

These tasks will help you prepare a piece of writing to enter the Orwell Youth Prize 2025, on the theme of 'Freedom is...'



LESSON 3: FREEDOM IN DYSTOPIA

If you've heard of one book by George Orwell, it's probably *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – Orwell's famous dystopia.* This novel was written in the 1940s and set in 1984, a terrible future in which people are completely controlled by 'the Party'.

On the page below, there are two short extracts from the novel – one from the start of the book and one from about halfway through. They are two different snapshots of the protagonist, Winston Smith, experiencing freedom/lack of freedom in the dystopian state of Oceania.

How does Orwell describe a world without freedom, and characters searching for freedom in this world?

First explore the extracts with the 'reading' questions. Then use your ideas from this to start your own short story about freedom...

Reading

- 1) First, read **extract one** only. Note down all the examples you can find of *lack of freedom* or freedoms being taken away, in this extract.
- 2) Next, read **extract two**. How could the thrush be seen as a metaphor or symbol for freedom in this extract? What affect does it have on Winston?
- 3) Now look at both extracts. The first extract is set in the city, the second is out in the countryside. How do Orwell's descriptions of these two settings compare to one another, and contribute to two contrasting senses of freedom/lack of freedom? Why do you think Orwell has chosen these two different settings?
- 4) How is nature and weather described in the first extract? How is it described differently in the second extract?
- 5) How is surveillance (being watched/listened to) described in the first extract? How is it described differently in the second extract?

Writing

Write the opening of a short story, set in a world where freedom is limited.

- 1) In what ways are your characters freedoms limited? Are they being watched? Are they limited in what they are allowed to say or do or where they can go?
- 2) What are the punishments/consequences for breaking these rules?
- 3) Who or what is limiting their freedom? And why?
- 4) How might your character(s) seek freedom in this world? Is there a place, person, activity or thing which might allow your character(s) still to experience freedom?



Part 1, Chapter 1

Outside, even through the shut window-pane, the world looked cold. Down in the street little eddies of wind were whirling dust and torn paper into spirals, and though the sun was shining and the sky a harsh blue, there seemed to be no colour in anything, except the posters that were plastered everywhere. The blackmoustachio'd face gazed down from every commanding corner. There was one on the house-front immediately opposite. **BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU**, the caption said, while the dark eyes looked deep into Winston's own. Down at street level another poster, torn at one corner, flapped fitfully in the wind, alternately covering and uncovering the single word **INGSOC**. In the far distance a helicopter skimmed down between the roofs, hovered for an instant like a bluebottle, and darted away again with a curving flight. It was the police patrol, snooping into people's windows. The patrols did not matter, however. Only the Thought Police mattered.

Behind Winston's back the voice from the telescreen was still babbling away about pig-iron and the overfulfilment of the Ninth Three-Year Plan. The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it, moreover, so long as he remained within the field of vision which the metal plaque commanded, he could be seen as well as heard. There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time. But at any rate they could plug in your wire whenever they wanted to. You had to live—did live, from habit that became instinct—in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized.

Part 2, Chapter 2

'Look!' whispered Julia.

A thrush had alighted on a bough not five metres away, almost at the level of their faces. Perhaps it had not seen them. It was in the sun, they in the shade. It spread out its wings, fitted them carefully into place again, ducked its head for a moment, as though making a sort of obeisance to the sun, and then began to pour forth a torrent of song. In the afternoon hush the volume of sound was startling. Winston and Julia clung together, fascinated. The music went on and on, minute after minute, with astonishing variations, never once repeating itself, almost as though the bird were deliberately showing off its virtuosity. Sometimes it stopped for a few seconds, spread out and resettled its wings, then swelled its speckled breast and again burst into song. Winston watched it with a sort of vague reverence. For whom, for what, was that bird singing? No mate, no rival was watching it. What made it sit at the edge of the lonely wood and pour its music into nothingness? He wondered whether after all there was a microphone hidden somewhere near. He and Julia had spoken only in low whispers, and it would not pick up what they had said, but it would pick up the thrush. Perhaps at the other end of the instrument some small, beetle-like man was listening intently — listening to that. But by degrees the flood of music drove all speculations out of his mind. It was as though it were a kind of liquid stuff that poured all over him and got mixed up with the sunlight that filtered through the leaves. He stopped thinking and merely felt.