

*1984*  
George Orwell  
Signet Classics  
Non-fiction/dystopian  
326 pages  
©1948

## A Dystopian Nightmare

By Alex N.

Imagine a society in which one's thoughts are not private, a society where children are trained to spy on their parents and report any abnormal mannerisms to the "Thought Police", where even a twitch can arouse suspicion and cause one to be "vaporized" and have all traces of them removed from existence. This is the dreadful world of George Orwell's *1984*.

In this world, Winston Smith, a middle-aged man, lives in London, a part of a region called Oceania. He works for the Ministry of Truth, a Party (or leadership) department ironically responsible for upholding anything but truth. His job includes altering history, which the Party controls with full authority. In one instance, Smith is tasked with changing history to erase a war from existence of which he had vivid memories. Telescreens, devices that monitor every Party member through both audio and video, record each and every action one performs. Even secret microphones are hidden everywhere. Smith, realizing how twisted and manipulative his society is, decides to cautiously attempt a revolt against the Party and its mysterious leader, Big Brother, with the help of another Party member, Julia. They aim to join the Brotherhood, a group calling for Big Brother's destruction and following the ideals of the elusive Emmanuel Goldstein, known for his betrayal of the Party and subsequent leading of the revolution. Throughout the second half of the book, their difficult struggle is conveyed and readers are left stunned with a shocking conclusion that leaves them questioning today's world in a way like never before.

Readers almost certainly emerge from *1984* with a new perspective on modern society. Although at first it may seem as the dystopian world is exaggerated from today's society, many say that today's world features many of the things in the book that make readers cringe. Especially in the age of advancing technology, people are questioning their privacy, and some believe that with all of today's modern devices, privacy truly does not exist anymore. No matter what opinion a reader emerges with, the book shows what extremes can occur if government has too much power. It also poses an important question: at what point does safety violate privacy?

*1984*, with Orwell's rich detail, allows even the most extraneous descriptions to be brought to life. The reader feels as if they are right beside Smith, whether he is covertly sneaking out of work or enjoying a glass of Victory Gin. The engagement is felt when Winston holds hands with Julia: "It could not have been ten seconds, and yet it seemed a long time that their hands were clasped together. He had time to learn every detail of her hand. He explored the long fingers, the shapely nails, the work-hardened palm with its row of calluses, the smooth flesh under the wrist." Due to the extensive imagery, one can imagine themselves in the moment with Smith.

The single negative aspect of the novel would be when the chapters of Goldstein's book, which showed the Party's philosophy, are displayed. The selection took up about 30 pages in total and although were necessary, were at times boring and read as an uninteresting history textbook. However, readers must take a grain of salt with this point, as Orwell probably intended for the pages to come off in this fashion.

High school students may find this novel to be complex for leisure reading. It is a novel that requires a certain standard of attention that not many others do. The various ideals/terms of Smith's world can be difficult to comprehend all at once, but when understood provide

wonderful imagery. If students want a book that will force them to think analytically about modern society and leave a lasting impact, *1984* is a superb choice.

Orwell was no rookie author. The British novelist wrote many essays and six books in his lifetime, and particularly two fiction books, *Animal Farm* and *1984*, gave him fame. *Animal Farm*, an allegory for the Russian Revolution, uses farm animals to illustrate the twisted control tactics of Stalin and his administration. As for *1984*, although written in the 1940s, the book is becoming increasingly more relevant today, where many Americans are concerned with the National Security Agency's collection of metadata and have turned to the novel for its messages. In the first week following the NSA revelation, sales of *1984* increased by over 7000% on Amazon.

Orwell, speaking about why he wrote *1984*, said: "...if the sort of world that I am afraid of arrives, a world of two or three great superstates which are unable to conquer one another, two and two could become five...That, so far as I can see, is the direction in which we are actually moving, though, of course, the process is reversible." His novel serves as a precautionary tale to future generations, attempting to raise awareness of what the future may hold.

After finishing *1984* twenty years ago, the ideas of the book may have seemed far-fetched and ridiculous. However, with the rapid advancement of technology today, it is entirely possible for readers twenty years from now to wonder how Orwell could have predicted their present society so accurately.