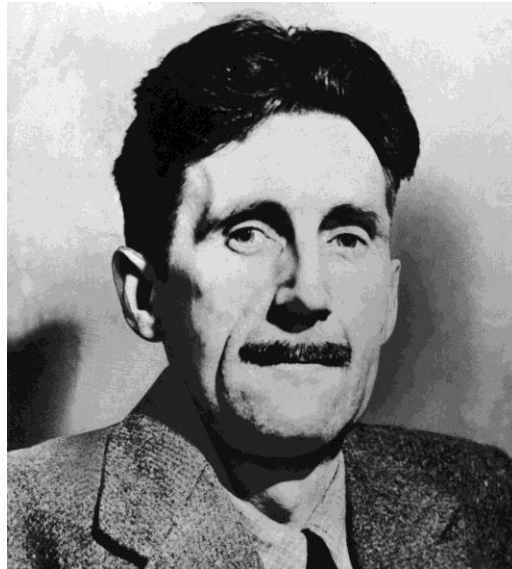


George Orwell Biography

Journalist, Author (1903–1950)



George Orwell was an English novelist, essayist, and critic most famous for his novels 'Animal Farm' (1945) and 'Nineteen Eighty-Four' (1949).

Who Was George Orwell?

George Orwell (June 25, 1903 to January 1, 1950), born Eric Arthur Blair, was a novelist, essayist and critic best known for his novels *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. He was a man of strong opinions who addressed some of the major political movements of his times, including imperialism, fascism and communism.

George Orwell's Most Famous Books

Sometimes called the conscience of a generation, Orwell best known for two novels, *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Both books, published toward the end of Orwell's life, have been turned into films and enjoyed tremendous popularity over the years.

'Animal Farm' (1945)

Animal Farm was an anti-Soviet satire in a pastoral setting featuring two pigs as its main protagonists. These pigs were said to represent **Joseph Stalin** and **Leon Trotsky**. The novel brought Orwell great acclaim and financial rewards.

'Nineteen Eighty-Four' (1949)

Orwell's masterwork, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (or *1984* in later editions), was published in the late stages of his battle with tuberculosis and soon before his death. This bleak vision of the world divided into three oppressive nations stirred up controversy among reviewers, who found this fictional future too despairing. In the novel, Orwell gave readers a glimpse into what would happen if the government controlled every detail of a person's life, down to their own private thoughts.

Essays by George Orwell

'Politics and the English Language'

Published in April 1946 in the British literary magazine *Horizon*, this essay is considered one of George Orwell's most important works on style. Orwell believed that "ugly and inaccurate" English enabled oppressive ideology, and that vague or meaningless language was meant to hide the truth. He argued that language should not naturally evolve over time but should be "an instrument which we shape for our own purposes." To write well is to be able to think clearly and engage in political discourse, he wrote, as he rallied against cliches, dying metaphors and pretentious or meaningless language.

'Shooting an Elephant'

This essay, published in the literary magazine *New Writing* in 1936, discusses Orwell's time as a police officer in Burma (now known as Myanmar), which was still a British colony at the time. Orwell hated his job and thought imperialism was "an evil thing;" as a representative of imperialism, he was disliked by locals. One day, although he didn't think it necessary, he killed a working elephant in front of a crowd of locals just "to avoid looking a fool." The essay was later the title piece in a collection of Orwell's essays, published in 1950, which included 'My Country Right or Left,' 'How the Poor Die' and 'Such, Such were the Joys.'

Birthday and Birthplace

George Orwell was born Eric Arthur Blair in Motihari, India, on June 25, 1903.

Family & Early Life

The son of a British civil servant, George Orwell spent his first days in India, where his father was stationed. His mother brought him and his older sister, Marjorie, to England about a year after his birth and settled in Henley-on-Thames. His father stayed behind in India and rarely visited. (His younger sister, Avril, was born in

1908.) Orwell didn't really know his father until he retired from the service in 1912. And even after that, the pair never formed a strong bond. He found his father to be dull and conservative.

According to one biography, Orwell's first word was "beastly." He was a sick child, often battling bronchitis and the flu.

Orwell was bit by the writing bug at an early age, reportedly composing his first poem around the age of four. He later wrote, "I had the lonely child's habit of making up stories and holding conversations with imaginary persons, and I think from the very start my literary ambitions were mixed up with the feeling of being isolated and undervalued." One of his first literary successes came at the age of 11 when he had a poem published in the local newspaper.

Education

Like many other boys in England, Orwell was sent to boarding school. In 1911 he went to St. Cyprian's in the coastal town of Eastbourne, where he got his first taste of England's class system.

On a partial scholarship, Orwell noticed that the school treated the richer students better than the poorer ones. He wasn't popular with his peers, and in books he found comfort from his difficult situation. He read works by **Rudyard Kipling** and **H.G. Wells**, among others.

What he lacked in personality, he made up for in smarts. Orwell won scholarships to Wellington College and Eton College to continue his studies.

After completing his schooling at Eton, Orwell found himself at a dead end. His family did not have the money to pay for a university education. Instead he joined the India Imperial Police Force in 1922. After five years in Burma, Orwell resigned his post and returned to England. He was intent on making it as a writer.

Early Writing Career

After leaving the India Imperial Force, Orwell struggled to get his writing career off the ground and took all sorts of jobs to make ends meet, including being a dishwasher.

'Down and Out in Paris and London' (1933)

Orwell's first major work explored his time eking out a living in these two cities. The book provided a brutal look at the lives of the working poor and of those living a transient existence. Not wishing to embarrass his family, the author published the book under the pseudonym George Orwell.

'Burmese Days' (1934)

Orwell next explored his overseas experiences in *Burmese Days*, which offered a dark look at British colonialism in Burma, then part of the country's Indian empire. Orwell's interest in political matters grew rapidly after this novel was published.

War Injury and Tuberculosis

In December 1936, Orwell traveled to Spain, where he joined one of the groups fighting against **General Francisco Franco** in the Spanish Civil War. Orwell was badly injured during his time with a militia, getting shot in the throat and arm. For several weeks, he was unable to speak. Orwell and his wife, Eileen, were indicted on treason charges in Spain. Fortunately, the charges were brought after the couple had left the country.

Other health problems plagued the talented writer not long after his return to England. For years, Orwell had periods of sickness, and he was officially diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1938. He spent several months at the Preston Hall Sanatorium trying to recover, but he would continue to battle with tuberculosis for the rest of his life. At the time he was initially diagnosed, there was no effective treatment for the disease.

Literary Critic & BBC Producer

To support himself, Orwell took on various writing assignments. He wrote numerous essays and reviews over the years, developing a reputation for producing well-crafted literary criticism.

In 1941 Orwell landed a job with the BBC as a producer. He developed news commentary and shows for audiences in the eastern part of the British Empire. Orwell drew such literary greats as **T.S. Eliot** and **E.M. Forster** to appear on his programs.

With **World War II** raging on, Orwell found himself acting as a propagandist to advance the country's national interest. He loathed this part of his job, describing the company's atmosphere in his diary as "something halfway between a girls' school and a lunatic asylum, and all we are doing at present is useless, or slightly worse than useless."

Orwell resigned in 1943, saying "I was wasting my own time and the public money on doing work that produces no result. I believe that in the present political situation the broadcasting of British propaganda to India is an almost hopeless task." Around this time, Orwell became the literary editor for a socialist newspaper.

Wives and Children

George Orwell married Eileen O'Shaughnessy in June 1936, and Eileen supported and assisted Orwell in his career. The couple remained together until her death in 1945. According to several reports, they had an open marriage, and Orwell had a number of dalliances. In 1944 the couple adopted a son, whom they named Richard Horatio Blair, after one of Orwell's ancestors. Their son was largely raised by Orwell's sister Avril after Eileen's death.

Near the end of his life, Orwell proposed to editor Sonia Brownell. He married her in October 1949, only a short time before his death. Brownell inherited Orwell's estate and made a career out of managing his legacy.

Death

George Orwell died of tuberculosis in a London hospital on January 1, 1950. Although he was just 46 years old at the time of his death, his ideas and opinions have lived on through his work.

George Orwell's Statue

Despite Orwell's disdain for the BBC during his life, a statue of the writer was commissioned by artist Martin Jennings and installed outside the BBC in London. An inscription reads, "If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear." The eight-foot bronze statue, paid for by the George Orwell Memorial Fund, was unveiled in November 2017.

"Would he have approved of it? It's an interesting question. I think he would have been reserved, given that he was very self-effacing," Orwell's son Richard Blair told *The Daily Telegraph*. "In the end I think he would have been forced to accept it by his friends. He would have to recognize that he was a man of the moment."