

**STUDY AND
REVISE**
for GCSE

Animal Farm

by George Orwell

- ▶ Written by experienced teachers and examiners
- ▶ Guides you to the best understanding of the text
- ▶ Get your best grade

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Language, style and analysis

Target your thinking

- Why is Orwell's use of language important? (AO2)
- How important is the setting in *Animal Farm*? (AO1, AO2)
- How does the author use language, style and structure to convey his message? (AO2, AO3)

Language

All authors choose their words carefully and purposefully for maximum effect, even when the language appears simple, as is the case with *Animal Farm*. This appearance can be deceptive as Orwell uses many language devices to tell the story. The straightforward prose style is appropriate for a fable or fairy story (see below) and Orwell deliberately uses some of the methods we associate with those forms of story.

GRADE BOOSTER

In an exam answer you may wish to consider the possibility that if Orwell is criticising people's unquestioning beliefs in political ideologies that can be reduced to simple slogans, then can't the same criticism be levelled at *Animal Farm*? Exploring alternative interpretations like this is a great way to gain the higher levels.

With his use of an external narrator, Orwell provides us with a traditional storyteller who unfolds the story for us. He opens the story with a focus on character and setting, before moving on to events which, as we have seen, relate to history. The narrator signals time passing and events for us in a simplified way: 'Three nights later old Major died peacefully in his sleep'; 'All through that summer'; 'By the late summer'.

Apart from Chapter 10, which takes place after 'Years [have] passed', the events in the novel span four years:

- Summer, Year 1: Chapters 1–4
- Autumn, Year 1: Chapter 4
- Winter, Year 1: Chapter 5
- Spring, Year 2: Chapter 5
- Winter, Year 2: Chapter 6
- Spring, Year 3: Chapter 7
- Autumn, Year 3: Chapter 8
- Winter, Year 3: Chapter 8
- Summer, Year 4: Chapter 8

Key quotation

'Four legs good, two legs bad!'

'Four legs good, two legs better!'

Key quotation

'Napoleon is always right.'

'I will work harder.'

Key quotation

'...it must be due to some fault in ourselves'

Key quotation

'And among us animals let there be perfect unity, perfect comradeship in the struggle.'

Repetition

One method Orwell employs is repetition, which is a very common device in fairy stories – think of 'The Three Little Pigs' or 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears'. In *Animal Farm* the use of repetition has precise purposes. The frequent mention of the animals' bad memories reminds us of how easy it is for the pigs to rewrite history. The constant bleating of the sheep has three functions: at text level it drowns out all attempts at criticism, but it is also used by Orwell to satirise people's unquestioning beliefs in political ideologies. Finally, it can be seen as a criticism of political systems that reduce complex ideas to simple slogans.

Boxer's maxims of 'I will work harder' and 'Napoleon is always right' are another example of Orwell's use of repetition. These help to emphasise the blind faith people have in their rulers: any failings in the system can be solved by working harder (meaning the working classes, not the rulers, of course!) and we must never criticise our 'betters'! Boxer's stupidity is also highlighted by the use of these maxims: this can most clearly be seen when, after the mass executions, Boxer's only response is 'I do not understand ... it must be due to some fault in ourselves. The solution ... is to work harder.' Squealer cynically uses Boxer's motto when he tells the animals that Boxer's 'very last words' were 'Napoleon is always right'. Napoleon too uses these maxims for his own ends in his oration in Boxer's honour, telling every animal that each 'would do well to adopt [these maxims] as his own'.

Another example of Orwell deliberately using repetition is the ironic use of the word 'comrades'. Here he is mocking the Communist regime's use of the word – the pigs and animals clearly are not comrades.

Orwell uses a list to convey the horror of the dystopian world that the animals endure post rebellion: lack of free speech, terror and murder. He uses emotive language to emphasise the sadness of the situation, with words such as 'fierce', 'growling' and 'shocking' conveying the absolute fear faced by the animals. The lack of freedom in this dystopian world is emphasised through the words 'had to', and the inclusion of the word 'comrades' is an ironic reminder of the utopian ideals of the Rebellion.

Build critical skills

Sometimes the word order, as well as the words themselves, is significant. Why do you think Orwell places the words 'silent' and 'terrified' at the beginning rather than at the end of this sentence?

After Snowball has been chased off the farm: 'Silent and terrified, the animals crept back into the barn.'

What is the effect of having these two words at the beginning? Find one more example of Orwell using word order for particular emphasis.

The narrative voice

An important aspect of language used in a story is the narrative voice used by the author. The narrative voice is the method the writer uses to tell the story. Most stories are told in the third person, that is, by an ever-present narrator who knows everything about the characters and events. *Animal Farm* is written in this way but with a slight, but interesting, difference. Orwell, at times, chooses not to tell us everything but instead leaves his readers to infer for themselves what has happened. Often significant events are not narrated by this omniscient voice but instead are seen through the eyes of the animals. For example: '...the animals were satisfied that they had been mistaken' when Squealer is caught altering the Fifth Commandment; it is described as a 'strange incident which hardly anyone was able to understand'. The effect of describing events through the eyes of the animals is that it emphasises their ignorance and gullibility and prompts the reader to ask why, if it is so obvious to us, they can't see what is happening?

Through this narrative viewpoint, Orwell invites the reader to deduce the significance of events and comments ironically. For example, after Squealer's propagandist explanation regarding the milk and apples, Orwell comments that 'The importance of keeping the pigs in good health was all too obvious.' As well as mocking the stupidity of the animals here, Orwell leads the reader to despair of any hope that the ideals of Animalism can succeed.

GRADE BOOSTER

It is no good just knowing the type of narrative voice employed; it is essential to explain in your responses why Orwell uses this method, what effect it has on the way the story is told and how it helps Orwell convey his message to the reader.

Build critical skills

Why do you think that Orwell does not tell us what has happened to the disappearing milk but simply states that when the animals came back from the harvest 'it was noticed that the milk had disappeared'?

Squealer's voice uses a combination of strategies that both simplify and complicate language. By radically simplifying language and indoctrinating the sheep when he teaches them to bleat 'Four legs good, two legs better!' he limits the terms of debate and ensures the pigs' control. Similarly, by complicating language unnecessarily and using statistics and clever wording (such as his reference to 'tactics' in Chapter 5), he confuses and intimidates the uneducated animals. When he explains that the rations have been 'readjusted' rather than 'reduced', and when he tells the animals all that Napoleon does is for the good of the farm, he is manipulating them into accepting what he says as truth. Squealer's ability to manipulate language is apparent from the start and we see in his speeches the ways he uses persuasive devices to good effect. His

Animal Farm

Key quotation

Even Boxer was vaguely troubled ... but in the end he could not think of anything to say.

Key quotation

He was always referred to in formal style as "our leader, Comrade Napoleon"

rhetorical questions, lists, choices of inclusion and omission and personal pronouns are all tools that help to pacify the animals and maintain the pigs' power.

The animals all have their own distinctive voices. For example, Orwell often has Squealer pose a number of rhetorical questions, causing the animals to question their own memories and suspicions of the pigs. He uses personal pronouns such as 'you' repeatedly in an accusatory way, inferring that the animals are in the wrong to want the pigs not to have a proper rest or sleep in beds. Orwell has Squealer refer to the animals as 'comrades' and uses the personal pronoun 'we' to suggest that he is on their side. His reference to the animals' absolute need for the pigs and their 'brainwork', along with Orwell's use of the emotive word 'surely', provokes guilt and instils a fear in the animals that without the pigs, Jones would come back to rule the farm. By mentioning Jones, Squealer ensures that the animals' fear of a past master keeps their present one in control.

It is noticeable that while Orwell frequently uses direct speech when the animals are talking, Napoleon's speech is always written in reported speech and never given in direct speech. This has the effect of making Napoleon seem a more remote figure, distant and aloof from the rest of the animals. The personality cult that has been built up around him is also emphasised when he never gives direct orders himself but always uses one of the pigs, usually Squealer, to convey his orders: he is seen by the animals as being too important actually to talk to them.

Realistic detail

Orwell writes very concisely, often using multiple adjectives to give the reader a lot of information very quickly. For example, Mollie is a 'foolish, pretty, white mare' and Clover a 'stout, motherly mare'. He often adds precise realistic detail, for example the effect of the seasons on the farm, which Orwell often uses to highlight the difficulties the farm faces: 'the autumn producing thirty-one young pigs' (which would have to be fed), or the description of Boxer and Clover setting down their 'vast hairy hoofs with great care lest there should be some small animal concealed in the straw'. The effect of such detail is, ironically, to add realism to what is a fable not a realistic story, helping us to suspend our disbelief and so be more receptive to the story and its message.

Imagery and symbolism

The vocabulary and sentence structure of *Animal Farm* is very simple, as is fitting for a novel that Orwell subtitled *A Fairy Story*. The simplicity of the story's style does not lend itself to an abundance of imagery, meaning that when Orwell does introduce imagery it is all the more effective.

A good example of this is the beginning of Chapter 6: 'All that year the animals worked like slaves.' This is a common image but in the context of this novel it is a powerful ironic comment: actually the animals are not *like* slaves – they *are* slaves, although they do not know it.

GRADE BOOSTER

If you are asked about symbolism in the text, you could discuss Animal Farm's flag, with its image of hoof and horn. Mentioning that this is similar to the Red Banner's image of the hammer and sickle (used by the Bolsheviks as a symbol of their ideological commitment to placing all authority in the hands of workers and peasants) may gain you extra marks in an exam.

Of course the entire novel is rich in symbolism, but it can be useful sometimes to consider some of the symbols that are also potent images, for example the flag. Flags are symbols of patriotism or loyalty to a geographical area, an organisation or a particular ideal. The hoof-and-horn flag is particularly interesting. Its background is green, perhaps suggesting the peace and tranquillity of pasture. It is therefore ironic that after the Rebellion the animals work just as hard and are treated as badly as in Jones's day. The flag later comes to represent the absolute control of the pigs when the hoof and horn are removed and it becomes a plain green flag.

Similarly, the whip is used to symbolise the cruel oppression of the animals by Jones. The destruction of the whips at the birth of Animal Farm is a triumphant moment for the animals – 'All the animals capered with joy when they saw the whips going up in flames' – but Clover is terrified towards the end of the novel when she sees Napoleon walking on his hind legs with a whip in his trotter.

GRADE BOOSTER

There is little point in being able simply to identify or list various aspects of language, style and structure. You need to be able to comment on how they add to the novel and help Orwell get his message across to the reader.

Finally, the apples and milk can be seen as symbolic of the luxuries that the animals believed they would all share after the Rebellion. The fact that they are taken away is the first indication of the pigs' greed and their belief that they see themselves as superior to the other animals.

Build critical skills

Don't be afraid to consider any negative aspects of a text's style. In using the form of a children's story, is there a danger that the message will be lost in the story or that the novel will not be taken seriously and seen only as a children's book? *Gulliver's Travels* is today regarded by most people as only a children's story but when it was written (in 1726) it was regarded as a clear political satire.

Style

If the characters in a novel tell us *who*, the plot tells us *what* and the themes tell us *why*, then the style of a novel tells us *how* all these elements knit together to produce the text. The style of *Animal Farm* is particularly important in conveying Orwell's message. The story may be told in a straightforward way – but don't be fooled by its apparent simplicity. *Animal Farm* has a clearly defined style that is crucial to the author's purpose.

The most obvious aspect of the style is that the novel is written as a story with talking animals, like many children's stories. Orwell originally subtitled his novel *A Fairy Story* and there are clear aspects of fairy tales in *Animal Farm*: the simple plot and setting, the struggle between good and evil and the stereotypical characters.

In this novel, however, good does not triumph over evil and the novel does not end with our heroes and heroines living 'happily ever after'. Instead of utopia being achieved, we have a dystopian world being created. The advantages of using animals is that the storyline, and characters, are kept simple, allowing Orwell's message about corruption and abuse of power to be all the more clearly seen. This simple, easily understood nature of the story makes for wide audience appeal and easy translation into other languages.

Contrasting styles

At the text level, what appears to be a simplicity of the language can, on closer inspection, become ambiguous and the effect of this simplicity is sometimes deliberately reversed. Orwell, mostly through Squealer, resorts to jargon and 'scientific' explanations to convince, confuse and manipulate the animals. There are numerous examples in the text of the way in which language is used to maintain power. Most of the animals (with the exception of Benjamin) are unable to understand concepts and ideologies, and Squealer is able to exploit their inability to think in the abstract.

Snowball also resorts to similar methods. As early as Chapter 3, we see Snowball's superior linguistic ability when he uses words such as 'propulsion' and 'manipulation', which the birds do not understand, to convince the animals that a wing is a leg. Later we see Squealer using language as a device to maintain the pigs' power, when he talks of 'tactics' in Chapter 5, which the animals do not understand, and when we are told that he refers to 'mysterious things' called 'files', 'reports' and 'memoranda', with the implied suggestion that these are unintelligible to the animals.

Key quotation

Milk and apples (this has been proved by Science, comrades) contain substances absolutely necessary to the well-being of a pig.

Fable and allegory

The use of animals indicates that *Animal Farm* can be described as a fable and/or allegory. A fable is usually a story with animals that have the power of speech and have human characteristics. There is always a moral or message about the human condition in the story. *Aesop's Fables* are perhaps the most well-known, for example 'The Tortoise and the Hare', which shows that patience and perseverance are rewarded. An allegory is a text that has a meaning unrelated to the actual story. In effect, an allegory is like a metaphor except the representation is sustained throughout. Both allegories and fables have a very similar purpose and with regard to *Animal Farm* the two terms can be regarded as interchangeable.

The fable/allegorical elements in *Animal Farm* operate on two levels. The novel is an allegory of the events leading up to the Russian Revolution (1917) and the Communist regime that followed, up to the Tehran Conference in 1943. Characters and events in the novel relate closely to actual historical figures and events in Russian history. On a deeper level, however, the novel operates as a warning against tyranny, oppression and totalitarian regimes. Orwell is telling the reader that we must always be vigilant and hold our rulers to account.

Setting

The novel is set entirely on the farm, although there are passing references to other places: after the Rebellion Jones is to be found in The Red Lion pub, 'complaining to anyone who would listen'. Orwell also gives us brief descriptions of the two neighbouring farms and the pigeons bring news of Mollie being 'between the shafts of a smart dogcart' on the other side of Willington and of 'a wave of rebelliousness [that] ran through the countryside'. The simple reason for this concentration of events in one location is that *Animal Farm* is a satire on the Russian Revolution and the subsequent events in that country.

Within the farm itself there are various locations that have a particular significance:

- 1 The farmhouse is a symbol of fear for the animals, as it represents Jones and other humans. It is to be preserved as a museum, a reminder of the bad times when Jones was the master. Thus, when the pigs move into the farmhouse, Orwell is showing their corruption and abuse of power: by breaking this resolution, as well as the Fourth Commandment, they are becoming more and more like Jones.
- 2 The knoll, where the windmill was built, is the place the animals seem to congregate in moments of great joy (after the success of the Rebellion) or great sadness (after the mass executions). It is used

Key quotation

'This, said Squealer, was something called tactics. ... "Tactics, comrades, tactics!" ... The animals were not certain what the word meant, but ... they accepted his explanation without further questions.'

Key quotation

'That was theirs too, but they were frightened to go inside.'

Build critical skills

How does Orwell show the animals' feelings when they enter the farmhouse for the first time?

Key quotation

'All were agreed that no animal must ever live there.'

Animal Farm

Key quotation

‘...they hurled themselves into the air in great leaps of excitement.’

Build critical skills

Compare how Orwell shows the contrast in the animals’ feelings when they go to the knoll after the Rebellion with when they go to the knoll after the executions.

Build critical skills

At the point just after Snowball has been driven out, how does Orwell emphasise the difference between the idealism of old Major’s speech and the reality of life on the farm?

Foreshadowing: a technique used to warn the reader of a future event.

Key quotation

‘They are taking Boxer to the knacker’s’

by Orwell to show how far life on the farm has moved away from those early idealistic days when the animals were in ‘ecstasy’ with the thought that everything ‘they could see was theirs’.

- 3 The barn has great significance as it is the place where the first meeting of the animals takes place and where the animals have their ‘Meetings’ each Sunday, until these are banned by Napoleon. It is also the place where the mass executions take place, thus enabling Orwell to contrast the hope generated by old Major’s speech with the despair felt after the ‘trials’ and executions ordered by Napoleon. The barn is where the Seven Commandments are written, and of course rewritten by Squealer, symbolising the rewriting of history by the pigs and the collective memory loss of the other animals.

Language and structure

Orwell’s use of language helps to convey a circular structure to the novel by introducing parallels in his narrative.

Read this extract from old Major’s speech at the beginning of the novel:

‘...our lives are miserable, laborious, and short. We are born, we are given just so much food as will keep the breath in our bodies, and those of us who are capable of it are forced to work to the last atom of our strength’

Now read this extract from Chapter 10, when years have passed. Is the life of the animals any different than it was in Chapter 1?

‘...They were generally hungry, they slept on straw, they drank from the pool, they laboured in the fields; in winter they were troubled by the cold, and in summer by the flies.’

Orwell employs the technique of **foreshadowing** to create a circular structure. He offers the reader hints as to what will happen later in the story. For example, read this extract from old Major’s speech at the beginning of the novel:

‘You, Boxer, the very day that those great muscles of yours lose their power, Jones will sell you to the knacker, who will cut your throat and boil you down for the foxhounds.’

Now read this extract from Chapter 9, when Boxer has finally collapsed through overwork and is taken away in a van, supposedly to hospital:

‘Benjamin pushed her aside, and in the midst of a deadly silence he read: “Alfred Simmonds, Horse Slaughterer and Glue Boiler, Willington. Dealer in Hides and Bone-Meal. Kennels supplied”.’

GRADE FOCUS**Grade 5**

To achieve a Grade 5 students will show a clear understanding of the methods Orwell uses to create effects for the reader, supported by appropriate references to the text.

Grade 8

To achieve a Grade 8, students will be able to explore and analyse the methods Orwell uses to create effects for the reader, supported by carefully chosen and well-integrated references to the text.

REVIEW YOUR LEARNING

(Answers are given on pp. 103–104.)

- 1 What is the most obvious aspect of the style of *Animal Farm*?
- 2 What techniques does Orwell use to emphasise key themes?
- 3 What effect does the use of unusual word order in some sentences have?
- 4 What is *Animal Farm* an allegory of?
- 5 What is the effect of the circular structure of the novel?
- 6 What is 'foreshadowing'?
- 7 Identify an example of foreshadowing in the novel.
- 8 How many years do the first nine chapters cover?