

## 1984 Socratic Seminar

### Pre-seminar Activities

Content: Read 1984 by George Orwell and compile a list of important aspects of the novel: historical context, author information, authorial intent, thematic connections, elements of plot, character, language, etc.—anything you believe is important in relation to the novel.

Process: Review seminar procedure and establish a personal goal.

### Seminar Questions

Opening What do you consider to be the most important aspect of the novel? Why?

#### Core

- Ø Many readers see in Orwell’s prophetic nightmare a warning that is timelier than ever. The institutions, the practices, and the events in Oceania have at least rudimentary parallels in today’s world. Site contemporary examples of variations of *Newspeak* and *doublethink* which serve to limit and obfuscate modern thought.
- Ø List some historical contextual elements that contribute to interpretation of the novel, particularly among those of Britain and the Americas who correspond to the citizens of Oceania in the novel.
- Ø How does the opening of the novel , including its opening line (“It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen”) contribute to the establishment of the tone?
- Ø Site specific examples within the plot of the novel which exemplify dystopian fiction and discuss in what ways they contest the presumption underlying much previous literature that human society is perfectible.
- Ø What lesson can you (a 16, 17, 18 year old high school student) learn from this novel?
- Ø What is the significance of the line, “We shall meet in the place where there is no darkness” in the novel?
- Ø Discuss the *Two Minute Hate* and *Physical Jerks* in relation to the novel and make comparisons to contemporary equivalents.
- Ø What is the significance of the *proles*? Why is there no attempt by the party to indoctrinate them, except in a desultory way (to monitor their actions)?
- Ø Discuss the existence of, as well as the implications of *Thought Police*, *Big Brother*, *the brotherhood*, and/or *the Party*, including contemporary interpretations/manifestations of each.
- Ø Although Orwell includes details which provide some sense of unity to Winston’s disjointed world, what instances of irony can you identify that add an extra dimension to the theme of appearance versus reality?
- Ø Consider O’Brien’s assertion while he is interrogating Winston that “reality exists in the human mind, and nowhere else.” Do you agree or disagree, and why?
- Ø Compare Winston’s world—the apartment and city in which he lives, his place of work, his relations with other people—with your own. In what ways are different? Similar?
- Ø Discuss how the Party’s slogan, War Is Peace, Freedom Is Slavery, Ignorance Is Strength, make sense or fail to make sense.
- Ø Consider the subject of memory in 1984. Does contemporary society—its values, technologies, forms of entertainment—threaten your own memory in a comparable way? Explain.

### Post Seminar Writing

Content: If George Orwell were alive today, do you think he would be relieved to find that 1984 had not proved prophetic or

horrified to find that it had? In your answer, compare specific details from your own observations and experience with details describing life in the novel.

Process: In a paragraph at the end of your Post Seminar Writing, assess individual and group participation in the seminar discussion. Do you think students met their personal goals? Did you? How could we improve procedure for the next seminar?