

# CliffsNotes.com® About the Author for 1984

## George Orwell

### Early Years

George Orwell is the pen name of Eric Arthur Blair, born in 1903 in Motihari, Bengal, India, during the time of the British colonial rule. Young Orwell was brought to England by his mother and educated in Henley and Sussex at schools.

The Orwell family was not wealthy, and in reading Orwell's personal essays about his childhood readers can easily see that his formative years were less than satisfying. However, the young Orwell had a gift for writing, which he recognized at the age of just five or six. Orwell's first published work, the poem "Awake Young Men of England," was printed in the *Henley and South Oxfordshire Standard* when he was eleven years old.

Orwell attended Eton College. Because literature was not an accepted subject for boys at the time, Orwell studied the master writers and began to develop his own writing style. At Eton, he came into contact with liberalist and socialist ideals, and it was here that his initial political views were formed.

### Adult Years

Orwell moved to Burma in 1922, where he served as an Assistant Superintendent of Police for five years before he resigned because of his growing dislike for British Imperialism. In 1928, Orwell moved to Paris and began a series of low paying jobs. In 1929, he moved to London, again living in what he termed "fairly severe poverty." These experiences provided the material for his first novel, *Down and Out in Paris and London*, which he placed with a publisher in 1933.

About this time, while Orwell was teaching in a small private school in Middlesex, he came down with his first bout of pneumonia due to tuberculosis, a condition that would plague him throughout his life and require hospitalization again in 1938, 1947, and 1950.

In 1933, Orwell gave up teaching and spent almost a year in Southwold writing his next book, *Burmese Days*. During this time, he worked part time in a bookshop, where he met his future wife, Eileen O'Shaughnessy. He and Eileen were married in 1936, shortly before he moved to Spain to write newspaper articles about the Spanish Civil War.

In Spain, Orwell found what he had been searching for — a true socialist state. He joined the struggle against the Fascist party but had to flee when the group with which he was associated was falsely accused of secretly helping the Fascists.

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By 1939, Orwell had returned to England. In 1941, he took a position with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) as the person in charge of broadcasting to India and Southeast Asia. Orwell disliked this job immensely, being, as he was, in charge of disseminating propaganda to these British colonies — an act that went against both his nature and his political philosophy. In 1943, Orwell took a job more to his liking, as the literary editor of *The Tribune*.

Shortly after Orwell and Eileen adopted a son in 1944, Orwell became a war correspondent for the Observer in Paris and Cologne, Germany. Tragically, Eileen died in the beginning of that year, just before the publication of one of his most important novels, *Animal Farm*. Despite the loss of his wife and his own battle with poor health, Orwell continued his writing and completed the revision of *1984* in 1948. It was published early the next year with great success.

Orwell remarried in 1949 to Sonia Brownell, only a year before his own death of tuberculosis. He is buried in the churchyard of All Saints, Sutton Courtenay, Berkshire.

## Literary Writing

Orwell's writing career spanned nearly seventeen years. Ironically, although Orwell didn't consider himself as a novelist, he wrote two of the most important literary masterpieces of the 20th century: *Animal Farm* and *1984*. While these are the most famous novels of his career, his memoirs, other novels, and essential work as an essayist all contribute to the body of work that makes up important twentieth century literature.

In Orwell's writing, he sought truth. Even his fiction has elements of the world around him, of the wars and struggles that he witnessed, of the terrible nature of politics, and the terrible toll that totalitarianism takes on the human spirit. From the time he began to write at the age of twenty-four, Orwell longed to capture the struggles of "real" people, to live among the less fortunate, and to tell their stories. Of his own writing, Orwell has said that he writes because there is some kind of lie that he has to expose, some fact to which he wants to draw attention. Orwell certainly does this in *1984*, a novel fraught with political purpose, meaning, and warning.