

Winston Began to Read: The Lessons of “The Book” in 1984

The best books, he perceived, are the ones that tell you what you know already.

The ninth chapter of *1984* is perhaps its most difficult to understand – and almost certainly its most important. The book’s most important messages, most pointed social criticisms, most memorable warnings, and most chilling philosophies can be found within its pages. But many readers find the chapter overwhelming – as though Orwell packs too much into too short a space.

This assignment aims to help you boil down the chapter’s salient points into an easy reference sheet. The answers can be found in (roughly) chronological order as you read, although it will be necessary to go back and add information to some of them as you move through the chapter. By the end of this activity, you should be able to clearly re-state and understand what Orwell tries to teach his readers – although the degree to which you agree with or accept his statements is up to you.

It’s really important that you both quote and cite the book while supporting your statement. (If you can’t find evidence, it means you can’t answer the question yet!) Many of these questions will re-appear during War Days, as well as on your exam, so make sure you can answer each even if you aren’t responsible for all of them.

- 1) Which geographic regions make up Eastasia, Eurasia, and Oceania?
- 2) How is war “re-described” by the Book? How is it different from earlier warfare, if at all?
- 3) Why won’t the war ever end?
- 4) What are the three nations fighting over?
- 5) What is the purpose of the war?
- 6) Why would the spoils from advanced technology and industrialization – progress! – threaten hierarchical society, even in one where power remained in the hands of relatively few?
- 7) How can one continue producing goods without adding to a society’s “wealth”?
- 8) Why keep a populace – even the favored groups of one – near “the brink of hardship”? How is such a populace able to accept that such favored groups should exist, given the circumstances?
- 9) What are the necessary moods that compose the mentality of a Party member? Why should these mental conditions exist?
- 10) What are the two aims of the Party, and what are the two problems it perennially faces?
- 11) What were the atomic wars of the 1950s like? What was their main consequence?
- 12) What type of “war strategy” does each superpower follow? Why *wouldn’t* one wish to conquer certain stretches of land?
- 13) Describe the relationship between Neo-Bolshevism, Ingsoc, and Deathworship/Obliteration of the Self.

- 14) Why does Orwell state that “while wars could be won or lost, no ruling class could be completely irresponsible”? Why does he state that in the present day, warfare has become a “purely internal affair” – and why is it simultaneously unreal and meaningful?
- 15) Ultimately, how is the Party’s slogan “War is Peace” accurate?
- 16) What three groups of people have always existed in any society? What are their goals, and why are they irreconcilable?
- 17) What is the “struggle that repeats itself”? Why can’t the lower classes ever succeed?
- 18) Why would equality be harmful to those who sought power – and what’s particularly sad about utopian possibilities?
- 19) Which kind of people would flourish in a world borne out of totalitarian traditions?
- 20) Why were the old tyrannical regimes “inefficient”?
- 21) How did Ingsoc become both like and unlike Socialism?
- 22) What are the four ways that ruling groups can fall from power – and what is the single most important factor that determines whether they stay in power? Which of those “dangers” no longer exist – and which is the only one that remains necessary to “check”?
- 23) What is the “essence of oligarchical rule” Orwell names at the bottom of page 209, and how does this differ from more traditional assumptions regarding how power is transmitted?
- 24) Why can the proles be granted intellectual liberty while even a party member’s smallest deviation from orthodox thought will be crushed?
- 25) Why don’t laws exist in Oceania? (In other words, why don’t citizens have any explicit statements regarding the behaviors and attitudes expected of them?)
- 26) Explain crimestop and blackwhite.
- 27) What are the two reasons for the alteration of the past?
- 28) How is the mutability of the past related to double-think?
- 29) What is doublethink?
- 30) What does Orwell call “the secret of ruling”?
- 31) Who is most rational about war, and why?
- 32) What are some of the contradictions intentionally undertaken by the party, and what prevailing mental condition must arise from accepting them?