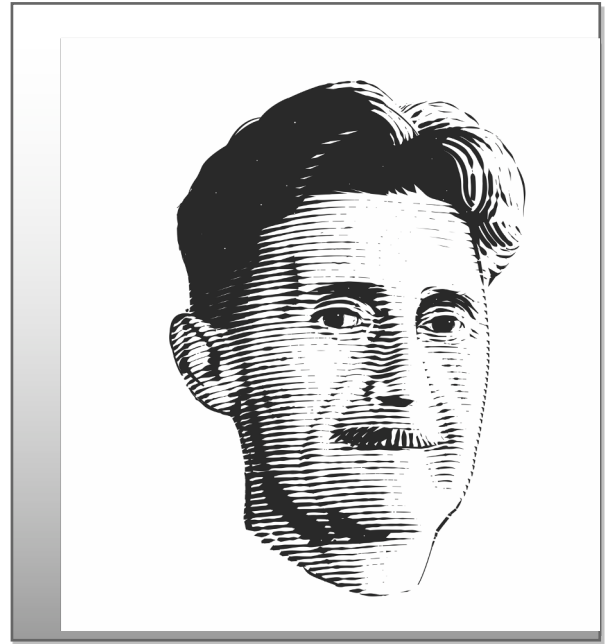


George Orwell (1903-1950)



Early life

George Orwell (pseudonym of Eric Arthur Blair) was a novelist, journalist, critic, and an essayist. He was born in 1903 in the Indian province of Bengal where his father worked for the British colonial Civil Service. Between 1917 and 1921 Orwell studied at Eton College and in 1922 he joined the Indian Imperial Police Force in Burma. He left his job in 1927 because he was critical of the British rule in India and decided to become a writer. However, Orwell's experience as a police officer provided him with the material for his first novel – *Burmese Days* (1934).

Orwell in England and France

Orwell returned to Europe where he travelled around England and France, living on the streets among the poorest and doing a series of low paid jobs. He did this to experience how the poor lived and to see how they were treated by society and institutions. He described these experiences in his memoir *Down and Out in Paris and London*, published in 1933. In England, Orwell worked as a private tutor, schoolteacher and bookshop assistant. In 1935 he wrote his second novel, *A Clergyman's Daughter*, drawing upon his life as a teacher, an urban vagrant and his life in Southwold, a seaside town in Suffolk where his family lived. The following years he published *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), based on his experience as a bookseller, and *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), a powerful description of the horrifying reality of poverty among unemployed miners in northern England, who he visited for two months, sharing and observing their lives and dignity.

Orwell in Spain

Orwell's political convictions for socialism led him and his wife, Eileen O'Shaughnessy, to Spain in December 1936 to fight in the Spanish Civil War for the Republican army – which was supported by the Soviet Union – against the Nationalists led by General Franco and which was supported by Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. In Spain, Orwell joined the United Workers Marxist Party militia, an anti-Stalinist communist party, but in June 1937 he was seriously wounded and returned to England where he wrote *Homage to Catalonia*. The book is a vivid account of his Spanish experience which turned him decisively against Soviet communism, made him a committed socialist and a stronger opponent of totalitarian

regimes and potential totalitarianism. He expressed his fears about a future threatened by fascism and war in *Coming Up for Air* (1939), which also focused on England's idyllic past.

Orwell during and after World War II

From 1941-1943, Orwell worked on propaganda for the BBC, as he believed it was a morally right cause. In 1943, he became literary editor of the *Tribune*, a socialist paper. At this time, Orwell was a prolific journalist, a literary critic and continued to write books. Before the end of World War II, he wrote *Animal Farm*. Published in 1945, it is a political fable about the hypocrisy and corruption of power and the dangers of dictatorships. This short novel together with *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), set in an imaginary and horrifying totalitarian future, brought Orwell worldwide fame. Orwell wrote it in 1948 during his battle with tuberculosis, which was the cause of his death in January 1950. Shortly before he died, he entered into a second marriage with Sonia Brownell, the assistant editor of a literary magazine.

A firm believer in liberty, equality, justice, and decency

Orwell was a firm believer in liberty, equality, justice, and decency. He had a remarkable sense of intellectual honesty and personal integrity. Orwell believed in the social function of the writer who addresses aspects of collective life, questions the world, informs the reader and, by seeking social or political changes, raises awareness about society's problems. Orwell described the miseries of poorer sections of society and the poverty among working class people to whom he felt emotionally close, using realistic language in a plain prose style. He deeply condemned the violation of liberty and tyranny and showed their terrifying impact on human beings. Orwell wrote to improve the conditions of an oppressed humanity and his life and works were dedicated to the values of democracy, freedom, equality, and truth.

Curiosities

- The following books inspired Orwell's 1984. *Darkness at Noon* and *The Yogi and the Commissar* by Arthur Koestler; *The Iron Heel* by Jack London; Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*; Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We*; James Burnham's *The Managerial Revolution*.

- Eric Arthur Blair chose the name George Orwell which reflects his love of English tradition and landscape. George is the patron saint of England and the River Orwell is a beautiful sailing spot in East Anglia. He decided to use a pseudonym to avoid embarrassing his parents because he was living in poverty and also to protect himself against any possible failure.

1) Answer the following questions.

1. Who was George Orwell?
2. When and where was he born?
3. Where did he study between 1917 and 1921?
4. When did Orwell join the Indian Imperial Police Force in Burma?
5. Why did he leave his job?
6. What did Orwell's experience in India teach him?
7. What did Orwell do when he returned to Europe? Why?
8. What kind of jobs did Orwell do in England?
9. Why did Orwell and his wife go to Spain in December 1936?
10. Which nation supported the Republican army?
11. Did Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany support General Franco's Nationalists?

2) Say if these sentences are True (T) or False (F).

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| 1. From 1940-1941, Orwell worked on propaganda for the BBC. | T | F |
| 2. In 1943, Orwell became literary editor of the <i>Tribune</i> , a fascist paper. | T | F |
| 3. Before the end of World War II, Orwell wrote <i>Animal Farm</i> which was published in 1945. | T | F |
| 4. Orwell wrote <i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i> in 1948 during his battle with tuberculosis, which was the cause of his death in January 1950. | T | F |
| 5. Shortly before Orwell died, he entered into a third marriage with Sonia Brownell. | T | F |
| 6. <i>Animal Farm</i> and <i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i> brought Orwell worldwide fame. | T | F |

3) Choose the correct answer.

1. Orwell was a firm believer in **oppression / liberty**, equality, justice, and decency.
2. He had a remarkable sense of intellectual **dishonesty / honesty** and personal integrity.
3. Orwell **didn't believe / believed** in the social function of the writer who addresses aspects of **individual / collective** life, questions the world, informs the reader and, by seeking social or political changes, raises awareness about society's problems.
4. Using a plain, prose style, with a **figurative / realistic** language, Orwell described the miseries of poorer sections of society and the poverty among **working class / middle class** people to whom he felt emotionally close.

5. He **didn't condemn** / **condemned** tyranny and the violation of liberty and showed their terrifying impact on human beings.
6. Orwell **didn't write** / **wrote** to improve the conditions of oppressed humanity and his life and works were dedicated to the values of democracy, freedom, equality, and truth.

4) Complete.

1. Orwell's experience as a police officer for the Indian Imperial Police Force in Burma provided him the material for his first novel –(1934).
2. In(1933), Orwell describes his experience living among the poor in Paris and London.
3. In 1935 Orwell wrote, drawing upon his life as a teacher, an urban vagrant and his life in Southwold, a seaside town in Suffolk where his family lived.
4. (1936) is based on Orwell's experience as a bookseller.
5. (1937) is a powerful description of the horrifying reality of poverty among unemployed miners in northern England.
6. (1937) is a vivid account of Orwell's Spanish experience which turned him decisively against Soviet communism, made him a committed socialist and a stronger opponent of totalitarian regimes.
7. In (1939), Orwell expresses his fears about a future threatened by fascism and war. The novel also focuses on England's idyllic past.
8., published in 1945, is a political fable about the hypocrisy and corruption of power and the dangers of dictatorships.
9. Orwell's last novel is (1949). It is set in an imaginary and horrifying totalitarian future.

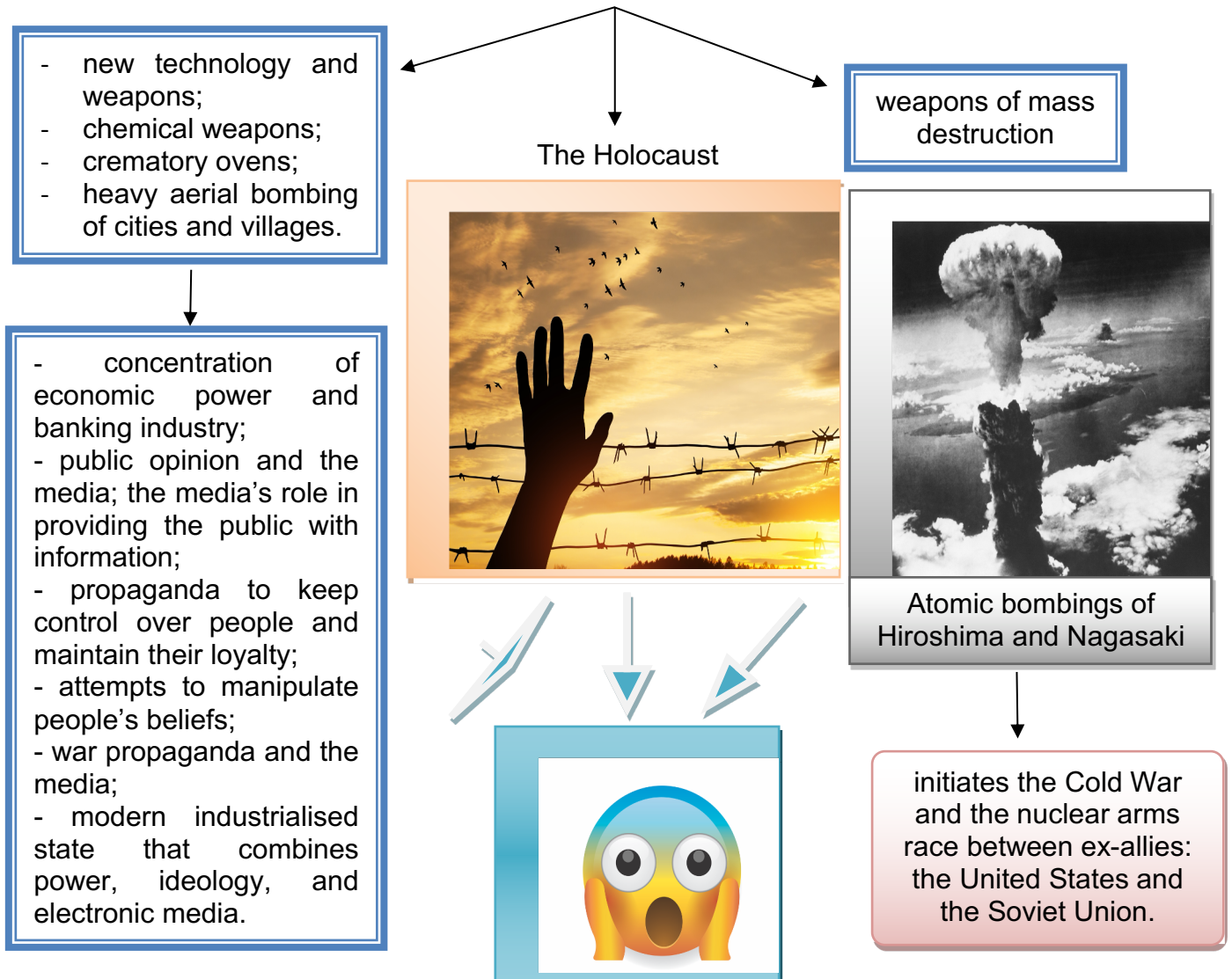
Nineteen Eighty - Four by George Orwell

Events of the first half of the 20th century which influenced Orwell's writing of the novel.

Historical context



The fruits of scientific and technological progress





loss of faith in progress



Critical thinking

Think!
Improper use of scientific and technological discoveries by politicians and big companies.

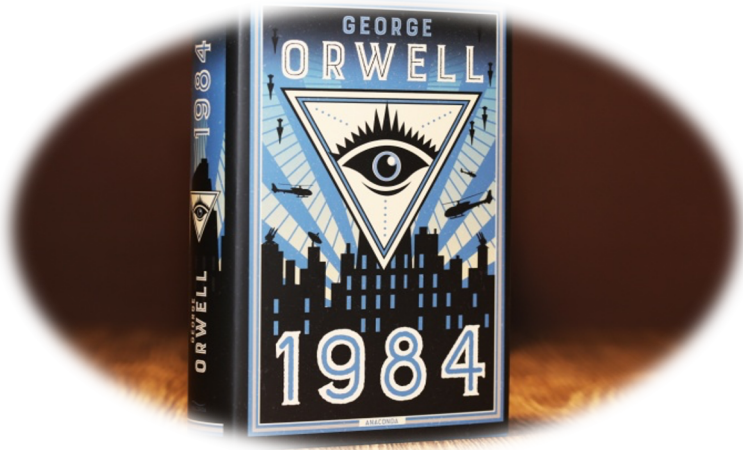
Think!
Language is an effective instrument of manipulation and political control.

Think!
Technology is abused by the authorities and people are constantly monitored.

Think!
Governments have complete power over people and control everything.

- 1) Write a list of events of the first half of the 20th century which influenced Orwell's writing of the novel.
- 2) Write a list of some fruits of scientific and technological progress which influenced Orwell's writing of the novel.

Read the text.



Nineteen Eighty-Four

George Orwell wrote the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in 1948 and published it in 1949. He describes a terrifying world where the government is only interested in power and has complete control over all citizens. Technology is abused by the authorities who constantly monitor people and manipulate history and people's thoughts, lives, and feelings. The past and the present are strictly controlled in the totalitarian state of Oceania, where who controls the past also controls the future.

The novel's original title was *The Last Man in Europe* but it was later changed to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which is the inversion of the last two digits of the year 1948, the year it was completed. There are various theories about this title. Some suggest that Orwell wanted to warn readers that such a society could easily become a reality in the near future. Others say that it was probably an allusion to the centenary of the *Fabian Society*, a British socialist organisation founded in 1884 which Orwell was very familiar with. The allusion, according to other critics, could have been inspired by Jack London's novel "The Iron Heel" or to G. K. Chesterton's "The Napoleon of Notting Hill", set in 1984, or even to the poem "End of the Century, 1984" written by Orwell's first wife.

3) Choose the correct answer.

1. George Orwell wrote the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in **1949 / 1948**.
2. George Orwell describes a terrifying world where the government is only interested in power and **doesn't have / has** complete control over all citizens.
3. Technology **is / isn't** abused by the authorities that **sometimes / constantly** monitor

people and manipulate history and people's thoughts, lives, and feelings.

4. The novel's original title **wasn't / was** *The Last Man in Europe*.
5. Some critics suggest that Orwell used the title *Nineteen Eighty-Four* because he wanted to warn readers that such a horrendous society could easily become a reality in the **distant / near** future.
6. Others say that the title *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is an allusion to the centenary of the *Fabian Society*, a British **fascist / socialist** organisation founded in 1884.
7. The allusion, according to other critics, could have been inspired by Jack London's novel "**Martin Eden**" / "**The Iron Heel**" or to G. K. Chesterton's "The Napoleon of Notting Hill", set in **1984 / 1948**.
8. Orwell probably alluded to the **novel / poem** "*End of the Century, 1984*" written by his first wife.

The plot



The world is divided into three superpowers – Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia – which are permanently at war with each other. Oceania is dominated by the Party, which controls everything, and its leader: Big Brother. He is the supreme ruler of Oceania, his image is everywhere and microphones and big telescreens are in every person's room, in the streets, in every public place and workplace. They broadcast Party propaganda and remind citizens that the authorities are constantly monitoring them by means of the slogan, "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU".

The story is set in London which is the capital of a province called Airstrip One. As a result of the war, the area is in ruins and the population lives in squalor and poverty. But the leading members of the Party enjoy a really good standard of living.

Airstrip One is part of Oceania. London is home to the Party's four ministries:

- the Ministry of Love is in charge of law, order and punishment;
- the Ministry of Peace is in charge of war;
- the Ministry of Plenty controls the supply of food and goods;
- the Ministry of Truth produces propaganda.

These ministries control all aspects of people's lives through telescreens, professional and volunteer spies, the Thought Police, Newspeak – a new language that controls independent thought – and Doublethink, which refers to the manipulation of the mind which makes people accept contradictions.

Winston Smith is the main character and narrator. He works at the Ministry of Truth, which is actually the ministry of propaganda, and his job is to rewrite history and reality. He constantly changes old newspaper articles and photos, books, and documents according to the Party's wishes. Individuals are not allowed to keep records of their past, such as photos or documents.

Winston likes his work but is curious about the real past, questions the Party's monopoly on truth and wants to maintain his identity. So he keeps a secret diary in which he

expresses his real feelings, memories and negative opinions about the Party and Big Brother. In his diary he writes “DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER”.

Winston, who is the last man of a generation that is disappearing, knows that this is a dangerous activity but he wants to reconstruct his childhood in order to create memory and history. He also has a clandestine relationship with Julia, a young woman who works at the Ministry of Truth and who is also a rebel.

In this horrendous society, people have no friends and are forced to watch government news on TV and attend propaganda events, including the Two Minutes Hate – a daily ritual where people express their hate and frustration towards political enemies created by the Party. Love only exists for the Party and Big Brother and sex is only an act of procreation. So Winston is guilty of committing two crimes: sex crimes and thought crimes.

Winston, induced by O’Brien – an official of the Party who tells Winston that he is also a secret rebel – becomes interested in a secret group called the Brotherhood and its leader E. Goldstein. Their aim is to defeat the Party and Big Brother. Winston reads the secret book of the Brotherhood that O’Brien gave him and understands how the Party seized power in Oceania and how it maintains that power. Winston and Julia are then arrested by the Thought Police who have been monitoring them since they first met.

The two rebels are taken to the Ministry of Love where they are cured of their rebellion through torture. O’Brien is present and reveals himself to be a loyal Party official. He takes Winston to room 101, tells him that the Party wants to have total power over his mind and tortures him. O’Brien destroys Winston physically, intellectually, and emotionally to the point that Winston learns to love Big Brother and becomes a devoted, loving fan of the Party. He becomes a new man with no roots and memory, dispossessed of his identity and his past.

1) Choose the correct answer.

1. In 1984 the world is divided into ...
 - a. Oceania, Eurasia and Eastasia.
 - b. Oceania and Eurasia.
 - c. Oceania and Eastasia.
2. The three superpowers ...
 - a. are not at war with each other.
 - b. are permanently at war with each other.
 - c. are sometimes at war with each other.
3. In Oceania, the Party ...
 - a. is not very powerful.
 - b. shares power with other political groups.
 - c. has complete power over people and controls everything.

Curiosities

- Winston Smith: the name Winston refers to Winston Churchill, the exalted Prime Minister of wartime Britain, and Smith is the most common surname in the English language. In this way, we have an ordinary man who becomes courageous in extraordinary circumstances. Winston Smith questions the terrible reality of his world – he is *The Last Man in Europe* (the original title of the novel).

- *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has had a big impact on the English language. In fact terms such as Big Brother, the thought police, Room 101, Doublethink, Newspeak and slogans – including “Big Brother Is Watching You” – are used to describe totalitarian regimes or the potentially dangerous behaviour by authority. “Orwellian” is used to describe any real world situation reminiscent of the novel.

4. Big Brother is ...
 - a. Winston's friend and his image is everywhere.
 - b. the enemy of the Party and his image is everywhere.
 - c. the leader of the Party and his image is everywhere.

5. In the society of *1984*, there are telescreens and microphones everywhere ...
 - a. to protect people from terrorists.
 - b. to control all aspects of an individual's life.
 - c. to test their efficacy.

6. The story is set in London which is in ruins and the population ...
 - a. enjoys a good standard of living.
 - b. lives comfortably.
 - c. lives in squalor and poverty.

7. The Party's Ministries control all aspects of people's lives through ...
 - a. telescreens, professional and volunteer spies, the Thought Police, Newspeak, and Doublethink.
 - b. telescreens, Newspeak and Doublethink.
 - c. telescreens, the Thought Police, and Newspeak.

8. Winston Smith works at the Ministry of Truth and his job is ...
 - a. to change old newspaper articles and photos, books, and documents according to the Party's wishes.
 - b. to entertain Big Brother.
 - c. to check records of the Party's leading members.

9. Winston Smith likes his work but ...
 - a. is curious about the real past and reads a lot about historical events.
 - b. is curious about the real past, questions the Party's monopoly on truth and wants to maintain his identity.
 - c. is curious about the real past and questions his identity.

10. Winston Smith keeps a secret diary in which he ...
 - a. writes about his life.
 - b. writes about past events.

- c. expresses his real feelings, memories, and negative opinions about the Party and Big Brother.

11. Winston Smith ...

- a. rebels against the Party.
- b. doesn't rebel against the Party.
- c. is the leader of the Party.

12. Winston has a...

- a. love affair with Julia.
- b. clandestine love affair with Julia.
- c. friendly relationship with Julia.

13. The Two Minute Hate is a daily ritual where ...

- a. people express their hate and frustration towards Party members.
- b. people express their hate and frustration towards Big Brother.
- c. people express their hate and frustration towards political enemies created by the Party.

14. In the society of 1984, love only exists for ...

- a. parents and sex is an act of love.
- b. poor people and sex is an act of procreation.
- c. the Party and Big Brother and sex is only an act of procreation.

15. Winston, induced by O' Brian, becomes ...

- a. a Brotherhood sympathizer.
- b. a Brotherhood enemy.
- c. the Brotherhood leader.

16. The Brotherhood is a ...

- a. resistance organisation.
- b. peaceful organisation.
- c. religious organisation.

17. The Thought Police take Winston and Julia to the Ministry of Love ...

- a. where they are treated with respect.
- b. where they have a relaxing stay.
- c. where they are tortured in order to be cured of their rebellion.

18. O'Brien is Winston's ...

- a. best friend.
- b. torturer.
- c. close colleague.

19. In the end Winston's relationship to Big Brother is based on feelings of ...

- a. hate.
- b. indifference.
- c. love.

20. Winston becomes a new man because he ...

- a. has no roots and memory and is dispossessed of his identity and his past.
- b. reconstructs his childhood and reinforces his identity and his past.
- c. reconstructs his identity.

2) Pair work. In pairs, examine the Constitution of the Italian Republic, in particular articles 1-54, and find freedoms granted to you as an Italian citizen. Then see if some of these freedoms are denied to citizens of other countries.

Read the texts.



Newspeak

The use of language as an instrument of manipulation and political control is one of the major themes of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Language is fundamental to human thought because it shapes the ideas that individuals can formulate and express. Controlling language means controlling people's thoughts and mind. For example, if there is no word for freedom, how can we describe it?

In Oceania, the Party has introduced a new language – *Newspeak* – which has a simplified vocabulary, a restricted grammar and replaces undesirable words with new words. The aim is to control independent thought by limiting the ability of every person to express their opinion or thoughts. Language is used not as a means of communication but in order to destroy individual consciousness and critical thinking as Syme explains to Winston: "We're destroying words – (...) hundreds of them, every day. We're cutting the language down to the bone. Every year fewer and fewer words, and the range of consciousness always a little smaller".

Doublethink

Another important Party technique used to eliminate an individual's capacity for independent thought is Doublethink, which teaches people to believe in two opposite ideas or beliefs simultaneously and to lose faith in objective truth. In fact, people believe anything the Party says. Doublethink is reflected in the Party's slogans which are everywhere: "War is peace," "Freedom is slavery," and "Ignorance is strength", and in the names of the four Ministries, including the Ministry of Love which is the Party's torture and punishment centre.

Oceania is dominated by indifference and the interchangeability of words. The Party has destroyed all traces of difference by eliminating historical memory.

1) Answer the following questions.

1. Which is one of the major themes of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*?
2. Why is language fundamental to human thought?
3. What language has the Party introduced to Oceania?
4. What is the aim of the Party?
5. Is language in Oceania used as a means of communication?
6. What does Doublethink teach people?
7. What is Doublethink reflected in?
8. What is Oceania dominated by?

2) These are the slogans of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

“War is peace” “Freedom is slavery” “Ignorance is strength”

Choose the following words to describe them.

contradictory logical opposite intelligent cool short

3) Match.

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| 1. Ministry of Love | a. starvation |
| 2. Ministry of Peace | b. propaganda |
| 3. Ministry of Plenty | c. war |
| 4. Ministry of Truth | d. torture |

1..... 2..... 3..... 4.....

4) Complete the text with the missing words.

enemy freedom population explanation

Slogans have a logical if they are related to the Party. The ignorance of the is the strength of the Party. Permanent war guarantees peace in Oceania because people are poor and have no energy left to fight the Party, and the real is Eurasia or Eastasia. In Oceania, the population is enslaved to the idea of

2) Complete the text with the missing words.

Internet freedom violence human rights messages



Mass media plays a fundamental role in spreading false, inaccurate or misleading information and to the public. It is designed to influence people, to manufacture consensus or to make profit. This phenomenon has dramatically expanded with the arrival of the and social media, and advanced manipulative information techniques such as deep-fake technology. All this threatens of thought and expression, the right to privacy and other aspects of life. It also confuses and manipulates people, and favours in society. This pervasive system of manipulation exposes people to an alarming degree of vulnerability and undermines democracy and

Curiosity

The Internet, which is an integral part of our life, is influencing language. In online communication, simplification is preferred to clarity and precision. The increasing use of emoticons and emojis contributes to the weakening of language.

3) Read the text and say if the sentences are True (T) or False (F).



The use of advanced technological means of surveillance as a weapon of controlling people is another relevant issue in our society. Our daily life is constantly monitored and controlled by cameras in shops, streets, offices, everywhere and modern communication technologies such as the Internet, social media and smartphones have made surveillance less visible. Companies and government agencies can collect, keep, and analyse an enormous amount of information about us and also study our data to predict human behaviour. Advanced technologies that states use to protect its citizens such as biometric data, satellite data, geolocation and drones, just to mention a few, allow states to monitor individuals on a 24/7 basis by invading their private sphere.

By sharing information and comments among themselves, individuals are more vulnerable to manipulation and by denouncing the negative behaviour of their peers they participate in the surveillance system.

Orwell's predictions have come true but in today's context diffuse and pervasive surveillance is less visible, more decentralised and effective to the extent that *Big Brother* isn't scary enough. If we want to reaffirm and preserve democracy and human rights, now is the time to raise the alarm.

1. The use of advanced technological means of surveillance as a weapon of controlling people isn't a relevant issue in today's society. **T** **F**
2. Our daily life is only sometimes monitored and controlled. **T** **F**
3. Modern communication technologies allow companies and government agencies to collect, keep, and analyse an enormous amount of information about us. **T** **F**
4. Companies and government agencies don't use our data to predict human behaviour. **T** **F**
5. States don't use advanced technologies to monitor individuals on a 24/7 basis and don't invade their private sphere. **T** **F**

- | | | | |
|-----|--|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 6. | By sharing information and comments among themselves, individuals are more vulnerable to manipulation. | T
<input type="checkbox"/> | F
<input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. | By denouncing the negative behaviour of their peers, individuals don't participate in the surveillance system. | T
<input type="checkbox"/> | F
<input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. | Orwell's predictions have come true. | T
<input type="checkbox"/> | F
<input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. | In today's context diffuse and pervasive surveillance is less visible, more decentralised and effective. | T
<input type="checkbox"/> | F
<input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. | In today's society, the level of pervasive surveillance undermines democracy and human rights. | T
<input type="checkbox"/> | F
<input type="checkbox"/> |

Dystopian fiction



1) Read the text and choose the correct answer.

Nineteen Eighty-Four is one of the most famous examples of a dystopian novel as it describes **an imagined / a real** society set in the future, characterised by suffering, oppression and **justice / injustice** and its effects on individuals who lead **humanised / dehumanised** and fearful lives.

The author investigates the potential of totalitarian regimes to destroy, spread hate and dominate people's lives and warns the reader against such dangers.

The dystopian novel is not the product of imagination because it is connected to the **unreal / real** world. It is used to examine real world issues and, by taking them to their extreme, to criticise the present and its negative aspects sending a timely warning to humanity.

Orwell's message is that freedom is guaranteed only if ideas and beliefs **cannot / can** be questioned and to be vigilant against any initiative which produces such terrible societal degradation.