Title: *Animal Farm*
Author: George Orwell
Date of Publication: August 17, 1945
Source of Information: Sparknotes

Orwell wrote and published *Animal Farm* shortly after World War II, during the beginning of the Cold War. The end of fascism saw the rise of communism, and Orwell's book focuses on the historical in-fighting occurring in Soviet Russia. The novel actually serves as a parallel to events that had occurred and were occurring behind the “Iron Curtain.” American democracy was in a silent struggle with soviet communism, while the British Empire slowly fell into socialism. Orwell actually finished the novel in 1943, when communism was extremely popular, since the Russians had handed Hitler his first defeat. When it was finally published, though, others were starting to see the dangers Orwell pointed out in his novel.

Provide information about the time period (literary, historical, philosophical, etc.):

*Animal Farm* actually fits into several categories, and it can be read on several levels. First, it is a FABLE, filled with talking animals and a moral at the end about becoming the thing you are fighting against. However, this is simply the first level of a novel that offers surprising depth and complexity for such a short work. The novel also operates as an ALLEGORY. Each character is symbolic, representing different aspects of humanity in their search for paradise. Like a good allegory, it presents the reader with a lesson about the nature of man. For those aware of Soviet history, the novel also functions as POLITICAL SATIRE. The pigs Napoleon and Snowball re-enact the clash between Stalin and Trotsky, with the other characters filling in various roles and groups of people. The novel can also serve as a general SATIRE, offering the cynical observation that “[a]ll animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.”

Significant details about the author:

George Orwell is the pen name of Eric Blair. He was born in Bengal, India where his father worked for the Civil Service. He won scholarships to prestigious prep schools, and after graduation he served as a constable in Burma. It was there that he developed his lifelong hatred for any form of Imperialism – British or otherwise. His pen name shows his love for England. St. George is the patron saint, and the River Orwell is described as one of his favorite sites in the country. In the 1930’s, he fought in the Spanish Civil War, and the actions of the communists served as the basis for *Animal Farm*. Orwell was a fervent believer in English Socialism, but he saw Soviet Communism as a perversion of those beliefs. His hatred of the Soviet system also inspired his best known work – 1984.

Provide the major plot points:

- Old Major lays out his dream for the Rebellion, where animals become the leaders and throw off the “tyranny of man.”
- The Rebellion occurs, with the animals successfully driving Farmer Jones off; they rename “Manor Farm” to “Animal Farm”
- The animals develop a list of “Seven Commandments,” and the pigs are put in charge of the “brainwork”
- A rivalry develops between Snowball and Napoleon while Squealer becomes the “spokespig” to the animals, convincing them to go along with whatever the pigs want
- Men try to retake the farm, only to be driven off by the animals
- Mollie the mare leaves the farm to go to work for one of the humans
- Snowball completes plans for a windmill, but the issue of whether or not to build it deeply divides the animals
- Napoleon uses the puppies he raised by himself to seize sole control, driving off Snowball; he uses the dogs to intimidate the other animals and the sheep to drown out any opposition
- Squealer goes around revising history; he explains that the windmill idea was actually Napoleon’s, and that Snowball was a spy working for Farmer Jones
- The pigs take over the farmhouse and start dealing with humans; they alter the seven commandments to reflect the changes they make; a huge storm destroys the windmill, but Napoleon blames Snowball
- Anything that goes wrong on the farm is attributed to Snowball or his agents; four of the pigs who regularly speak out against Napoleon are seized; they confess to collaborating with Snowball; several other animals also confess and all are executed
- Farmer Fredericks attacks the farm; the animals are driven back; the windmill is blown up; the pigs get drunk
- Boxer is sold to a knacker’s, and the pigs use the money from the sale to purchase more whiskey
- Finally, the pigs learn to walk upright on two legs and begin carrying whips; when the other animals peer in on a party the pigs are having with some of the humans from the surrounding area, they are unable to determine which is pig and which person, since the pigs have started wearing clothes
Identify, define, and explain the use and effect of **three** literary techniques:

1. **Jargon** – technical terms specific to a profession, meaningless to outsiders. Squealer often uses statistics and jargon to confuse his listeners so they will agree with him.

2. **Hyperbole** – exaggeration for emphasis or effect; an exaggeration. Old Major, Napoleon, Snowball, and Squealer all use hyperbole to exaggerate how bad things were under Farmer Jones and how well things are going now that the pigs are in control.

3. **Paradox** – a statement that seems contradictory, but that actually expresses a deeper truth. The final commandment the pigs come up with is a perfect example. It expresses the concept that some people are above the rules, especially those in control who set the rules in the first place.

Cite and Quote one example of each:

1. “For the time being, certainly, it had been found necessary to make a readjustment of rations (Squealer always spoke of it as a “readjustment,” never as a “reduction”), but in comparison with the days of Jones, the improvement was enormous” (112-13).

2. “Is it not crystal clear, comrades, that all the evils of this life of ours spring from the tyranny of human beings? Only get rid of Man, and the produce of our labour would be our own. Almost overnight, we could become rich and free” (9).

3. “There was nothing there now except a single Commandment. It ran: ‘ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL BUT SOME ANIMALS ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHERS’” (134).

Cite and Quote three significant passages (use ellipses to abbreviate):

1. “Comrades, you have heard already about the strange dream that I had last night [. . . .] The Birds jumped on their perches, the animals settled down in the straw, and the whole farm was asleep in a moment” (6-14).

2. “At this there was a terrible baying sound outside, and nine enormous dogs wearing brass-studded collars came bounding into the barn [. . . .] Napoleon read out the orders for the week in a gruff soldierly style, and after a single singing of *Beasts of England*, all the animals dispersed” (52-7).

3. “Twelve voices were shouting in anger, and they were all alike. No question, now, what had happened to the faces of the pigs. The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which” (141).

In your own words, explain the significance of each passage or explain how it relates to the work as a whole:

1. In this excerpt, Old Major relates his dream of a place where the animals rule the farm without the interference of man. All are equal, and all contribute equally to the success of the farm. His speech is the ideal form of socialism, where everyone works together as equals, and no one is any better than anyone else. It is an expression of the Utopian ideal that is supposed to be created once man has been removed. The song *Beasts of England* reflects those ideals.

2. In this excerpt, Napoleon uses brute force to seize total control. His henchmen (the dogs) drive off Snowball. Squealer immediately begins to paint Snowball as an enemy who was working with the human enemies. This passage mirrors Stalin’s power grab in Russia, but also shows that one person will eventually grab power away from the masses. The idealism expressed in Old Major’s dream is supplanted with a simple change of masters. It also foreshadows the rest of the novel as the pigs become corrupt, acting more and more like the hated humans.

3. The final paragraph of the novel drives home Orwell’s point. Once corruption sets in, it becomes impossible to distinguish the new way of doing things from the old. One set of masters has been replaced by another.
Describe the setting(s) and explain its significance:

The novel takes place entirely on a farm in England. Other locations are mentioned, but we never see them. Originally called “Manor Farm,” it is renamed “Animal Farm” after the animals drive out Farmer Jones. By the end of the novel, it regains the name “Manor Farm” as the pigs become more human.

In a general sense, the farm represents an attempt at creating a Utopian ideal. Without humans, all the animals are supposed to have an equal share in the farm’s produce. However, like all ideals, the reality quickly falls flat. The pigs start acting no better than the humans as they move to consolidate their power. The attempt to create perfection is always doomed to fail because people themselves are not perfect.

The farm is also a symbolic representation of Soviet Russia. Orwell is satirizing the events that occurred when the communists came to power, and the rise of Josef Stalin to absolute power. The farm serves as a microcosm of the Soviet Union and the events that took place there over several years. As for the time, the novel is set in the present and takes place over the course of four or five years.

Write and explain the theme(s) of the work:

**Corruption of Socialist Ideals** – Orwell’s main inspiration for the novel was seeing what was happening in Russia. As Stalin used brutal tactics to firmly place himself and his friends into positions of power, he simply replaced the tyranny of the Tsar with his own brand of ruling. The Soviet Union was no longer a worker’s paradise where all worked together as true equals. Similarly, the farm trades one set of masters for another who, in the end, are hardly distinguishable from the originals.

**Danger of a Naïve Working Class** – Boxer and the sheep especially drive this particular theme. They buy into everything they are told by the pigs. They are not able to truly think for themselves, as demonstrated by Boxer falling into a repetition of “Napoleon is always right” when he is presented with a contradiction. That unwillingness or inability to think makes the working class victims to those who would, like Napoleon or Stalin, take advantage of it.

**Use of Propaganda** – Squealer twists, distorts, and manipulates the facts to suit whatever “truth” is needed this day. He also makes revisions to the “Seven Commandments” in the middle of the night in order to justify Napoleon’s actions. Orwell shows how those in power use the media to control the masses. Snowball morphs from one of the initial leaders of the rebellion to a subversive enemy agent through the careful twisting of the truth. Under a flood of “readjustments,” black becomes white, up becomes down, and lies become truth.

Identify and explain the given metaphors (M), symbols (S) or motifs (F) in the work:

**Ritual** (F) – Parades, weekly meetings, and awards become a way to distract the majority while the pigs seize control. The repetition gives the animals a sense of the familiar even as power slips from the many to consolidate in the hands of the few.

**Animal Farm** (S) – Originally Manor Farm, it is a symbolic representation of Soviet Russia. However, it is also a general symbol for any form of community. The events at the farm will occur, no matter what type of system is established be it socialism, communism, or a democracy.

**The Barn** (S) – It symbolizes the collective memory of the society. As the pigs alter the “Seven Commandments,” they alter the society as they rise to power.

**The Windmill** (S) – It represents the attempts made at modernization in the Soviet Union that ultimately failed due to internal corruption. It also serves as a means of manipulation. The pigs trick the other animals into ignoring basic concerns like food and shelter to focus on what ultimately becomes a means for the pigs to gain wealth.

Write at least three questions or topics for discussion:

1. Why do the other animals continue to follow the pigs, even after they catch Squealer making changes to the commandments?
2. Benjamin seems to expect the entire course of events. Why does he not do more to prevent what is happening?
3. What happens to Snowball after he leaves the farm?
4. Compare and contrast the techniques used by Snowball and Napoleon. What point is Orwell making?
List the major characters. Explain their relationship to other characters, provide three adjectives to describe the character, and explain his purpose or function in the story. Be sure to indicate if the character is round or flat, static or dynamic.

- **Old Major** – symbolically, he represents Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin. Like all of the characters of the story, he is flat and static. He presents the ideal form of socialism where everyone is absolutely equal. Old Major is the inspiration for the Utopian society whose ideals will be corrupted by his successors. Three adjectives: idealistic, hopeful, and inspiring.

- **Napoleon** – symbolically, he represents brute force and is a satirical version of Josef Stalin. He is flat and static, as he is much more of a caricature of the brutal despot rather than an actual character. He is in a rivalry for control of the farm with Snowball. He trains the puppies to become his elite guard, which allows him to seize power through force. Three adjectives: brutal, egotistical, and hypocritical.

- **Snowball** – symbolically, he represents the man of vision and is a satirical version of Leon Trotsky. He is flat and static, as his purpose is to serve as the man who appeals to the minds of his fellow worker. He truly believes in the “brothership of animals,” and is a gifted speaker. However, he fails to recognize the danger presented by Napoleon and is eventually driven off and demonized. Three adjectives: naïve, persuasive, and enthusiastic.

- **Squealer** – a flat, static character who is symbolic of a controlled media. Squealer uses technical terms, statistics, and complicated jargon to constantly re-write history to conform to the current narrative desired by the leader. His function is to illustrate the danger posed by propaganda and an uneducated populace. Three adjectives: persuasive, dishonest, and slick.

- **Boxer** – this flat, static character is symbolic of the working class. He functions as the typical person who just wants to work hard and receive what he is promised. He blindly accepts whatever he is told, repeating the maxims, “I will work harder” and “Napoleon is always right.” He even willingly goes to his own slaughter, unaware that he has been sold to a knacker so the pigs can buy more whiskey. Three adjectives: determined, hard-working, uneducated.