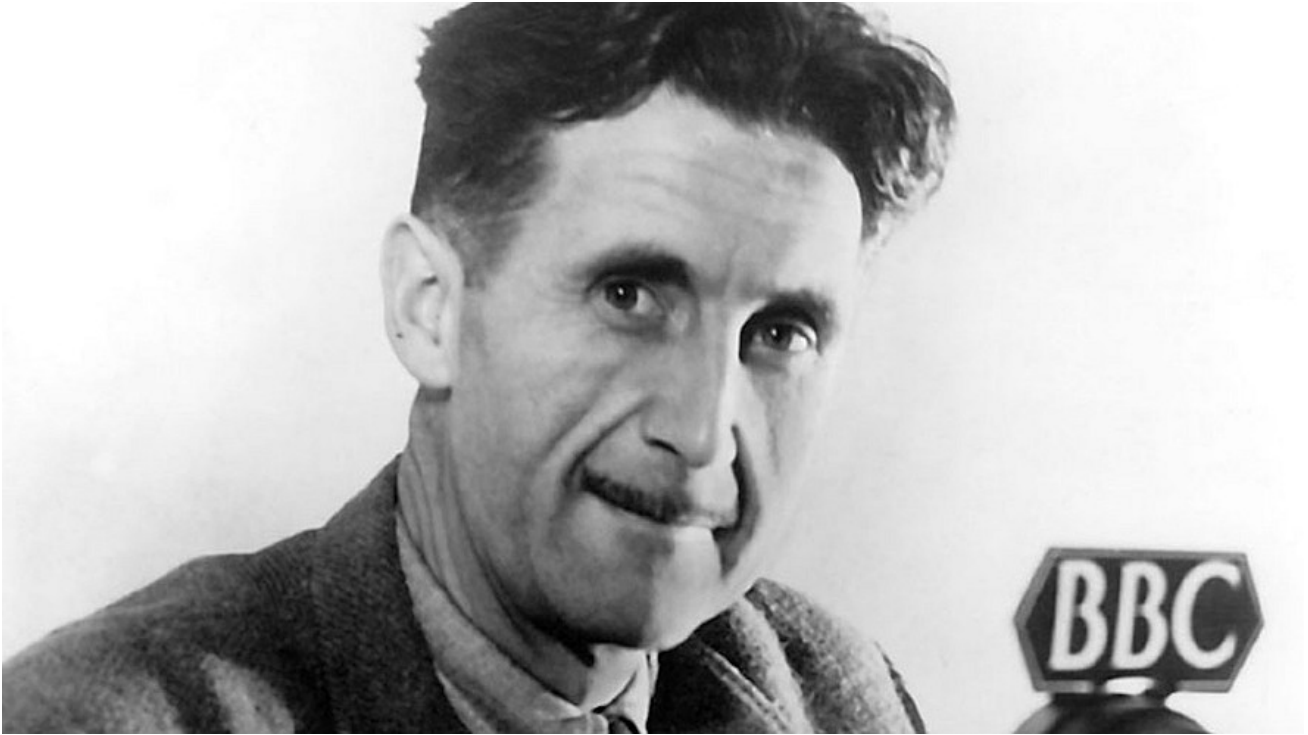


# Authors: George Orwell

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George Orwell talks on BBC radio news in 1940. Public Domain.

**Synopsis:** Born Eric Arthur Blair in Motihari, Bengal, India, in 1903, George Orwell, novelist, essayist and critic, went on to become best known for his novels "Animal Farm" and "Nineteen Eighty-Four."

## Early Life

Born Eric Arthur Blair, George Orwell created some of the sharpest satirical fiction of the 20th century with such works as "Animal Farm" and "Nineteen Eighty-Four." He was a man of strong opinions who addressed some of the major political movements of his times, including imperialism, fascism and communism.

The son of a British civil servant, George Orwell spent his first days in India, where his father was stationed. His mother brought him and his older sister, Marjorie, to England about a year after his birth and settled in Henley-on-Thames. His father stayed behind in India and rarely visited. (His younger sister, Avril, was born in 1908.) Orwell didn't really know his father until he retired from the service in 1912. And even after that, the pair never formed a strong bond. He found his father to be dull and conservative.

According to one biography, Orwell's first word was "beastly." He was a sick child, often battling bronchitis and the flu. Orwell was bitten by the writing bug at an early age, reportedly composing his first poem around the age of 4. He later wrote, "I had the lonely child's habit of making up stories and holding conversations with imaginary persons, and I think from the very start my literary ambitions were mixed up with the feeling of being isolated and undervalued." One of his first literary successes came at the age of 11 when he had a poem published in the local newspaper.

Like many other boys in England, Orwell was sent to boarding school. In 1911, he went to St. Cyprian's in the coastal town of Eastbourne, where he got his first taste of England's class system. On a partial scholarship, Orwell noticed that the school treated the richer students better than the poorer ones. He wasn't popular with his peers, and in books he found comfort from his difficult situation. He read works by Rudyard Kipling and H. G. Wells, among others. What he lacked in personality, he made up for in smarts. Orwell won scholarships to Wellington College and Eton College to continue his studies.

After completing his schooling at Eton, Orwell found himself at a dead end. His family did not have the money to pay for a university education. Instead he joined the India Imperial Police Force in 1922. After five years in Burma, Orwell resigned his post and returned to England. He was intent on making it as a writer.

## **Early Career**

After leaving the India Imperial Force, Orwell struggled to get his writing career off the ground. His first major work, "Down and Out in Paris and London" (1933), explored his time eking out a living in these two cities. Orwell took all sorts of jobs to make ends meet, including being a dishwasher. The book provided a brutal look at the lives of the working poor and of those living a transient existence. Not wishing to embarrass his family, the author published the book under the pseudonym George Orwell.

Sometimes called the conscience of a generation, Orwell next explored his overseas experiences in "Burmese Days," published in 1934. The novel offered a dark look at British colonialism in Burma, then part of the country's Indian empire. Orwell's interest in political matters grew rapidly after this novel was published. Also around this time, he met Eileen O'Shaughnessy. The pair married in June 1936, and Eileen supported and assisted Orwell in his career.

In December 1936, Orwell traveled to Spain, where he joined one of the groups fighting against General Francisco Franco in the Spanish Civil War. Orwell was badly injured during his time with a militia, getting shot in the throat and arm. For several weeks, he was unable to speak. Orwell and his wife, Eileen, were indicted on treason charges in Spain. Fortunately, the charges were brought after the couple had left the country.

Other health problems plagued the talented writer not long after his return to England. For years, Orwell had periods of sickness, and he was officially diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1938. He spent several months at the Preston Hall Sanatorium trying to recover, but he would continue to battle with tuberculosis for the rest of his life. At the time he was initially diagnosed, there was no effective treatment for the disease.

To support himself, Orwell took on all sorts of writing work. He wrote numerous essays and reviews over the years, developing a reputation for producing well-crafted literary criticism. In 1941, Orwell landed a job with the BBC as a producer. He developed news commentary and shows for audiences in the eastern part of the British Empire. Orwell enticed such literary greats as T. S. Eliot and E. M. Forster to appear on his programs. With World War II raging, Orwell found himself acting as a propagandist to advance the country's side. He loathed this part of his job and resigned in 1943. Around this time, Orwell became the literary editor for a socialist newspaper.

### **Later Works: "Animal Farm" and "Nineteen Eighty-Four"**

Orwell is best known for two novels, "Animal Farm" and "Nineteen Eighty-Four," both of which were published toward the end of his life. "Animal Farm" (1945) was an anti-Soviet satire in a pastoral setting featuring two pigs as its main protagonists. These pigs were said to represent Josef Stalin and Leon Trotsky. The novel brought Orwell great acclaim and financial rewards.

In 1949, Orwell published another masterwork, "Nineteen Eighty-Four." This bleak vision of the world divided into three oppressive nations stirred up controversy among reviewers, who found this fictional future too despairing. In the novel, Orwell gave readers a glimpse into what would happen if the government controlled every detail of people's lives, down to their own private thoughts.

"Nineteen Eighty-Four" proved to be another huge success for the author, 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 January 21, 1950, in a London hospital. He may have passed away all too soon, but his ideas and opinions have lived on through his work. Both "Animal Farm" and "Nineteen Eighty-Four" were turned into films and enjoyed tremendous popularity.

### **Personal Life**

Orwell was married to Eileen O'Shaughnessy until her death in 1945. According to several reports, the pair had an open marriage. Orwell had a number of dalliances during this first marriage. In 1944, the couple adopted a son, whom they named Richard Horatio Blair, after one of Orwell's ancestors. Their son was largely raised by Orwell's sister Avril after Eileen's death.

Near the end of his life, Orwell proposed to editor Sonia Brownell. He married her in October 1949, only a short time before his death. Brownell inherited Orwell's estate and made a career out of managing his legacy.

## Quiz

- 1 Which of the following sentences BEST shows how George Orwell used his writing to explore political issues?
- (A) His first major work, "Down and Out in Paris and London" (1933), explored his time eking out a living in these two cities.
  - (B) The novel offered a dark look at British colonialism in Burma, then part of the country's Indian empire.
  - (C) He wrote numerous essays and reviews over the years, developing a reputation for producing well-crafted literary criticism.
  - (D) He may have passed away all too soon, but his ideas and opinions have lived on through his work.

- 2 Read the following selection from the section "Early Life."

*Like many other boys in England, Orwell was sent to boarding school. In 1911, he went to St. Cyprian's in the coastal town of Eastbourne, where he got his first taste of England's class system. On a partial scholarship, Orwell noticed that the school treated the richer students better than the poorer ones.*

Which of the following conclusions can be drawn from this selection?

- (A) Orwell was determined to succeed as a writer because he was treated poorly at school.
  - (B) Orwell's experience at school made him aware of how some people were treated unfairly.
  - (C) Orwell's time in boarding school directly inspired a novel that he wrote later in life.
  - (D) Orwell decided not to pursue a university education due to his experiences in school.
- 3 According to the article, each of the following inspired Orwell's writing EXCEPT:
- (A) his views about government
  - (B) his struggle to make a living
  - (C) his observations of colonial life
  - (D) his battle with tuberculosis

- 4 Which sentence BEST summarizes Orwell's legacy?
- (A) Orwell's life story provides inspiration for those struggling to achieve their goals.
  - (B) Orwell's satirical writing style has influenced countless aspiring authors.
  - (C) Orwell's novels provide thought-provoking insights into political issues.
  - (D) Orwell's writing provides objective summaries of many political issues.