

Set Text Guide: 1984



GCSE (9-1) Drama

Pearson Edexcel Level 1/Level 2 GCSE (9-1) in Drama (1DR0)

GCSE Drama 2016: 1984

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Summary

The play does not have defined acts or scenes; therefore, page numbers are used here for reference. You will note from the Foreword, which is relative to the Appendix in the novel 1984, that the playwrights have incorporated the Appendix into the play.

Because of this, we can assume that the characters that exist almost as a chorus in many of the nondescript places throughout the play are talking from a time in the future, specifically after 2050.

Winston is caught between what is real and what is not, therefore the staging and the lucid nature of the scenes invite the audience to empathise with his confusion.

Scenes often jump suddenly to different times and places, with a blackout or the sound of a klaxon.

Page 13

We open on Winston Smith about to put pen to paper and start a diary. He knows this is a crime, for which he will inevitably be caught. He is resigned to this fact even before he starts writing, convinced that the Thought Police will discover he has committed the Thoughtcrime eventually.

Page 14

After a blackout, we jump into what appears to be the present day, with the company assembled to listen to the voice we have heard narrating: The Host. These people may be the imagined readers that Winston was writing for in the future, or he may be the imagined writer they are reading. As ambiguous as this may sound, this theme of 'what is real' leaves room for much interpretation, and though decisions should be made from moment to moment, the questions do not have to be fully answered for the audience.

Page 17

There is a blurring of the tenses, as Winston hears the memory of 'Oranges and Lemons' from his past, but the tune blurs into a ringtone version from the future.

Page 20

We then enter the story of 1984, with Winston's first encounter with Julia, who at this point is simply called Waitress. She is wearing a scarlet sash, the emblem of the Anti-Sex League. She looks at Winston, who is immediately terrified, assuming her to be Thought Police.

Page 21

The ringtone goes off again, and another overlapping of the worlds, as Winston mouths along with Martin: 'Every age sees itself reflected'. This is an important reference to the timeless nature of the major themes in the play.

Page 22

Next, we hear O'Brien's voice. He can communicate with Winston through the telescreens. He tells Winston that they 'will meet in the place where there is no darkness'. Suddenly, Mrs Parsons' child appears, accusing Winston of being a Thought Criminal. Mrs Parsons enters. She fears her own child. Winston is in a daze as she tells him that he works with her husband and lives next door.

Page 24

The Host becomes Charrington, an antique shop owner, who persuades Winston to buy the diary. Here is a solid example that we are not operating on a linear timeline, as we have already seen Winston writing in the diary at the opening of the play.

Page 26

Again, Winston is plunged into darkness and we snap back to the future. They reposition Winston in his chair and try to help him.

Page 27

There is a klaxon and we hear an announcement from the telescreen about the Brotherhood, and that they are planning a major attack. The klaxon sounds again and the voice of a female fitness instructor takes over. She orders Winston to stand. Here we see that the telescreens work both ways: this is a world with no privacy.

Page 28

We meet Syme, who lectures Winston on the beauty of Newspeak. They are joined by Parsons, who tells how proud he is of his daughter for shopping a foreigner as an enemy agent. Meanwhile, Julia has come and sat at the other end of the table, making Winston very nervous.

Page 31

Another announcement through the telescreen, about a victory and an increase in the chocolate rations. Winston hears O'Brien's voice and remembers that every day the chocolate rations are raised, but always to the same amount.

We see O'Brien for the first time. Winston says he is writing a diary, and roars with the effort of thinking for himself. They agree to meet, in the place where there is no darkness.

Page 33

An abrupt lighting change and Winston is at work, deleting someone from history. Here we see what happens to the history of those who are caught rebelling against the party.

Page 34

Another klaxon and now we learn what they do to these thought criminals after they are erased from history; in *Two Minutes of Hate* we witness the confession and execution of a Thought Criminal.

Page 37

Julia collides with someone and falls over. Winston goes to help her up, and she slips him a note that reads, to his surprise, 'I Love You'.

Page 38

We see a near repeat of the conversation with Syme and Parsons, but this time when Julia is sitting at the table, Winston nudges his tray onto the floor. As they are both on the floor picking it up, they hastily arrange to meet by a specific tree in the countryside on Sunday.

Page 39

In a second we are there, and they talk more openly than we have seen anyone do, as they are so far away from the telescreens, it seems. They have sex, in a defiant act of political disobedience. They discuss what is real and what is a dream. Before they part, Julia tells him, 'We are the dead'.

Page 44

We are back in the antique shop. This time Charrington offers Winston a storage room to rent, with no telescreen. It all seems too good to be true, and so it will prove.

Page 45

Time and place are becoming more fluid now, as Winston looks up from the bed and sees Julia, smiling. She has lots of contraband treats. She teases him about rats, but we see here his total phobia of rats. 'Anything but rats,' he pleads.

Page 46

She sings some of 'Oranges and Lemons' to him. He discovers her grandad taught it to her. This is an example of the theme of history being passed on through story and truth.

Page 48

At Julia's command, Winston goes out into the yard to see the Mother singing. Julia tells him that here they can be real. Winston explains that he deletes people, and that he once deleted evidence that would have proved that the party lied.

He is shocked at Julia's disregard of this revelation. We see a stark difference in their beliefs here, as Winston is interested in the future, but she is interested in the now.

Page 51

We see another near repeat of the scene in the canteen, only this time Syme's chair is empty, indicating he has been unpersoned. O'Brien enters and invites Winston to come and look at a new dictionary at his apartment.

Page 53

We are back in the antique shop room, and Winston remembers an old memory which he relates to Julia, about stealing chocolate from his sister.

We learn that Winston thinks O'Brien is part of the Brotherhood, and they agree to meet at his apartment.

Page 56

We are at O'Brien's apartment. As he sees Winston, he turns off the telescreen. This is the first real moment of silence we have had in the play. This demonstrates O'Brien's power. Winston boldly explains that he and Julia are Thought Criminals and that they believe in the Brotherhood.

Martin is there with them, and O'Brien declares that he is one of them too, and they drink a toast to Goldstein, the rebels' leader. O'Brien tests what Winston would be willing to do for the cause: he will do anything except never see Julia again. O'Brien then explains that the Brotherhood does not exist in the ordinary sense, and that he will give him a copy of Goldstein's book, which will help him 'understand the true reality of things'.

Page 62

Winston is in a street and is handed a briefcase containing the book. He returns to the antique shop room and tells Julia he has the book. He reads extracts to her, though she seems disinterested, eventually falling asleep. Winston is elated.

Page 65

Winston wakes with a scream from a nightmare. Julia comforts him, while the Mother sings outside again. They agree to never betray each other. Winston marvels at the billions of people across the world who are like the Mother. People are all the same. He has got the sentiment from Goldstein's book. He has not finished the book yet. He says he doesn't need to, he has a new-found hope. They both repeat, 'we are the dead'.

Page 69

Suddenly, a voice is heard saying, 'YOU ARE THE DEAD'. They are taken away. It is revealed that Charrington is a much younger man than he appeared, and he has betrayed them. He finally gives Winston the last line to the song 'Oranges and Lemons' that he has been trying to remember: 'here comes a chopper to chop off your head'.

Page 70

Winston is in the Ministry of Love. He is unsure how long he has been here, and it may be that he has been here before in the context of the play, when hearing O'Brien's voice, for example. Parsons is also there, having ironically been shopped by his own daughter.

Page 73

Suddenly, Winston wakes next to Julia again and feels it has been a dream. This is a scene we have also seen before. Winston 'comes to' and is back with O'Brien. There is now no real definition between what is real and what is a dream.

Page 74

O'Brien begins to interrogate Winston with the help of torturers. He goes about expunging his memories and beliefs through torture.

Page 80

In a bold break of theatrical convention, the house lights are brought up and O'Brien asks Winston to talk to the unborn he was addressing in his diary. In this case, the audience represent the future and he can talk to them.

Page 81

Winston declares himself to be 'morally superior' to the party, and O'Brien plays him his own voice from earlier, saying that he would 'throw sulphuric acid in a child's face' for the cause.

Page 84

O'Brien tells Winston that he doesn't exist. Winston defiantly proclaims that he has not betrayed Julia, but is informed that he is in room 101. He knows what is coming. A contraption is attached to him that encourages rats to bore through his face. Winston begs the audience to help him. As soon as the threat of the final gate being opened happens, he betrays Julia and asks that they do it to her instead. They have broken him.

Page 89

Winston is back sitting in the café. Julia is there, though her name in the play text has returned to Waitress. They each tell the other that they betrayed them, though it is without feeling or emotion. It is as if it is a false memory.

Page 90

We hear the voice from the start, and the ending bookends the play with the company representing the future. The host tells them that Winston never existed. The play ends with Winston thanking O'Brien.

Characters

Winston

The protagonist. He is staunchly against the party, and will fight for the truth no matter what it takes. He struggles with reality throughout, and is even unsure whether he himself is real by the end.

Julia

Winston's lover. Though she is a rebel, she is a hedonist and is only interested in the immediacy of rebellion. She does not have the drive to change society that Winston has.

O'Brien

A member of the inner party. He represents the party. He initially appears to be on Winston's side, but eventually indoctrinates him into the ways of the party.

Charrington

The owner of an antique shop and a secret member of the Thought Police.

Martin

A mysterious character who seems able to exist in the past and the future. It is open to interpretation how and why this is possible. He does begin reading the book, and says 'you're seeing yourself in it'.

Syme

Works with Winston in the Ministry of Truth. He is eventually deleted.

Parsons

Winston's neighbour. He is betrayed to the Ministry of Love by his own daughter.

Social, cultural and historical context

George Orwell was a writer, born in 1903. He held strong opinions, and addressed some of the major political movements of his time, including imperialism, fascism and communism. Along with *1984*, arguably his other most successful novel was *Animal Farm*, which has been adapted several times for stage and cinema.

Nineteen Eighty-Four proved to be a huge success for the author when he published it in 1949, but he had little time to enjoy it. By this time, Orwell was in the late stages of his battle with tuberculosis. He died on 21 January 1950, in a London hospital.

Orwell's novel, like many works of literature, carries with it literary traditions reaching back to the earliest of storytellers. Among these is the concept of utopia, which Orwell distorts effectively for his own purposes.

Utopia (from the Greek meaning 'Nowhere Land'), is an ideal place or society in which human beings realise a perfect existence, a place without suffering or human malady. Orwell was not the first to use this genre. In fact, the word 'utopia' is taken from Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, written in 1516. The word is now used to describe any place considered to be perfect.

Although Orwell was writing nearly 70 years ago, it is almost spine-chilling how accurate many of his predictions of the future have proved to be.

This adaptation was created by Robert Icke and Duncan Macmillan, and first performed in 2014 at Nottingham Playhouse.

This adaptation has a Foreword that explains the playwrights' interpretation of the Appendix in the book. It is highly recommended that this Foreword is not overlooked, as it sets out the most significant difference between the play and the novel as it is commonly understood.

Themes

Though it may not be the case with the novel, one of the most significant themes of this stage adaptation is **dreams vs reality**. Winston is constantly seeking to find what reality is. We, the audience, are also doing the same throughout, as we pick our way through the jumpy and misleading narrative to find what is real and what is dream.

Another key theme is **truth**. The party look to eradicate and alter the truth of the past to suit their needs. Winston is committed to revealing the truth.

Past, present and future are explored in a fascinating way, as we jump through time, never quite sure exactly where we are. This is a homage to both the novel itself, and more specifically to its Appendix, written, as it is, to be beyond the year 2050, making even the present, past.

Love is another theme, as ultimately this is what causes Winston and Julia to be discovered.

Totalitarian government is a significant theme. It is the injustice of the lack of individual freedom of thought that drives Winston to rebel against the party.

Resources

There is a wealth of resources available on the Pearson Edexcel website and these are being added to and updated regularly. Many of these, including Sample Assessment Materials, are free to download.

Recommended edition

1984 by George Orwell. A new adaptation created by Robert Icke and Duncan Macmillan. ISBN: 978-1-78319-061-4 Oberon Books

Further reading

1984 by George Orwell (highly recommended, as the play has striking differences from the novel, which may prove difficult to understand without prior knowledge).

Online resources

YouTube is a useful source of extracts from cinema versions of the novel. Some are full length, others are short extracts. These can be used to stimulate ideas and discussion around the tone of a production and the portrayal of the characters. At the time of writing, there are trailers that give a flavour of what Orwell's intentions were, brought to the cinema screen.

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/feb/16/1984-review>

http://www.citz.co.uk/images/fileuploads/1984_Resource_Pack.pdf

Useful soundtracks to use in the classroom

'Oranges and Lemons'

'1984' by Rick Wakeman

'1984' by David Bowie

Model Box resources

www.theatre-inabox.com

Other resources

Reviews of the Broadway production of this play that is due to open in June 2017.

Google Images – there are hundreds of images associated with *1984*.

Practical exploration activities

Performers

The following exercises are designed to help theatre makers practically explore some of the key characters, themes and ideas that are central to *1984*. Some of these exercises may help performers to consider how key roles might be communicated and realised from 'page to stage'.

Off-text improvisation is a useful explorative technique to consider the 'before and after' life of the play. You might explore moments from the play that are alluded to but not seen, for example:

- Winston as a child hearing 'Oranges and Lemons' for the first time
- O'Brien and inner party members discussing how they are going to trick Winston
- Julia being tortured.

Hot-seating is a valuable and exciting method to develop characterisation. It helps performers to 'flesh out' their understanding of the characters. Using their imagination and the information provided in the given circumstances will allow performers to consider the voice, attitude and physicality of the character they are exploring.

A more theatrical way to explore hot-seating might be to combine it with an off-text improvisation. For example, following on from the examples above, after we have watched a scene, we could immediately interview the character and ask them probing questions to discover thoughts the performer may not have considered.

Exploring accent and dialect can also help performers to consider character choices. How might vocal choices help the audience understand which time frame we are in?

Non-verbal communication is often a highly effective way to explore character, subtext, tension and silence. How does each character behave in moments of silence? For example, you might see how different characters behave when they are on their own. How does this differ, if it does, from the way they behave when they are with other characters? How might characters behave if the telescreens were turned off?

Another useful exercise involves **staging and rehearsing a key scene with a particular focus and then trying it in an alternative style**. For example, the performers might explore status in conjunction with the director. The director calls out numbers from 1 to 20 for the performers in the space; 1 is the lowest status, that of a slug, if you will; 20 is the highest status, the king, perhaps. By playing this game we can begin to discover how bodies in space can signify status, and this might give a good indication of how to stage certain pivotal moments in the play, where status plays a crucial role.

This might help us see how members of the outer party in the canteen, such as Winston, behave when O'Brien is around.

As there is the constant threat from the Thought Police, a director might **play a game of 'wink murder'** with the performers. Performers sit in a circle and the director chooses a detective, or in this case a member of the Thought Police. The detective goes outside while the murderer is chosen. When the murderer winks at someone, they must play dead. The detective then returns and must try to catch the murderer. Although this game appears – and is – simplistic, it may lead into more developed activities around waiting for the knock on the door, for example, or a structured version of Chinese Whispers during which, inevitably, the truth becomes distorted.

Directors

The following exercises are designed to help theatre makers explore some of the key concepts, characters and themes that are central to *1984*. Some of the suggestions may help directors to consider how key ideas in the play might be communicated and realised from 'page to stage'. This is not an exhaustive list; it is a guide.

It might be useful to set up a **production meeting** and pitch for your students – either as one group or in smaller groups, depending on numbers – as this will help them to consider the play as a whole and root their practical ideas in aims and intentions.

Remember that audience impact is key, and that setting up small groups of potential theatre makers might help your students to consider the text in a holistic way. In this model, for example, a small group of five could consist of a director, set, costume, sound and lighting designers. The director puts important questions to each member of the team, in order to develop a creative concept for a production of the play, then sells a potential 'theatrical' pitch to the teacher (producer or 'dragon') in order to secure funding. It is important that the director has an overall vision for the play in performance, and the design team should question the director on their overall approach and theatrical intention.

This is a useful discussion exercise that also lends itself to research, images and presentations. It can work at the start of a scheme of work to initiate ideas and contextualise themes and key moments or, probably more effectively, at the end of a scheme of work as a way of ensuring all aspects of production are considered. It is important with this activity that each member of each production team should justify their ideas with key moments from the play.

The overall look and feel of a production, for example within a composite set would be key to ensuring that the pace of the play in performance is maintained.

Another useful exercise for a director to consider involves **staging and rehearsing a key scene with a particular focus** and then trying it in an alternative style. For example, it might be useful to explore the moment of O'Brien's first appearance when all eyes are on him. Try exploring the scene by shifting the focus between O'Brien and Winston using lights, for example, or levels, to look at what happens when O'Brien is not immediately seen as the threat he later becomes. This would impact on the dynamic of the moment. As a director, you would be encouraging performers to think about appropriate interpretations of characters, within the context of the whole play.

A director may **explore the structure of the play** and look at other ways into it. For example, starting with any other episode or moment in this structure, and flashing back or rewinding the story to the beginning from this point and taking the narrative through until the end, might be an interesting way of tracing the effects of the events of Winston and Julia's relationship.

Designers

The following exercises and ideas are designed to help theatre makers explore some of the opportunities, themes and ideas that are central to *1984*. Some of the suggestions may help designers to consider how key aspects of the play might be communicated and realised from 'page to stage'.

Setting up a **production meeting and pitch** for your student designers will help them to consider the play as a whole and root their practical ideas in aims and intentions.

Remember that audience impact is key, and that setting up small groups of potential theatre makers might help students to consider the text in a holistic way. For example, a group could consist of a set, costume, sound and lighting designer. Smaller groups simply take on more than one area of responsibility. It is important that each designer questions the aims and intentions of the others, so that each member of the team is able to think in a holistic and collaborative way. The design 'pitch' could then be offered to the teacher (producer). This is a useful discussion exercise that also lends itself to research, images and presentations. It can work at the start of a scheme of work to initiate ideas/contextualise themes and key moments, or at the end of a scheme of work as a way of ensuring all aspects of production are considered. It would also make an excellent 'active' revision session in time for the exam. TIP – each member of the production team should justify their ideas with key moments from the play.

Creating a model box of a potential set design is a useful exercise and can be as simple or as elaborate as required. It is often useful for students to see how each scene

or episode will be played in a potential space, and by creating a model box they will be able to refer more easily to their ideas in a specific space. *1984* is open to much interpretation, as it offers a view of a dystopian world, and operates in different time periods and tenses.

Exploring different music and sound effects for key moments is another effective way of considering how design can play an important role in the development of a key idea or theme. Motives and variations based on 'Oranges and Lemons', for example, may be explored. How might sound be used to give the oppressive feeling of the telescreens that are always on, and especially to draw a sharp contrast when O'Brien turns one off?

How can lighting help to create shadow and suspense? **Look at previous productions and lighting designs** to see how other theatre makers have used lighting to create impact. If you don't have access to lighting, you might want to consider the effect of torches or candles. (Safety first!) There are many lighting blackouts and directions in the play text. Look to these initially for inspiration, but be encouraged to explore how this can be interpreted to help tell the story.

Another useful exercise that helps to build the world of the play and develop ideas for performance is **sourcing and designing potential costumes**. Research is key, and will help students who are initially daunted about the thought of 'designing'. They don't have to be great artists to create great designs. The main thing is that they approach the design of the production in a holistic way. Is their costume design expressionistic, representational, or more naturalistic? What is their aim and intention? Does their costume design root the production and performance in a particular time period or style?

Obviously in this case there are many different time periods that could be incorporated into a costume design, though certain things, such as Julia's red sash, are specifically named in the text.

