motihari, Bengal, in the then British colony of India where his father worked**
- **His mother, Ida, brought him to England at the age of one.**
- **He did not see his father again until 1907, when Richard visited England for three months before leaving again until 1912 (he did not have a traditional English childhood).**
- **Eric had an older sister and a younger sister**
- **With his characteristic humor, he would later describe his family's background as "lower-upper-middle class."**

- **At age five, Blair was sent to a small Anglican parish school in England**
- **Two years later he was recommended to one of the most successful preparatory schools in England**
- **After a term at Wellington, Eric moved to Eton, where he was a King's Scholar from 1917 to 1921.**
- **After finishing his studies at Eton, having no prospect of gaining a university scholarship, Eric joined the Indian Imperial Police in Burma.**
- **He resigned and returned to England in 1928 having grown to hate imperialism.**

- He adopted his pen name in 1933. He chose a pen name that stressed his deep, lifelong affection for the English tradition and countryside: George is the patron saint of England (and George V was monarch at the time), while the River Orwell in Suffolk was one of his most beloved English sites.
- Orwell lived for several years in poverty, sometimes homeless, sometimes doing itinerant work, as he recalled in the book *Down and Out in Paris and London*.

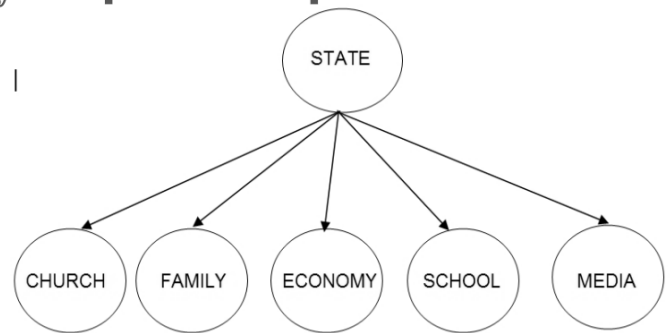
- Orwell began supporting himself by writing book reviews for the *New English Weekly* until 1940.
- During World War II he was a member of the Home Guard and in 1941 began work for the BBC Eastern Service, mostly working on programs to gain East Asian support for Britain's war efforts.
- He was well aware that he was shaping propaganda, and wrote that he felt like "an orange that's been trodden on by a very dirty boot."
- Despite the good pay, he resigned in 1943 to become literary editor of *Tribune*, the left-wing newspaper.

- In 1944 Orwell finished his anti-Stalinist allegory *Animal Farm*, which was published the following year with great critical and popular success.
- The royalties from *Animal Farm* provided Orwell with a comfortable income for the first time in his adult life.
- From 1945 Orwell was the *Observer's* war correspondent and later contributed regularly to the *Manchester Evening News*.
- In 1949 his best-known work, the dystopian *1984*, was published.

Now let's talk politics...

**What do you already know about
Totalitarianism?**

Totalitarianism is a term employed by political scientists to describe modern regimes in which the state regulates nearly every aspect of public and private behavior.



- **These regimes mobilize entire populations in support of the state and political ideology, and do not tolerate activities by individuals or groups**
- **They stay in power through using secret police, propaganda delivered through state-controlled mass media, restriction of free discussion and criticism, and widespread use of terror tactics.**

What do you know about Socialism?

Socialism is an ideology with the core belief that a society should exist in which popular collectives control the means of power, and therefore the means of production.

- **strongly related to the establishment of an organized working class**
- **created through revolution or social evolution**
- **purpose is to build a classless society**
- **Marxism and communism are both branches of socialism**



What do you know about Communism?

Communism refers to a theoretical system of social organization and a political movement based on common ownership of the means of production.

- **seeks to establish a classless society**
- ***The Communist Manifesto* of Karl Marx (the capitalist profit-based system of private ownership is replaced by a communist society in which the means of production are communally owned)**
- **pure communism has never been implemented**



Now that we have a handle on the political background of this novel, let's focus on the literary genre: allegory.

What is an allegory?

In the most basic sense of the word, an allegory is an extended metaphor comparing two unlike things with the purpose of making a point.

But wait, there's more...

Here are some grown up definitions:

"An allegory is the presentation of an abstract idea through more concrete means. It often has two levels of meaning."

"An allegory is a metaphorical narrative in prose in which the characters and parts of the narrative represent moral and spiritual values."

Purpose:

- **to entertain with a story**
- **to bring attention to an issue of moral, political, philosophical, or religious significance**

Forms and Features:

Two levels of meaning:

- surface level story line
- deeper level of meaning which may be moral, political, philosophical, or religious

Two categories:

- *political and historical allegory* - the characters, setting, or actions match the historical people, places, and events
- *allegory of abstract themes* - characters stand for ideas or abstract qualities

Here are some examples of allegories...

- **Avatar**

"There are obvious layers of allegory in *Avatar*. The Pandora woods is a lot like the Amazon rainforest, and the attempt to get the Na'vi to 'cooperate' carries overtones of the U.S. involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan."

- Owen Gleiberman, *Entertainment Weekly*, 12/30/09



- *The Chronicles of Narnia*

The Chronicles of Narnia is a strong allegory of the Christian religion. The character, Aslan, is an allegory for Jesus Christ, and the stories in the series are an allegory for Jesus's death and resurrection.



This is the painting *Primavera*. It is a tempera panel painting by Italian Renaissance artist Sandro Botticelli painted in 1482.

How is this painting an allegory?

