

1984 by George Orwell

What You Need to Know

The Setting

- London, England—aka “Airstrip One”
- The year 1984 (but really just sometime in the future)
- Government=totalitarian dictatorship
 - Big Brother: symbol and glorified persona
 - Inner Party: intellectuals devoted to Party
 - Outer Party: powerless middle class
 - The Proles: the “subhuman” workers

Genre = Dystopia

- Dystopia = a perfect society gone wrong
- Orwell warns against what could happen in the future based on the atrocities and dictators that gained power in WWII
 - The rise of totalitarian governments
 - The use of science and technology to regulate or brainwash society
 - The distortion of truth through rhetoric
 - The restricting of individual freedoms

What Orwell Saw . . .

- Economic depression in the 1930s
 - High unemployment
 - Shortages of money, housing, and food
 - Restrictions on daily life and rations
- The beginning of the Cold War
 - Countries east of “iron curtain” were communist
 - Countries west of it were protected by US

Terms to Know

- Oceania = N. and S. America, Britain, Australia, S. Africa
- Eurasia = Russia, Western and Eastern Europe
- Eastasia = China
- Land up for grabs = Middle East and Northern Africa
- Constant fighting for control of that land

Terms to Know (cont)

- Newspeak = official language of Oceania, words are condensed and simplified for communication, resulting in less thought
- Ingsoc = English Socialism, these principles guide the state of Oceania
- Doublethink = believing two contradictory ideas at the same time
- Telescreen = a two-way television screen

Main Characters

- Winston Smith = the “everyman” who is a member of the Party; rewrites history, begins to rebel against the party
- O’Brien = a man with whom Winston feels a connection; member of “the brotherhood,” an underground rebel group
- Julia = a girl from Winston’s work that he becomes infatuated with

Things to think about . . .

- How does this novel connect with our own society?
- What is Orwell's ultimate message about
 - Societal apathy?
 - The use of fear?
 - Mass manipulation?
 - Isolation and individualism?

Remember

- The book is supposed to be set in the future—it's not necessarily supposed to be the real 1984. If it helps, just call the book by a different title: 2050 or something.
- Winston has flashbacks and dreams at times, so if you get confused, be sure to ask questions in class.
- You will have an in-class assignment for the book each day, so be sure to read carefully.