

1984: Understanding the First Third

- 1) Who are the three main powers in *1984*?
- 2) What does the word “Ingsoc” mean in our language? Who was supposedly in power before Ingsoc became dominant, and how were they described?
- 3) What happens when Winston visits the Parsons family in Chapter II? What’s noteworthy about the parent/child interactions here?
- 4) What is Winston’s job? What is his particular skill?
- 5) What happens during the Two Minutes Hate in Chapter I? Which figures are shown on the telescreen?
- 6) What is the Brotherhood? Who leads it? How are its teachings supposedly spread, and why is it difficult to find?
- 7) Who does Winston make eye contact with during the Hate, and why is the moment significant?
- 8) Why is Syme noteworthy? What does Winston believe his eventual fate will be, and why does he believe this?
- 9) What is “doublethink?” What are some examples, and how do they work?
- 10) What does Winston’s encounter with the old man illustrate regarding Smith’s search for the “true past”?
- 11) Why is Winston curious about the past to begin with? Why doesn’t he simply accept what the party says, engaging in doublethink the way Syme does? (Think of all the reasons he rebels against orthodoxy.)
- 12) How are the proles treated in comparison to members of the Inner/Outer Party? (For example, what do the proles traditionally drink, and what are they technically forbidden to drink?) Why is there a contrast? What’s the reason for treating the proles in this way, and why do they accept their treatment?
- 13) The “O’Brien” that appears in Winston’s dream says, “We shall meet in the place where there is no darkness.” Without reading ahead, try to explain what O’Brien means; what could the “place with no darkness” be?
- 14) What sort of psychological toll do the actions of the government take on citizens? Start by thinking about Winston – his dreams, his urges, his reactions, etc. However, don’t simply look at what happens to Winston – look at Syme, at the Parsons, at Tillotson (the little man who glares with open hostility and suspicion at Smith while working). How are their reactions influenced or directed by Oceania’s government/society and its systems of control?
- 15) Authors use two modes of characterization most frequently: Direct characterization (the author allows the reader to understand a figure better by directly stating information about that figure, such as physical attributes and descriptions) and indirect characterization (the author reveals something about a character without specifically saying it; he/she can do this by showing us the person’s actions, his/her thoughts, or even other figures’ opinions regarding him/her). Most authors frequently switch between modes while writing, and Orwell is no exception. How does he “directly characterize” Winston? How does he “indirectly characterize” him? What do you learn from each method? Remember to include examples from the book, and to list what we learn, the evidence that allows us to learn, and the method Orwell uses (character’s thoughts, another character’s comments, etc.)!