



# This is a...copy & paste of a Plot Summary

- Winston Smith is a low-ranking member of the ruling Party in London, in the nation of Oceania. Everywhere Winston goes, even his own home, the Party watches him through telescreens; everywhere he looks he sees the face of the Party's seemingly omniscient leader, a figure known only as Big Brother. The Party controls everything in Oceania, even the people's history and language. Currently, the Party is forcing the implementation of an invented language called Newspeak, which attempts to prevent political rebellion by eliminating all words related to it. Even thinking rebellious thoughts is illegal. Such thoughtcrime is, in fact, the worst of all crimes.
- As the novel opens, Winston feels frustrated by the oppression and rigid control of the Party, which prohibits free thought, sex, and any expression of individuality. Winston dislikes the party and has illegally purchased a diary in which to write his criminal thoughts. He has also become fixated on a powerful Party member named O'Brien, whom Winston believes is a secret member of the Brotherhood—the mysterious, legendary group that works to overthrow the Party.

# Cont. copy & paste

- Winston works in the Ministry of Truth, where he alters historical records to fit the needs of the Party. He notices a coworker, a beautiful dark-haired girl, staring at him, and worries that she is an informant who will turn him in for his thoughtcrime. He is troubled by the Party's control of history: the Party claims that Oceania has always been allied with Eastasia in a war against Eurasia, but Winston seems to recall a time when this was not true. The Party also claims that Emmanuel Goldstein, the alleged leader of the Brotherhood, is the most dangerous man alive, but this does not seem plausible to Winston. Winston spends his evenings wandering through the poorest neighborhoods in London, where the proletarians, or proles, live squalid lives, relatively free of Party monitoring.
- One day, Winston receives a note from the dark-haired girl that reads "I love you." She tells him her name, Julia, and they begin a covert affair, always on the lookout for signs of Party monitoring. Eventually they rent a room above the secondhand store in the prole district where Winston bought the diary. This relationship lasts for some time. Winston is sure that they will be caught and punished sooner or later (the fatalistic Winston knows that he has been doomed since he wrote his first diary entry), while Julia is more pragmatic and optimistic. As Winston's affair with Julia progresses, his hatred for the Party grows more and more intense. At last, he receives the message that he has been waiting for: O'Brien wants to see him.

# Cont.

- Winston and Julia travel to O'Brien's luxurious apartment. As a member of the powerful Inner Party (Winston belongs to the Outer Party), O'Brien leads a life of luxury that Winston can only imagine. O'Brien confirms to Winston and Julia that, like them, he hates the Party, and says that he works against it as a member of the Brotherhood. He indoctrinates Winston and Julia into the Brotherhood, and gives Winston a copy of Emmanuel Goldstein's book, the manifesto of the Brotherhood. Winston reads the book—an amalgam of several forms of class-based twentieth-century social theory—to Julia in the room above the store. Suddenly, soldiers barge in and seize them. Mr. Charrington, the proprietor of the store, is revealed as having been a member of the Thought Police all along.
- Torn away from Julia and taken to a place called the Ministry of Love, Winston finds that O'Brien, too, is a Party spy who simply pretended to be a member of the Brotherhood in order to trap Winston into committing an open act of rebellion against the Party. O'Brien spends months torturing and brainwashing Winston, who struggles to resist. At last, O'Brien sends him to the dreaded Room 101, the final destination for anyone who opposes the Party. Here, O'Brien tells Winston that he will be forced to confront his worst fear. Throughout the novel, Winston has had recurring nightmares about rats; O'Brien now straps a cage full of rats onto Winston's head and prepares to allow the rats to eat his face. Winston snaps, pleading with O'Brien to do it to Julia, not to him.

cont.

- Giving up Julia is what O'Brien wanted from Winston all along. His spirit broken, Winston is released to the outside world. He meets Julia, but no longer feels anything for her. He has accepted the Party entirely and has learned to love Big Brother.

# Characters

- **Winston Smith** - A minor member of the ruling Party in near-future London, Winston Smith is a thin, frail, contemplative, intellectual, and fatalistic thirty-nine-year-old. Winston hates the totalitarian control and enforced repression that are characteristic of his government. He harbors revolutionary dreams.
- **Julia** - Winston's lover, a beautiful dark-haired girl working in the Fiction Department at the Ministry of Truth. Julia enjoys sex, and claims to have had affairs with many Party members. Julia is pragmatic and optimistic. Her rebellion against the Party is small and personal, for her own enjoyment, in contrast to Winston's ideological motivation.
- **O'Brien** - A mysterious, powerful, and sophisticated member of the Inner Party whom Winston believes is also a member of the Brotherhood, the legendary group of anti-Party rebels.
- **Big Brother** - Though he never appears in the novel, and though he may not actually exist, Big Brother, the perceived ruler of Oceania, is an extremely important figure. Everywhere Winston looks he sees posters of Big Brother's face bearing the message "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU." Big Brother's image is stamped on coins and broadcast on the unavoidable telescreens; it haunts Winston's life and fills him with hatred and fascination.
- **Mr. Charrington** - An old man who runs a secondhand store in the prole district. Kindly and encouraging, Mr. Charrington seems to share Winston's interest in the past. He also seems to support Winston's rebellion against the Party and his relationship with Julia, since he rents Winston a room without a telescreen in which to carry out his affair. But Mr. Charrington is not as he seems. He is a member of the Thought Police.
- **Syme** - An intelligent, outgoing man who works with Winston at the Ministry of Truth. Syme specializes in language. As the novel opens, he is working on a new edition of the Newspeak dictionary. Winston believes Syme is too intelligent to stay in the Party's favor.
- **Parsons** - A fat, obnoxious, and dull Party member who lives near Winston and works at the Ministry of Truth. He has a dull wife and a group of suspicious, ill-mannered children who are members of the Junior Spies.
- **Emmanuel Goldstein** - Another figure who exerts an influence on the novel without ever appearing in it. According to the Party, Goldstein is the legendary leader of the Brotherhood. He seems to have been a Party leader who fell out of favor with the regime. In any case, the Party describes him as the most dangerous and treacherous man in Oceania.

# Themes, Motifs, and...Cymbals

- THEMES

- **The Dangers of Totalitarianism**

- 1984 is a political novel written with the purpose of warning readers in the West of the dangers of totalitarian government. Having witnessed firsthand the horrific lengths to which totalitarian governments in Spain and Russia would go in order to sustain and increase their power, Orwell designed 1984 to sound the alarm in Western nations still unsure about how to approach the rise of communism. In 1949, the Cold War had not yet escalated, many American intellectuals supported communism, and the state of diplomacy between democratic and communist nations was highly ambiguous. In the American press, the Soviet Union was often portrayed as a great moral experiment. Orwell, however, was deeply disturbed by the widespread cruelties and oppressions he observed in communist countries, and seems to have been particularly concerned by the role of technology in enabling oppressive governments to monitor and control their citizens.

- **Psychological Manipulation**

- The Party barrages its subjects with psychological stimuli designed to overwhelm the mind's capacity for independent thought. The giant telescreen in every citizen's room blasts a constant stream of propaganda designed to make the failures and shortcomings of the Party appear to be triumphant successes. The telescreens also monitor behavior—everywhere they go, citizens are continuously reminded, especially by means of the omnipresent signs reading “BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU,” that the authorities are scrutinizing them. The Party undermines family structure by inducting children into an organization called the Junior Spies, which brainwashes and encourages them to spy on their parents and report any instance of disloyalty to the Party. The Party also forces individuals to suppress their sexual desires, treating sex as merely a procreative duty whose end is the creation of new Party members. The Party then channels people's pent-up frustration and emotion into intense, ferocious displays of hatred against the Party's political enemies. Many of these enemies have been invented by the Party expressly for this purpose.

# cont.

## – Physical Control

- In addition to manipulating their minds, the Party also controls the bodies of its subjects. The Party constantly watches for any sign of disloyalty, to the point that, as Winston observes, even a tiny facial twitch could lead to an arrest. A person's own nervous system becomes his greatest enemy. The Party forces its members to undergo mass morning-exercises called the Physical Jerks, and then to work long, grueling days at government agencies, keeping people in a general state of exhaustion. Anyone who does manage to defy the Party is punished and “reeducated” through systematic and brutal torture. After being subjected to weeks of this intense treatment, Winston himself comes to the conclusion that nothing is more powerful than physical pain—no emotional loyalty or moral conviction can overcome it. By conditioning the minds of their victims with physical torture, the Party is able to control reality, convincing its subjects that  $2 + 2 = 5$ .

## – Control of Information and History

- The Party controls every source of information, managing and rewriting the content of all newspapers and histories for its own ends. The Party does not allow individuals to keep records of their past, such as photographs or documents. As a result, memories become fuzzy and unreliable, and citizens become perfectly willing to believe whatever the Party tells them. By controlling the present, the Party is able to manipulate the past. And in controlling the past, the Party can justify all of its actions in the present.

## – Technology

- By means of telescreens and hidden microphones across the city, the Party is able to monitor its members almost all of the time. Additionally, the Party employs complicated mechanisms (1984 was written in the era before computers) to exert large-scale control on economic production and sources of information, and fearsome machinery to inflict torture upon those it deems enemies. 1984 reveals that technology, which is generally perceived as working toward moral good, can also facilitate the most diabolical evil.



# cont.

## – Language as Mind Control

- One of Orwell's most important messages in 1984 is that language is of central importance to human thought because it structures and limits the ideas that individuals are capable of formulating and expressing. If control of language were centralized in a political agency, Orwell proposes, such an agency could possibly alter the very structure of language to make it impossible to even conceive of disobedient or rebellious thoughts, because there would be no words with which to think them. This idea manifests itself in the language of Newspeak, which the Party has introduced to replace English. The Party is constantly refining and perfecting Newspeak, with the ultimate goal that no one will be capable of conceptualizing anything that might question the Party's absolute power. Interestingly, many of Orwell's ideas about language as a controlling force have been modified by writers and critics seeking to deal with the legacy of colonialism. During colonial times, foreign powers took political and military control of distant regions and, as a part of their occupation, instituted their own language as the language of government and business. Postcolonial writers often analyze or redress the damage done to local populations by the loss of language and the attendant loss of culture and historical connection.

## • MOTIFS

### – Doublethink

- The idea of “doublethink” emerges as an important consequence of the Party's massive campaign of large-scale psychological manipulation. Simply put, doublethink is the ability to hold two contradictory ideas in one's mind at the same time. As the Party's mind-control techniques break down an individual's capacity for independent thought, it becomes possible for that individual to believe anything that the Party tells them, even while possessing information that runs counter to what they are being told. At the Hate Week rally, for instance, the Party shifts its diplomatic allegiance, so the nation it has been at war with suddenly becomes its ally, and its former ally becomes its new enemy. When the Party speaker suddenly changes the nation he refers to as an enemy in the middle of his speech, the crowd accepts his words immediately, and is ashamed to find that it has made the wrong signs for the event. In the same way, people are able to accept the Party ministries' names, though they contradict their functions: the Ministry of Plenty oversees economic shortages, the Ministry of Peace wages war, the Ministry of Truth conducts propaganda and historical revisionism, and the Ministry of Love is the center of the Party's operations of torture and punishment.

## – **Urban Decay**

- Urban decay proves a pervasive motif in 1984. The London that Winston Smith calls home is a dilapidated, rundown city in which buildings are crumbling, conveniences such as elevators never work, and necessities such as electricity and plumbing are extremely unreliable. Though Orwell never discusses the theme openly, it is clear that the shoddy disintegration of London, just like the widespread hunger and poverty of its inhabitants, is due to the Party's mismanagement and incompetence. One of the themes of 1984, inspired by the history of twentieth-century communism, is that totalitarian regimes are viciously effective at enhancing their own power and miserably incompetent at providing for their citizens. The grimy urban decay in London is an important visual reminder of this idea, and offers insight into the Party's priorities through its contrast to the immense technology the Party develops to spy on its citizens.

# Charactorial Analysis

- **Winston Smith**
- Orwell's primary goal in 1984 is to demonstrate the terrifying possibilities of totalitarianism. The reader experiences the nightmarish world that Orwell envisions through the eyes of the protagonist, Winston. His personal tendency to resist the stifling of his individuality, and his intellectual ability to reason about his resistance, enables the reader to observe and understand the harsh oppression that the Party, Big Brother, and the Thought Police institute. Whereas Julia is untroubled and somewhat selfish, interested in rebelling only for the pleasures to be gained, Winston is extremely pensive and curious, desperate to understand how and why the Party exercises such absolute power in Oceania. Winston's long reflections give Orwell a chance to explore the novel's important themes, including language as mind control, psychological and physical intimidation and manipulation, and the importance of knowledge of the past. Apart from his thoughtful nature, Winston's main attributes are his rebelliousness and his fatalism. Winston hates the Party passionately and wants to test the limits of its power; he commits innumerable crimes throughout the novel, ranging from writing "DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER" in his diary, to having an illegal love affair with Julia, to getting himself secretly indoctrinated into the anti-Party Brotherhood. The effort Winston puts into his attempt to achieve freedom and independence ultimately underscores the Party's devastating power. By the end of the novel, Winston's rebellion is revealed as playing into O'Brien's campaign of physical and psychological torture, transforming Winston into a loyal subject of Big Brother.
- One reason for Winston's rebellion, and eventual downfall, is his sense of fatalism—his intense (though entirely justified) paranoia about the Party and his overriding belief that the Party will eventually catch and punish him. As soon as he writes "DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER" in his diary, Winston is positive that the Thought Police will quickly capture him for committing a thoughtcrime. Thinking that he is helpless to evade his doom, Winston allows himself to take unnecessary risks, such as trusting O'Brien and renting the room above Mr. Charrington's shop. Deep down, he knows that these risks will increase his chances of being caught by the Party; he even admits this to O'Brien while in prison. But because he believes that he will be caught no matter what he does, he convinces himself that he must continue to rebel. Winston lives in a world in which legitimate optimism is an impossibility; lacking any real hope, he gives himself false hope, fully aware that he is doing so.

# cont.

- **Julia**

- Julia is Winston's lover and the only other person who Winston can be sure hates the Party and wishes to rebel against it as he does. Whereas Winston is restless, fatalistic, and concerned about large-scale social issues, Julia is sensual, pragmatic, and generally content to live in the moment and make the best of her life. Winston longs to join the Brotherhood and read Emmanuel Goldstein's abstract manifesto; Julia is more concerned with enjoying sex and making practical plans to avoid getting caught by the Party. Winston essentially sees their affair as temporary; his fatalistic attitude makes him unable to imagine his relationship with Julia lasting very long. Julia, on the other hand, is well adapted to her chosen forms of small-scale rebellion. She claims to have had affairs with various Party members, and has no intention of terminating her pleasure seeking, or of being caught (her involvement with Winston is what leads to her capture). Julia is a striking contrast with Winston: apart from their mutual sexual desire and hatred of the Party, most of their traits are dissimilar, if not contradictory.

- **O'Brien**

- One of the most fascinating aspects of 1984 is the manner in which Orwell shrouds an explicit portrayal of a totalitarian world in an enigmatic aura. While Orwell gives the reader a close look into the personal life of Winston Smith, the reader's only glimpses of Party life are those that Winston himself catches. As a result, many of the Party's inner workings remain unexplained, as do its origins, and the identities and motivations of its leaders. This sense of mystery is centralized in the character of O'Brien, a powerful member of the Inner Party who tricks Winston into believing that he is a member of the revolutionary group called the Brotherhood. O'Brien inducts Winston into the Brotherhood. Later, though, he appears at Winston's jail cell to abuse and brainwash him in the name of the Party. During the process of this punishment, and perhaps as an act of psychological torture, O'Brien admits that he pretended to be connected to the Brotherhood merely to trap Winston in an act of open disloyalty to the Party.

- This revelation raises more questions about O'Brien than it answers. Rather than developing as a character throughout the novel, O'Brien actually seems to un-develop: by the end of the book, the reader knows far less about him than they previously had thought. When Winston asks O'Brien if he too has been captured by the Party, O'Brien replies, "They got me long ago." This reply could signify that O'Brien himself was once rebellious, only to be tortured into passive acceptance of the Party. One can also argue that O'Brien pretends to sympathize with Winston merely to gain his trust. Similarly, one cannot be sure whether the Brotherhood actually exists, or if it is simply a Party invention used to trap the disloyal and give the rest of the populace a common enemy. The novel does not answer these questions, but rather leaves O'Brien as a shadowy, symbolic enigma on the fringes of the even more obscure Inner Party.

fin