

George Orwell, 1984

It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled¹ into his breast in an effort to escape the vile² wind, slipped quickly through the glass doors of Victory Mansions, though not quickly enough to prevent a swirl of gritty dust from entering along with him.

The hallway smelt of boiled cabbage and old rag mats.³ At one end of it a coloured poster, too large for indoor display, had been tacked to the wall. It depicted simply an enormous face, more than a metre wide: the face of a man of about forty-five, with a heavy black moustache and ruggedly handsome features. Winston made for the stairs. It was no use trying the lift. Even at the best of times it was seldom working and at present the electric current was cut off during daylight hours. It was part of the economy drive⁴ in preparation for the Hate Week. The flat was seven flights up, and Winston, who was thirty-nine and had varicose ulcer above his right ankle, went slowly, resting several times on the way. On each landing, opposite the lift-shaft, the poster with the enormous face gazed from the wall. It was one of those pictures which are so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you move. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption beneath it ran.

Inside the flat a fruity⁵ voice was reading out a list of figures which had something to do with the production of pig-iron.⁶ The

voice came from an oblong metal plaque like a dulled mirror which formed part of the surface of the right-hand wall. Winston turned a switch and the voice sank somewhat, though the words were still distinguishable. The instrument (the telescreen, it was called) could be dimmed, but there was no way of shutting it off completely. He moved over to the window: a smallish, frail

figure, the meagreness of his body merely emphasized by the blue overalls which were the uniform of the Party. His hair was very fair, his face naturally sanguine, his skin roughened by coarse⁷ soap and blunt⁸ razor blades and the cold of the winter that had just ended.

Outside, even through the shut window-pane, the world looked cold. Down in the street little eddies⁹ of wind were whirling dust and torn paper into spirals, and though the sun was shin-

ing and the sky a harsh blue, there seemed to be no colour in anything, except the posters that were plastered everywhere. The black mustachio'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, flapped¹⁰ fitfully in the wind, alternately covering and uncovering the single word INGSOC.¹¹ In the far distance a helicopter skimmed down between the roofs, hovered



Glossary

1 pressed – 2 strong – 3 small pieces of rough material which cover part of a floor – 4 effort – 5 persuasive – 6 a form of iron that is not pure – 7 bad – 8 without sharp edge – 9 whirlpools – 10 moved up and down – 11 English Socialism (in Newspeak)

for an instant like a bluebottle,¹² and darted¹³ away again with a curving flight. It was the police patrol, snooping¹⁴ 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 overfulfilment¹⁵ 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 scrutinised.

Glossary

12 a large blue fly – **13** moved suddenly and quickly – **14** spying – **15** success

activities



↓ READING COMPREHENSION

Answer the following questions.

- 1 When is the passage set?
- 2 What does the poster in the hallway depict?
- 3 How old is Winston?
- 4 What does he look like?
- 5 What does Winston hear inside the flat?
- 6 What can Winston see from his window?
- 7 How does the telescreen work?
- 8 What are the tasks of the Thought Police?

↓ TEXT ANALYSIS

Answer the following questions.

- 1 Which senses are foregrounded in the passage above? Provide examples from the text.

SIGHT	HEARING	TOUCH	SMELL	TASTE

- 2 Where is the passage set?
- 3 Is the character described in detail or not?
- 4 What is the general atmosphere like?
- 5 How important is the setting in conveying the general mood?
- 6 What kind of narrator is employed?
- 7 Which narrative modes are prevalent?

↓ WRITING

Re-title the passage.