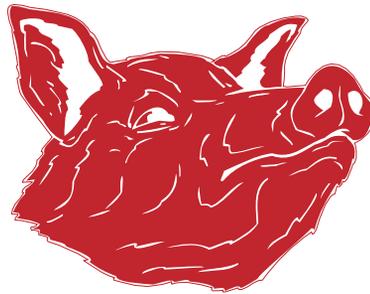


# Animal Farm

*A Study Guide*



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### Introductory Materials — *Why teach Animal Farm?*

Animal Farm might be thought of as more relevant to the history of the 20th century than today, but reading Animal Farm can help students to understand how oppressive governments have come to power and continue to rule those who live under them today.

Speaking at the One Young World conference in 2014, Park Yeon-mi (Westernized: Yeonmi Park), a defector from North Korea, spoke about the effect that reading Animal Farm had on her:

“Reading Animal Farm set me free from the dictatorship in my head,” said Park. “I could see all the tactics used by the regime to control us — they were all in that book. Until then I thought everything that wasn’t part of the regime was evil.” (Source linked on LiberalStudiesGuides.ca: Nathan A. Thompson, “Having Dinner with North Korea’s Celebrity Defector” Vice.)

Ms. Park is referring to the fact that in North Korea, the way that control over the population is maintained is through a belief in the ability of the regime to catch perpetrators of thought crimes.

(A video of Ms. Park speaking can be found under ‘cumulative exercises’ at LiberalStudiesGuides.ca, but teachers may choose to share it before reading the book.)

This mirrors the stories of those who, reading Orwell’s book, 1984, in or after escaping the Soviet Union, believed that George Orwell must have lived under a totalitarian regime. It speaks to Orwell’s power at conveying the reality for people living under brutal governments, as many people still do today.

Animal Farm offers students the chance to explore how good intentions can lead to dangerous results, the role of equal representation in a fair society, the importance of art and education in a free society, and a chance to build empathy with those who are fighting for the freedoms that we enjoy in Canada today.

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## Reading the Book

We suggest exploring this text through discussion based inquiry. A few guidelines:

- Students will read the books and prepare their own questions, or explore the reading beginning with questions introduced for the class.
- Possible points for discussion are outlined in the chapter breakdown below, but students should guide the discussion during Socratic seminars.
- Students should be marked on participation in the discussion, respect for differing opinions, and evidence that they've read the book.
- If using Socratic seminars, periodic journals on class discussions should be kept by students for evaluation.
- Teaching material for the classes leading up to Socratic seminars and in line with the points for discussion outlined below follow the chapter-by-chapter breakdown.
- As the material in this study guide is based on student-led discussion questions, it may be necessary to experiment with different formats for the discussions. Literature Circles can work quite well, for example. Also worth considering: timed debates, Think/Pair/Share, Word Walls or role playing.

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## Chapters 1–3

### Discussion questions:

- What do you think of the animals' commandments? Are they good building blocks for their society?
- Do you think it's a good idea for the animals not to associate with other farms? What are the advantages and disadvantages?
- Is the farm more like a family or a country? What are the similarities and differences?
- Are you surprised by how quickly the pigs gave themselves special privileges?
- Is there an alternative to fear that the pigs could use to keep order that may have avoided the loss of equality?

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## Exercises *Chapters 1–3*

### Voting exercise (ongoing through the novel): part 1

Divide the class. One group will play the role of the pigs, another will play the role of horses, and a third will play the role of chickens. Each group should prepare and present an argument about what should be done with the milk and apples. After class, each student should write a one-page explanation of who should get the milk and apples based on the arguments in class. (They don't have to argue for their side.)

- *Optional:* Allow the class to vote (not as pigs, horses, and chickens, but as all the animals) on who should get the apples and milk. Have each student write a one-page explanation of whether the solution that was voted for is fair or the best solution.

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## Chapters 4–5

### Discussion questions:

- What do you think of the ‘information war’ between the pigs and the owners of other farms? Why do the people spread the rumours that the animals are starving?
- “Is there anything that could make the members of Animal Farm get along with the human owners of other farms instead of fighting? What’s stopping this from happening? Would it be a good idea for Animal Farm or for the other farms?”
- Are the animals correct that it’s their right to keep the farm? Why or why not?
- Did Mollie do the wrong thing?
- What do you think of the difference between how Boxer reacts to the aftermath of the battle compared to Snowball’s reaction? Who is right?
- What changed when Napoleon revealed his dogs?
- Is Animal Farm worse off without Snowball, given that Napoleon will go ahead with the windmill?

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## Exercises *Chapters 4–5*

### Voting exercise (ongoing through the novel): part 2

In groups of pigs, horses, and chickens, debate the merits of building a windmill. If you are in favour of the windmill, how will you ensure the farm can get the parts? Have individual students write about the plan that they thought would be best.

- *Optional:* Allow the class to vote (not as pigs, horses, and chickens, but as all the animals) on whether to build the windmill. Have each student write a one-page explanation of whether the solution that was voted for is fair or the best solution.

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## Chapters 6–7

### Discussion questions:

- Do you think trading with neighbouring farms is bad for reasons other than it breaks the rules the animals set for themselves? Could they work for themselves and trade?
- Would the animals be better off if they could all meet with the humans with whom they're trading?
- Why can't the animals keep track of the changing rules? What do you think Orwell is trying to say about the people living under the governments he's writing about?
- Why does Clover still think things are better than they were before the animals' rebellion?
- What is the point of blaming Snowball for the storm destroying the windmill?
- Why do you think there are stories of Snowball coming in the night during the winter, or conspiring to take the farm?
- What do you make of the chickens' rebellion? Could another strategy have been used to supply the farm through the winter?

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## Exercises *Chapters 6–7*

### Voting exercise (ongoing through the novel): part 3

In groups of pigs, horses, and chickens, debate whether or not to trade with neighbouring farms. What should be traded? Should any special benefits go to the animals who make the traded goods? Once again, have individual students write about the plan that they thought would be best.

- *Optional:* Allow the class to vote (not as pigs, horses, and chickens, but as all the animals) on whether to trade with neighbouring farms. Have each student write a one-page explanation of whether the solution that was voted for is fair or the best solution.

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## Chapters 8–10

### Discussion questions:

- Why did the people blow up the windmill when Napoleon has been doing business with them?
- What do you think the windmill represents to the animals? Do you think it means the same thing to most of them as it does to the pigs? Do you think it represents something special for Napoleon?
- Why do you think the animals are glad to believe that the hard winter is better than ‘the old days’ with Jones?
- Do you think that it’s realistic that every single rule for the farm’s new society fell apart? Do you think that even with all its flaws Animal Farm would have done better?
- Do you think the return of rule like Jones’ was inevitable on the farm? Why or why not?
- What do you think Moses the raven represents? Why did he return?
- What would be different if the animals had a better record of what had happened on the farm? How could such a record be kept?

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## Exercises *Chapters 8–10*

### Propaganda in schools:

When discussing the schoolhouse with the class, share the school book from Cultural Revolution era China (PDF linked on LiberalStudiesGuides.ca) with the students.

You may also wish to refer to material on education and power from the supplementary resources provided in the Uncle Tom's Cabin study guide.

- Find a similarity in the Cultural Revolution era book to Animal Farm's school.
- Why do you think education forms such an important role in authoritarian societies?

### Art, music, and freedom:

Share the video of Park Yeon-mi (Westernized: Yeonmi Park) speaking at the Oslo Freedom Forum, **Yeonmi Park — 박연미 — North Korea's Black Market Generation**, with your class. A link can be found at LiberalStudiesGuides.ca.

Ms. Park talks about the importance that art has under the regime in North Korea, where it is illegal to watch, listen to, or read material from outside North Korea and those who disobey are harshly punished.

She also talks about the role that Animal Farm played in helping her overcome brainwashing.

- What role did art play in helping Yeonmi Park break free from the regime in North Korea?
- What role might art have had on the farm?
- Why do you think Animal Farm played such an important role in Yeonmi Park's understanding of her life?

### Do you think there is true freedom to make art in Canada today? Why or why not?

Yeonmi Park describes herself as capitalistic and individualistic, but she says she read The Communist Manifesto and understood that reading it was freedom. Do you think that she's right that the freedom to read ideas that you believe are wrong is important?

### Voting exercise (ongoing through the novel): part 4

In groups of pigs, horses, and chickens, debate whether or not the retirement age agreed on in the first year of Animal Farm can be honoured. If you say yes, how will the work be made up, given short rations? If you say no, what should be done instead? Once again, have individual students write about the plan that they thought would be best.

- *Optional:* Allow the class to vote (not as pigs, horses, and chickens, but as all the animals) on the proposed retirement solutions. Have each student write a one-page explanation of whether the solution that was voted for is fair or the best solution.

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## Cumulative Exercises

### Voting exercise: cumulative assignment

Essay topic for classes that have hosted debates and votes:

How did your debates and votes differ from the outcomes in the book? Why do you think they were different? Evaluate these differences. Some questions to consider:

- Could Animal Farm have turned out differently if more than one group of animals had a voice?
- Would all animals be better off, or would some, who were not represented on a committee, still have been at a disadvantage?
- How did the lack of transparency and record-keeping affect the eventual fate of the farm? Could democracy like what we've practiced in the class have helped, or would more reforms have been needed?

## How do societies fall into totalitarianism?

Share *The Road to Serfdom in Cartoons* (available on [LiberalStudiesGuides.ca](http://LiberalStudiesGuides.ca)) with your class. *The Road to Serfdom* by economist F. A. Hayek was an important book when it came out because it represented an explanation of how Germany had fallen to the Nazis and how totalitarian governments rise in general. Have your class discuss the comic vs. *Animal Farm* or compare and contrast the two in an essay. Questions students may choose to answer with their essays include:

- What insights from ***The Road to Serfdom in Cartoons*** could have helped the animals see that they were headed for trouble?
- Based on your reading of *Animal Farm* and this comic, what do you think George Orwell would think of *The Road to Serfdom*?

(After collecting essays, teachers may wish to share with their students that, in fact, Orwell reviewed *The Road to Serfdom* and both praised and criticized it. “In the negative part of Professor Hayek’s thesis there is a great deal of truth. It cannot be said too often — at any rate, it is not being said nearly often enough — that collectivism is not inherently democratic, but, on the contrary, gives to a tyrannical minority such powers as the Spanish Inquisitors never dreamt of. . . . [Yet, a] return to ‘free’ competition means for the great mass of people a tyranny probably worse, because more irresponsible, than that of the state.” — Review of *The Road to Serfdom* by F. A. Hayek, etc. “As I Please, 1943-1945: The Collected Essays, Journalism & Letters, Vol 3”)

### Essay topic:

Benjamin believed that things could never get better. In the end, he was right that things ended up more or less the same. But did they have to stay that way? Look at the experience of the real world: Soviet countries, about whom Orwell was writing, lagged behind the rest of the world in terms of improving quality of life. Is Benjamin too cynical? What is he cynical about? Do you believe things have gotten better? Do you think they will continue to?

# Animal Farm

## *A Study Guide*

Liberal Studies Guides help teachers engage their students when discussing literature through study guides and cross-curricular resources made freely available for classroom use. We also offer free workshops on using the Socratic method with secondary students of all levels.

Our study guides break down novels into lessons with ideas for discussion, exercises, and assignments. We tie our guides together with additional resources on our website, LiberalStudiesGuides.ca, including ready-to-use worksheets, to encourage the discussion of current events, history, music, philosophy, and economics to help tie the lessons to the real world.

Although our guides are aimed at English classrooms, the supplementary resources may be useful for history, music, drama, communications studies, economics, philosophy, and social studies.

Liberal Studies Guides is a project of the Institute for Liberal Studies, a non-partisan educational charity. We believe that encouraging discussion in the classroom helps to better equip students to discuss the problems facing Canadian society.



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