

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

1984

by George Orwell

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1984

BOOK ONE

Chapter I

Note: Written in 1949, this novel is Orwell's vision of the future. Before reading *1984*, it is important for students to understand the political atmosphere of the time. World War II had just ended. The true horrors of the holocaust and Hitler's Germany had just been revealed to the world. Although Orwell believed in socialized medicine and other community help programs, he was concerned that Communist and Fascist ideas may invade England. *1984* points out the evils of absolute government and totalitarianism.

As students read this novel, they may want to reflect on the extent to which Orwell accurately predicts life in the future.

1. The telescreen in Winston's apartment can be dimmed but never completely turned off. In addition, "the telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously." Everything Winston says or does can be viewed by the Thought Police. Winston is never sure that he is being watched, but he knows that it is always a possibility.

To what extent has Orwell's vision of the telescreen, which invades the privacy of Winston's home, become a reality in our modern homes?

2. The sentence, "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU," has become a part of our modern language. What does it mean to you? Explain a situation in which you used those words in a conversation with a friend.

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3. The three Party slogans on the side of the building are paradoxes.

“WAR IS PEACE
FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH”

A paradox is a statement that on the surface seems to be self-contradictory but in another sense may be true. Write a dialogue between yourself and another student discussing in what sense each of these statements may be true. A dialogue for the slogan WAR IS PEACE might begin as follows.

Friend: Peace means not to fight, so how can war be peace?

You: Maybe making war on another country helps to bring the people together.

4. The ministry names, The Ministry of Truth, The Ministry of Peace, The Ministry of Love, and The Ministry of Plenty, are ironic. For example, The Ministry of Peace concerns itself with war. It is interesting to watch for examples of irony and humor in this story and to recognize that these literary devices are part of Orwell’s writing style.

In the following excerpt, Orwell describes the Ministry of Love. The description is ironic and darkly humorous. Using this description as an example, write a similar description of your classroom ironically titled “The Room of Learning.”

“The Ministry of Love was the really frightening one. There were no windows in it at all. Winston had never been inside the Ministry of Love, nor within half a kilometer of it. It was a place impossible to enter except on official business, and then only by penetrating through a maze of barbed-wire entanglements, steel doors, and hidden machine-gun nests. Even the streets leading up to its outer barriers were roamed by gorilla-faced guards in black uniforms, armed with jointed truncheons.”

5. Winston knows that “if detected it was reasonably certain that it [owning the diary] would be punished by death, or at least by twenty-five years in a forced-labor camp.” Knowing the danger, he purchases the diary because he “had been stricken immediately by an overwhelming desire to possess it.”

Write about a time that you may have done something impulsively that you knew to be dangerous.

6. Winston writes in the diary about the films he saw the night before. At the films, the audience applauds at the sight of a child’s dismembered arm going up into the air. Some critics believe the audience and Winston have been conditioned to accept this kind of violence from constant exposure to violent images. Do you think today’s movies have desensitized their audience, so they accept and expect to see brutal violence? Write about a movie you have seen or read about to support your answer.

7. While preparing for the Two Minutes Hate, Winston notices a young woman. He “disliked her from the very first moment of seeing her.” His opinion of the girl is based totally on her appearance and his perception of what her appearance says about her character.

By the way O’Brien adjusts his glasses and looks, Winston concludes that O’Brien is an intelligent man with whom he would enjoy talking. Have you even felt this way about someone you have never met, but seen in passing? Write a letter to Winston warning him of the dangers of judging someone’s character based on his or her appearance. Use experiences from your life to illustrate your points.

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8. The Two Minutes Hate is a way for the government to focus the hostility and hate of the people onto one person. The people become unified and, instead of dwelling on their own lives and problems, come together to hate “Emmanuel Goldstein, the Enemy of the People.”

There are many ways for people to come together and unite in their feelings. This can happen at an important sporting event, a rock concert, a political rally, etc. Write about an experience you have had, read about, or know about when a group unites or pulls together because of a shared emotion.

9. After the Two Minutes Hate, the face of Big Brother appears on the screen to break the spell of hate. The entire group of people, who a few seconds earlier were engaged in feelings of hate, chants “B-B!...B-B!” over and over. Orwell describes the chant in the following excerpt.

“It was a refrain that was often heard in moments of overwhelming emotion. Partly it was a sort of hymn to the wisdom and majesty of Big Brother, but still more it was an act of self-hypnosis, a deliberate drowning of consciousness by means of rhythmic noise.”

Write about a time you may have experienced a kind of self-hypnosis similar to that described in the novel. (Hint: Consider how you feel at a revival meeting, listening to loud music, chanting cheers at a football game, etc.)

10. People accused of Thoughtcrime disappear. “Your name was removed from the registers, every record of everything you had ever done was wiped out, your one-time existence was denied and then forgotten.”

In what sense is the punishment for Thoughtcrime worse than death? Why do you think Winston is willing to risk nonexistence?

Chapter II

11. Winston does not like children. He comments that,
- “It was almost normal for people over thirty to be frightened of their own children. And with good reason, for hardly a week passed in which the *Times* did not carry a paragraph describing how some eavesdropping little sneak – “child hero” was the phrase generally used – had overheard some compromising remark and denounced his parents to the Thought Police.”

Do you think anything like this can or does happen today? Why or why not? (Hint: Consider the cases of children who are forced to testify against their parents in child custody or child abuse cases.)

12. Winston hears an announcement on the telescreen proclaiming a great military victory and immediately knows that bad news is coming. The propaganda about the “glorious victory” does not fool Winston.

Think about the television news programs constantly broadcast nationwide. Do you believe that the news is sometimes presented in such a way as to sway or influence your opinion? Discuss your impressions of the television news. In your opinion, is the news reliable and impartial?

13. As a greeting to anyone who might read his diary, Winston writes,
- “To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone – to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone:
From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of double think – greetings!”

Rewrite this greeting as if you are writing a diary that will be read five hundred years in the future. Consider the following as you write. Winston sees the future as a time when “men are different from one another and do not live alone.” How do you envision the future? Winston refers to his time as the age of uniformity, solitude, Big Brother, and double think. How would you characterize the age you are living in?