

HIGH SCHOOL/COLLEGE PREP ENGLISH IIB

Animal Farm Comprehension and Critical Thinking Activities

Background of the Author:

George Orwell was the pen name of Eric Blair. He was born in 1903 to British Colonists in Bengal, India. He attended elite private schools in England, including Eton, where the nobility are educated. It was his experiences with the snobbishness of these schools that made him suspicious of class systems in society. He also had deep feelings about the fairness with which governments around the world treated the poorer people.

These feelings led him to become a Socialist. He supported a government where there was dignity for all human beings. And, he supported social equality which would eliminate selfish individual interests. He spoke out openly against those governments who caused physical suffering and destroyed human dignity. He even fought, briefly, in the Spanish Civil War which lasted from 1936 – 1939.

George Orwell wrote many essays and shorter works, but is primarily remembered for his two great anti-totalitarian novels, 1984, written in 1949, and Animal Farm, written in 1946. Orwell died in 1950.

Questions:

1. *What did George Orwell believe about how people should be treated?*
2. *What year was Orwell born and when did he die?*

The Writing of *Animal Farm*:

George Orwell got the idea for *Animal Farm* when he saw a young boy whipping a cart horse. His sympathy for the horse reminded him of his sympathy for the working class – the people who were mistreated by some Capitalist governments during this period of history. In England, for example, ordinary factory workers had very low wages, no benefits, and were subjected to long hours.

At this time, some people admired the Soviet Union because it was originally formed with the idea of all people being equal. But, in reality, the Soviet Union strayed from the ideals of its founders, and became a dictatorship, under the rule of Joseph Stalin. The people of the Soviet Union lost all of their freedoms under Communism and only the leadership led a good life.

Animal Farm was written as a critique of the Soviet experience. It was also written to be a broader example of how Totalitarianism destroys human dignity. It was not just about Stalin, but about Adolph Hitler, Napoleon Bonaparte and all dictators then and now. It was a warning

to people everywhere that they must be watchful of their freedoms and participate in government decision-making at every opportunity.

It is interesting that Animal Farm is not about people, or about a particular place or time. It is a fable, like Aesop's Fables, which is a story written to make a point or teach a moral lesson. Usually animals are used as main characters to represent people. In this way, Orwell could criticize openly a country and a person without fear, and yet he could make his point about what he believe to be true. A fable is also a more inviting way of getting the reader interested.

Questions:

1. *Why was Animal Farm written?*
2. *What is a fable?*
3. *Why would Orwell write this story as a fable?*

A Short History of the Soviet Revolution:

In order to understand, fully, the meaning of Orwell's fable, a little history needs to be told of what actually happened in the Soviet Union in 1917 and after.

Before the Soviet Revolution in 1917, Russia was a country ruled by a king or Tsar. He had absolute power over the lives of everyone in the country. The Tsar ruled with the help of a noble class who shared in the wealth that the Tsar had gathered. He also had a strong army that was loyal only to him. Everyone else in the nation was poor, hungry and without any rights. World War I caused the people even more unbelievable hardship.

The common people began to get very angry over the way they were treated. Their growing anger led them to start a revolution against the Tsar in 1917. The people that rebelled believed in the ideas of Karl Marx, a German. His idea was that Socialism (Communism) was the highest form of government. Under Communism, all property would be held in common and all people would live as equals. It was for those ideals that the people fought.

The revolution was led by Vladimir Lenin, who promised peace, bread and land. It succeeded in bringing down the Tsar. Lenin, however, died in 1924 before the ideals of Marx could become reality. After his death, two factions, one led by Joseph Stalin, the other by Leon Trotsky, struggled for power. Stalin was a very crafty politician who worked quietly behind the scenes to gain power. Trotsky was popular, and had real beliefs in the way government should be. He was famous for his speeches. Stalin eventually won the power struggle by forming alliances with others. He banished Trotsky from Russia, and had him assassinated. Stalin started several economic programs in the Soviet Union. However, the country was so impoverished and economically weak that the programs failed. There was widespread suffering. When there was any complaint about conditions, Stalin would blame Trotsky. Stalin then became stronger by killing or imprisoning his enemies and taking total control of the power in the entire nation with the help of his military.

Questions:

1. *What was life like in Russia before 1917 for the Tsar? What was it like for the common people?*
2. *What did Karl Marx believe in?*
3. *Who led the Revolution against the Tsar?*
4. *Who were the two people who struggled for power?*
5. *Who won this struggle?*
6. *Did the ideas of Karl Marx win the struggle? What actually happened?*

The Characters in *Animal Farm*

As you will see in *Animal Farm*, the main characters represented those in the history of the Soviet Union. Napoleon is Stalin, Snowball is Trotsky, and Major is Karl Marx. The other characters represent groups of people or ideas that many people held. In this packet is a list of the major characters in *Animal Farm*. It will be up to you to “fill in the blanks” as you read the book, telling what each character was like, what their beliefs were, and how they got along with the other animals.

Assignment – Main Characters

Describe each of the following characters. Give as much information about them as you can discover while you are reading the book. This assignment will be due after you have finished Chapter 10.

NAPOLEON
SNOWBALL
BOXER
SQUEALER
MAJOR
CLOVER
MOSES
MOLLIE
BENJAMIN
MR. JONES
MR. FREDERICK
MR. PILKINGTON

Questions from *Animal Farm*

Chapter 1

1. Which animal gave a speech to the other animal about how life should be?
2. List 5 examples of how he described animals' lives.
3. Give 5 examples of how he described man's life.
4. From what did he say sprang all of the evils of this life, and what was his one word message to them?
5. The animals sang "Beasts of England". Why do you think that having a song was important to the animals?

Chapter 2

1. Why were the pigs selected to do the organizing?
2. What was Sugar Candy Mountain?
3. Why did the animals destroy the bits and whips?
4. List the Seven Commandments.
5. What do you think happened to the milk? What does this foretell about the character of Napoleon and his commitment to the reasons for the rebellion?

Chapter 3

1. Describe the work of the animals on the farm in that first summer.
2. Either draw or describe the flag at animal farm. What did the color and the items on the flag represent?
3. What was the single maxim that the Seven Commandments was reduced to? Why do you think it was reduced?
4. What did Napoleon do with the puppies?
5. Why did the pigs get to have all of the apples and milk? How did Squealer get the other animals to agree to this?

Chapter 4

1. Why were Farmers Pilkington and Frederick worried about Animal Farm?
2. How were the animals able to defeat the farmers?
3. What happened to the stable boy? How did Boxer feel? What did snowball say to Boxer?
4. How was the dead sheep honored?
5. Why do you think a military decoration was created?

Chapter 5

1. What happened with Mollie? Were there clues earlier in the book that she might do this?
2. What differences were there between Napoleon and Snowball?

3. How did Napoleon use the dogs?
4. How did Squealer justify the fact that Snowball had been driven out and there would be no more debates?
5. Why do you think Squealer told the animals that loyalty, obedience and discipline were more important than bravery?

Chapter 6

1. What was Boxer's role in the building of the windmill?
2. How did Napoleon propose to get the items that could not be produced on the farm?
3. How did Squealer explain the new arrangement to engage Mr. Whymper?
4. How did Squealer justify the fact that the pigs were now sleeping in beds?
5. Why did Napoleon blame Snowball for the destruction of the windmill?

Chapter 7

1. Describe the hen's rebellion and its outcome.
2. Look up the word "scapegoat" and write the definition.
3. How was Snowball being used as a scapegoat by Napoleon.
4. How did Clover picture the future? What kind of time had they actually come to?
5. Why do you think Napoleon had the pigs and hens killed?

Chapter 8

1. How was the Commandment against killing animals changed?
2. Give three examples of the way Napoleon lived and was treated by the others.
3. What happened to the windmill? Why were the animals so upset about it?
4. What did Benjamin seem to understand had happened when Squealer fell off the ladder?
5. How did Napoleon and Squealer control the animal's attitudes toward Napoleon's rule?

Chapter 9

1. How did Squealer explain the difference in the amount of food given to the animals?
2. Why did the animals like the Spontaneous Demonstrations?
3. What was Boxer's fate?
4. What does this treatment of Boxer tell you about Napoleon's character?
5. How did the life and death of Boxer symbolize what Orwell saw as the basic problem with totalitarian societies?

Chapter 10

1. What did Benjamin tell the animals was the law of life?
2. Why did the animals continue to believe in Animal Farm?
3. What was the last remaining Commandment?

4. How did this commandment work or apply to Animal Farm?
5. What was the significance of the fact that the animals could no longer tell which were the humans and which were pigs?