Your notes

GCSE English Literature: revision notes

Animal Farm

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Plot

- Old Major, a prize boar, tells the animals of Manor Farm about his dream of a world without humans. After his death, the pigs Snowball and Napoleon lead a rebellion that drives out the drunken farmer, Mr Jones. The farm becomes Animal Farm, run by Seven Commandments, including 'All animals are equal'.
- The pigs take charge. Snowball plans a windmill; Napoleon uses his trained dogs to chase Snowball away and becomes leader. Squealer uses **propaganda** to justify everything Napoleon does.
- Napoleon rules through fear, with forced confessions and executions, and blames Snowball for every problem. The pigs move into the farmhouse and secretly change the commandments.
- Boxer, the loyal, hard-working horse, collapses and is sold to the knacker (horse slaughterer); Squealer claims he died in hospital.
- The commandments are reduced to one: 'All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.' The pigs walk on two legs, and at the end the animals can't tell the pigs from the humans.

The allegory

- It is an **allegory** of the Russian **Revolution** and Stalin's rule. Old Major represents Marx and Lenin; Napoleon, Stalin; Snowball, Trotsky; Squealer, Soviet **propaganda**; Boxer, loyal workers; the dogs, the secret police; Mr Jones, Tsar Nicholas II; Moses the raven, the Church; the windmill, the Five-Year Plans; and Mr Frederick, Hitler.

Themes

- Power and **corruption**, **propaganda** and the misuse of language, equality and class, **revolution** and betrayal, and education and ignorance.

Context

- George Orwell published it in 1945. He was a democratic socialist who opposed dictatorships, and he wanted to show how Stalin had betrayed the ideals of the Russian **Revolution**.

Key quotations

- 'Four legs good, two legs bad' (the sheep). 'I will work harder' and 'Napoleon is always right' (Boxer).
- 'All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others' (the final commandment).

How to get top marks

- Know the **allegory** but write about Orwell's methods. Marks are for how he presents power, not for a Russian history lesson.
- Focus on language as control: Squealer's speeches and the changing commandments show how truth gets rewritten.
- Use the last image, the pigs and men who can't be told apart, as the end point of your argument.

Key terms

Allegory	A story in which characters and events represent real people and events.
Propaganda	Information designed to persuade people and control what they think.
Satire	Using humour and exaggeration to criticise people or ideas.
Fable	A short story, often with animals, that teaches a lesson.
Totalitarianism	A system in which one ruler or party controls every part of life.
Revolution	The overthrow of a government or ruler.
Corruption	Dishonest or immoral use of power.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Whose dream inspires the rebellion?

Your notes

2. Whom does Napoleon represent?
3. Whom does Snowball represent?
4. What is Squealer's role?
5. How does Napoleon take power from Snowball?
6. What happens to Boxer?
7. What is the final version of the commandments?
8. What do the sheep chant?

Answers

1. Old Major's
2. Stalin
3. Trotsky
4. He spreads propaganda for Napoleon
5. He sets his trained dogs on him
6. He is sold to the knacker
7. All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others
8. Four legs good, two legs bad

What to do next

Practise 12 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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