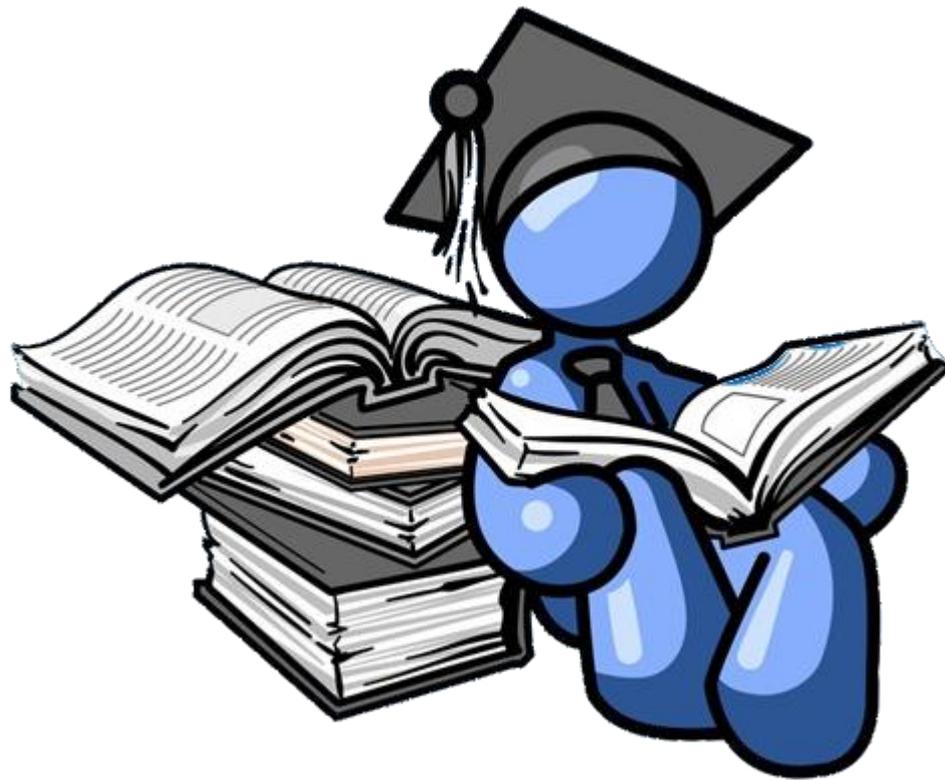


Animal Farm

REVISION NOTES- English Literature



ANIMAL FARM REVISION

Allusions to history, geography and current science

- The ousting of the humans after the farmers forget to feed the animals is an allusion to the Russian Revolution of 1917 that led to the removal of the Czar after a series of social upheavals and wars and ultimately resulted in famine and poverty.
- Mr. Jones' last ditch effort to re-take the farm (The Battle of the Cowshed) is analogous to the Russian Civil War in which the western capitalist governments sent soldiers to try to remove the Bolsheviks from power.
- Napoleon's removal of Snowball is like Stalin's removal of Leon Trotsky from power in 1927 and his subsequent expulsion and murder.
- Squealer constantly changing the commandments may refer to the constant line of adjustments to the Communist theory by the people in power..
- During the rise of Napoleon, he ordered the collection of all the hens' eggs. In an act of defiance, the hens destroyed their eggs rather than give them to Napoleon. During Stalin's collectivization period in the early 1930s, many Ukrainian peasants burned their crops and farms rather than handing them over to the government.
- Napoleon's mass executions, of which many were unfair for the alleged crimes, is similar to Stalin executing his political enemies for various crimes after they were tortured and forced to falsify confessions.
- Napoleon replaces the farm anthem "Beasts of England" with an inane composition by the pig poet Minimus. In 1943, Stalin replaced the old national anthem "the Internationale" with "the Hymn of the Soviet Union." The original version glorified Stalin so heavily that after his death in 1953, entire sections of the anthem had to be replaced or removed.
- Napoleon's later alliance with the humans is like Stalin's non-aggression pact with Hitler in the early years of WWII.
- Napoleon changing Animal Farm back to Manor echos the Red Army's name change from the "Workers' and Peasants' Red Army" to the "Soviet Army" to appear as a more appealing and professional organization rather than an army of the common people.
- Squealer may be an allegory of the Soviet Newspaper in which Stalin often wrote many of the articles anonymously to give the impression the country was far better off than it was.
- The dogs may be an allegory to the NKVD (KGB), the elite police force who ruled by terror under Stalin's hand.
- Boxer, in the allegory of the novel, directly relates to the working class who laboured under strenuous and exceedingly difficult conditions throughout the Communist regime with the hope that their work would result in a more prosperous life
- When Napoleon and Snowball argue about how Animal Farm should be ruled--Napoleon favored the harvest, Snowball favored getting other farms (countries) to rebel. This is similar to Stalin wanting "Socialism in one country" and Trotsky's theory of "Permanent Revolution."

Character Analysis

Napoleon

- From the very beginning of the novella, Napoleon emerges as an utterly corrupt opportunist. Though always present at the early meetings of the new state, Napoleon never makes a single contribution to the revolution—not to the formulation of its ideology, not to the bloody struggle that it necessitates, not to the new society's initial attempts to establish itself.
- He never shows interest in the strength of Animal Farm itself, only in the strength of his power over it. Thus, the only project he undertakes with enthusiasm is the training of a litter of puppies. He doesn't educate them for their own good or for the good of all, however, but rather for his own good: they become his own private army or secret police, a violent means by which he imposes his will on others.
- Although he is most directly modelled on the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, Napoleon represents, in a more general sense, the political tyrants that have emerged throughout human history and with particular frequency during the twentieth century.
- His namesake is not any communist leader but the early-eighteenth-century French general Napoleon, who betrayed the democratic principles on which he rode to power, arguably becoming as great a despot as the aristocrats whom he supplanted.
- In the behavior of Napoleon and his henchmen, one can detect the lying and bullying tactics of totalitarian leaders such as Josip Tito, Mao Tse-tung, Pol Pot, Augusto Pinochet, and Slobodan Milosevic treated in sharply critical terms.

Snowball

- As a parallel for Leon Trotsky, Snowball emerges as a fervent ideologue who throws himself heart and soul into the attempt to spread Animalism worldwide and to improve Animal Farm's infrastructure. His idealism, however, leads to his downfall. Relying only on the force of his own logic and rhetorical skill to gain his influence, he proves no match for Napoleon's show of brute force.
- Although Orwell depicts Snowball in a relatively appealing light, he refrains from idealizing his character, making sure to endow him with certain moral flaws. For example, Snowball basically accepts the superiority of the pigs over the rest of the animals.
- Moreover, his fervent, single-minded enthusiasm for grand projects such as the windmill might have erupted into full-blown megalomaniac despotism had he not been chased from Animal Farm. Indeed, Orwell suggests that we cannot eliminate government corruption by electing principled individuals to roles of power; he reminds us throughout the novella that it is power itself that corrupts.

Boxer

- The most sympathetically drawn character in the novel, Boxer epitomizes all of the best qualities of the exploited working classes: dedication, loyalty, and a huge capacity for labour.
- He also, however, suffers from what Orwell saw as the working class's major weaknesses: a naive trust in the good intentions of the intelligentsia and an inability to recognize even the most blatant forms of political corruption. Exploited by the pigs as much or more than he had been by Mr. Jones, Boxer represents all of the invisible labour that undergirds the political drama being carried out by the elites.
- Boxer's pitiful death at a glue factory dramatically illustrates the extent of the pigs' betrayal. It may also, however, speak to the specific significance of Boxer himself: before being carted off, he serves as the force that holds Animal Farm together.

Squealer

- In *Animal Farm*, the silver-tongued pig Squealer abuses language to justify Napoleon's actions and policies to the proletariat by whatever means seem necessary. By radically simplifying language—as when he teaches the sheep to bleat “Four legs good, two legs better!”—he limits the terms of debate. By complicating language unnecessarily, he confuses and intimidates the uneducated, as when he explains that “a bird's wing . . . is an organ of propulsion and not of manipulation.” In this latter strategy, he also employs jargon (“tactics, tactics”) as well as a baffling vocabulary of false and impenetrable statistics, engendering in the other animals both self-doubt and a sense of hopelessness about ever accessing the truth without the pigs' mediation.
- Squealer's lack of conscience and unwavering loyalty to his leader, alongside his rhetorical skills, make him the perfect propagandist for any tyranny. Squealer's name also fits him well: squealing, of course, refers to a pig's typical form of vocalization, and Squealer's speech defines him. At the same time, to squeal also means to betray, aptly evoking Squealer's behaviour with regard to his fellow animals.

Old Major

- As a democratic socialist, Orwell had a great deal of respect for Karl Marx, the German political economist, and even for Vladimir Ilych Lenin, the Russian revolutionary leader. His critique of *Animal Farm* has little to do with the Marxist ideology underlying the Rebellion but rather with the perversion of that ideology by later leaders.
- Major, who represents both Marx and Lenin, serves as the source of the ideals that the animals continue to uphold even after their pig leaders have betrayed them.
- Though his portrayal of Old Major is largely positive, Orwell does include a few small ironies that allow the reader to question the venerable pig's motives. For instance, in the midst of his long litany of complaints about how the animals have been treated

by human beings, Old Major is forced to concede that his own life has been long, full, and free from the terrors he has vividly sketched for his rapt audience. He seems to have claimed a false brotherhood with the other animals in order to garner their support for his vision.

Themes

The Corruption of Socialist Ideals in the Soviet Union

Animal Farm is most famous in the West as a stinging critique of the history and rhetoric of the Russian Revolution. Retelling the story of the emergence and development of Soviet communism in the form of an animal fable, *Animal Farm* allegorizes the rise to power of the dictator Joseph Stalin. In the novella, the overthrow of the human oppressor Mr. Jones by a democratic coalition of animals quickly gives way to the consolidation of power among the pigs. Much like the Soviet intelligentsia, the pigs establish themselves as the ruling class in the new society.

The struggle for pre-eminence between Leon Trotsky and Stalin emerges in the rivalry between the pigs Snowball and Napoleon. In both the historical and fictional cases, the idealistic but politically less powerful figure (Trotsky and Snowball) is expelled from the revolutionary state by the malicious and violent usurper of power (Stalin and Napoleon). The purges and show trials with which Stalin eliminated his enemies and solidified his political base find expression in *Animal Farm* as the false confessions and executions of animals whom Napoleon distrusts following the collapse of the windmill. Stalin's tyrannical rule and eventual abandonment of the founding principles of the Russian Revolution are represented by the pigs' turn to violent government and the adoption of human traits and behaviors, the trappings of their original oppressors.

Although Orwell believed strongly in socialist ideals, he felt that the Soviet Union realized these ideals in a terribly perverse form. His novella creates its most powerful ironies in the moments in which Orwell depicts the corruption of Animalist ideals by those in power. For *Animal Farm* serves not so much to condemn tyranny or despotism as to indict the horrifying hypocrisy of tyrannies that base themselves on, and owe their initial power to, ideologies of liberation and equality. The gradual disintegration and perversion of the Seven Commandments illustrates this hypocrisy with vivid force, as do Squealer's elaborate philosophical justifications for the pigs' blatantly unprincipled actions. Thus, the novella critiques the violence of the Stalinist regime against the human beings it ruled, and also points to Soviet communism's violence against human logic, language, and ideals.

The Societal Tendency toward Class Stratification

Animal Farm offers commentary on the development of class tyranny and the human tendency to maintain and re-establish class structures even in societies that allegedly stand

for total equality. The novella illustrates how classes that are initially unified in the face of a common enemy, as the animals are against the humans, may become internally divided when that enemy is eliminated. The expulsion of Mr. Jones creates a power vacuum, and it is only so long before the next oppressor assumes totalitarian control. The natural division between intellectual and physical labour quickly comes to express itself as a new set of class divisions, with the “brainworkers” (as the pigs claim to be) using their superior intelligence to manipulate society to their own benefit. Orwell never clarifies in *Animal Farm* whether this negative state of affairs constitutes an inherent aspect of society or merely an outcome contingent on the integrity of a society's intelligentsia. In either case, the novella points to the force of this tendency toward class stratification in many communities and the threat that it poses to democracy and freedom.

The Danger of a Naïve Working Class

One of the novella's most impressive accomplishments is its portrayal not just of the figures in power but also of the oppressed people themselves. *Animal Farm* is not told from the perspective of any particular character, though occasionally it does slip into Clover's consciousness. Rather, the story is told from the perspective of the common animals as a whole. Gullible, loyal, and hardworking, these animals give Orwell a chance to sketch how situations of oppression arise not only from the motives and tactics of the oppressors but also from the naïveté of the oppressed, who are not necessarily in a position to be better educated or informed. When presented with a dilemma, Boxer prefers not to puzzle out the implications of various possible actions but instead to repeat to himself, “Napoleon is always right.” *Animal Farm* demonstrates how the inability or unwillingness to question authority condemns the working class to suffer the full extent of the ruling class's oppression.

The Abuse of Language as Instrumental to the Abuse of Power

One of Orwell's central concerns, both in *Animal Farm* and in *1984*, is the way in which language can be manipulated as an instrument of control. In *Animal Farm*, the pigs gradually twist and distort a rhetoric of socialist revolution to justify their behaviour and to keep the other animals in the dark. The animals heartily embrace Major's visionary ideal of socialism, but after Major dies, the pigs gradually twist the meaning of his words. As a result, the other animals seem unable to oppose the pigs without also opposing the ideals of the Rebellion. By the end of the novella, after Squealer's repeated reconfigurations of the Seven Commandments in order to decriminalize the pigs' treacheries, the main principle of the farm can be openly stated as “all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.” This outrageous abuse of the word “equal” and of the ideal of equality in general typifies the pigs' method, which becomes increasingly audacious as the novel progresses. Orwell's sophisticated exposure of this abuse of language remains one of the most compelling and enduring features of *Animal Farm*, worthy of close study even after we have decoded its allegorical characters and events.

Motifs

Songs

Animal Farm is filled with songs, poems, and slogans, including Major's stirring "Beasts of England," Minimus's ode to Napoleon, the sheep's chants, and Minimus's revised anthem, "Animal Farm, Animal Farm." All of these songs serve as propaganda, one of the major conduits of social control. By making the working-class animals speak the same words at the same time, the pigs evoke an atmosphere of grandeur and nobility associated with the recited text's subject matter. The songs also erode the animals' sense of individuality and keep them focused on the tasks by which they will purportedly achieve freedom.

State Ritual

As *Animal Farm* shifts gears from its early revolutionary fervour to a phase of consolidation of power in the hands of the few, national rituals become an ever more common part of the farm's social life. Military awards, large parades, and new songs all proliferate as the state attempts to reinforce the loyalty of the animals. The increasing frequency of the rituals bespeaks the extent to which the working class in the novella becomes ever more reliant on the ruling class to define their group identity and values.

Symbols

Animal Farm

Animal Farm, known at the beginning and the end of the novel as the Manor Farm, symbolizes Russia and the Soviet Union under Communist Party rule. But more generally, Animal Farm stands for any human society, be it capitalist, socialist, fascist, or communist. It possesses the internal structure of a nation, with a government (the pigs), a police force or army (the dogs), a working class (the other animals), and state holidays and rituals. Its location amid a number of hostile neighboring farms supports its symbolism as a political entity with diplomatic concerns.

The Barn

The barn at Animal Farm, on whose outside walls the pigs paint the Seven Commandments and, later, their revisions, represents the collective memory of a modern nation. The many scenes in which the ruling-class pigs alter the principles of Animalism and in which the working-class animals puzzle over but accept these changes represent the way an institution in power can revise a community's concept of history to bolster its control. If the working class believes history to lie on the side of their oppressors, they are less likely to question oppressive practices. Moreover, the oppressors, by revising their nation's conception of its origins and development, gain control of the nation's very identity, and the oppressed soon come to depend upon the authorities for their communal sense of self.

The Windmill

The great windmill symbolizes the pigs' manipulation of the other animals for their own gain. Despite the immediacy of the need for food and warmth, the pigs exploit Boxer and the other common animals by making them undertake backbreaking labor to build the windmill, which will ultimately earn the pigs more money and thus increase their power. The pigs' declaration that Snowball is responsible for the windmill's first collapse constitutes psychological manipulation, as it prevents the common animals from doubting the pigs' abilities and unites them against a supposed enemy. The ultimate conversion of the windmill to commercial use is one more sign of the pigs' betrayal of their fellow animals. From an allegorical point of view, the windmill represents the enormous modernization projects undertaken in Soviet Russia after the Russian Revolution.