

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Animal Farm

by

George Orwell

Book Information

George Orwell, Animal Farm
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Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1946
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128 Pages
Book Level: 7.3
Interest Level: UG

Politically minded farm animals undergo a revolution against their human master and establish a new government that fails because of a corrupt leader tempted by greed and power.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books

Topics: Animals, Farm Animals; Emotions, Hate; Humor/Funny, Funny; Popular Groupings, College Bound; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 9-12

Main Characters

Benjamin a cynical donkey who remains quiet about but unswayed by Napoleon's ideas

Boxer a hard-working horse who remains obedient and loyal to Napoleon despite his minor misgivings

Moses a raven who spends his time talking about life in Sugarcandy Mountain where the animals will go after they die

Mr. Frederick and Mr. Pilkington the feuding owners of the farms adjacent to Animal Farm

Mr. Jones the farmer who owns Manor Farm and against whom the animals rebel

Mr. Whymper a solicitor who makes money from Animal Farm by becoming the middleman in the animals' tradings with humans

Napoleon a mean-spirited boar who takes over control of all aspects of life at Animal Farm

old Major a well-respected old boar who proposes the idea of rebellion to the animals at Manor Farm

Snowball an outgoing, clever boar who originally helps organize the animals at Manor Farm but is later run off by Napoleon

Squealer a young pig who becomes Napoleon's closest assistant and advocate

Vocabulary

enmity hatred

leagued associated with

obstinate stubborn

superannuated retired and given a pension due to old age

Synopsis

This is the story of how some farm animals overthrow their master and take control of their own lives. Inspired by the speech of a well-respected, elderly boar, the animals of Manor Farm organize a rebellion against their master, Mr. Jones. One fateful day the animals lash out at Mr. Jones and drive all humans off the farm.

Under the leadership of Snowball and Napoleon, two young pigs, the animals experience great joy, as they harvest record amounts of grain and hay. The animals pass resolutions banning anything resembling human behavior, some learn to read, and the pigs begin to study anything they can obtain. The animals even thwart an attempt by Mr. Jones to retake his farm. Life seems to be going along well until a debate grows over building a windmill. Snowball has researched the benefits of having one, but Napoleon staunchly disapproves of the idea. Just as it seems that Snowball is winning the debate, Napoleon has his personally trained dogs attack and chase Snowball off the farm.

Little by little life becomes harder and more regulated by Napoleon and the other pigs. Napoleon proposes the construction of the windmill, which he had violently opposed before, and decides to initiate trade with the outside world. Hardship and hunger strike the farm as time is taken away from the crop harvest and redirected towards building the windmill. Napoleon and Squealer, his closest assistant, begin to spread propoganda that Snowball is responsible for various "crimes" against the farm.

Gradually Napoleon and his pigs take on more and more human qualities such as drinking alcohol,

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living in the farm house, and executing fellow animals. This behavior baffles many of the animals but most of them remain loyal to Napoleon, still believing their lives are better than in the days when Mr. Jones ran the farm.

In the end, Napoleon and the other pigs teach themselves to walk on two legs and invite the neighboring farmers to join them in the comradery of drinking and playing cards, thus completing the circle of transformation into the very thing they rebelled against--Man.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

What are the two sides of the debate about building the windmill? Is the debate really about the windmill, or are they just fighting for power?

Snowball claims the windmill would save the animals time and energy and could be built rather quickly. Napoleon argues that it would take precious time away from field work and would cause the animals to suffer from lack of food. After Napoleon expels Snowball from the farm, however, he orders the construction of the windmill anyway. This leads the reader to believe the windmill issue may just be a pretense for gaining power.

Literary Analysis

Snowball and Napoleon have very different styles of leadership and different goals for the animals. Describe each character's leadership style.

Snowball presents ideas that he had spent a great deal of time researching and that were focused on social improvement of the animals. He influences the others by delivering great speeches and exuding great enthusiasm for his projects. Napoleon, on the other hand, is impulsive and prefers ideas that are designed to give him more authority. He is not much of a public speaker, but rather likes to garner support in private conversations and dealings.

Inferential Comprehension

When Snowball is chased off the farm, life becomes very different for the animals. How would the story have been different if this event had not occurred?

If Snowball had stayed, or been allowed to stay, there are a number of different things that could have happened. The society may have remained more democratic, and the labor would not have been so difficult. Problems may have been handled more wisely if Snowball remained in partial control. However, a civil war could have broken out on the farm which pitted supporters of Snowball and supporters of Napoleon against one another.

Constructing Meaning

Benjamin seems to see and understand the terrible direction Animal Farm is headed under Napoleon's leadership, yet he does nothing to stop it. Should he share partial blame for what happens? What would you have done if you were Benjamin?

Benjamin could have warned the other animals of Napoleon's treachery, although they may not have listened to him, and he may have put himself in danger.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors George Orwell was clearly influenced by the experiences of his own life when writing this story. In order to understand the story of *Animal Farm* better, the reader should have a good grasp of the historical and cultural setting in which the author lived. Have the students research George Orwell's life and discuss how the events of his own life influenced this story.

Extending Meaning The society that is created on *Animal Farm* after the rebellion and after Snowball is chased away could be said to contain elements of many societies. Invite a history teacher to the classroom to discuss the different types of society that are represented in this book. Discuss and/or ask about the various characteristics of some leaders such as

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Napoleon and Mussolini that exist in Napoleon's character.

Describing Actions or Events The story of *Animal Farm* revolves around the transformation of Napoleon and the formation of a totalitarian society with Napoleon as its leader. Have the students create a timeline of the major events which occur in this story. In addition, have them summarize how each event affects the different characters in the story and the overall life on Animal Farm.

Understanding the Main Idea When old Major proposes the rebellion against Man, he also outlines the structure that the farm's society should take. He states that all animals would be equal, no animal would lord over or abuse any other animal, and that no animal should take on even a single human quality. It would seem that in this society no one would have been in charge. Hold a class debate over whether a society such as that can be successful.