**Animal Farm Summary**

[Animal Farm](https://www.gradesaver.com/animal-farm) is a satirical fable set on Manor Farm, a typical English farm. Orwell employs a third-person narrator, who reports events without commenting on them directly. The narrator describes things as the animals perceive them.

[Old Major](https://www.gradesaver.com/animal-farm/study-guide/character-list#old-major) calls a meeting of all the animals in the big barn. He announces that he may die soon and relates to them the insights he has gathered in his life. Old Major tells the animals that human beings are the sole reason that “No animal in England is free” and that “The life of an animal is misery and slavery.” Therefore the animals must take charge of their destiny by overthrowing Man in a great Rebellion. He relates his dream of rebellion.

Old Major dies soon after the meeting and the other animals prepare for the Rebellion under [Snowball](https://www.gradesaver.com/animal-farm/study-guide/character-list#snowball), [Napoleon](https://www.gradesaver.com/animal-farm/study-guide/character-list#napoleon), and [Squealer](https://www.gradesaver.com/animal-farm/study-guide/character-list#squealer)’s leadership. One night, Mr. [Jones](https://www.gradesaver.com/animal-farm/study-guide/character-list#jones) passes out drunk, creating the perfect opportunity for the animals to rebel. They are so hungry that they break into the store-shed. When Jones and his men try to whip them into submission, the animals run them off the farm. The animals burn all reminders of their former bondage but agree to preserve the farmhouse “as a museum.” Snowball changes the name of the farm to “Animal Farm” and comes up with Seven Commandments, which are to form the basis of Animalism. They are:

1. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy.  
2. Whatever goes upon four legs, or has wings, is a friend.  
3. No animal shall wear clothes.  
4. No animal shall sleep in a bed.  
5. No animals shall drink alcohol.  
6. No animal shall kill any other animal.  
7. All animals are equal.

The pigs milk the cows, and then the animals go out to begin the harvest. When they return, the milk has disappeared mysteriously. The first harvest is a great success. The animals adhere to the tenets of Animalism happily, and with good result. Each animal works according to his ability and gets a fair share of food.

Every Sunday, Snowball and Napoleon lead a meeting of all the animals in the big barn. The pigs are the most intelligent animals, so they think up resolutions for the other animals to debate. Soon after, the pigs set up a study-center for themselves in the harness-room. Snowball embarks on various campaigns for social and economic improvement. Napoleon opposes whatever Snowball does. Because most of the animals lack the intelligence to memorize the Seven Commandments, Snowball reduces them to the single maxim, “Four legs good, two legs bad.” The sheep take to chanting this at meetings.

As time goes by, the pigs increase their control over the animals and award themselves increasing privileges. They quell the animals’ questions and protests by threatening Mr. Jones’s return. During this time, Napoleon also confiscates nine newborn puppies and secludes them in a loft in order to “educate” them.

By late summer, Snowball’s and Napoleon’s pigeon-messengers have spread news of the Rebellion across half of England. Animals on other farms have begun lashing out against their human masters and singing the revolutionary song “Beasts of England.” Jones and other farmers try to recapture Animal Farm but fail. The animals celebrate their victory in what they call “The Battle of the Cowshed.”

The animals agree to let the pigs make all the resolutions. Snowball and Napoleon continue to be at odds and eventually clash over the windmill. Snowball wants to build a windmill in order to shorten the work week and provide the farm electricity, but Napoleon opposes it. Napoleon summons nine fierce dogs (the puppies he trained) to run Snowball off the farm. Napoleon announces that Sunday meetings will cease and that the pigs will make all the decisions in the animals’ best interest. At this point, [Boxer](https://www.gradesaver.com/animal-farm/study-guide/character-list#boxer) takes on his own personal maxims, “I will work harder” and “Napoleon is always right.” In the spring, Napoleon announces plans to build the windmill, claiming that it was his idea all along—rewriting history.

Building the windmill forces the animals to work harder and on Sundays. Shortages begin to occur, so Napoleon opens up trade with the human world. Through Squealer, he lies that no resolutions against interaction with humans or the use of money had ever been passed. Napoleon enlists [Whymper](https://www.gradesaver.com/animal-farm/study-guide/character-list" \l "whymper) to be his intermediary, and the pigs move into the farmhouse. Squealer assures the animals that there is no resolution against this, but [Clover](https://www.gradesaver.com/animal-farm/study-guide/character-list#clover) and [Muriel](https://www.gradesaver.com/animal-farm/study-guide/character-list#muriel) discovers that one of the resolutions has been changed to: “No animal shall sleep in a bed *with sheets*.” Squealer convinces her that there was never a resolution against beds at all.

One night, strong winds shake the farm and the animals awake to discover the windmill destroyed. Napoleon blames Snowball and sentences the expelled pig to death.

In the winter, as conditions become worse on Animal Farm, Napoleon deceives the human world into thinking Animal Farm is prospering. He signs a contract for a quota of four hundred eggs per week, inciting a hen rebellion that results in several deaths. Around the same time, Napoleon begins negotiating with [Frederick](https://www.gradesaver.com/animal-farm/study-guide/character-list#frederick) and [Pilkington](https://www.gradesaver.com/animal-farm/study-guide/character-list#pilkington) to sell Animal Farm’s store of timber. He also spreads propaganda against Snowball, claiming that Snowball was always a spy and a collaborator while Napoleon was the true hero of the Battle of the Cowshed, and Squealer warns against Snowball’s secret agents.

Four days later, Napoleon holds an assembly in which he makes several animals confess to treachery and then has the dogs execute them. The dogs try to get Boxer to confess but leave him alone when they cannot overpower him. Afterwards, Clover and some other animals huddle together on a hill overlooking the farm. They reminisce about Animalism’s ideals and consider how much they differ from the violence and terror of Napoleon’s reign. They sing “Beasts of England,” but Squealer informs them that the song is useless now that the Rebellion is completed and that it is now forbidden. The new anthem begins with the lyrics: “Animal Farm, Animal Farm, / Never through me shalt thou come to harm!”

Another commandment is changed to read: “No animal shall kill any other animal *without cause*.” Clover and Muriel convince themselves that the commandment has always been this way. Squealer begins reading the animals statistics regularly to convince them that production is increasing. Napoleon seldom appears in public. The animals now call him “our Leader, Comrade Napoleon.” They attribute all misfortunes to Snowball and all success and luck to Napoleon.

Napoleon continues to negotiate with the farmers and eventually decides to sell the timber to Mr. Pilkington. At last, the windmill is finished and named “Napoleon Mill.” Soon after, Napoleon announces that he will sell the timber to Frederick, quickly changing his allegiance and disavowing his earlier vilification of Frederick. Napoleon says that Pilkington and Snowball have been collaborating. Frederick pays for the timber in fake cash, and the next morning, Frederick and his men invade the farm and blow up the windmill. The animals manage to chase the humans off, though many die or are injured in what they call “The Battle of the Windmill.”

After the battle, the pigs discover a case of whisky in the farmhouse. They drink to excess and soon, Squealer reports that Napoleon is dying and, as his last action, has made the consumption of alcohol punishable by death. But Napoleon recovers quickly and then sends Whymper to procure manuals on brewing alcohol. Squealer changes another commandment to “No animal shall drink alcohol *to excess*.”

Napoleon plans to build a schoolhouse for the thirty-one young pigs he has parented. Towards the end of the winter, Napoleon begins increasing propaganda to distract the animals from inequality and hardship. He creates special “Spontaneous Demonstrations” in which the animals march around and celebrate their triumphs.

In April, Napoleon declares the farm a Republic and is elected unanimously as President. The animals continue to work feverishly, most of all Boxer. One day, Boxer collapses while overexerting himself. Napoleon promises to send him to the veterinarian in Willingdon. A few days later, a horse-slaughterer takes Boxer away in his van. The animals are none the wiser until [Benjamin](https://www.gradesaver.com/animal-farm/study-guide/character-list#benjamin) reads the lettering on the side of the van. A few days later, Squealer reports that Boxer died in the hospital despite receiving the best possible care. He claims that Boxer’s last words glorified Animal Farm and Napoleon. He also claims that the van belongs to the veterinarian, who recently bought it from the horse slaughterer and had not yet managed to paint over the lettering. Napoleon promises to honor Boxer with a special banquet. But the pigs use the money from his slaughter to buy a case of whisky, which they drink on the day appointed for the banquet.

Years go by, and though Animal Farm’s population has increased, only a few animals that remember the Rebellion remain. Conditions are still harsh despite technological improvements. The pigs and dogs continue to do no manual labor, instead devoting themselves to organizational work. One day, Squealer takes the sheep out to a deserted pasture where, he says, he is teaching them a song. On the day the sheep return, the pigs walk around the yard on their hind legs as the sheep chant, “Four legs good, two legs *better*.” The other animals are horrified. Clover consults the barn wall again. This time Benjamin reads to her. The Seven Commandments have been replaced with a single maxim: “All animals are equal / But some animals are more equal than others.”

The pigs continue the longstanding pattern of awarding themselves more and more privileges. They buy a telephone and subscribe to magazines. They even wear Jones’s clothing. One night, Napoleon holds a conciliatory banquet for the farmers. Pilkington makes a speech in which he says he wants to emulate Animal Farm’s long work hours and low rations. Napoleon announces that the farm will be called “Manor Farm” again, the animals will call each other “Comrade” no longer, and they no longer will march ceremoniously past Old Major’s skull (a practice he denies understanding). He also declares that the farm’s flag will be plain green, devoid of the symbols of the Rebellion. As the animals peer through the windows to watch the humans and pigs play poker, they cannot distinguish between them.

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