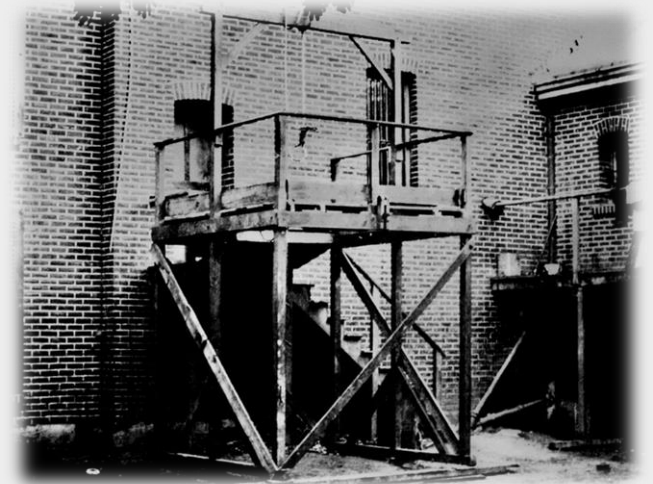


"A Hanging"

George Orwell



Why are we doing this?

Learning Intentions

- To gain an understanding of the background of 'A Hanging'
- To gain an understanding of the language techniques and theme present throughout the text

Success Criteria

- To fully annotate the text 'A Hanging'
- To successfully comment on the language techniques used in vocal and written formats

What is Capital Punishment?

- Capital punishment means putting a person to death as a punishment for a crime, for example murder.
- The way of doing this varies. Some executions involve hanging by a rope, another method could be electrocution such as the electric chair and in some countries people are shot in front of a firing squad.

Why was Capital Punishment introduced?

There are three main reasons that Capital Punishment began. These include:

1. **RETRIBUTION** - this is the belief that people who do wrong need to be punished for their crime. They should get what they deserve.
2. **DETERRENCE** - this is the hope that it will deter or stop people from committing the same crime again.
3. **PROTECTION** - Stopping people from harming others by possibly repeating the crime.

Does Capital Punishment reduce crime?

- Figures are collected in official surveys about whether capital punishment has any effect on the number of murders. They do not give a definite answer. The figures do not support the argument that capital punishment stops murders more than any other forms of punishment.
- Even if a country has a death penalty it does not put a stop to murder, however, execution it is believed prevents that particular individual from committing the same crime.

- Some countries have no form of capital punishment regardless of the crime committed. Capital punishment is completely abolished. Some of these include: Australia, Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Portugal, Switzerland and Sweden
- Some countries law states the death penalty will only ever be carried out in very exceptional circumstances such as crimes under military law or war crimes. These countries basically have no capital Punishment only in exceptional circumstances. These countries include:
Canada, Israel, Mexico, Peru, Spain, South Africa and United Kingdom

Capital Punishment in the U.S.A

- The state of New York reinstated the death penalty in March 1995, and increased the number of American states having the death penalty to 37. Some states make use of it more than others.
- In 1990 there were 2,331 people awaiting execution in the USA. Between 1976 and 1990 there were 121 executions.

Capital Punishment for Ordinary Crimes

- There are 27 countries that have a law stating people can face the death penalty for an ordinary crime such as stealing, but these countries have not carried out an execution in over ten years.
- 97 countries do use the death penalty to punish ordinary crimes.
- 22 countries allow the death penalty for drug offences and in some if a person is found guilty of drug possession they must be executed. These countries include: Malaysia, Taiwan, Iran, Singapore and China

The Figures...

- Amnesty International received reports of 1,791 executions in China, 139 executions in Iran and over 100 in Nigeria in 1994.
- This accounted for 87% of all executions recorded in that year.

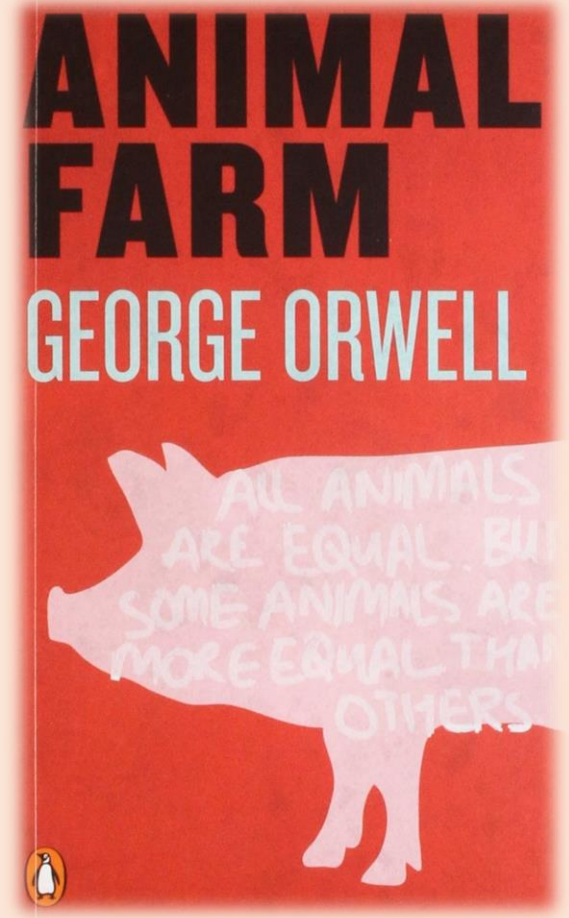
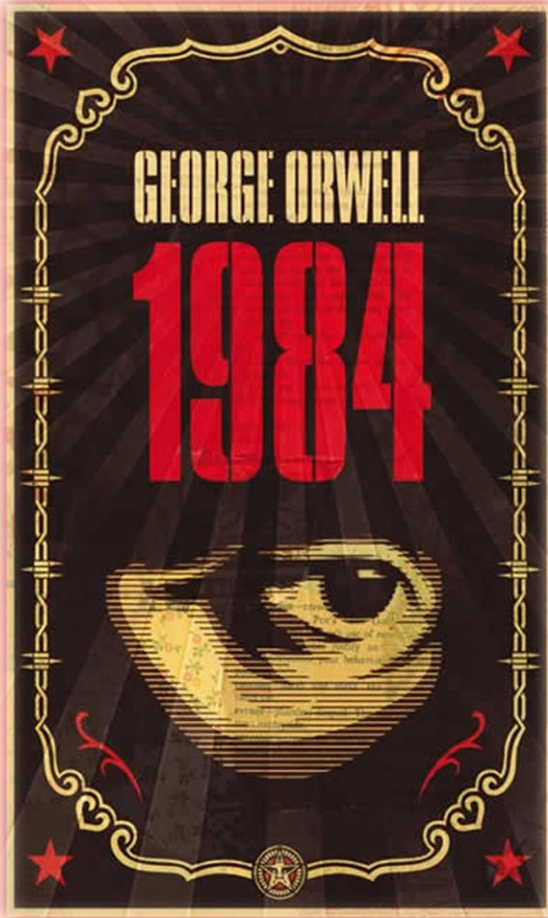
Capital Punishment in the United Kingdom

In Britain Capital Punishment was abolished in 1973 but the last execution was carried out in 1964.



Who is George Orwell?

- **Eric Arthur Blair** (25 June 1903 - 21 January 1950), better known by his pen name **George Orwell**, was an English author.
- His work is marked by a profound consciousness of social injustice, an intense opposition to totalitarianism, and a passion for clarity in language.
- Considered perhaps the 20th century's best chronicler of English culture, he wrote works in many different genres including novels, essays, polemic journalism, and poetry. His most famous works are the satirical novel *Animal Farm* (1945) and the dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949).



“Big Brother is watching you!”

"A Hanging"- The Context

- In the 1920s the south-east Asian country, **Burma**, (now known as **Myanmar**) was part of British Empire.
- As a young man, **George Orwell** enlisted with the **Indian Imperial Police** and quickly attained the rank of **Assistant District Superintendent**.



- During his time as a British police officer in an Asian country, Orwell experienced, first hand, the social inequalities present in a country ruled by a foreign power.
- These experiences went on to inform much of his written work including his essay, *A Hanging*.

"A Hanging"

- "A Hanging" is a reflection on one of the many judicial executions witnessed by Orwell in his official capacity as a chief of justice.
- Orwell's detailed observations of the prisoner and the events leading up to his eventual death illuminate the banal reality of death and highlight his strong anti-capital punishment sentiments.

What is the writer's purpose?

- When producing a written piece of work all writers will have a particular purpose in mind which they wish to communicate to the reader. In *A Hanging*, Orwell makes a **social comment** about **capital punishment**.
- Through his clever use of language techniques such as **imagery, symbolism, tone** and **word choice** Orwell evokes the reader's sympathy for the prisoner's plight.

Can the punishment ever fit the crime?

- Orwell omits to mention the prisoner's crime as he does not want the reader to make any judgement about the whether or not the death penalty was justified.
- By focusing solely on the process of killing another human being Orwell exposes the brutal reality of capital punishment - writer's purpose.
- For what crime is the prisoner being executed?

'A Hanging'



Prose: Non-
Fiction

Important Quotes!

"...a sodden morning of the rains."

- Pathetic fallacy: miserable weather which reflects the mood of the prison

Note:

Pathetic fallacy: the attribution of human feelings and responses to inanimate things or animals, especially in art and literature.

"...sickly light..."

- Again, an unnatural atmosphere.

"...yellow tinfoil..."

- Oxymoron: describes the confined suffocating space, with the heat making it feel almost claustrophobic.

Note:

Oxymoron: a figure of speech in which apparently contradictory terms appear in conjunction

"...like small animal cages..."

- Describes how the guards view the prisoners.

"...ten feet by ten..."

- Numerical reference continues the claustrophobic feel throughout the essay. Suggests time and space are closing in without escape.

"...brown silent men..."

- Inspires sympathy; they have given up the fight for life.

"...a puny wisp of a man..."

- Description makes the reader feel sympathetic towards the prisoner, he seems small and insignificant.

"He had a thick, sprouting moustache, absurdly too big for his body, rather like the moustache of a comic man on the films."

- Ironic reference talking about comedy at such a serious point.

"Six tall Indian warders..."

- Contrast with the size of the prisoner.

"...rifles and fixed bayonets... handcuffed him, passed a chain through his handcuffs and fixed it to their belts, and lashed his arms tight to his sides."

- Heavily over the top security for someone who could not possibly escape.

"But he stood quite unresisting..."

- He puts up no fight towards the guards.

"...desolately thin in the wet air.."

- Damp and cold atmosphere.

"For God's sake hurry up, Francis," he said irritably. "The man ought to have been dead by this time."

- Inspires disgust; he sees this as a just job.

"The prisoners can't get their breakfast till this job's over."

- Word Choice: this is just another task for the prison, they are emotionally removed from it.

"Two warders marched on either side of the prisoner, with their rifles at the slope; two others marched close against him, gripping him by arm and shoulder, as though at once pushing and supporting him."

- The security is unnecessary as the prisoner is unresisting.

"...we had gone ten yards..."

- Structure: Orwell counts down to the prisoner's fate.

"A dreadful thing..."

- Describes the situation which contrasts with the happiness of the dog.

"...-a dog..."

- A typically savage beast but in this instance provides relief from the situation.

"...wild with glee at finding so many human beings together."

- Ironic: the dog thinks its all fun and games. The dog has no idea of the severity of the situation.

"...it had made a dash for the prisoner, and jumping up tried to lick his face."

- The dog is the only one who treats the prisoner as a person.

"Everyone stood aghast..."

- Awkward interruption to the situation.

"...charged clumsily after the dog..."

"...but it dodged the stones and came after us again."

- Almost comedic atmosphere contrasted with the sombre mood earlier.

"The prisoner, the grasp of the two warders, looked on curiously..."

- Prisoner is completely numb to his fate.

"It was about forty yards to the gallows."

- Numerical reference emphasises the claustrophobic feel, the prisoner is approaching a death from which he cannot escape.

"And once, in spite of the men who gripped him by each shoulder, he stepped slightly aside to avoid a puddle on the path."

- Turning point of the story

"It is curious, but till that moment I had never realized what it means to destroy a healthy, conscious man."

- It is an epiphany as to the situation which is occurring around him.

"...the unspeakable wrongness, of cutting a life short when it is in full tide."

- Word Choice: play on words; literally and metaphorically.
- Realisation that Capital Punishment is wrong.

"...solemn foolery."

- Word Choice: highlights the sadness of the waste of life.

"His eyes saw the yellow gravel and the grey walls, and his brain still remembered, foresaw, reasoned- reasoned even about puddles."

- Overall realisation that the prisoner is a person just like him.

"...one mind less, one world less."

- Anaphora: repetitive and rhetorical to emphasise emotion; expressing the sadness of the situation.

Note:

Anaphora: the repetition of a word or phrase also rhetorical to create effect.

"The hangman, a grey-haired convict in the white uniform of the prison..."

- Ironical: a fellow prisoner is carrying out the death sentence.

"...five yards away."

"And then, when the noose was fixed, the prisoner..."

- Again, numerical reference highlights the claustrophobic feel. The prison is a small place. The prisoners awaiting death will see and hear all that is going on, knowing they too await the same fate.

"Ram! Ram! Ram! Ram!"

- Calling to his God- no point in appealing to those around him.
- Hearing the prisoner's voice reminds the guards he is a person. He makes the guards feel awkward and uncomfortable.

"...not urgent and fearful..."

- He is dealing bravely with death. The reader feels admiration because he shows no fear at his impending death.

"Minutes seemed to pass."

- Frozen in time by their own awkwardness.

"Everyone had changed colour."

- They suddenly realise they are dealing with a person.

"...and one or two of the bayonets were wavering."

- Everyone is affected by this including the guards.

"...oh, kill him quickly, get it over, stop that abominable noise!"

- Juxtaposition- this follows directly on from Orwell's realisation that Capital Punishment is wrong.

"Chalo!"

- "Let's go!"

"...dead silence."

- Effective short sentence which also contrasts to the noise immediately before. After death there is a shocking silence.

"...looking timorously out at us. We went round the gallows to inspect the prisoner's body."

- The dog, thought of as a savage beast is aware of the cruelty the prisoner has endured.
- They want to make sure the prisoner is dead, show little respect for what has just taken place.

"He was dangling with his toes pointed straight downwards, very slowly revolving, as dead as a stone."

- Graphic description to secure the horror of the reader.

"...reached out his stick and poked the bare body..."

- The treatment of the prisoner's body is inhumane.

"HE'S all right..."

- Sense of relief; he's dead Thank God!

"The moody look had gone out of his face quite suddenly."

- Relief from the superintendent that the prisoner has died quickly.

"Eight minutes past eight."

- The relief he feels then turns cold and he continues to be methodical in his approach to the prisoner's dead body.

"We walked out of the gallows yard, past the condemned cells with their waiting prisoners, into the big central yard of the prison."

- Reminder of the other prisoners who have heard what has just happened and know they await the same fate.

"...it seemed quite a homely, jolly scene, after the hanging."

- Juxtaposition/contrast to what has previously just occurred. Highlights the separate lives between the criminals and the officials.

"One felt an impulse to sing, to break into a run, to snigger. All at once everyone began chattering gaily."

- Even Orwell, who had been so disgusted by the hanging, feels a sense of 'relief' and 'happiness'.

"Do you know, sir, our friend..."

- Slightly mocking tone which emphasises the sinister approach towards the criminal.

"...he pissed on the floor of his cell. From fright..."

- Inappropriate and callous to laugh at the prisoner's reaction as if he is not an ordinary man with feelings.
- Clearly the prisoner was scared but the reader admires him for not showing it on the day of his death.

"Kindly take one of my cigarettes, sir."

- Almost like gossip.

"...utmost satisfactoriness."

- Disbelief in the way they speak about the hanging of the prisoner, he has just died!

"Most disagreeable!"

- The guards can only think of how the situation affected them.

"Wriggling about..."

- Word choice suggests a playful and jovial atmosphere.

"My dear fellow," we said, "think of all the pain and trouble you are causing to us!"

- Repulsive to think only of their own trouble, this is simply a job to them. They are detached from the lives of the prisoners.

"I found that I was laughing quite loudly."

- The narrator is worse because he **realises** Capital Punishment is wrong but still joins in the fun.

"I've got a bottle of whisky in the car."

- Almost like a celebration which is awful considering a dead body lies not far away.

"Pulling at this legs!" exclaimed a Burmese magistrate suddenly, and burst into a loud chuckling."

- Gang mentality- they find it hilarious when they are all together.

"The dead man was a hundred yards away."

- A stark reminder of the heinous act which has just occurred.

Paragraph Structure

- **Introduction**- sets the scene; pathetic fallacy.
- **Paragraph 2**- remains informative, detailing scene.
- **Paragraph 3**- stronger focus on the mood/reflecting emotion of the guards.
- **Paragraphs 4 and 5**- emphasises how unfeeling the guards are towards the prisoner.
- **Paragraph 6**- informative but introduces the 'countdown' just prior to the dog incident; Orwell is beginning to have more awareness of the humanitarian aspect and just how close the end is. The word choice is much more emotive here.

- **Paragraphs 7 and 8-** highlight the anxiety of the situation and the lack of control.
- **Paragraph 9-** Closer now to the prisoner's fate; focus is on the prisoner. Looking at the man rather than the situation.
- **Paragraphs 9 and 10-** Turning point of the essay. Epiphany: Orwell gains some insight into the value of human life. Focus is on Orwell's thought process rather than the actual process before him. Very detailed description of human life-how important it is emphasised. Ends in an impassioned plea of unity.
- **Paragraph 11-** Back to the situation: no getting away from it. As long as no-one voices concerns it is going ahead.

- **Paragraph 12-** Countdown: far enough away to be observers only yet they are close enough to intervene if they so choose. Middle ground between allowing and stopping it.
- **Paragraph 13-** Time stands still- awkwardness of whether to intervene. More awareness of emotional reactions around him from others. Perhaps waiting to see if anyone else puts a stop to it.
- **Paragraphs 15-18-** back to business end; needs to be done. Mixes observations with sickening detail of how the corpse is treated (still in his mind).
- **Paragraphs 19-23-** Observational again: highlights the sinister side of the events and lack of care shown towards the prisoner.

- **Paragraph 24-** Orwell's reflection; admiration is surprising to him and us. '*Quite loudly*' suggests he's overcompensating to disguise his disgust.
- **Paragraph 25-** lack of respect is disgusting. Back to distance: he's still there but a bit of space between them allows the police/wardens to remove themselves from it.

Observational

More emotion

Anxious

More emotion

Observational

**Capital
Punishment is
wrong**

Contrast - Guards and Prisoner

- The prison guards are described as;

“tall Indian warders” and one, in particular, as a “fat Dravidian”

- These descriptions of healthy, well-fed guards contrast with the ill treatment of the prisoners .

In doing so Orwell stimulates the reader's sympathy which fulfils the **writer's purpose**.

Symbolism - The Dog

By noting that the dog goes directly to the prisoner instead of the officials, Orwell uses **symbolism** to suggest that **all people are equal** regardless of their circumstances.

The reaction of the prison officials to the appearance of the dog demonstrates their **underlying discomfort** at having to take a life - *"Everyone stood aghast..."*

This **symbolises** Orwell's further belief that not only is capital punishment wrong, it is also **against human nature to kill another person**.

Symbolism - The Puddle

- Although the prisoner is being led to his death he instinctively avoids a puddle in order to minimise his discomfort; a seemingly futile action.
- This symbolises human survival instinct and reiterates Orwell's belief that taking life is against human nature.

Symbolism Summed Up

- Gallows = the end of human life
- Water = the vivacity of human life
- Dog = the humanitarian view; underlying discomfort of the guards is exposed

Irony

- *The hangman, a grey haired convict...* - The authorities task the prisoners with killing other prisoners therefore passing burden of responsibility - taking life unnatural.

"...the same thought was in all our minds: oh, kill him quickly..."

- Orwell appears to **want** the killing to happen even though he is against it. Indicates the discomfort of everyone in the vicinity.

"He's all right, said the superintendent..."

The prisoner is dead. **Callous and uncaring** statement - reader feels sympathy for the prisoner.

"...it seemed like quite a homely, jolly scene..."

An absurd sentiment indicating the **relief** of the officials now that the execution had been completed.

- *"My dear fellow...think of all the pain and trouble you are causing us"*

Another callous statement directed at a doomed prisoner. The resulting laughter from this anecdote indicates a lack of compassion.

The **light-hearted atmosphere**, after the killing, is a **false emotion** and acts as a **coping mechanism** for the men - emphasises inhumane practice.

Tone

- "*It is curious...*" - **Reflective tone** where Orwell goes on to describe his own feelings on the subject.
- "*The unspeakable wrongness...*" - **Frankness** of tone leaves the reader in no doubt about his opinion on capital punishment.

Figurative language

"...like small animal cages..."

- Simile- describes prisoners' living conditions. Evokes reader sympathy.

"...it was like men handling a fish which is still alive..."

- Simile- continues comparison between prisoners and animals. Highlights the helplessness of the prisoner - sympathy.

"...the Indians had gone grey like bad coffee..."

- Metaphor- indicates the **discomfort** felt by the guards - emphasises **dehumanising effect** of the execution on the men - Orwell suggests that everybody involved in the execution is a victim.

Sentence Structure

- The parenthesis contains a list of bodily functions - "*bowels digesting food, skin renewing itself, nails growing, tissues forming*" - which remind the reader that the prisoner is a **healthy human being who is not ready to die.**
- The line, "*...one mind less, one world less...*" is an example of a rhetorical device called **Anaphora**. This involves the **repetition** of one or more words at the beginning of two or more balanced clauses. Designed to make a point more **memorable.**

- The final two sentences of the essay are designed for **maximum impact**.

"We all had a drink together, native and European alike, quite amicably. The dead man was a hundred yards away."

- The **jovial scene** of the penultimate sentence is **contrasted** with the nearby dead man.
- The final sentence is a **short statement** which **neatly summarises** Orwell's message.
- Upon finishing reading the essay the reader is left to contemplate this **vulgar scene** - **which gives impact**.

Themes

- Wrongness of Capital Punishment
- Value of human life

Understanding Questions

1. For what crime is the prisoner being executed?
2. What evidence is there for the poor condition of the prisoners? Use quotes to support your answer.
3. Why do you think Orwell chose to include such detailed description of the prisoner's conditions?
4. How does the description of the prisoner compare with the descriptions of the guards? In what way does this comparison contribute to the writer's purpose?
5. Why do you think Orwell decided to include a detailed description of the dog's appearance in the prison yard?
6. What does Orwell suggest in his description of the prisoner avoiding a puddle while being led to the gallows?

One of the predominant tones throughout the essay is **irony**. For example, the prisoner dodging the puddle is ironic because he is going to die anyway.

- Find and quote 3-4 further examples of irony in the essay. In each case explain **how** these examples relate to purpose of the essay.

(Look at paragraphs 12, 14, 17, 18, 23 and 24)

In paragraph 10 there is a change in tone where, for the first time, Orwell **openly states his opinion** on the events he witnessed.

- Find one phrase from this paragraph which indicates Orwell's reflection on the events.
- Find one phrase which clearly indicates Orwell's feelings.
- What is the purpose of the parenthesis in paragraph 10? How does this contribute to the writer's purpose?

Critical Essay Questions

1. Choose a non-fiction text in which the writer describes a traumatic or rewarding experience. Discuss, with reference to appropriate techniques, how the writer conveys the traumatic or rewarding nature of the experience.
2. Choose a non-fiction text in which the writer attempts to influence the reader's opinion on a person or an issue. Discuss, with reference to appropriate techniques, how the writer attempts to influence the reader's opinion on the person or the issue.
3. Choose a non-fiction text which recreates a moment in time. Discuss how the description effectively recreates this moment and show how important this is to your appreciation of the text as a whole.
4. Choose a non-fiction text which is structured in a particularly effective way. Explain how the structure enhances the impact of the writer's message.
5. Choose a non-fiction text which made you consider your views about a social or political or ethical issue. Explain what the issue is and how the writer uses language effectively to engage you.