*Animal Farm* Background Notes

George Orwell (a.k.a. Eric Arthur Blair)

* Spent early years in India (under British rule)
* Sent to boarding school at age 8
* Instead of college, took a job with the Indian Imperial Police
* Orwell was against British rule of India and promoted British withdrawal (oppressors)
* Orwell’s beliefs about politics were affected by his experiences fighting in the Spanish Civil War
* He viewed socialists (government, but group works together for common good; control what group produces), communists (no government; run by people; everyone is equal; more radical socialist; no one person in power), and fascists (country controlled by one person, dictator, controls through censorship, secret police, propaganda) as repressive and self-serving
* With each book and essay that he wrote, Orwell solidified his role as the outsider willing to question any group’s ideology

# Animal Farm

* Criticized the Soviet Union despite its role as a WWII ally to Britain
* No one would publish it initially; finally published and met with great success in 1945
* Orwell’s inspiration for the novel came from watching a little boy whip a horse. He felt that if animals became aware of their strength, humans would have no power over them. He saw human exploitation of animals as analogous to the rich exploiting the working class.
* Orwell said he tried to blend the political and artistic into one novel
* When first publish, *AF* was often misplaced under children’s literature

Historical Context of *AF*

* Early 1900s – Czar Nicholas II faced an increasingly discontented population; freed from serfdom in 1861, many Russian peasants were struggling to survive
* Look for an alternative to the capitalist system, many Russians grabbed on to Karl Marx’s theory of communism. Followers of Marx were called Socialists.
* The Socialists split into two groups:

Socialists – wanted a milder form of Communism

Communists – extreme form of Communism; led by Lenin; referred to as Bolsheviks or Bolshevik Party

* In two major battles, the Bolsheviks overthrew Nicholas II, and Lenin was new leader
* Lenin died in 1924; Stalin, head of Communist Party, and Trotsky, hero of Revolution, battled for power. Stalin won and exiled Trotsky.
* Stalin was a ruler who cared for power, and he killed anyone who opposed him. Stalin and his secret police (KGB) are said to be responsible for 20 million executions
* Stalin wanted to move Russia into the modern industrial age. Under his rule, the government controlled land and labor.
* Stalin also controlled the flow and content of information to all people. He practically outlawed churches.
* Ironically, what started out as Communism turned into Totalitarianism.

The Many Functions of *Animal Farm*

* Satire – writer attacks a serious issue by presenting it in a ridiculous light or by otherwise making fun
* Allegory – narrative that can be read on more than one level
* Fable – narration intended to enforce a useful truth; fables teach a lesson, and the characters are most frequently animals. Anthropomorphism
* Fairy Tale? The subtitle of *Animal Farm* is A Fairy Tale. Why? Is *AF* a fairy tale?

*Animal Farm* Background Notes

George Orwell (a.k.a. Eric Arthur Blair)

1. Where did Orwell spend most of his early years? What job did he take here after he completed boarding school?
2. What affected Orwell’s political beliefs? How did he feel about socialists, communists, and fascists?
3. As Orwell wrote more, what happened to his reputation?

# Animal Farm

1. Of what is *AF* critical? Why would no one publish it?
2. Where did Orwell get his inspiration for the novel?
3. What did Orwell attempt to blend in *AF*?

Historical Context of *Animal Farm*

Identify the following:

Czar Nicholas II

Karl Marx

Socialists

Communists (Bolsheviks)

Lenin

Stalin

Trotsky

Describe how Russia functioned under Stalin’s rule.

The Many Functions of *Animal Farm*

## Satire –

Allegory –

Fable –

Fairy Tale –

In the space below, answer the following questions.

What qualities does a good leader possess? List at least seven.

What reasons can you think of for why a government might be overthrown? List five, and be as specific as possible.

### Write a response to the following. Do you agree? Why or why not? What specific examples can you use to prove or disprove this theory?

### Orwell’s Theory of Power

Power always corrupts, and therefore, revolutions always fail. New masters are always corrupted by new power. In other words, ABSOLUTE POWER CORRUPTS ABSOLUTELY.