



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **George Orwell Biography** *Encyclopedia of World Biography on George Orwell*

The British novelist and essayist George Orwell (1903-1950) is best known for his satirical novels *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-four*.

George Orwell was born Eric Arthur Blair at Motihari, Bengal, India. His father, Richard Walmesley Blair, was a minor customs official in the opium department of the Indian Civil Service. When Orwell was four years old his family returned to England, where they settled at Henley, a village near London. His father soon returned to India. When Orwell was eight years old, he was sent to a private preparatory school in Sussex. He later claimed that his experiences there determined his views on the English class system. From there he went by scholarship to two private secondary schools: Wellington for one term and Eton for four and a half years.

Orwell then joined the Indian Imperial Police, receiving his training in Burma, where he served from 1922 to 1927. While home on leave in England, Orwell made the important decision not to return to Burma. His resignation from the Indian Imperial Police became effective on Jan. 1, 1928. He had wanted to become a writer since his adolescence, and he had come to believe that the Imperial Police was in this respect an unsuitable profession. Later evidence also suggests that he had come to understand the imperialism which he was serving and had rejected it.

### **Establishment as a Writer**

In the first 6 months after his decision, Orwell went on what he thought of as an expedition to the East End of London to become acquainted with the poor people of England. As a base, he rented a room in Notting Hill. In the spring he rented a room in a working-class district of Paris. It seems clear that his main objective was to establish himself as a writer, and the choice of Paris was characteristic of the period. Orwell wrote two novels, both lost, during his stay in Paris, and he published a few articles in French and English. After stints as a kitchen porter and dishwasher and a bout with pneumonia, he returned to England toward the end of 1929.

Orwell used his parents' home in Suffolk as a base, still attempting to establish himself as a writer. He earned his living by teaching and by writing occasional articles, while he completed several versions of his first book, *Down and Out in London and Paris*. This novel recorded his experiences in the East End and in Paris, and as he was earning his living as a teacher when it was scheduled for publication, he preferred to publish it under a pseudonym. From a list of four possible names submitted to his publisher, he chose "George Orwell." The Orwell is a Suffolk river.

### **First Novels**

Orwell's *Down and Out* was issued in 1933. During the next three years he supported himself by teaching, reviewing, and clerking in a bookshop and began spending longer periods away from his parents' Suffolk home. In 1934 he published *Burmese Days*. The plot of this novel concerns personal intrigue among an isolated group of Europeans in an Eastern station. Two more novels followed: *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935) and *Keep the Aspidochelone Flying* (1936).

In the spring of 1936 Orwell moved to Wallington, Hertfordshire, and several months later married Eileen O'Shaughnessy, a teacher and journalist. His reputation up to this time, as writer and journalist, was based mainly on his accounts of poverty and hard times. His next book was a commission in this direction. The Left Book Club authorized him to write an inquiry into the life of the poor and unemployed. *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) was divided into two parts. The first was typical reporting, but the second part was an essay on class and socialism. It marked Orwell's birth as a political writer, an identity that lasted for the rest of his life.

### **Political Commitments and Essays**

In July 1936 the Spanish Civil War broke out. By the end of that autumn, Orwell was readying himself to go to Spain to gather material for articles and perhaps to take part in the war. After his arrival in Barcelona, he joined the militia of the POUM (Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista) and served with them in action in January 1937. Transferring to the British Independent Labour party contingent serving with the POUM militia, Orwell was promoted first to corporal and then to lieutenant before being wounded in the middle of May. During his convalescence, the POUM was declared illegal, and he fled into France in June. His experiences in Spain had made him into a revolutionary socialist.

After his return to England, Orwell began writing *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), which completed his disengagement from the orthodox left. He then wished to return to India to write a book, but he became ill with tuberculosis. He entered a sanatorium where he remained until late in the summer of 1938. Orwell spent the following winter in Morocco, where he wrote *Coming Up for Air* (1939). After he returned to England, Orwell authored several of his best-known essays. These include the essays on Dickens and on boys' weeklies and "Inside the Whale."

After World War II began, Orwell believed that "now we are in this bloody war we have got to win it and I would like to lend a hand." The army, however, rejected him as physically unfit, but later he served for a period in the home guard and as a fire watcher. The Orwells moved to London in May 1940. In early 1941 he commenced writing "London Letters" for *Partisan Review*, and in August he joined the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) as a producer in the Indian section. He remained in this position until 1943.

### **First Masterpiece**

The year 1943 was an important one in Orwell's life for several reasons. His mother died in March; he left the BBC to become literary editor of the *Tribune*; and he began book reviewing on a more regular basis. But the most important event occurred late that year, when he commenced the writing of *Animal Farm*. Orwell had completed this satire by February 1944, but several publishers rejected it on political grounds. It finally appeared in August 1945. This fantasy relates what happens to animals that free themselves and then are again enslaved through violence and fraud.

Toward the end of World War II, Orwell traveled to France, Germany, and Austria as a reporter. His wife died in March 1945. The next year he settled on Jura off the coast of Scotland, with his youngest sister as his housekeeper.

### **Crowning Achievement**

By now, Orwell's health was steadily deteriorating. Renewed tuberculosis early in 1947 did not prevent the composition of the first draft of his masterpiece, *Nineteen Eighty-four*. The second draft was written in 1948 during several attacks of the disease. By the end of 1948 Orwell was seriously ill. *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949) is an elaborate satire on modern politics, prophesying a world perpetually laid waste by warring dictators.

Orwell entered a London hospital in September 1949 and the next month married Sonia Brownell. He died in London on Jan. 21, 1950.

Orwell's singleness of purpose in pursuit of his material and the uncompromising honesty that defined him both as a man and as a writer made him critical of intellectuals whose political viewpoints struck him as dilettante. Thus, though a writer of the left, he wrote the most savage criticism of his generation against left-wing authors, and his strong stand against communism resulted from his experience of its methods gained as a fighter in the Spanish Civil War.

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## George Orwell Research Worksheet

Using the biography information, answer the following questions:

1. In which year did Orwell go to Spain to find information for articles and join a militia?
2. While he was still trying to establish himself as a writer, how did he earn a living?
3. What was the name George Orwell was originally born with?
4. What year did Orwell write his first draft of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*?
5. What was the initial response to the book?
6. What was the date of Orwell's death?
7. Reread the following statement and attempt to explain it in your own words:  
"Thus, though a writer of the left, he wrote the most savage criticism of his generation against left-wing authors, and his strong stand against communism resulted from his experience of its methods gained as a fighter in the Spanish Civil War."

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Today's Objective: SWBAT explain how revolutions happen.

SWBAT set a purpose for reading *Animal Farm* based on Orwell and his view of revolutions.

Vocabulary in Context:

Revolution

Socialism

Do Now: Type 1 Writing: Write down a list of at least 3 things you would like to revolt against (overthrow) and why.

Notes: Revolution and the Soviet Union

Revolution:

Many of the ideals behind the \_\_\_\_\_ revolution were based on the writings and teachings of \_\_\_\_\_.

A German intellectual who lived in the \_\_\_\_\_, Marx believed that societies are divided into \_\_\_\_\_ segments, a \_\_\_\_\_ class and an \_\_\_\_\_ class.

The \_\_\_\_\_ all the products, while the owner class \_\_\_\_\_ all the benefits of these products.

This class division leads to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of the working class.

Marx's objective was to create a \_\_\_\_\_ in which the work is shared by all for the benefit of all, and he believed \_\_\_\_\_ was the way to achieve this goal.

In leading workers toward revolution, Marx used \_\_\_\_\_ like "From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs."

He also urged people to give up their \_\_\_\_\_, which he believed gave them \_\_\_\_\_ 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 " \_\_\_\_\_," a typical form of address in the former Soviet Union, to the revolutionary song he teaches the other animals.

CFU: What similarities do you see between Marx's views of society and the current state of America society?

Group Directions: Work in partner pairs to think about 4 different revolutions and why they might have happened.

Revolution	Time and Location	Why it might have happened
American Revolution		
Civil Rights Movement (America)		
Arab Spring		
First and Second Intifadas		





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Define each word and then use it in a sentence that makes sense.

1. cannibalism *n.*

2. cryptic *adj.*

3. gambol *v.*

4. ignominious *adj.*

5. indefatigable *adj.*

6. parasitical *adj.*