

Themes and contexts

Power, leadership and corruption

In *Animal Farm*, Orwell exposes what happens when leaders become corrupted by power. Ultimately, corrupt leaders mean that all others within society suffer. Napoleon's corruption means that he thinks only of himself and members of his own species, and even then not all pigs are protected! Farmer Jones's power has corrupted him. Alcohol is a symbol of his corruption: he is cruel and selfish and neglects his animals.

Although it is easy to make links between the events of *Animal Farm* and the Russian Revolution (see pages 71–74), Orwell is really criticising corrupt leaders in general. You could swap Animalism for any other political ideology. It is not the political beliefs that underpin a society that are the problem: it is individuals who seize power and use it for their own selfish gain.

DO IT!

Snowball Napoleon Jones Old Major Frederick

For each leader, list five characteristics. Are any of them truly 'good' leaders? What makes a good leader?

DO IT!

Write a list of reasons why the animals fail to create old Major's utopian society.

- What could the animals have done differently?
- Was Animal Farm doomed from the start?

Revolution and rebellion

Orwell is not criticising revolution or rebellion as actions to overthrow corrupt leadership. In fact, he praises the organisation, planning and execution of the original Rebellion at Animal Farm. The Rebellion is successful because of the vision of old Major, the planning and preparation by the pigs and the involvement of every animal collectively fighting for their freedom.

The Rebellion happens much more easily than the pigs expect. It is triggered by Jones's drunk behaviour and his neglect of the animals. When he forgets to feed and milk them, the animals break into the food store. When the men respond with whips, this triggers outrage and the Rebellion begins. The animals chase the humans off the farm. Orwell shows us that rebellions can catch leaders by surprise and can be triggered by very specific events.

Revolution: coming full circle

By the end, Orwell has shown us that the Rebellion has simply resulted in one cruel tyrant replacing another. The parallels between Jones and the pigs are made explicit throughout. The final chapter concludes with the statement, 'The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which.' This shows that the animals feel hopeless. There is no way they can overthrow Napoleon. Or is there?

STRETCH IT!

Do you think Orwell teaches us that revolutions are pointless? If so, what else could be done to overthrow tyrants?