

May 2019

Dear AP English Language and Composition Scholar,

In “Politics and the English Language,” published just after the end of World War II, George Orwell explores the reciprocal relationship between the spread of evil and the debasement of language. “But if thought corrupts language,” he writes, “language can also corrupt thought.” He then goes on to rail against the kind of political speech that disguises torture and murder in vague, euphemistic expressions like “pacification” and “elimination of unreliable elements.” Orwell ends by arguing that conscientious people have a responsibility to be precise, deliberate users of language to guard against the enemies of justice and humanity.

In *1984*, your summer reading assignment for next year, Orwell comes at this idea through the lens of fiction. In Oceania, the dystopia described in *1984*, the ruling party uses language as a tool to maintain control over the people. In fact, the manipulation of language is so central to Big Brother’s totalitarianism that Oceania has its own modified version of English known as Newspeak, which one character describes as “the only language in the world that gets smaller every year.” By eliminating words from the language, Big Brother also eliminates people’s capacity for independent thought. Eventually, rebellion will become impossible because no words will exist for such an idea.

Besides being an important and compelling read, Orwell’s book, with its emphasis on the relationship between language and thought, provides a good introduction to rhetoric, which will be the focus our study in AP English Language and Composition. Put simply, rhetoric, as an academic discipline, examines how people use language and symbols to influence the attitudes, beliefs, and actions of others. Therefore, as you read *1984* this summer, pay attention to the way Big Brother uses slogans, images, and Newspeak to control the people.

As before with summer reading, you will need to track down your own copy of *1984*. It’s a famous book, so some of you will be able to scavenge dog-eared copies that your parents or siblings have lying around the house. The rest of you will need to purchase your own copy. Viewpoint Books stocks extra copies for our benefit, so if you’re interested in taking a stroll downtown and supporting a local business, then I encourage you to look here. Of course, used and electronic copies are also readily available, so I trust you will have no problem finding a version that meets your needs.

Naturally, you should annotate *1984* as you read it. Taking reading notes requires the kind of sustained, thoughtful engagement with texts that will be expected of you in this course. Next year, we will continue to cultivate this skill, but for now, you should be underlining key passages and jotting down thoughts in the margin. Approach each page as if you are a naturalist

studying a new environment—what do you see, why is it important, and how does it affect everything around it?

In closing, we hope you have a great summer. We know that annotating a book about a futuristic totalitarian super-state doesn't sound like the kind of casual summer reading that makes you want to reach for your sunscreen and beach towel, but *1984* is a towering book that will make you look uber-impressive poolside. Moreover, it is an excellent introduction to the important work we will be doing with language next year. We look forward to seeing you in August.

Happy reading,

Mr. Gaylord

Ms. Dowling-Spencer