

EIGHTH GRADE SUMMER READING AND QUESTIONS

***Animal Farm* by George Orwell**

Introducing the Novel/ Background Information

On the publication of *Animal Farm* in 1945, George Orwell discovered with horror that booksellers were placing his novel on children's shelves. According to his housekeeper, he began traveling from bookstore to bookstore requesting that the book be shelved with adult works. This dual identity—as children's story and adult satire—has stayed with Orwell's novel for more than fifty years. *Animal Farm* tells the story of Farmer Jones's animals who rise up in rebellion and take over the farm. Tired of being exploited solely for human gain, the animals—who have human characteristics such as the power of speech—vow to create a new and more just society. Though the novel reads like a fairy story, and Orwell subtitles it as just that, it is also a satire containing a message about world politics and especially the former Soviet Union in particular. Since the Bolshevik revolutions of the early 1900s, the former Soviet Union had captured the attention of the world with its socialist experiment. Stalin's form of government had some supporters in Britain and the United States, but Orwell was against this system. In a **satire**, the writer attacks a serious issue by presenting it in a ridiculous light or otherwise poking fun at it. Orwell uses satire to expose what he saw as the myth of Soviet socialism. Thus, the novel tells a story that people of all ages can understand, but it also tells us a second story—that of the real-life Revolution. Many critics have matched in great detail the story's characters to historical persons—for example, linking the power struggle between Napoleon and Snowball to the historical feuding between Joseph Stalin and Leon Trotsky for control of the Soviet Union. Critics also believe that Old Major represents Karl Marx, who dies before realizing his dream. Other comparisons include Moses as the Russian Orthodox church, Boxer and Clover as workers, the sheep as the general public, Squealer as Stalin's government news agency, the dogs as Stalin's military police, and Farmer Jones as Czar Nicholas II. The farm's neighbors, Pilkington and Frederick, are said to represent Great Britain and Germany, while Mollie suggests the old Russian aristocracy, which resists change.

Animal Farm is more than a fairy story. It is a commentary on the relevance of independent thought, truth, and justice.

Many of the ideals behind the Soviet revolution were based on the writings and teachings of Karl Marx. A German intellectual who lived in the mid-1800s, Marx believed that societies are divided into two segments, a working class and an owner class. The working class creates all the products, while the owner class enjoys all the benefits of these products. This class division leads to inequality and oppression of the working class. Marx's objective was to create a classless society in which the work is shared by all for the benefit of all, and he believed revolution was the way to achieve this goal. In leading workers toward revolution, Marx used slogans like "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs." He also urged people to give up their religion, which he believed gave them false hope for a better life in heaven. The character of Old Major in *Animal Farm* is sometimes interpreted as a representation of Karl Marx.

Major's speech in the novel's opening chapter reflects many Marxist ideas, from the opening "Comrades," a typical form of address in the former Soviet Union, to the revolutionary song he teaches the other animals.

Power Struggle

In Chapters 5 through 7, the battle for power between Snowball and Napoleon comes to its climax. In Soviet history, a similar battle raged between two very different men, Leon Trotsky and Joseph Stalin. Stalin exercised power through regulations and rules. As its leader, he controlled the Communist Party bureaucracy. Trotsky had proven himself a masterful military strategist and inspirational leader during the Russian Civil War. He wanted to limit government power. The two also disagreed about how to industrialize and whether to focus on Soviet or worldwide socialism. Stalin took control in 1925—control he kept largely through tactics of terror.

One of Orwell's concerns about the Soviet state was that it used language to distort historical events. After Stalin bullied Leon Trotsky out of the country, he systematically removed any trace of Trotsky from Soviet history—took him out of photographs, censored his papers, and so on. He also used *Pravda*, his news agency, to control the information people received. In Chapters 5 through 7, Orwell repeatedly calls readers' attention to both Napoleon's manipulation of information and the animals' willingness to believe him.

Allies and Enemies

Napoleon wants the farm to have greater contact with the outside world. Joseph Stalin had similar visions for the Soviet Union. During the 1930s, he was torn between allying himself with Western capitalist nations or with Adolf Hitler's fascist German government. The Soviet propaganda machine defiled each "enemy" in turn as Stalin shifted allegiances. In 1939 Stalin pledged himself to Hitler by signing a "nonaggression pact." Hitler broke his promise and invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. The Soviets then became allies with the West. At first, Hitler had great success against Stalin's less modern armies. Ultimately, the Soviet army turned the tide with the Battle of Stalingrad, though the city was nearly destroyed and thousands of Soviets killed.

THE TIME AND PLACE

An **allegory** is a narrative that can be read on more than one level. Critics often consider *Animal Farm* to be an allegory of the Russian Revolution. In the early 1900s, Russia's Czar Nicholas II faced an increasingly discontented populace. Freed from feudal serfdom in 1861, many Russian peasants were struggling to survive under an oppressive government. By 1917, amidst the tremendous suffering of World War I, a revolution began. In two major battles, the Czar's government was overthrown and replaced by the Bolshevik leadership of Vladimir Lenin. When Lenin died in 1924, his former colleagues Leon Trotsky, hero of the early Revolution, and Joseph Stalin, head of the Communist Party, struggled for power. Stalin won the battle, and he deported Trotsky into permanent exile.

A **fable** is a narration intended to enforce a useful truth. Fables have two important characteristics. First, they teach a moral or lesson. In *Animal Farm*, the moral involves Orwell's views about Soviet politics. Second, the characters are most frequently animals. These animal characters often function as a satiric device to point out the follies of humankind. Though Old Major, Snowball, and Napoleon may represent Karl Marx, Leon Trotsky, and Joseph Stalin, many of the story characters are much more general. Some animals are grouped together as a single character—"the sheep," "the hens," and "the dogs." Orwell also capitalizes on the traits generally associated with particular animals, such as sheep as followers and dogs as loyal.

EACH ANSWER SHOULD BE AT LEAST ONE, WELL-WRITTEN PARAGRAPH (except #4). IF THE QUESTION HAS MORE THAN ONE PART, EACH PART IS TO BE ADDRESSED IN AT LEAST ONE, WELL-WRITTEN PARAGRAPH.

1. How does your school song resemble the theme song for *Animal Farm*?
2. What technique does Orwell use to cast doubt on the likelihood of a successful revolution?
3. Describe how the Rebellion takes place. How does the animals' behavior during the Rebellion suggest both human and animal characteristics?
4. The major characters in *Animal Farm* are introduced in the first four chapters. As you read, think about the purpose of each of Orwell's characters. Complete the chart by noting details that describe each character or by listing key actions.

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5. The very last paragraph of Chapter Two foreshadows trouble ahead for the animals. Explain the context of the paragraph and what you predict will happen in the coming chapters.
6. How do the pigs gain the rights to the cow's milk? Why do the other animals allow this to occur? What does this event suggest about the power hierarchy on the farm?
7. Why do the executions take place? What message do these events send to the animals about their role in a future society?
8. If you were to give titles to Chapters Five and Six, what would you name each? Explain.
9. If Benjamin, the donkey, were a person, what kind of person would he be? Why do you think the author included his character in this novel?
10. Explain the irony in Napoleon's inviting Mr. Pilkington to tour animal Farm. It may help you to refer back to Chapter Eight.
11. The novel ends with a chilling passage; 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. Which character do you think cheated in the card game, Napoleon or Pilkington? Give reasons to support your choice.
13. Explain how the story has run full circle. Begin with the overthrow of Mr. Jones's farm, Manor Farm, and end with the last scene in which Pilkington proposed a toast.
14. 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?
15. 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?

16. Almost all countries dedicate monuments to their heroes or leaders.
Find 3 monuments from 3 different countries that exist in our world today, and find 3 monuments from 3 different areas in America. State for whom, when, and why they were erected (all six).
17. Laws and rules are a part of everyone's life. View the “Rules and Regulations” of the Flint River Academy student handbook (it’s on the website). Rewrite five of these rules (just as Squealer did) to make exceptions for certain people or groups.
18. Do you think it’s fair that those who are more educated or more skilled—like the pigs in *Animal Farm*—have more influence in decision making? Consider how decisions are made in your community, state, or in the nation. Be sure to explain your answer.
19. *Animal Farm* contains many extremely effective scenes. Some are humorous or witty, others are bitterly ironic or pessimistic. Which scene did you find most memorable and effective? Why?
20. Do you think revolution is worth the upheaval and damage it inevitably causes? Can it bring about real and lasting change? Why or why not?
21. How would you feel if the rules for correct behavior kept changing?
22. Imagine you are a newcomer to the farm. Write a paragraph stating if you either support or oppose to Napoleon’s views and methods.
23. I picked this novel because we just finished an election year and your ideas behind the society you created this year. *Animal Farm* is full of 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 why it’s important that the masses (the population) be educated when voting and the knowledge of history? How has the novel changed your worldview regarding leadership and/or politics?
24. A **haiku** is a form of Japanese poetry that states, in three lines of five, seven, and five syllables, a picture designed to arouse a distinct emotion or a specific insight into a topic or idea. Compose a haiku that reflects your understanding of the author’s ideas in *Animal Farm*.