

1984

BY GEORGE ORWELL

1 It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston
2 Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile wind, slipped
3 quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to
4 prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him.

5 The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats. At one end of it a coloured
6 poster, too large for indoor display, had been tacked to the wall. It depicted simply
7 an enormous face, more than a metre wide: the face of a man of about forty-five,
8 with a heavy black moustache and ruggedly handsome features. Winston made
9 for the stairs. It was no use trying the lift. Even at the best of times it was seldom
10 working, and at present the electric current was cut off during daylight hours. It was
11 part of the economy drive in preparation for Hate Week. The flat was seven flights
12 up, and Winston, who was thirty-nine and had a varicose ulcer above his right ankle,
13 went slowly, resting several times on the way. On each landing, opposite the
14 lift-shaft, the poster with the enormous face gazed from the wall. It was one of
15 those pictures which are so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you
16 move. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption beneath it ran.

17 Inside the flat a fruity voice was reading out a list of figures which had something
18 to do with the production of pig-iron. The voice came from an oblong metal
19 plaque like a dulled mirror which formed part of the surface of the right-hand wall.
20 Winston turned a switch and the voice sank somewhat, though the words were still
21 distinguishable. The instrument (the telescreen, it was called) could be dimmed,
22 but there was no way of shutting it off completely. He moved over to the window:
23 a smallish, frail figure, the meagreness of his body merely emphasized by the blue
24 overalls which were the uniform of the party. His hair was very fair, his face naturally
25 sanguine, his skin roughened by coarse soap and blunt razor blades and the cold of
26 the winter that had just ended.

27 Outside, even through the shut window-pane, the world looked cold. Down in
28 the street little eddies* of wind were whirling dust and torn paper into spirals, and
29 though the sun was shining and the sky a harsh blue, there seemed to be no colour
30 in anything, except the posters that were plastered everywhere. The
31 black-moustachio'd face gazed down from every commanding corner. There was
32 one on the house-front immediately opposite. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the
33 caption said, while the dark eyes looked deep into Winston's own.

34 Behind Winston's back the voice from the telescreen was still babbling away about
35 pig-iron and the over fulfilment of the Ninth Three-Year Plan. The telescreen received
36 and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a
37 very low whisper, would be picked up by it, moreover, so long as he remained within
38 the field of vision which the metal plaque commanded, he could be seen as well as
39 heard. There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at
40 any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in
41 on any individual wire was guesswork. It was even conceivable that they watched
42 everybody all the time. But at any rate they could plug in your wire whenever
43 they wanted to. You had to live--did live, from habit that became instinct--in the
44 assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness,
45 every movement scrutinized.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

- 1** What time of the day is the story set?
- A** Early afternoon
 - B** Late afternoon
 - C** Late morning
 - D** Early evening
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- 2** Which word best describes the wind outside?
- A** Terrifying
 - B** Dreadful
 - C** Disgusting
 - D** Aggressive
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- 3** Which one of these statements is true?
- A** The man on the poster is 45 years old
 - B** The hallway smelt of fried cabbage and boiled mats
 - C** The poster barely fit on the wall
 - D** The man on the poster had a thin moustache
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- 4** Why did Winston ignore the elevator?
- A** It rarely works
 - B** It is often busy
 - C** It is often locked
 - D** It only works at certain times of the year
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- 5** What direction do the posters on each floor face?
- A** Towards the wall
 - B** Towards the elevator door
 - C** Towards to the stairs
 - D** Towards the window
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- 6** Which one of these statements are false?
- A** A condition on Winston's ankle hinders his ability to walk to his flat
 - B** The elevator is not working in order to prepare for something
 - C** Winston felt paranoid by the poster
 - D** The eyes of the poster are designed to appear like they follow you
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- 7** What was the voice in Winston's flat speaking about?
- A** Some numbers related to the production of pig-iron
 - B** Some people responsible for the production of pig-iron
 - C** Some shapes that you can produce pig-iron in
 - D** It is not fully explained
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- 8** What word best replaces 'distinguishable' on line 21?
- A** Recognisable
 - B** Illuminated
 - C** Enunciated
 - D** Inspiring
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- 9** Which description best describes Winston?
- A** Injured and weak
 - B** Optimistic and hopeful
 - C** Ambitious and overworked
 - D** Depressed and bored
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- 10** How does the description of the outside world affect the reader?
- A** It makes them feel solemn
 - B** It makes them feel jovial
 - C** It makes them feel inspired
 - D** It makes them feel defiant
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- 11** What writing technique is 'commanding corner'?
- A** Simile
 - B** Metaphor
 - C** Alliteration
 - D** Onomatopoeia
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- 12** What effect is created when the writer makes only the posters have colour?
- A** It makes the poster seem even bigger
 - B** It makes you feel like you are trapped
 - C** It makes the presence of the posters stand out
 - D** It makes you feel like you're in the story
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- 13** Why does the writer use the word ‘babbling’ to describe the way the telescreen talks?
- A** It makes it sound like a baby and unthreatening
 - B** It makes it seem like the telescreen just talks endlessly and randomly
 - C** It makes it sound mechanical and robotic
 - D** It makes the telescreen sound unintelligent
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- 14** 1984 was written in 1948. In a way, the last paragraph sounds like it’s been written recently. Explain why some things sound modern. (4 marks)
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