

USEFUL VOCABULARY

Throughout the twentieth century, the country that initially called itself the Russian Empire changed its name two more times. A brief explanation follows.

WHAT WAS RUSSIA CALLED?

The country that today we call Russia was once known as the **Russian Empire**, ruled by Tsar Nicholas II from 1896. Then, in 1917, there were two revolutions.

Following the February revolution, the Provisional Government of mainly capitalists and the aristocracy replaced the tsar, who abdicated. With the October revolution, the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, seized control and overthrew the Provisional Government. Between 1922-1991, the Russian Empire became the **Soviet Union**, or **USSR** (Union of Soviet Socialist Republic), and it expanded to fifteen states. The Soviet Union was dissolved 1991 and is now known as **Russia**.

The people who fought for a communist Russia were called **Bolsheviks**; they were members of the Russian Social Democratic Party. Their revolutionary **Red Army**, sometimes called the Reds, was established after the October 1917 Revolution (also called Red October), and it consisted of workers and peasants. In contrast, the **White Army** (or the Whites) was anti-Bolshevik.

In your exam, if you are discussing the farm under the ownership of Mr Jones at the beginning of the novella and want to talk about context, reference the Russian Empire. Once the animals seize control, reference the Soviet Union (or the USSR).

POLITICAL WORDS

With the changing political climate of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, there evolved new words to describe emerging political systems or ideologies. Some of these new words are below, alongside other words that might be useful for understanding *Animal Farm*.

Anarchism: a political philosophy that believes that all governments should be abolished, and that people should choose to work together to govern themselves without compulsion. **Anarchist:** a person who supports this philosophy.

Capitalism: a political system in which a country's trade and industry are controlled by private owners for profit, rather than by the state.

Communism: a society in which property is owned by the community rather than individuals. Each person is equal, contributing according to their ability and receiving according to their needs.

Communist: a person who supports this society.

Dictatorship: a system of rule in which a society is run by a dictator, who has total power. Everything that the dictator says is law and must be obeyed.

Fascism: a governmental system that is frequently led by a dictator having complete power, forcibly suppressing opposition, regimenting all industry, commerce, etc. A fascist government is aggressively nationalistic and often racist.

KGB: the Russian secret police whose purpose is to eliminate any opposition. The KGB started in the 1950s. From 1917, the secret police were known as the Cheka. Under Stalin, they were called the NKVD.

Left wing (noun): a political party with socialist tendencies. It aims to reform and might have radical views. (Adjective: *left-wing*.)

Marxism: a political ideology based on the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. It is a philosophical framework used to create a communist state. This will be discussed in more detail later in this guide.

Republic: a state (for example, the USA) in which the people have the power and they are led by an elected president.

Right wing (noun): conservatives (people who are reluctant to change because they like things as they are) and nationalists (people who think their nation's interests are more important than those of other nations). There are also *far-right* fascists and racists, who hold extreme right-wing beliefs.

Socialism: socialism and communism are often confused. According to Marxist theory, a socialist state is a state that is in transition: it has overthrown capitalism but has not yet fully achieved communism.

Totalitarianism: a form of government where a ruler (dictator) or a ruling group has complete control. This includes total control of the economy, media and the people.

THE AUTHOR: GEORGE ORWELL

George Orwell (1903-1950) is the pen name of Eric Arthur Blair, a novelist, essayist, critic and journalist, who was born in British India where his father worked in the Civil Service. When Orwell was one, his mother brought him and his two sisters to live in England.

Despite his great-great grandmother marrying an earl, his parents did not own any property and were dependent on the civil service for an income. This meant that they could not afford to send him to a public school (a selective, fee-paying independent school without financial support). Orwell was a bright child, and he won a partial scholarship to a preparatory school in Eastbourne where he boarded for five years. A budding writer, he composed two poems that were published in the local paper. At school, his awareness of the class system increased when he noticed that the richer students were treated better than the poorer ones. Hating his time at St. Cyprian's, he successfully won scholarships for Wellington College and for Eton. He attended Wellington in spring 1917 until a place became available at Eton where he was much happier. At Eton, he helped to produce the college magazine and other publications. His school experiences developed his awareness of class divisions in society.

When he left school, Orwell joined the India Imperial Police Force and in 1922 was posted to Burma. He had always been an independent thinker, so he learnt fluent Burmese; however, the better he got to know the native people, the more he felt guilty about his role in a British Empire colony. In *Animal Farm*, Mr Jones and the pigs exploit and maltreat the weak in the same way that some British colonisers exploited and maltreated the Burmese. His first novel *Burmese Days* (published in 1934) is based on his experiences in Burma and bitterly describes British prejudice and corruption. We therefore see that Orwell did not share contemporary beliefs about the benefits of colonialism: the

concept of abusing power is a universal theme, not just limited to communist Russia. At this point, we can understand why, by the late 1920s, Orwell considered himself an anarchist (someone who does not recognise government authority).

In 1927, Orwell became very ill with the mosquito-borne dengue fever, so he returned home to England on leave. At this point, he decided to leave the Imperial Police to become a writer.

The next stage of Orwell's life is described in *Down and Out in Paris and London*, published in 1933. In his memoir, Orwell describes how, disguised as a tramp, he explored the poorer parts of London. He got to know its inhabitants and made notes about his experiences. He also spent two years in Paris where he continued to write, supporting himself by taking low-paid jobs such as dishwashing, which he describes in his book. He also wrote articles about unemployment and the social conditions of the poor—the theme of poverty was emerging as a deeply interesting subject for him.

When *Down and Out in Paris and London* was published, Orwell chose to publish under the *nom de plume* George Orwell because he did not want to embarrass his family about his time as a tramp.

Upon his return to England, Orwell wrote articles and novels, supporting himself with a range of jobs, including teaching, and working in a second-hand bookshop. He continued his occasional explorations, disguised as a tramp, and did low-paid jobs that provided material for his writing. At one point, Orwell unsuccessfully tried to get himself arrested in the hope that he would be sent to prison, so that he could write about the experience!

His novel *A Clergyman's Daughter* was published in 1935; and *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* was published in 1936.

In 1936, Orwell accepted a commission to write about social conditions in the north of England. He spent a month in Wigan, visiting the poor, investigating how they lived and worked—he saw first-hand the effects of overwork and hunger later described in *Animal Farm*. As well as visiting coal mines, he attended meetings of the Communist Party (and formed a low opinion of Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Union of Fascists). Orwell's experiences culminated in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, published in 1937. The first half describes his investigations while the second half is a controversial essay in which he describes his middle-class background and the development of his political conscience. At this point, he considered himself to be a socialist and challenged British attitudes towards socialism.

Orwell's political views were so strong that, at the end of 1936 (the same year that he married Eileen O'Shaughnessy), he decided to go to Spain to fight in the Spanish Civil War. He wanted to defend the left-wing Republican government against General Franco, the fascist leader supported by Hitler.

In Spain, Orwell fought alongside members of an anti-Stalinist movement. He saw active service and survived being shot in the throat by a sniper. When he was in Barcelona, the situation began to deteriorate, as Soviet-backed communists began to suppress their political opponents, who included socialists. The communist press spread lies and propaganda, accusing the anti-Stalinists of collaborating with the fascists. (The use of propaganda can be seen through the character of Squealer in *Animal Farm*.) Consequently, Orwell and Eileen were forced to flee Spain in fear of their lives. Orwell's experiences in the Spanish Civil War and his disillusionment with the Communist Party are described in *Homage to Catalonia*, published in 1938. Orwell now hated any form of totalitarianism: socialism, communism or fascism. These views form the underlying ideology of *Animal Farm* and his final novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

With the outbreak of World War II, Orwell was declared unfit for military service by the Medical Board because of the condition of his lungs, so from 1941 to 1943, he worked for the BBC's Eastern Service, countering Nazi propaganda. (It was around this time that he started to write *Animal Farm*.) In November 1943, Orwell became literary editor of the Tribune. His literary output as a journalist became prolific: he wrote numerous reviews and articles.

It is at this point that we can appreciate the significance of the political context. We already know how Orwell's life helped to shape his views and that *Animal Farm* was an attack on the Soviet regime. British politics of the time also impacted on Orwell's life: initially, publishers refused to accept *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story* because the Soviet Union was a war ally. In 1945, the year the war ended, and Eileen died, the novella was finally published in the UK. A year later, it was published in America and became an immediate success—increasingly so from 1947 when the Cold War began.

Now a well-known writer, Orwell mixed journalism with contributions to literary magazines. He worked on his last and possibly most famous novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which was published in June 1949.

Suffering from tuberculosis, Orwell married Sonia Brownell from his hospital bed in October 1949. Three months later, he died at the age of 46.

TITLE, FORM AND GENRE

PLOT RECAP

At Manor Farm, a pig called Major tells the animals about Animalism and, shortly afterwards, he dies. The drunken farmer Mr Jones forgets to feed the animals, which triggers a rebellion. The animals decide to live by the ideas of Animalism, which the pigs summarise as the Seven Commandments. The pigs, led by Napoleon and Snowball, take charge, and the animals successfully win the Battle of the Cowshed against the returning humans. Napoleon sets his dogs on his rival Snowball, who flees the farm. Napoleon, assisted by Squealer's propaganda, consolidates his position and becomes a dictator. One by one, the commandments are broken by the pigs. The animals' lives become harder: they work like slaves; there is less food; Napoleon starves the hens to death; there are forced confessions and executions. Minimus encourages the animals to view Napoleon as a cult figure. Napoleon forges a trade alliance with a neighbouring farmer, which results in the Battle of the Windmill. Eventually, Boxer the hard-working horse is taken away by the knacker, but the animals believe the pigs' lies, so we see that the pigs' power and control is absolute. At the end of the novella, the pigs have the same status as humans, and the animals' lives are just as bad—if not worse—than they were under Mr Jones.

TITLE

Wanting a fresh start after the revolution, the animals get rid of the name of Manor Farm, which reminds them too much of Mr Jones. In the allegory, Manor Farm represents the Russian Empire, a totalitarian feudal country ruled by Mr Jones's historical counterpart, Tsar Nicholas II.

The name change to Animal Farm parallels the historical name change to the Soviet Union (USSR) under communist rule. Animal Farm represents the idealistic hopes and dreams of the animals, a haven where they are equal and free from totalitarian rule, just as the Soviet Union represented the

communist ideology of everyone being equal. The title *Animal Farm* is therefore a metaphor for communism in the Soviet Union (this is discussed in more detail in **Allegory**, below). This metaphor can be extended to all human societies in which totalitarian regimes rise to power.

At the end of the novella, the pigs change the name of the farm back to Manor Farm. This symbolises the cyclical nature of tyranny, as the farm has now become the totalitarian regime against which the animals initially rebelled. The animals will continue to be exploited, and they will work until they can work no more. Orwell therefore manipulates the title to encourage the reader to reflect upon the hypocrisies of the communist regime.

FORM

Orwell opted to write the novella (short novel) in the third person (using *he, she, it* and *they*) to deliberately distance the reader from events. For example, the reader is first alerted to the hypocrisy of the pigs when in chapter 2 'it was noticed that the milk had disappeared'. The use of the passive voice creates a neutral tone and emphasises how the animals notice the absence of the milk yet draw no conclusions as to where it has gone. By presenting the animals' perspective, the reader is encouraged to judge the characters and their actions, forming an independent conclusion as to what is really happening. Through his use of the passive voice, Orwell therefore draws the reader's attention to the way the pigs (and by implication all leaders of communist states) manipulate power for their own selfish ends.

Another benefit of telling the story from the perspective of the animals is that it fits communist ideology: it focuses on the workers and their experience of Animalism. This narrative choice heightens the irony at the end of the novella. Even in as late as chapter 10, the animals still naïvely believe that 'All animals are equal' and they still believe that they are working for a better life. This optimism contrasts with the pigs' totalitarian rule, heightening the impact of the final scene in the chapter when the animals are wholly unable to distinguish the pigs from the humans.

ALLEGORY

As we have seen, the novella was written in World War II when the Soviet Union and Britain were allies in the struggle against Hitler. We also know that Orwell was anti-communist because of his experiences in Spain. Orwell therefore aimed to criticise the Soviet Union indirectly. In order to do this, he took the form or genre of a fable (a short story with animal characters and a moral) and expanded it into an allegory.

An allegory is a fable or story that is an extended metaphor: it has another meaning beyond the obvious surface meaning. On the surface, *Animal Farm* is a story about Napoleon's rise to power on the farm. In reality, the novella is a metaphor for Stalin's equally ruthless rise to power in the Soviet Union. This is a clever choice of genre not least because it enables Orwell to make the complex world of communist politics accessible to the everyday reader.

For example, we associate particular animals with well-known character traits: horses are hard-working, sheep lack intelligence, and dogs can be vicious. Orwell uses these traits as vehicles for his characters and their links to communism. For example, Napoleon is a pig, and pigs connote laziness and greed. Perhaps another layer of meaning is that the pigs symbolise all greedy exploitative tyrants in any country. This makes the story simpler and helps the reader to understand the dangers that communism presents.

Orwell also invites us to think about the gullible and apathetic populace who allow these regimes to emerge. His choice of the allegory form therefore encourages the reader to explore a range of meanings.

FAIRY STORY

The original name of the novella was *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story*. Let's explore some elements of a fairy story:

ELEMENTS OF A FAIRY STORY	ANIMAL FARM EVIDENCE
SET IN THE PAST	Use of past tense
FANTASY ELEMENTS	The animals can talk The pigs can walk on two legs
TRADITIONAL GOOD VERSUS EVIL CHARACTERS	Good—old Major and his theory of Animalism. He wants to defeat the evil Mr Jones Good—Snowball tries to defeat Napoleon Evil—Mr Jones and Napoleon

Many fairy tales begin with a functioning, well-ordered setting, so the reader of *Animal Farm* begins the novella expecting that everything at Manor Farm will be secure. This heightens the shock when we meet Mr Jones (or Tsar Nicholas II) in the first paragraph—more on this later in the guide.

Furthermore, fairy tales generally adhere to a particular structure: there is a clearly defined problem which comes to a climax, the problem is solved, and everyone lives happily ever after. The readers of *Animal Farm* would have expected a similar ending so, when this does not happen, the shock is considerable. Communist rule under Lenin and Stalin promised benefits to the Russian people—benefits that were not delivered; instead, communism created misery and inequality. Orwell might be suggesting that Marxism is like a fairy tale: it promises good things but cannot deliver. The reality of the unhappy ending in the novella in Orwell's view is proven by events in the real world. The title's reference to a fairy tale is thus deliberately deceptive: it seduces the reader into expecting a happy ending which does not happen, heightening the impact of his message about the dangers of communism.

Interestingly, when *Animal Farm* was published in America, publishers dropped the *Fairy Tale* part of the title because it was obvious that the novella was not a traditional story for children. Translations of the novella into other languages followed suit and left out the *Fairy Tale* wording; however, in some editions, publishers added the subtitle *A Satire or A Contemporary Satire* to make the critical purpose of the novella as obvious as possible. Original Fairy Tale subtitle notwithstanding, it is clear that the novella is and has always been a work of political satire.

POLITICAL SATIRE

What is satire exactly? A satire is a literary or other artistic work that ridicules the vices, silliness and shortcomings of people, organisations, government or society. Orwell uses the novella to ridicule

the myth of communism. Depicting Stalin as a pig and many other characters as animals turns them into objects of ridicule.

Orwell uses irony (see **Language**, below) to create satire and exaggerate the faults of the pigs.

ANIMAL FARM AND HISTORICAL PARALLELS

Animal Farm mirrors events leading up to the overthrow of Tsar Nicholas (Mr Jones) after the 1917 Russian Revolution led by Lenin. Then the novella takes us through the 1918-1921 Russian Civil War (Battle of the Cowshed) and into the period after Lenin's death in 1924 when Stalin (Napoleon) took complete control of the reins of power. Stalin was a mass murderer on a scale beyond even Hitler: historians estimate that he was responsible for the deaths of between 6 to 20 million people.

With each chapter summary of *Animal Farm* below, historical parallels are drawn. Please note that events in the novella do not always reflect the chronology of historical events.

CHAPTER 1

<i>Animal Farm:</i>	Mr Jones, the drunken owner of Manor Farm, falls asleep.
Historical parallel:	From the early 1900s, the Russian people were increasingly unhappy with Tsar Nicholas II's poor leadership. Like the tsar, Mr Jones was irresponsible and out of touch. Mr Jones's drunkenness symbolises the tsar's inadequacy.
<i>Animal Farm:</i>	The pig 'old Major' delivers a rousing speech about Animalism.
Historical parallel:	The founding fathers of communism, Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), published their thoughts in a <i>Communist Manifesto</i> (1848). These two German political philosophers conceived of communism as an economic and social system in which all property and resources are owned by the state on behalf of everyone.
<i>Animal Farm:</i>	Old Major's speech about 'Animalism' reflects many aspects of communist ideology; the pig's hatred for 'Man' might also mirror Lenin's hatred of the tsar and his family (it is a widely-held belief that Lenin gave the order for their assassination). Major's speech is analysed in more detail later in this guide, so here is a summary of the key points and their links to the <i>Communist Manifesto</i> :
'Animalism' Ideology in Old Major's Speech	Communist Ideology in the <i>Communist Manifesto</i>
The animals are miserable and exploited: 'the life of an animal is misery and slavery'.	All historical developments are because of class struggles in which the ruling classes defeat and exploit the workers.
'Remove man from the scene, and the root cause of hunger and overwork is abolished for ever'.	With no ruling class, the populace collectively owns property and resources, so everyone has enough: 'From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs'.

'Man is the only creature that consumes without producing'	Capitalists consume the profits yet (unlike the workers) do nothing to create them.
The animals should revolt against humans: 'Rebellion!'	This will only happen if there is a revolution: 'The proletarians [common workers] have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workers of the world, Unite!'
Describes a society where 'All animals are equal.'	Describes a society in which work and profits are shared equally. The social hierarchy, with its divisions between the rich and poor, is swept away.
Animal Farm:	Major teaches the animals 'Beasts of England'.
Historical parallel:	The anthem 'Beasts of England' corresponds to the Soviet Union's national anthem, The Internationale. The words for anthem were written by left-wing French Revolutionary Eugène Edine Pottier in 1871, and the anthem, which is worth comparing with 'Beasts of England', was used by many left-wing organisations.
<p>The Internationale</p> <p>Arise ye workers from your slumbers Arise ye prisoners of want For reason in revolt now thunders And at last ends the age of cant. Away with all your superstitions Servile masses arise, arise We'll change henceforth the old tradition And spurn the dust to win the prize.</p> <p>Refrain: So comrades, come rally And the last fight let us face The Internationale unites the human race.</p>	<p>No more deluded by reaction On tyrants only we'll make war The soldiers too will take strike action They'll break ranks and fight no more And if those cannibals keep trying To sacrifice us to their pride They soon shall hear the bullets flying We'll shoot the generals on our own side.</p> <p>No saviour from on high delivers No faith have we in prince or peer Our own right hand the chains must shiver Chains of hatred, greed and fear E'er the thieves will out with their booty And give to all a happier lot. Each at the forge must do their duty And we'll strike while the iron is hot.</p>
Animal Farm:	Their singing wakes Mr Jones, who thinks there is a fox and fires his gun.
Historical parallel:	<p>The firing of the gun might symbolise how Tsar Nicholas II was associated with violence and death. His political opponents called him Nicholas the Bloody. Here are some reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Khodynka Tragedy (1896): at a celebration of the crowning of the emperor and empress, 1,389 people were trampled to death and roughly the same number again were injured. • Anti-Semitic pogroms (organised massacres of Jews) 1903-1906: the tsar was responsible for the estimated deaths of up to 2,500 Jews. • Bloody Sunday or Red Sunday (1905): The Imperial Guard fired upon unarmed demonstrators, as they marched towards the Winter Palace in St. Petersburg to present a petition to Tsar Nicholas II of Russia. About 200 people died and 800 were wounded.

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• After the unsuccessful 1905 Revolution: the number of death sentences and executions dramatically increased.• Russo-Japanese War (1904-5): the tsar was widely believed to be responsible for this war. The Japanese victors destroyed the Russian fleet and won every battle. |
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