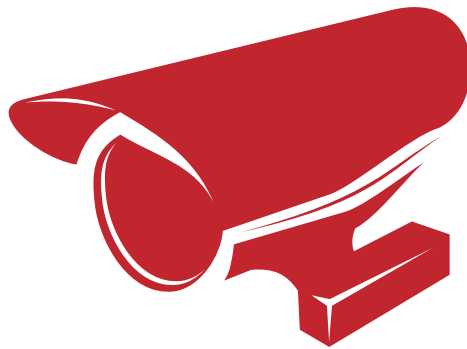


Little Brother

A Study Guide



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Introductory Materials — *Why teach Little Brother?*

Little Brother, a novel by Canadian author Cory Doctorow, depicts the fight of a San Francisco teen against the policies of a government reeling from a terrorist attack on the Bay Bridge and Bay Area subway system. This provides the foil for Doctorow to explore the expansion of the surveillance and security states since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

Books can be like time machines. They can bring us back to events and feelings long after they've happened. They can also be like experience machines, helping us to understand things we didn't live through. The 9/11 attacks are one of the most important contemporary events that shape our public policy, but high school students today may not have appreciated the events as they happened, if they remember them at all. Little Brother provides an opportunity for students to imagine the feelings and fallout from such an event and explore their beliefs about the trade-off between freedom and security.

Students can build empathy for those who put the policies of the post-9/11 world in place and explore whether those policies are appropriate today and how they believe we should proceed. Fiction allows the discussion to escape the politically charged world of reality.

Similarly, the novel also presents opportunities to discuss racism, privacy, civic responsibility, the ethics of whistleblowing, a comparative discussion of Canadian law, and recent Canadian history.

Little Brother can be taught as an alternative to George Orwell's 1984, as it covers many of the same subjects in a more contemporary context and is written by a Canadian author.

Little Brother has been adapted for stage, and this adaptation can be found at LiberalStudiesGuides.ca.

There is a sequel to Little Brother called Homeland. Students may also be interested in Pirate Cinema, which talks about the challenges of copyright law and intellectual property.

Doctorow makes all of his books available for free online under Creative Commons. Full text copies can be found here: <http://craphound.com/>

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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.

Chapters 1 – 7

Discussion topics:

- What do you think of the rules in the school? Should Marcus break them? Can they be enforced?
- Do you think Doctorow did a good job capturing what it would be like to be present during an attack like the bridge? How would this change how you think?
- What do you think of Marcus asking if he was under arrest and asking for an attorney? Did he make things worse? If so, do you think it's right that asking made things worse?
- The way that Marcus was treated by Homeland Security is based on documentation of 'enhanced interrogation' of suspects in the War on Terror. Do you think there is ever a reason to treat *suspects* like this? Should Marcus have had a trial first?
- Do you think guilty prisoners should be tortured?
- Do you think something like what happened in these chapters could happen in your city? Why or why not?
- Should the government have been allowed to bug Marcus' computer? If you think they should be allowed to, when do you think they should be able to bug them?
- Consider the Turkish coffee shop owner deciding to stop using debit cards instead of allowing the government to monitor his customers. How do you think his customers will respond?
- Compare the Turkish coffee shop with the response to parents at the school to the cameras and to Marcus' dad responding to the police officers.
- Marcus says, "The law said they couldn't force us to go to school with cameras all over the place, but it didn't say anything about us *volunteering* to give up our Constitutional rights." Did Charles make a compelling case for the cameras? How about the police and Marcus' dad?

Exercises *Chapters 1 – 7*

Group research and discussion: topics in the surveillance debate

Marcus found a bug in his computer, but that's not the only way that governments have looked for information about terrorists. Split the class into groups and have them research and present on the following topics:

- Levitation surveillance program
- Five Eyes
- Edward Snowden
- Anti-Terrorism Act, 2015 (Bill C-51)

Torture in the real world:

Share with your students the article, **Torture is Bad So Psychologists Helped the US Redefine It (WIRED)** (available through LiberalStudiesGuides.ca).

- Does how we talk about 'enhanced interrogation' or torture affect how we think about it?
- Is there any role for health care professionals in these techniques? If not, what does that mean for what can be done?

Innocent until proven guilty?

Share with your students the article, **Greenberg — Guilty Until Proven Guilty: Threatening the Presumption of Innocence** (available through LiberalStudiesGuides.ca).

Read the following passage in class and allow students to explore it through collaborative conversation, or a Socratic seminar:

- "Human rights groups, civil libertarians, and those of us who opposed the Bush Justice Department's disdain... those 12 jurors should come up with their own determination of guilt or innocence."
- What do you think the conviction rate approaching something like 100% and the public believing that a trial that doesn't result in a conviction is a 'failure' mean for the ability of terror victims to have a fair trial? Do you think Marcus could have had a fair trial?

Surveillance in Canada:

Share with your students the article/website, **CBC News: CSE tracks millions of downloads daily: Snowden documents** (available through LiberalStudiesGuides.ca)

This article includes 1:45 minute video for discussion.

- Do you believe that the programs were only being used on terrorists, or do you think information is being collected about Canadians, as has been revealed in the United States?
- If information is being collected, do you think it's worth it?

Chapters 8 – 14

Discussion topics:

- What do you think of Marcus' dad's reaction to the police checking people with abnormal travel records?
- Van says, "They only get away with it because the normal feel smug compared to the abnormals. If everyone was getting pulled over, it would be a disaster." Do you think she's right? What do you think this means for how security policy should work?
- Marcus' plan to clone the transit passes and the other plans to overload ('jam') surveillance affects everyone, even people who didn't call for increased surveillance. But in the process he gives the police and Homeland Security a reason to increase their resources. Do you think what Marcus did can be defended? If so, how? If not, why not?
- What do you think about Jolu's decision to not join the network they set up at the party? Do you think being treated differently affects accountability when it comes to security and police policies?
- What are some differences between the stories of funny protests by 'Yippies' that Ms. Galvez tells and what the Xnetters are doing? What are the similarities?
- What do you think of "Don't trust anyone over 25"? Do you think that old and young people are the only ones with different perspectives? What about what Jolu said?
- What do you think of Mrs. Anderson vs. Ms. Galvez?

Exercises *Chapter 8 – 14*

Short paper topic:

What would you have written for Ms. Galvez's assignment? (Write a paper to compare the political response of the hippies and Yippies to the civil rights movements responding to the War on Terror today.)

Plan a protest:

- Plan a less serious, funny, 'Yippie'-style protest that the Xnetters could do instead of "jamming".
- Design posters to advertise the protest
- Provide descriptions of what you would do
- What resources would you need?
- What would make your protest a success?
- Would anything change right away?

Constitutional rights and racial profiling:

Share the **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms**, the **U.S. Constitution**, and the article **Does Racial Profiling Exist at the Canada-U.S. border?** (available on LiberalStudiesGuides.ca) with your students.

The second article includes a 3:50 video for discussion.

- U.S. customs say that they don't racially profile. It could be that this happens often and these men felt discriminated against because of their appearance. But there is a lot of evidence that how you look affects the likelihood that you will be questioned or detained. Do you think customs officials are telling the truth?
- Does racial profiling make sense for directing police resources?

Chapters 15 – 22

Discussion topics:

- What do you think 'M1k3y' got right in his statements at the press conference? What did he get wrong? How would you change it?
- Marcus 'blows the whistle' on the DHS by giving his story to Barbara. Do you think he did the right thing? Or do you believe that undermining the DHS could make it impossible for them to find a more effective way to protect San Francisco?
- How should we view whistleblowers? When do you think they deserve support?
- Marcus says that most of the people being held in Gitmo-by-the-Bay are "one shade of brown or another". Racial profiling is a policy that some people argue for when it comes to security. Do you think this is right?
- What do you think would happen if they were to give trials to everyone being held in the real Guantanamo Bay? Do you think it's realistic? What else can be done?
- Is the end of the book optimistic or pessimistic?

Exercises *Chapter 15 – 22*

Short paper assignment:

Research and write a short paper on Maher Arar, a Canadian who was subject to extraordinary rendition

Extraordinary rendition:

Share the article [ACLU Fact Sheet: Extraordinary Rendition](#) (available at [LiberalStudiesGuides.ca](#)) with your students.

References about being sent to Syria or ‘off-shore’ are to something called ‘extraordinary rendition’, also discussed in this article.

- What do you think of this process?
- Why do you think it happens?
- What do you think the advantages and disadvantages are?
- Do you think it is ever justified?

Whistleblowers and accountability:

Share with your students the articles [10 Whistleblowers and the scandals they spurred](#) (CBC) and [Daniel Ellsberg credits Edward Snowden with catalysing US surveillance reform — with video](#) (The Guardian), both available through [LiberalStudiesGuides.ca](#).

- Some people object to the fact that Edward Snowden fled the United States rather than allowing himself to be arrested when he blew the whistle on the NSA. Do you think Marcus would be doing something wrong by trying to get out of the U.S.?

Cumulative Exercises

Essay topic:

The idea behind asking whistleblowers to stand trial after they ‘blow the whistle’ is to allow the public to decide whether what they did was wrong. Explain if and why (or why not) you think this is how things should work, and whether you believe it’s how they do work.

Class discussion:

Ask students to talk to people who remember the events of 11 September 2001.

- Do they think Doctorow captured some of what people remember?
- What do they think is different in *Little Brother*?
- Essay topic: Is *Little Brother* realistic? Is America “caught in a massive, irrational shrieking freak-out where anything could be done in the name of stopping terrorism”? Is Canada? Where do you think the book goes too far, or not far enough?
- Research an article about Canada’s role in the war on terror.
- What insights did *Little Brother* give you into understanding the article?

Canada and digital surveillance:

Share the articles, Jesse Brown — *Where is Canada’s rage over digital surveillance?* and Kestler-D’Amours — *Majority of Canadians oppose surveillance, new report finds* (available at LiberalStudiesGuides.ca) with your students.

- The first article outlines some of what Canadians know about digital surveillance in our country from the Snowden leaks. Do these programs sound effective to you? Do they strike the right balance between freedom and safety?
- The second article says that more people think they’re being surveilled, but also that their online habits won’t change if they are. Do you think they’re right? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Why do you think Canadians react so differently than Americans to learning they’re under surveillance? Is *Little Brother* relevant to the Canadian context?

PRISM: Real-world surveillance

Share the article, Cory Doctorow — *The NSA’s Prism: Why we should care* (available at LiberalStudiesGuides.ca) with your students.

- In this essay, Doctorow lays out his argument for worrying about surveillance without the pretext of a novel. How has *Little Brother* made you think about these arguments?

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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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