

Animal Farm

By George Orwell

"During times of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act."

"Journalism is printing what someone else does not want printed:
everything else is public relations."

-- George Orwell

Radical Intro

Orwell did not flatter humanity. He portrays humans as a mob of domesticated animals, and the animals are incredibly stupid. Even Old Major and the pigs are stupid. They think a revolution consists merely of removing corrupt authorities, rulers or elites. That is not revolutionary thinking.

None of the farm animals seem to know that truly free animals should not live on farms eating food painstakingly grown, harvested and processed in the manner of modern agriculture. Free animals roam the wilderness and eat what Nature provides. And since *Animal Farm* is a fable, what does this reading mean for humans? Does it mean, perhaps, that agriculture is part of the curse of civilization, that humans should not be investing so much time and energy into growing grains and other foods that are so labor-intensive and often must be processed before being consumed?

Moreover, the farm is Orwell's symbol for a corporation or shall we say the corporation? Its purpose is to extract the life and energy from its domesticated animals – animals that represent the citizens and workers from which modern corporations forcibly extract energy and life. As such, *Animal Farm* condemns every modern nation since every such nation *forcibly* extracts the life and energy from its citizen workers. After all, taxes are not paid voluntarily, and no one is given land on which to live freely.

The fact that life becomes worse after the violent revolution installs a new government simply highlights our historical reality and the logic of 'progress.' Life is becoming worse. Life for everyone, children included, is becoming more stressful. Political leaders are generally becoming more immoral while relatively liberal, socialistic and democratic leaders like Snowball are constantly failing to becoming leaders.

Contrary to the popular reading that conveniently assumes that *Animal Farm* is merely a condemnation of communist nations, this novel is a condemnation of the heart of every modern civilization.

Questions

0. Orwell did not flatter humanity. He portrays humans as a mob of domesticated animals, and the animals are incredibly stupid. Even Old Major and the pigs are stupid. Discuss evidence of stupidity, and try to include a discussion of the animal's food choices. Consider, growing wheat, oats and similar farm crops to eat is much more difficult than eating like the wild animals who never work to

produce the food they eat. By the way, almost the same argument applies to humans who rely on the modern meat and grain diet; these foods are extremely energy and resource intensive and destructive of both human and environmental health.

1. The windmill is supposed to grind the grains that the animals harvest. It is a labor-saving machine. Repeatedly, the animals sacrifice themselves in order to build it, only to see it destroyed time and again. Does modern technology similarly fail to free people from labor? Are people working less? Why might Napoleon want to keep the hope alive but prevent its fulfillment? In what way is the windmill like a religious hope?
2. The natural characteristics of each animal determine their motives and pronouncements. How do the actions of Napoleon (a pig), Boxer (a horse), Benjamin (a donkey) and the dogs and sheep reflect the traits normally associated with the animal? Do you feel that Orwell purposely chose certain types of animals to assume certain roles?
3. "Surely there is no one among you who wants to see Jones come back?" Throughout the animals' reign on the farm, Napoleon and Squealer dangle the possibility of Jones' return as a constant danger, keeping most of the other animals in fear, and thus, submission. Do you think that this was a valid threat? Do you feel that, overall, the animals were better or worse off once they were in control of the farm?
4. On pages 3 - 10 of the novel, Old Major expresses his vision of a society free of human influence and control. Compare and contrast this against what eventually plays out on Manor Farm once the animals have taken over. What, if any, concepts or goals remain the same?
5. In one of the first scenes in the novel, Old Major sings Beasts of England, effectively bringing the animals together under a common purpose. Indeed, throughout the initial struggle against Man, it is a wildly popular and inspirational song. Yet later on, when the animals have successfully conquered the humans, Squealer, "attended by two dogs," announces that Beasts of England had been abolished and "was no longer needed." Why? Can you cite other examples where what was once held "sacred" and "necessary" to the common cause was later banished by decree?
6. Following the massacre of "guilty" animals at the hands of Napoleon and the other pigs, Clover reflects sadly on what she thought life should have been like on Manor Farm: "If she herself had had any picture of the future, it had been of a society of animals set free from hunger and the whip, all equal, each working according to his capacity, the strong protecting the weak, as she had protected the lost brood of ducklings with her foreleg on the night of Major's speech." Is Clover overly idealistic in feeling this way? Do you feel that such a community can exist?
7. Initially, the seven commandments issued by the animals were deemed unalterable, and symbolized a code by which the animals could live peacefully and equally among themselves. How and by what means were the commandments eventually changed? Choose and discuss one or two individual commandments. Who benefited in each instance and how?
8. Animal Farm is replete with subtle and not so-subtle lessons on blind conformity and the misuse of power. What are some of the lessons you've personally taken away from the novel regarding education of the masses, knowledge of history, idealist thought and class structure? Has the novel changed your worldview in any way?

9. Can you account for how the pigs ascended so quickly to power and dominion over all other animals? What key steps did they take, or more specifically, which elements did they make certain to control?
10. Although Napoleon is considered the absolute Leader of Animal Farm, it is Squealer who is most adept at conveying the "party line" to the animals, often convincing them to disbelieve their own eyes. What methods does Squealer employ to deceive and/or placate the other animals? How does the concept of memory (or lack thereof) figure in Squealer's pronouncements and dealings with them?
11. The novel ends with a chilling passage, wherein Clover notices something odd about the humans and pigs meeting in the farmhouse: "Twelve voices were shouting in anger, and they were all alike. No question, now, what had happened to the faces of the pigs. The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which. What is Orwell saying here? How do you interpret this final scene?"
12. Discuss Napoleon's interaction with the humans after the animals have taken control of the farm. What does Napoleon's dealings with Whymper say about the self-sufficiency of the animals? What is at the root of Napoleon's interplay with Pilkington and Frederick?
13. In reading **Animal Farm**, Lord Acton's famous pronouncement "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely" may come to mind. How and why is this statement applicable to the course of events in the novel?
14. When first published, **Animal Farm** was seen as a direct attack on Stalinism and the communist regime in Russia. The novel has direct parallels to actual players in Russian history. However, Napoleon's name belongs to the famous general and emperor of post-revolutionary France, and other names refer to England. Discuss parallels between the novel and modern, capitalist and democratic states like Canada and England.
15. In the aftermath of the rebellion against Mr. Jones, Snowball and Napoleon emerge as the predominant figureheads-yet it is Napoleon who eventually consolidates and assumes power as unquestioned leader. Snowball, now banished from the farm, goes on to assume a newer and possibly more powerful role. Describe the differences between Snowball and Napoleon. What actions taken by Napoleon ensured his ascension to power and "victory" over Snowball? Why does Snowball play so heavily in the decisions and actions on Manor Farm even after he's no longer there?
16. Among the various characters in the novel, whom do you feel is the noblest or most worthy? Which animal would be best suited to lead a group against Napoleon and the pigs? What qualities would this animal need to possess to do so?
17. Why do Napoleon and Squealer consistently emphasize ceremony, tradition and rank? Do you feel that titles such as "Animal hero, second class," or the "Order of the Green Banner" (page 87) mean as much to the rest of the animals as they do the pigs?
18. Do you find it strange that Molly, the narcissistic and lazy horse, successfully leaves the farm and goes to live among humans, even though she is fully aware of the "evil" that Man represents? What deeper meanings or symbolisms do Molly's actions hold?

19. The animals successfully repel a second human attack on the farm. As a consequence of the battle, however, the windmill is destroyed. Squealer considers this outcome an unmitigated victory. Why is Boxer so reluctant to agree?

20. Benjamin, the dour and unflinching Donkey, frequently assumes a sort of "middle ground" regarding events on Animal Farm. He repeatedly states that "Donkeys live a long time," and that regardless of political outcomes, "life would go on as it always had-badly (page 41)." Discuss the symbolism of Benjamin and his various pronouncements. What role does this character serve in **Animal Farm**?

ECONOMICS

Much of the work on the farm involves producing hay and grains for them to eat. Explain why this is ridiculous on a literal level if the animals are animals (hint: think of how wild herbivores survive). On the figurative level, if we view the animals as humans, what might a grain-based diet also be ridiculous for humans? Imagine how much work goes into making a bowl of cooked rice, or a slice of bread, and compare that to providing an apple or some other fruit produced by a perennial plant.

All of the animals' energy is invested in producing food. If the windmill cannot save them, can they find other ways of surviving? Can we? We should. The food industry is a huge burden on humans and on the environment. Study and comment on the info in the links below:

<https://www.chooseenergy.com/blog/energy-101/energy-food-production/>

<http://veganorganic.net/2012/06/what-is-efficient-agriculture/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2013/jan/10/how-much-water-food-production-waste>

So, why don't the farms animals simply return to the wild and forage for wild food, like normal animals? They don't exhaust themselves working to produce food. But what does this question mean if we read the story as a fable about humans? Can we find less labor- and energy-intensive ways to produce food?

Optional task: Briefly research and comment on no-till farming, permaculture and agroforestry.

POLITICS

It has been said that *Animal Farm* is a byproduct of George Orwell's long-held hatred of totalitarianism. What is the opposite of totalitarianism? Is it anarchy or democracy? Explain.

After the revolution, under the leadership of the pigs, a list of seven commandments is established - deemed unalterable - under which all animals on the farm would adhere. Slowly, however, some of the animals become wary of the pigs, who don't work but supervise, and whose pronouncements become law despite little or no discussion. The pigs' usurpation of power continues to the point where their rule is questioned only upon pain of death.

Does Orwell illustrate the dangers inherent in a complacent citizenry and the consequences of unchecked power, or does he illustrate the dangers inherent in giving power to anyone?

TECHNOLOGY

What are windmills traditionally used for? <https://sciencing.com/do-grain-windmills-work-7622732.html> Can farm animals really benefit from a windmill? Explain. Can humans benefit from windmills? Explain with reference to jobs and diet.

STUPIDITY

The animals, the pigs and dogs included, are stupid, daft, foolish, ignorant, short-sighted, obtuse imbeciles. They are destroying their own health, risking more violence, doing almost no thinking and achieving nothing. Support this thesis with some evidence.

Consider discussing Old Major. He claims to be wise, but is he? Is his dream a good one? Explain and consider: judging from his song and his speech, the animals are only interested in having more food and more freedom from work. However, these two goals are in conflict. Explain.

Is Napoleon wise? He claims the pigs need all the milk because they do all the thinking, but do they think well or are they just repeating Farmer Jones' mistake? Explain.

ANALYTIC CHALLENGE

Attempt to identify, in detail, which characters and actions belong to the following modern institutions, and explain how they support Napoleon's intentions to remain in power and acquire wealth:

1. Mainstream media (news and entertainment)
2. Public education (literacy and history)
3. Law and legislation
4. Capitalism (exploiting nature and others for profit)
5. Technology (the windmill)
6. Religion and/or Nationalism

COMPARTIVE CHALLENGE

Find parallels between Napoleon's reign and his policies and strategies and the Trump presidency (building a wall instead of a windmill...), or between Napoleon and any other modern leader. Or, simply research the real Napoleon—Napoleon Bonaparte, and explain why George Orwell named his villain after him.

TOP QUOTES

- 1) Old Major warns, "Your resolution must never falter. No argument must lead you astray. Never listen when they tell you that Man and the animals have a common interest....we must not come to resemble him...No animal must ever live in a house or sleep in a bed, or wear clothes, or drink alcohol, or smoke tobacco, or touch money, or engage in trade."
- 2) Orwell narrates, "Nobody stole, nobody grumbled over his rations, the quarreling and biting and jealousy which had been normal features of life in the old days had almost disappeared."
- 3) Squealer consoles the animals, saying, "Do not imagine, comrades, that leadership is a pleasure. On the contrary, it is a deep and heavy responsibility. No one believes more firmly than Comrade Napoleon that all animals are equal. He would be only too happy to let you make your decisions for yourselves. But sometimes you might make the wrong decisions, comrades, and then where should we be?" The classic hypocrisy seen here is too hard to miss.
- 4) Orwell explains, "Once again the animals were conscious of a vague uneasiness. Never to have any dealings with human beings, never to engage in trade, never to make use of money- had not these been among the earliest resolutions passed at the first triumphant Meeting when Jones was expelled?"
- 5) As Napoleon was deceiving the neighboring farmers he was also tricking his own animals. The scapegoat was again Snowball. "Whenever anything went wrong it became usual to attribute it to Snowball." In fact many of the claims begin to sound ridiculous to the objective mind. Of course, Squealer's mission is to keep everything subjective in the minds of the animals.
- 6) So Napoleon, with the help of his dogs, slaughters anyone who is said to be disloyal. "...the tale of confessions and executions went on, until there was a pile of corpses lying before Napoleon's feet and the air was heavy with the smell of blood, which had been unknown there since the expulsion of Jones." To top it off, Napoleon outlaws Beasts of England, which had served as one of the only remaining ties between Animal Farm and old Major.
- 7) But when Muriel reads the writing on the barn wall to Clover, interestingly, the words are, "No animal shall kill any other animal without cause."
- 8) But to justify this little episode, arrangements to amend the rules are made. "No animal shall drink alcohol to excess."
- 9) Orwell states, "Somehow it seemed as though the farm had grown richer without making the animals themselves any richer- except, of course, for the pigs and the dogs."
- 10) The 7 Commandments are abridged for the last time, simply reading, "All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others."

VOCABULARY

ensconced	settled comfortably
laborious	requiring much work
enmity	hatred
vivacious	lively, animated
apathy	lack of interest, indifferent
acute	sharp, intense
parasitical	living on others without any useful return
cryptic	secret, mysterious
indefatigable	tireless
tractable	easily managed, controlled
ignominious	disgraceful, shameful
impromptu	done without preparation
canvass	to go asking for votes
procured	obtained through care or effort
eloquence	power to win by speaking
articulate	to put thoughts into words easily and clearly
malignity	malice, extreme hatred
capitulate	surrender on certain terms
countenance	expressions of the face
treachery	deceit
retinue	a group of attendants or servants
conciliatory	soothe, reconcile
demeanor	way a person looks and acts
morose	gloomy, sullen
taciturn	speaking very little
filial	of a son or daughter
eminent	outstanding, distinguishing

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/they-were-family-woman-horrified-to-learn-horses-were-sold-slaughtered-1.3909749>