Plot Summary

In 1984, Winston Smith lives in London which is part of the country Oceania. The world is divided into three countries that include the entire globe -- Oceania, Eurasia, and Eastasia. Oceania, and both of the others, is a totalitarian society let by Big Brother, which censors everyone's behavior, even their thoughts. Winston is disgusted with is oppressed life and secretly longs to join the rumored Brotherhood, a supposed group of underground rebels intent on overthrowing the government. Winston meets Julia and they secretly fall in love and have an affair, something which is considered a crime. One day, while walking home, Winston encounters O'Brian, an inner party member, who gives Winston his address. Winston had exchanged glances with O'Brian before and had drams about him giving him the impression that O'Brian was a member of the Brotherhood. Since Julia hated the party as much as Winston did, they went to O'Brian's house together where they were introduced into the Brotherhood. O'Brian is actually a faithful member of the Inner-Party and this is actually a trap for Winston, a trap that O'Brian has been cleverly setting for seven years. Winston and Julia are sent to the Ministry of Love which is a sort of rehabilitation center for criminals accused of thoughtcrime. There, Winston is separated from Julia, and tortured until his beliefs coincided with those of the Party. Winston denounces everything he believed, even his love for Julia, and was released back into the public where he wastes his days at the Chestnut Tree drinking gin.

Organizational

1984 is divided into three primary books, each separated into smaller chapters marked by roman numerals.

Book 1 is 104 pages and divided into eight chapters. This first part of the book is devoted to introducing the major characters, themes of the novels, Winston’s life and that of minor Party members, and the world of the proles/poor. One of the most important plot developments in this first section is Winston’s discovery of Charrington’s antique shop.

Book 2 is 120 pages divided into ten chapters. This is the bulk of the book; Winston’s affair with Julia blossoms, he meets O’Brien, makes contact with the Brotherhood, and he begins to
rent out the room above the antique shop. Beyond the new relationship bonds that develop, the theme of psychological manipulation is brought to the forefront as Winston begins to recall childhood memories and how much they have been manipulated or dictated by the Party.

Side note – In this part, chapter 9 is the longest chapter in the entire book lasting 38 pages. It is primarily filled with the book *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchial Collectivism* by Emmanuel Goldstein. This chapter often seems like a never ending lull from the action that had filled 1984 to this point and can be challenging for students.

The differences between Winston and Julia begin to develop and become more apparent to the reader up to the point that the Thought Police arrive and arrest Winston ending his affair and rebellion against the Party.

**Book 3** is the final book and is only 72 pages that are divided into 6 chapters. This portion is filled with the graphic and horrific torture of Winston by O’Brien in the Ministry of Love. The torture is not so much to extract information from Winston, but to brainwash him into agreeing and believing the Party’s ideology. He is only released after betraying Julia to ensure his self-preservation. This final act breaks him far worse than death would have been; he believes that he is limited by his body, that knowledge and personal expression cannot help one transcend from the quotidian things of a mortal life, therefore he has no reason to think, act or rebel. The last line of the book is, “He loved Big Brother.”

**The Central Question**

**How much power should a government have?**

Throughout all of 1984 the image of "Big Brother" and an endless presence of security is beyond oblivious. Yet, the citizens seem to have no rights beyond going to work, getting up to exercise, and thinking what The Party wants them too. Does the government have right to spy on all of its citizens? Should there be freedom of speech/thought? Or, in the name of preserving order, should the government control all thought and information? These are all questions that Weston asks in 1984, and are still pertinent to ask today.

**What power does an individual have against the masses?**

Weston seeks to be an individual, unique from the rest. He seeks out the past, love, and knowledge; things that the masses did not seek out. He felt different during the 2 Minuet Hate and was not moved by the mob mentality. Searching for The Brotherhood, Weston seeks to fight against the masses -- The Party. Can the individual stand up against the masses? In the end of 1984, this is the question.
**Themes**

The Danger of Totalitarianism -- One of the major themes that is not masked in any way. Orwell wrote 1984 to warn its readers in the Western World of the dangers of a totalitarian society. With the fear of spreading communism after the end of World War II and the development of the Cold War, Orwell wanted to reveal what widespread cruelties and oppression he had witnessed in communist countries. 1984's dystopia view of what a pure totalitarian society would be like fosters a fear of totalitarianism. The governing party's abuse of absolute power. The censorship of the media and its information. The inappropriate use of technology. And the control exerted over the individual. The book is based on Winston's discontent with this form of government and his desire for something new.

Control -- An overarching theme that can be broken down into smaller portions. Control over the individual through psychological manipulation, physical control, control of information and history, and language as mind control. Each of these themes relating back to the major theme of the dangers of totalitarianism, can and do stand on their own.

The psychological manipulation stems from the constant reminded that "Big Brother Is Watching," the endless presence of the telescreens, the constant stream of propaganda, the "Hate" moments, etc. Most of the forms of manipulation are developed through technology and fictional enemies created by the Party to do just that - manipulate.

The use of language as mind control is one of Orwell's masterful messages left in 1984. The use of newspeak - which had the goal of altering the structure of the language so that it would be impossible to even conceive certain ideas since there would be no words with which to describe or think them - is prevalent throughout the novel. The constant refinement of newspeak causes its effects to bleed into that of the psychological manipulation and the control of information.

Physical control is expressed through the mandatory workout times with the Physical Jerks, the long and monotonous days of work, and the continual state of exhaustion. There is also the physical removal of anyone suspected of thinking of being disloyal to The Party and their sentence to the Ministry of Love. In the last book, the idea of physical control develops more fully when Winston is subject to physical torture until he breaks and agrees with all The Party says.

The control of information and history ironically sits, in part, with Winston and his work in the Ministry of Truth. The Party does not allow
individual records to be kept, only The Party's official record can be kept -- and this record is often rewritten to ensure that the Party always looks its best. They control the past, and therefore are able to justify all their actions in the present and predict the future.

**Setting**

The story is centered in Oceania, one of the three totalitarian superpowers that rule the world using censorship and pure terror. Most of the time is focus in London and the surrounding land just outside of the city where the prolos live. While it is center here, there are two locations that are also of great importance -- Mr. Charrington's rented room and the Ministry of Love.

Another important setting is Mr. Charrington's rented room where Winston and Julia are able to hideaway and make love while hidden from the telescreens and the constant watching of the Party.

The final book is set in the Ministry of Love, the rehabilitation center where anything but love is shown to the residence. In this center torture and brainwashing techniques are used in order to completely conform its prisoners into the thinking and beliefs of the Party only to be later killed, sent to forced labor camps or even released back into society.

**Point of View**

Orwell's prose is very descriptive and informative. He portrays terrifying images and conveys horrifying truths in a calm voice that contrasts effectively with the true horrors of his message. Foreshadowing and suspense in used to heighten this exciting novel.

1984 is written in third person limited omniscient from the perspective of Winston. All the information and emotions that are expressed throughout the book come from Winston; because of this the readers also become confused as they come to understand Oceania through Winston's eyes. By the end, when the reader experiences the brutal and explicit language of the torture scene, the reader is similarly tortured. The reader becomes Winston -- until his departure from free will at the end. This causes the reader to feel particular awful since they have gotten used to sympathizing with him, to experiencing things with him. All this is possible because of the Third Person Limited Omniscient Narrative Technique used by Orwell in 1984.

**Literary Terms**

There are a number of terms that can be taught in conjunction with this novel, here only follows a few:
Allegory -- Where every aspect of a story is representative, usually symbolic, of something else, usually a larger abstract concept or important historical/geopolitical event. Some read 1984 as a political allegory while others read it as a religious allegory; each reading produces a very different reading and drastically different feelings at the end.

Irony -- Where an event occurs which is unexpected, in the sense that it is somehow in absurd or mocking opposition to what would be expected or appropriate. 1984 is filled with irony. Each of the Ministries stand as a symbol for irony - Ministry of Truth dedicated to destroying truth, Ministry of Love dedicated to hate and torture, Ministry of Peace dedicated to war. The slogans are deeply ironic. Winston Smith enters "Victory mansions" but there is no victory for him. The list can go on.

Paradox -- Where a situation is created which cannot possibly exist, because different elements of it cancel each other out. "Doublethink" refers to the paradox where history is changed, and then claimed to have never been changed.

Satire -- A literary mode based on criticism of people and society through ridicule. The satirist aims to reduce the practices attacked by laughing scornfully at them -- and by witty enough to allow the reader to laugh, also. Ridicule, irony, exaggeration, and several other techniques are almost always present. It is very important that the students understand what this is before and while reading 1984, the entire book is a book of satire. This novel is a satiric statement on what could happen if people in the world didn't recognize the problems and do something about it.

**Vocabulary Issues**

Language is a very important aspect of 1984 -- the power it has to control minds, doublespeak, doublethink, newspeak. While most of the vocabulary used throughout the book will be easy for students to understand, there are the occasional words that students may stumble on. Because of this, wonderful vocabulary list can be developed and taught in conjunction with the book. Examples of possible list can be found at the following links:

http://classiclit.about.com/od/nineteeneightyfour/a/aa_1984vocab.htm

http://www.foothilltech.org/rgeib/english/orwell/vocabulary.htm

http://www.vocabulary.com/VUctnineteen.html
Background Knowledge

It is important that the students understand what totalitarianism and democratic socialism are so that they can understand what 1984 is warning against. Teaching the students about the Cold War and the concerns of the time will help the students understand why Orwell felt that a satirical dystopia warning for what might happen in the future was needed and appropriate.

Helping them learn about Stalin-era Soviet Union will allow them to make connections throughout the book; the "Two Minutes' Hate" and its relationship to Stalinism's habitual demonstration of its enemies and rivals, the very description of Big Brother himself and the physical resemblance to Stalin, while The Party's great enemy, Emmanuel Goldstein, resembles Leon Trotsky.

1984 is also filled with an extensive and institutional use of propaganda. Students will come to your class with different understandings of what this means. They will have learned them from movies and even their history classes. By providing them with common information about what it is, students will be able to better understand the themes of control in 1984.

While it is important to help the students understand this background knowledge and how it was present in the past, it is important also to tap into their knowledge of the current modern day. Encourage them to see how propaganda exist today, even in their own communities. Help them realize that there are totalitarian nations in the world still. Help them recognize the existence of propaganda in their own lives. Some may even know of the use of hidden cameras in a number of cities across the United States and in England.

There is almost limitless background information that the students might bring with them, because of this it is important that as teachers we evaluate what it is and seek to bring them all together in their understanding. Because of the present-day application for a number of the themes and motifs there are countless sources that can be used to ensure an strong and sure scaffolding be created for teaching 1984.

Implications for Students of Diversity

1984 is based on a constant struggle between the uneven distribution of wealth and political power. The diversity ranges from the poor and powerless Proles that make up 85% of Oceania's population contrasting the very rich and all powerful...
Inner Party that only makes up 2% of Oceania’s population.

Because of the diversity expressed in the book, it is important to remember that your students also experience similar forms of diversity, and they may become sensitive topics in class. Be aware of the diversity that exists in your own classroom. Students and parents will have different political, social, and economic views from one another. 1984 brings all of these topics to the surface. Because of this it is important that it does not seem that you are promoting one ideology over the other, or speaking down or bad about different social classes, and do not allow your students to do it either.

**Gender Issues**

In 1984 gender is an issue in a different manner than might be expected, relationship between men and women are based on procreation only and not love. Women are taught that sex is wrong and dirty and unnecessary. The Party does not promote any love except the love for Big Brother. The Party attempts to make gender a non-issue; women are completely equal to men in the society of 1984.

It is important to recognize that though The Party wishes to make gender and sex a non-issue, there are still graphic sex scenes found in the book.

**Research Issues/Project Ideas**

The options are endless, here follow only a few while countless more can be found on the English Companion Ning found at http://englishcompanion.ning.com/.

- Find and read several articles about surveillance in the modern world (these should all be dated within the last couple of years—either your teacher or Ms. Hall the librarian can help you source them). Write a 2-3 page argument claiming that 1984 either is or is not relevant as a modern text. Use both of your articles and 1984 to support your argument, and include a Works Cited page.
- Find and read several articles about surveillance in the modern world (these should all be dated within the last couple of years—either your teacher or Ms. Hall the librarian can help you source them). Create either a comic book of at least 4 pages or a short story of 2-3 pages which tells the story of a character living in a world of surveillance. As Doctorow did in Little Brother, you should make references to 1984 and tie in some of the same themes. Include a Bibliography (not annotated) of the articles you used.
- Find and read several articles about the Stanford Prison experiment, the Milgram experiment, or both, and write a 2-3 page paper about how they can deepen our
understanding of 1984 in some way. Use both of your articles and 1984 to support your argument, and include a Works Cited page.

- With a parent’s permission, view the movie version of 1984. Write a 2-3 page paper comparing the book and the movie, making an argument as to whether or not the movie is a good depiction. You should include references to both the book and the movie in your paper.

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(These ideas come from Mr. Bravo's and Mr. Keer's 1984 Perfect 100 Final)