CAPITOLO

# 12

# Dystopia and Power: Orwell and the 1930s–1940s

*"Good prose is like a windowpane." — George Orwell, "Why I Write" (1946)*

**OBIETTIVI**

1. I can outline the crisis of the 1930s, the Second World War and the start of the Cold War, and explain how they shaped British writing.
2. I can define dystopia and compare the imagined societies of Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.
3. I can analyse the opening of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the last commandment of *Animal Farm* and Orwell's six rules for writing.
4. I can recognise euphemism, doublespeak, agentless passives and loaded words, and rewrite official language in plain English.
5. I can challenge an argument politely, read news and propaganda critically online, and write a plain-English rewrite with a note on my changes.

**INDICE DEL CAPITOLO**


12.1 History and Society: Depression, Dictators and War, 1929–1949 ..... 2

12.2 Literature: Dystopia and the Political Writer ..... 6

12.3 Texts: Big Brother, Equal Animals, Six Rules ..... 9

12.4 Language: the Language of Power ..... 13

12.5 Skills: Surveillance, Propaganda and Plain Words ..... 17

12.6 Connections: Orwell and Italy; Codes and Chain Reactions ..... 21

English 5 · Parte III · Modernism and the World Wars · versione 1.0
Capitolo 12: Dystopia and Power: Orwell and the 1930s–1940s · pagine 379–406 del volume completo · estratto per lo studio

In April 1984, in a London that has become the chief city of a province called Airstrip One, a man of thirty-nine climbs seven flights of stairs under the eyes of a poster. George Orwell imagined that scene in 1947 and 1948 on a remote Scottish island, ill with the tuberculosis that killed him in January 1950, seven months after the novel appeared. Very little in it was invented from nothing. The bomb sites, the rationing, the loudspeakers, the rewritten news and the slogans all came from the twenty years he had lived through.

This chapter follows those years, from the Depression to the first months of the Cold War, and the writers who tried to describe them honestly. It asks a question that is still ours: what happens to truth when power controls the words we use?

## 12.1 History and Society: Depression, Dictators and War, 1929–1949

The Wall Street Crash of October 1929 (chapter 11) turned an American crisis into a world one. In Britain unemployment struck hardest at the old industries — coal, shipbuilding, steel and cotton — in the north of England, South Wales and central Scotland, while much of the south and the Midlands, with newer industries such as cars and electrical goods, recovered sooner. Contemporaries spoke of two Britains. Figura 12.1 sets the events of the period beside Orwell's books.

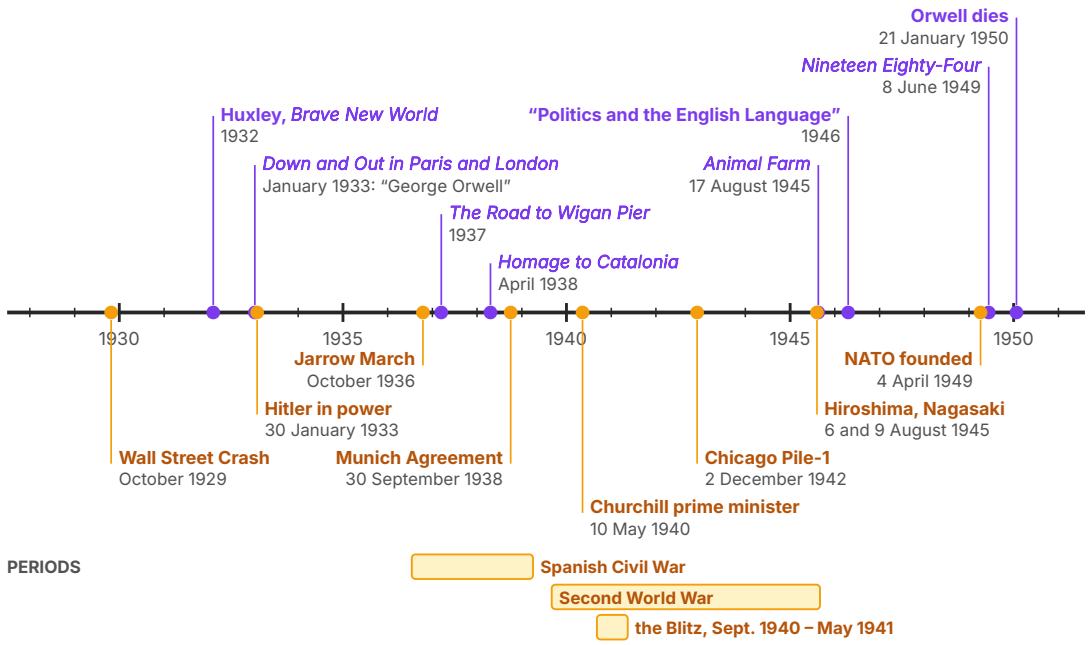



**Figura 12.1** Britain, Europe and Orwell, 1928–1951: works (above the axis, violet), events (below, amber) and periods (bottom bars), on a proportional axis (ticks every year, labels every 5 years).

One town became the symbol of the decade. When Palmer's shipyard at Jarrow, on the river Tyne, closed in 1934, the town lost its main employer. From 5 to 31 October 1936 about two hundred men marched from Jarrow to London with a petition asking the government to bring work back. The House of Commons received the petition but did not debate it. The march achieved little at once, but it fixed the image of the "hungry thirties" in British memory. In the same year Orwell travelled north to see the mining towns for himself.

### 12.1.1 Dictators and appeasement

Mussolini had ruled Italy since 1922. In Germany Hitler became chancellor on 30 January 1933 and within months had banned other parties, closed the free press and opened the first concentration camps. Historians call such regimes examples of **totalitarianism** (*totalitarismo*): a system in which one party and its leader aim at total control of the state and of society, through a single official ideology, propaganda and terror. Stalin's Soviet Union is usually placed in the same category.

British governments hoped to avoid another world war. The policy of **appeasement** (*politica di pacificazione*), linked above all with Neville Chamberlain, prime minister from 1937, meant accepting some of Hitler's demands in the hope of satisfying him. At Munich, on 30 September 1938, Britain, France, Italy and Germany agreed that Czechoslovakia must give the Sudetenland

to Germany; Czechoslovakia itself was not present. In March 1939 German troops occupied Prague. Historians still debate whether appeasement was weakness or a way of gaining time to rearm.

**APPROFONDIMENTO**

**An Italian word.** *Totalitarian* was born in Italian. In 1923 the liberal anti-fascist Giovanni Amendola used it to condemn Mussolini's takeover of every institution; the regime soon adopted it with pride. When Orwell wrote about *totalitarian* states, he was using a word that Italy had first given the world as a warning.

### 12.1.2 Spain, 1936–1939

On 17–18 July 1936 army officers rose against the elected government of the Spanish Republic. The *Nationalists*, soon led by General Francisco Franco, fought a fragile Republican alliance of liberals, socialists, communists and anarchists. Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany sent soldiers, aircraft and weapons to Franco; the Soviet Union armed the Republic; Britain and France chose "non-intervention". Thousands of volunteers from many countries joined the **International Brigades** (*Brigate internazionali*) to defend the Republic, among them Italian anti-fascists of the Garibaldi Battalion. On 26 April 1937 German and Italian aircraft destroyed the Basque town of Guernica. The war ended with Franco's victory on 1 April 1939, and he ruled Spain until his death in 1975.

**ERRORE FREQUENTE**

✗ «Orwell combatté in Spagna con le Brigate internazionali.» → ✓ Orwell si arruolò nella milizia del **POUM**, un piccolo partito marxista contrario a Stalin; le Brigate erano organizzate dal movimento comunista internazionale.

✗ «Guernica fu bombardata dagli aerei di Franco.» → ✓ Fu distrutta da aerei **tedeschi** (Legione Condor) e **italiani** (Aviazione Legionaria), inviati a sostegno di Franco.

### 12.1.3 Britain at war

Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, and Britain and France declared war on 3 September. After months of waiting, Germany attacked in the west in May 1940. On 10 May Winston Churchill became prime minister, and his broadcast speeches (still under copyright) gave the nation phrases such as "their finest hour". Between 26 May and 4 June 338,226 Allied soldiers were taken off the beaches of Dunkirk by a fleet of more than 800 vessels, many of them small civilian boats. Italy entered the war on Germany's side on 10 June, and France surrendered later that month. In the Battle of Britain (summer and autumn 1940) the Royal Air Force kept control of the skies, and the invasion was postponed.

Then came **the Blitz** (from German *Blitzkrieg*, "lightning war"): the bombing of British cities, mostly at night, from 7 September 1940 to May 1941, in which about 40,000–43,000 civilians were killed. Orwell, then serving in the Home Guard in London, opened his essay *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1941) with the sentence: "As I write, highly civilized human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me." The war became global in 1941, when Germany invaded the Soviet Union (June) and Japan attacked the American fleet at Pearl Harbor (7 December). Figura 12.2 shows Europe in November 1942, when the Axis was close to its greatest extent and the battles of El Alamein, in Egypt, and Stalingrad, on the Volga, began to turn the war.

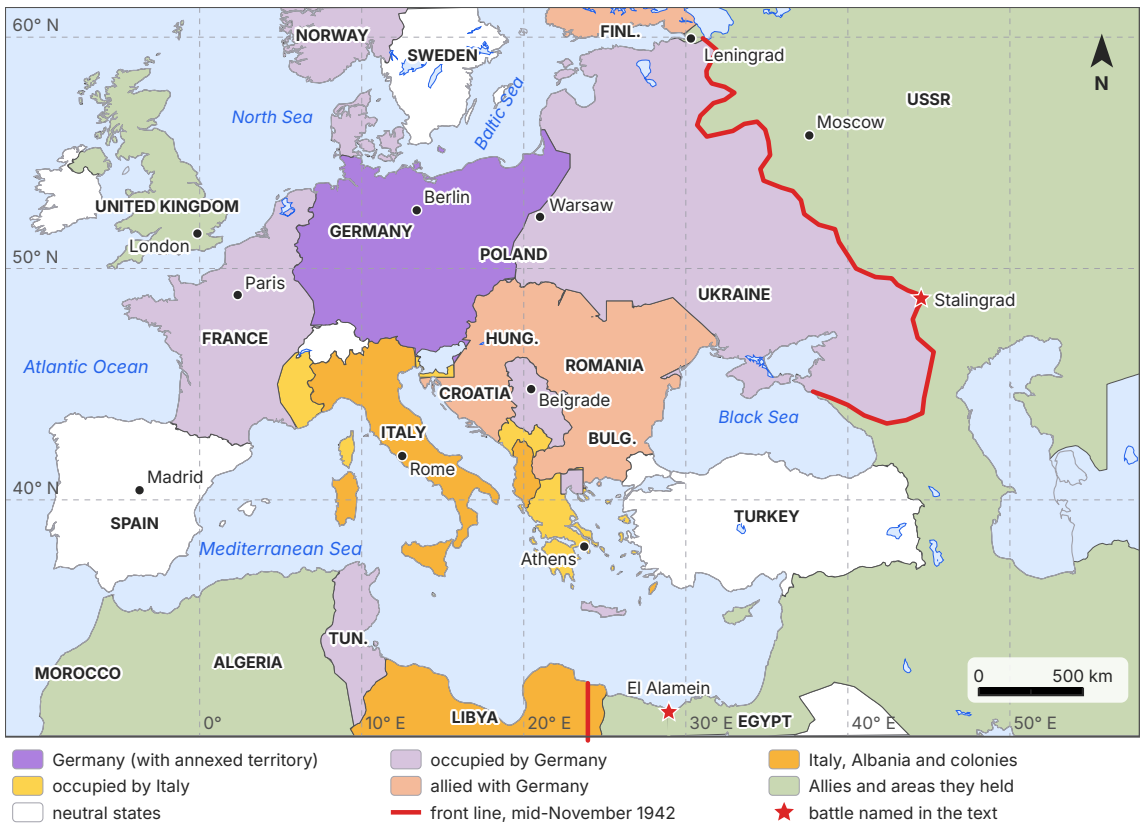



**Figura 12.2** Europe and the Mediterranean in mid-November 1942 (borders and front lines approximate; equirectangular projection; in Libya the front is drawn near Tobruk, which the British retook on 13 November). Map data: Natural Earth, simplified; the categories follow the situation after the Allied landings in North Africa (8 November) and the German occupation of southern France (11 November).

### 12.1.4 The Holocaust and the bomb

The **Holocaust** (*Shoah*) was the systematic murder of about six million European Jews by Nazi Germany and its collaborators, above all between 1941 and 1945, in mass shootings and in extermination camps such as Auschwitz-Birkenau. Roma and Sinti, disabled people and political

opponents were also persecuted and killed. Italy's racial laws of 1938 excluded Jews from schools and public employment; after September 1943 Jews in German-occupied Italy were deported. Soviet troops reached Auschwitz on 27 January 1945, the date that Italy (by a law of 2000) and the United Nations (in 2005) chose for Holocaust remembrance.

The war in Europe ended on 8 May 1945. In the Pacific, the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima (6 August) and Nagasaki (9 August). Japan announced its surrender on 15 August and signed it on 2 September 1945. The bombs came from the Manhattan Project, one of whose first steps was Enrico Fermi's reactor in Chicago (section 12.6).

### 12.1.5 A cold peace

In July 1945 the Labour Party won a landslide general election (chapter 13 tells what it built). Abroad, the allies of the war quickly became rivals. Europe divided into a Soviet sphere in the east and the western democracies; speaking at Fulton, Missouri, on 5 March 1946, Churchill described an "iron curtain" across the continent. Orwell had already imagined, in "You and the Atom Bomb" (*Tribune*, 19 October 1945), a world shared by a few super-states, each armed with the bomb and locked in a permanent "cold war" — an early use of the phrase in its modern sense; the American financier Bernard Baruch first applied it to the US–Soviet rivalry in April 1947. The **Cold War** (*guerra fredda*) became the name of the long rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, fought with alliances, propaganda and nuclear threat rather than direct battle. In 1949 NATO was founded (4 April) and the Soviet Union tested its first atomic bomb (August). Less than three months before the Soviet test, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* had been published.

## 12.2 Literature: Dystopia and the Political Writer

In the 1930s few writers stayed out of politics. The "thirties poets" — W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Louis MacNeice and Cecil Day-Lewis (still under copyright, so not quoted) — wrote about unemployment, fascism and Spain, where Auden went in 1937. In prose, the most lasting answer to the age was a new kind of novel about the future.

### 12.2.1 From utopia to dystopia

In English 3 (chapter 8) you met Thomas More's *Utopia*: an imaginary good society used to criticise a real one. A **dystopia** (*distopia*; from Greek *dys-*, "bad", and *tópos*, "place") is its dark mirror: an imagined society, usually set in the future, that is much worse than ours, described in order to warn readers about tendencies already present in their own world. Most dystopias share total control, surveillance, the manipulation of language and memory, and an individual who tries to resist — usually without success.

Forerunners include H. G. Wells (chapter 4) and Yevgeny Zamyatin's Russian novel *We* (written 1920–21), which Orwell reviewed in *Tribune* on 4 January 1946.

### 12.2.2 Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (1932)

Aldous Huxley (1894–1963) was the grandson of Thomas Henry Huxley, Darwin's great defender (chapter 3). His novel (still under copyright) is set in the World State in the year 632 "After Ford", named after the car maker Henry Ford, whose assembly line has become a kind of religion. Babies are produced in hatcheries and conditioned to belong to fixed castes, from Alphas to Epsilons, and everybody is kept content with entertainment and a drug called *soma*. Into this world comes John, "the Savage", who has grown up on a reservation reading Shakespeare; the title comes from Miranda's words in *The Tempest*, "O brave new world, / That has such people in't!" (V.1). John cannot accept happiness without freedom, and the novel ends in his despair.

Readers often compare the two: Huxley imagines control through pleasure, Orwell through fear.

### 12.2.3 George Orwell (1903–1950)

Eric Arthur Blair was born on 25 June 1903 at Motihari, in British India, where his father worked for the colonial administration. After Eton he served in the Indian Imperial Police in Burma (1922–27), which left him with a lasting hatred of imperialism. He then lived among the poor in Paris and London and in January 1933 published *Down and Out in Paris and London* as George Orwell; *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) described the industrial north.

At the end of 1936 Orwell went to Barcelona and joined the militia of the POUM, a small anti-Stalinist Marxist party. In May 1937 a sniper's bullet passed through his throat. When the government, under communist pressure, suppressed the POUM, he escaped to France. *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) shows newspapers of left and right lying about events he had seen. From then on, he wrote ten years later in "Why I Write" (1946): "Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic socialism, as I understand it."

During the war he worked for the BBC (1941–43) and the weekly *Tribune*. Several publishers refused *Animal Farm* because Britain and the Soviet Union were allies; it appeared on 17 August 1945. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, written mostly on the Hebridean island of Jura, followed on 8 June 1949. Orwell died in London on 21 January 1950, aged 46. His works have been in the public domain in Italy since 2021; in the United States the two novels are still protected by copyright.

**IN SINTESI**

**Orwell's main books**

- *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) — poverty, reported from inside
- *Burmese Days* (1934) — a novel of colonial Burma
- *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) — unemployment in the industrial north
- *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) — the Spanish Civil War and its lies
- *Animal Farm* (1945) — a fable of a revolution betrayed
- "Politics and the English Language" (1946) — an essay on language and honesty
- *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) — the totalitarian dystopia

### 12.2.4 *Animal Farm*: a fable and an allegory

*Animal Farm* carried the subtitle *A Fairy Story*. The animals of Manor Farm, inspired by the dream of an old boar, Old Major, drive out the drunken farmer Mr Jones and rename the place Animal Farm. They paint Seven Commandments on the barn wall; the last says that all animals are equal. The pigs take charge: Napoleon drives out his rival Snowball with his dogs, Squealer justifies every privilege, the loyal horse Boxer works until he collapses and is sold to the knacker, and the commandments are quietly rewritten. At the end the pigs walk on two legs, and the other animals, looking through a window, can no longer tell the pigs from the men.

The book is a fable — a short story with animal characters and a moral — and an *allegory* (English 3), in which characters and events stand for others. Readers usually identify Old Major with Marx and Lenin, Napoleon with Stalin and Snowball with Trotsky, and the story with the Russian Revolution of 1917 and its betrayal. Orwell, a socialist, was attacking not equality but a dictatorship that used its language.

### 12.2.5 *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

The world of the novel is divided among three super-states always at war. Britain, now called Airstrip One, belongs to Oceania, ruled by the Party in the name of Big Brother, a leader who may not exist. A *telescreen* in every room both broadcasts and watches; the Thought Police punish *thoughtcrime*. Winston Smith works at the Ministry of Truth, where he rewrites old newspaper articles so that the past always agrees with the Party. He keeps a secret diary, falls in love with Julia and trusts O'Brien, a senior Party member who in fact betrays them. In the Ministry of Love Winston is tortured and finally broken in Room 101, where each prisoner faces his worst fear. The last sentence of the novel is "He loved Big Brother."

Two of Orwell's inventions have entered the language. **Newspeak** (*neolingua*) is the official language of Oceania, designed to make rebellion impossible by reducing the number of words: if there is no word for political freedom, nobody can think it. **Doublethink** (*bipensiero*) is the

ability to hold two contradictory beliefs at the same time and to accept both — to know that the Party has changed the past and, at the same moment, to believe that it has not.

**ERRORE FREQUENTE**

✗ «*Nineteen Eighty-Four* è una profezia sul futuro.» → ✓ È un **avvertimento** satirico: Orwell spiegò dopo l'uscita che non prevedeva una società così, ma che qualcosa di simile **poteva** arrivare.

✗ «Orwell era contro il socialismo.» → ✓ Orwell si definiva **socialista democratico**; attaccava il totalitarismo, quello di Stalin come quello di Hitler.

✗ «*La fattoria degli animali* è un libro per bambini.» → ✓ Ha la forma della **favola**, ma è un'allegoria politica per adulti.

## 12.3 Texts: Big Brother, Equal Animals, Six Rules

Three extracts by Orwell: the opening of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the last commandment of *Animal Farm*, and the six rules that close his essay on political language. All three are about the same thing: words used to control people, and words used to set them free.

### 12.3.1 T1 · George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, I.1: "a bright cold day in April"

**Context.** The first page of the novel. Winston Smith comes home for his lunch break to Victory Mansions, a block of flats in London.

**Tabella 12.1** T1 — *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Part One, ch. 1 (Project Gutenberg Australia eBook 0100021h; checked against the text at orwell.ru). […] marks a cut.

It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen. Winston Smith, his chin nuzzled into his breast in an effort to escape the vile 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. 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. […] 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.

**Glosses.** *nuzzled into his breast*: pressed down against his chest · *vile*: horrible · *gritty*: full of small hard bits · *rag mats*: small rugs made of old cloth · *tacked*: fixed with small nails · *moustache*: hair on the upper lip · *ruggedly handsome*: attractive in a strong, rough way · *landing*: the floor space at the top of a flight of stairs · *contrived*: made with a hidden purpose.

### Analysis

**Normal and wrong.** The opening reads like any realistic novel — weather, season, a man going home — but its first sentence hides one wrong word: clocks do not strike *thirteen*. Orwell uses the 24-hour clock, then unusual in Britain, to tell us at once that this is our world changed. The details that follow (boiled cabbage, old rag mats) belong to post-war London, not to science fiction.

**The poster.** Big Brother first appears not as a person but as an image "too large for indoor display", repeated on every landing. The caption is in capitals and in the present continuous: the watching never stops. The second person in "follow you about" pulls the reader in with Winston.

**A modest hero.** Winston first appears hiding his chin from the wind and slipping through a door; in the lines cut here he climbs the stairs slowly, resting on the landings, because of an ulcer on his ankle. He is an ordinary, tired man of thirty-nine, not an action hero. The name of his building, Victory Mansions, is the first example of official language that says the opposite of what we see.

- Which word in the first sentence tells you that this world is not ours? Why is it effective to hide it in an ordinary sentence?
- Find two details in the hallway that suggest poverty or decay.
- What is the effect of the capital letters and the present continuous in the caption?
- How does Winston move in the second sentence? What kind of protagonist does this suggest?

## 12.3.2 T2 · George Orwell, *Animal Farm*, ch. 10: "more equal than others"

**Context.** Years have passed. Most of the animals who remember the Rebellion are dead; the pigs have just been seen walking on their hind legs, and the sheep have drowned every protest with a new slogan. Clover, an old mare, asks the donkey Benjamin, who can read but rarely speaks, to look at the wall.

**Tabella 12.2** T2 — *Animal Farm*, ch. 10 (text at orwell.ru; checked against Project Gutenberg Australia eBook 0100011h, which has the misprint "tatted" for *tarred*; editions differ slightly in their commas).

Benjamin felt a nose nuzzling at his shoulder. He looked round. It was Clover. Her old eyes looked dimmer than ever. Without saying anything she tugged gently at his mane and led him round to the end of the big barn, where the Seven Commandments were written. For a minute or two they stood gazing at the tarred wall with its white lettering.

'My sight is failing,' she said finally. 'Even when I was young I could not have read what was written there. But it appears to me that that wall looks different. Are the Seven Commandments the same as they used to be, Benjamin?'

For once Benjamin consented to break his rule, and he read out to her what was written on the wall. There was nothing there now except a single Commandment. It ran:

ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL
BUT SOME ANIMALS ARE MORE EQUAL
THAN OTHERS.

**Glosses.** *nuzzling*: touching gently with the nose · *tugged*: pulled · *mane*: the long hair on a horse's neck · *tarred*: painted with tar, a black liquid · *consented to*: agreed to · *ran*: said (of a text).

#### Analysis

**Who can read?** Clover cannot read the wall; Benjamin can, but has always refused to get involved. Whoever controls the written word controls the farm, and only memory — failing, like Clover's eyes — can notice the changes.

**The impossible sentence.** *Equal* is an absolute word: things are equal or they are not, so "more equal" is logically impossible. The sentence keeps the old principle and destroys it in the same breath — an example of what Orwell would later call doublethink.

- Why does Clover ask Benjamin, and why is it significant that "for once" he agrees?
- How many commandments are left? What has happened to the others?
- Explain in your own words why "more equal" is a contradiction.
- The narrator does not comment. How does this plain style make the scene more powerful?

### 12.3.3 T3 · George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language" (1946): six rules

**Context.** The essay appeared in the magazine *Horizon* in April 1946. Orwell argues that dead metaphors, pretentious words and vague abstractions help politicians hide what they do, and ends with these rules.

**Tabella 12.3** T3 — "Politics and the English Language" (text from the Orwell Foundation's site, numbered (i)–(vi) as in Project Gutenberg Australia eBook 0200151 and Fifty Orwell Essays, where the Foundation prints i.–vi.; each rule checked against Project Gutenberg Australia eBook 0200151 and orwell.ru, which differ only in a comma or in the word "outright").

I think the following rules will cover most cases:
(i) Never use a metaphor, simile or other figure of speech which you are used to seeing in print.
(ii) Never use a long word where a short one will do.
(iii) If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.
(iv) Never use the passive where you can use the active.
(v) Never use a foreign phrase, a scientific word or a jargon word if you can think of an everyday English equivalent.
(vi) Break any of these rules sooner than say anything outright barbarous.

**Glosses.** *figure of speech*: metaphor, simile and similar devices · *jargon*: the special words of a profession, hard for outsiders · *sooner than*: rather than · *outright*: complete · *barbarous*: ugly, uncivilised.

### Analysis

**Rules that obey themselves.** Five rules are short imperatives beginning with *Never* or *If*; most of the words are short and everyday. The sixth rule breaks the pattern and tells you to break the others when they would produce something ugly: the rules serve clarity, not the reverse.

**Why politics?** For Orwell, ready-made phrases think for the writer and make it easy to avoid saying who did what to whom — exactly what propaganda needs.

- Which rule would cut *at this point in time* to *now*? Which would change *utilise* to *use*?
- Rule (iv) is about the passive. Why might a government prefer the passive when it reports bad news?
- Is rule (vi) a contradiction of the other five? Explain.
- Does Orwell follow his own rules in this extract? Give two pieces of evidence.

**ESEMPIO SVOLTO**

**A PEE paragraph comparing T1 and T2** (Point, Evidence, Explanation — English 3).

**Point:** In both extracts a written text on a wall is the instrument of power. **Evidence:** in T1 the caption under the poster repeats on every landing that Big Brother is watching; in T2 the old Seven Commandments have been reduced to one impossible sentence painted in white on the barn. **Explanation:** Orwell shows power working through words that everybody sees every day but nobody may question. In T1 the words create fear; in T2 they quietly change the past. In both, official language says the opposite of reality: Victory Mansions is falling apart, and the "equal" animals have masters again.

**Model sentence:** *In both texts Orwell turns a public slogan into a sign of control: the words remain on the wall while their meaning is emptied or reversed.*

## 12.4 Language: the Language of Power

Orwell's rules are a starting point for something you will use far beyond literature: recognising language that hides more than it shows. This section brings together several structures you already know — the passive (English 3, chapter 4) and nominalisation (English 4, chapter 5) — and looks at how they can be used to avoid responsibility.

### 12.4.1 Euphemism

A **euphemism** (*eufemismo*; from Greek "speaking well") is a mild or vague word used instead of a direct one that might be painful or embarrassing. Many euphemisms are simply polite: *pass away* for *die*, *let go* for *dismiss from a job*. In politics and war, however, euphemism can hide violence. Orwell's most famous example comes from the same essay as T3: "Defenceless villages are bombarded from the air, the inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary bullets: this is called pacification." The observation is old. The Roman historian Tacitus gives Calgacus, a chief of the Caledonians in northern Britain, a speech against the Romans that ends: *ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant* — "where they make a desert, they call it peace" (*Agricola* 30; translation by the editors).

Modern examples include *collateral damage* (civilians killed by accident in a military attack), *negative growth* (an economy that is shrinking), *downsizing* (dismissing employees) and *friendly fire* (soldiers killed by their own side). When a euphemism deliberately disguises or reverses the meaning of what it describes, it becomes **doublespeak** (*linguaggio ambiguo*, *doppio linguaggio*). The word itself does not appear in Orwell's novel: it was formed later from *Newspeak* and *doublethink*.

### 12.4.2 Hiding the agent

The simplest way to avoid responsibility is to remove the person who acted. You know the *agentless passive* (*passivo senza complemento d'agente*): *Mistakes were made* — but by whom? Nominalisation does the same with nouns: *The closure of the library has been decided* turns two actions (somebody closed; somebody decided) into abstract nouns with no subject. Tabella 12.4 collects the main tools of evasion.

**Tabella 12.4** The language of power: five tools of evasion and their plain-English versions

| Tool | How it works | Example | Plain English |
|---|---|---|---|
| **euphemism** | a soft word replaces a hard fact | *The company is restructuring.* | *The company is sacking people.* |
| **agentless passive** | the person who acted disappears | *Mistakes were made.* | *We made mistakes.* |
| **nominalisation** | actions become abstract nouns, with no subject | *A reduction in services will be implemented.* | *We will cut services.* |
| **vague abstraction** | large words with no clear content | *measures to ensure a positive outcome* | say which measures, and what result |
| **loaded word** | a word that carries a judgement | *the regime* / *the leadership*; *handout* / *support* | choose the most neutral word, or say whose view it is |

A **loaded word** (*parola connotata*, *parola carica*) is one whose connotation — the feeling it carries — pushes the listener towards a judgement before any argument is made. *Regime* suggests an illegitimate government; *handout* suggests that people receiving help are lazy. Loaded words are not always dishonest, but a careful reader notices them and asks who chose them, and why.

### 12.4.3 Rewriting into plain English

**Plain English** (*linguaggio chiaro*) means writing that its intended reader can understand the first time: short sentences, everyday words, active verbs and a clear agent. In Britain the Plain English Campaign has argued for clear official writing since 1979. Figura 12.3 applies Orwell's rules to one invented sentence, phrase by phrase.

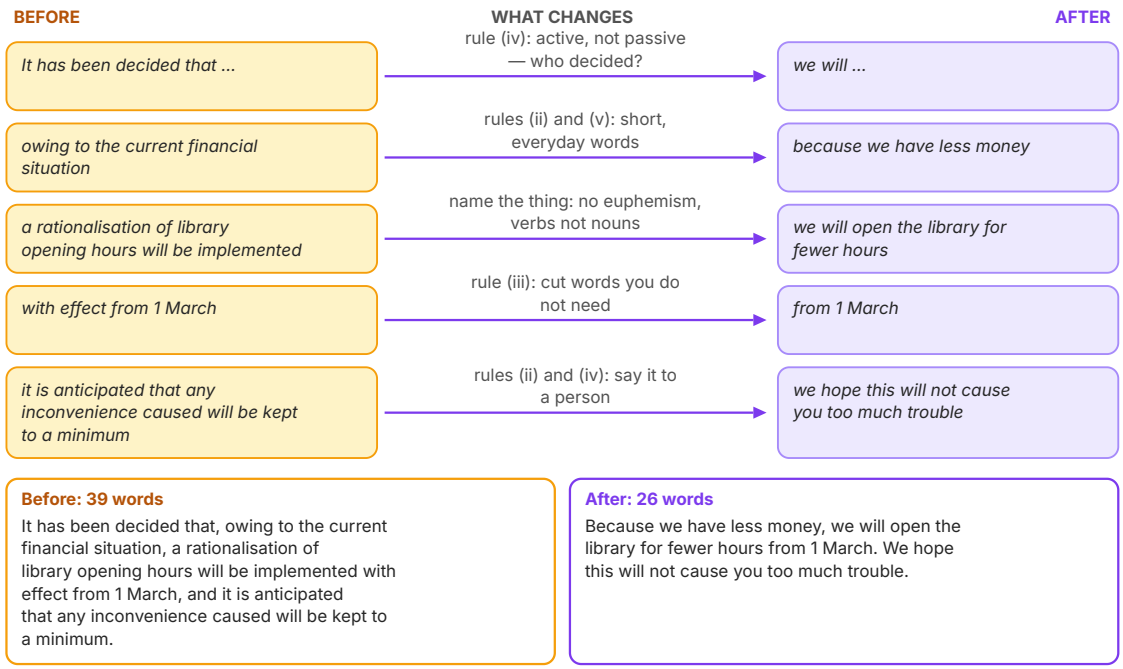



**Figura 12.3** From official language to plain English: an invented notice rewritten phrase by phrase, with the reason for each change and, where one applies, the rule from T3. Word counts: 39 before, 26 after.

### ESEMPIO SVOLTO

**Rewriting a sentence in four steps.** *It has been deemed necessary to implement a temporary suspension of the canteen service, owing to staff shortages.*

1. **Find the agent.** Who deemed? The school. → *The school has decided…*
2. **Turn nouns back into verbs.** *implement a suspension* → *suspend* or, more simply, *close*.
3. **Replace long or foreign words.** *deemed necessary* → *decided*; *owing to* → *because*.
4. **Cut and check.** *temporary* needs a date to be honest.

**Result:** *We will close the canteen until 15 March because we do not have enough staff.* (15 words instead of 18, and every reader knows who is acting, what will happen and when.)

### GRAMMAR IN ITALIANO

**Il linguaggio del potere.** L'**eufemismo** sostituisce una parola dura con una attenuata (*collateral damage* = vittime civili). Il **passivo senza agente** (*Mistakes were made*) e la **nominalizzazione** (*the closure of the library*) nascondono chi ha agito. Una **parola connotata** (*loaded word*) contiene già un giudizio. Per riscrivere in *plain English*: trova l'agente, trasforma i nomi in verbi, usa parole brevi e comuni, taglia.

**Confronto con l'italiano.** L'italiano conosce bene il **burocratese**: *si è proceduto all'effettuazione del pagamento* (= abbiamo pagato), *in data odierna* (= oggi), con il *si* impersonale che fa sparire l'agente come il passivo inglese. Italo Calvino lo chiamò «antilingua» (1965). Attenzione: alcuni eufemismi italiani sono forme di rispetto (*non vedente*), non di inganno; il problema nasce quando l'attenuazione serve a nascondere un fatto.

### ERRORE FREQUENTE

✗ «Ogni passivo è manipolazione.» → ✓ Il passivo è normale quando l'agente è ignoto, ovvio o poco importante: *The samples were heated to 80 °C* (relazione scientifica); *Guernica was destroyed in 1937* (se poi si dice da chi). Diventa evasivo quando nasconde un responsabile che il lettore ha diritto di conoscere.

✗ *The mistakes were done.* → ✓ *Mistakes were **made**.* (*make a mistake*, non *do*). ✗ *It was decided to closing the canteen.* → ✓ *It was decided **to close** the canteen.*

## 12.5 Skills: Surveillance, Propaganda and Plain Words

### 12.5.1 Vocabulary: power, propaganda and surveillance

**Tabella 12.5** Power, propaganda and surveillance: key words

| Word | Meaning | Example |
|---|---|---|
| **propaganda** (n.) | information, often false or one-sided, spread to influence opinion | *Squealer is the farm's propaganda machine.* |
| **censorship** (n.) | the control of what can be published or said | *Wartime censorship cut parts of soldiers' letters.* |
| **surveillance** (n.) | careful, continuous watching of people | *The telescreen is a tool of surveillance.* |
| **totalitarian** (adj.) | controlling every part of life | *Oceania is a totalitarian state.* |
| **dictatorship** (n.) | government by one person or party with unlimited power | *Spain lived under a dictatorship until 1975.* |
| **dissent** (n., v.) | disagreement with official opinion | *In Oceania even private dissent is a crime.* |
| **slogan** (n.) | a short, memorable phrase used in politics or advertising | *The Party's three slogans are paradoxes.* |
| **rewrite** (v.) | write again in a different form | *Winston rewrites old newspaper articles.* |
| **erase** (v.) | remove completely, leave no trace | *People who fall from favour are erased from the records.* |

#### Word formation: neologisms and coinages

A **neologism** (*neologismo*) is a new word or a new meaning for an old one; a **coinage** (*conio*) is a word deliberately invented by one person. Orwell coined several words that are now in every English dictionary: *Newspeak*, *doublethink*, *thoughtcrime*, *unperson*, and the phrase *Big Brother*, now used for any watching authority and the name of a television format. *-speak* now forms nouns for a group's jargon (*management-speak*), as *-gate*, from Watergate (chapter 14), forms names of scandals (*Dieselgate*, 2015); *Orwellian* is an eponym (English 4, chapter 14). A coinage becomes a dictionary word when a *corpus* (English 4) shows many writers using it, over time, without explanation.

### 12.5.2 Listening: Who's Watching?

**Before you listen.** How many apps on your phone know where you are right now? Would you notice if one of them changed what it collected? **Listen (books closed)** while four classmates read the script: it is The Link's monthly video call.

**Tabella 12.6** Listening script — Who's Watching?

| | |
|---|---|
| **Giulia** | Can everyone hear me? Marta says hi. She's here doing maths homework, supposedly. |
| **Sam** | Hi, Marta! Right — I promised a topic. Our seminar this week was on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and the lecturer asked us to count the screens in our rooms. I've got four. Laptop, phone, watch and a smart speaker my mum gave me. |
| **Callum** | The speaker is the telescreen. Obviously. |
| **Sam** | That's what I said! And my seminar group laughed, but then someone pointed out that we bought these things ourselves. Nobody forced us. |
| **Aoife** | Which is the Huxley version, not the Orwell one. Pleasure, not fear. |
| **Giulia** | Honestly, I think that's a bit exaggerated. My phone isn't Big Brother. If you've got nothing to hide, you've got nothing to fear. |
| **Callum** | Hang on — what's the evidence for that? Because in my geography module we used location data to map how people move through Edinburgh at weekends. It was anonymous, but we could see bus routes, pubs, even a hospital. Put enough "nothing to hide" together and you know a lot. |
| **Giulia** | Okay, fair point. But that was for research, wasn't it? Nobody was punished. |
| **Aoife** | Can I just come in here? We track animals in marine science. We tag seals with GPS to protect their feeding areas. But the seals don't get to say no. That's the difference, isn't it? Consent. |
| **Sam** | Isn't "nothing to hide" a bit of a loaded phrase, though? It assumes the only reason for privacy is guilt. |
| **Giulia** | Mm. I see what you mean. Actually, I checked my screen-time report before the call. Five hours and twelve minutes yesterday. Three apps knew my location all day. I didn't even remember giving permission. |
| **Callum** | There you go. |
| **Giulia** | So my new position is: it's not Big Brother. It's a lot of little brothers. |
| **Aoife** | Put that on the blog. Seriously. |
| **Sam** | Next month's challenge, then: everyone switches off location for one week and reports back. Giulia, you're chairing. |
| **Giulia** | Fine. But I'm keeping my alarm clock. |

### 12.5.3 Speaking: challenging an argument politely

In a discussion, in the colloquio or online, you will often hear claims that sound convincing but rest on weak evidence, a loaded word or a false choice. Challenge the argument, not the person.

**Tabella 12.7** Useful language — challenging an argument politely

| Function | Phrases |
|---|---|
| asking for evidence | *What's the evidence for that? · Where does that figure come from? · Do we actually know that?* |
| questioning a word | *Isn't that a bit of a loaded term? · What exactly do you mean by…? · Is "crisis" the right word here?* |
| pointing out a generalisation | *Is that true of everyone, though? · That might be true in some cases, but…* |
| spotting a false choice | *Are those really the only two options? · Couldn't it be both?* |
| conceding, then challenging | *Okay, fair point, but… · I take your point; even so… · That's true as far as it goes, but…* |
| keeping it friendly | *I'm not saying you're wrong, I'm just not convinced yet. · Can I just come in here?* |

- **Task 1 (pairs, 3 minutes).** Student A defends one of these claims; Student B challenges it, using at least four phrases from Tabella 12.7: *Phones should be banned in all schools. · Social media make young people less political. · Security cameras in every street would stop crime.* Swap roles.
- **Task 2 (groups).** Bring an English advert or slogan (source noted); find its loaded words and ask what it wants you to believe, and on what evidence.

### 12.5.4 Writing: a plain-English rewrite

Official notices are often written in the language of section 12.4. A **plain-English rewrite** keeps all the information but makes it clear to its real reader. You write the new version (about two-thirds of the original length) and a short note explaining your changes.

**Tabella 12.8** Model text — a plain-English rewrite with its note (original 150 words; rewrite 105 words; note 60 words)

| **Original** (a notice in Sam's hall of residence) |
|---|
| *Residents are hereby advised that, with a view to ensuring compliance with applicable health and safety requirements, a programme of routine inspections of all shared kitchen facilities will be implemented with effect from the commencement of the forthcoming term. It is anticipated that inspections will take place on a fortnightly basis, during which time access to the facilities may be subject to temporary restriction. Residents are requested to ensure that all personal items, including foodstuffs, are appropriately stored and clearly labelled prior to the inspection date. Any items deemed to constitute a hazard, or which are found to be unlabelled, may be subject to removal and disposal without further notification. Failure to comply with the above may result in the imposition of a charge in accordance with the terms of the residence agreement. Any residents with queries are invited to direct them to the Accommodation Office at their earliest convenience.* |
| **Rewrite** |
| From the start of next term, we will check all shared kitchens every two weeks to make sure they are safe and clean. While we check, you may not be able to use the kitchen for a short time.<br><br>Before each check, please put away all your things, including food, and label them clearly with your name. If we find anything dangerous or unlabelled, we may throw it away without telling you first.<br><br>If you do not follow these rules, you may have to pay a charge, as your residence agreement says.<br><br>Questions? Please contact the Accommodation Office as soon as you can. Thank you. |
| **Note on the changes** |
| I changed the passives to active verbs with "we" and "you", so readers know who acts. I replaced long words (*commencement*, *fortnightly basis*, *disposal*) with everyday ones, cut empty phrases (*hereby*, *at their earliest convenience*), and split the text into short paragraphs: when, what to do, what happens if not, who to ask. I kept every fact of the original. |

**Analysis.** Every fact of the original survives; the rewrite uses *we* and *you*, follows the order a resident needs, and the note names the rule behind each change.

**Checklist.** ✓ no information lost · ✓ the agent named (*we*, *you*) · ✓ active verbs · ✓ everyday words · ✓ one idea per sentence · ✓ about two-thirds of the original length · ✓ a note of about 60 words that explains the changes, not just lists them.

LEARNING TO LEARN

**Reading propaganda and news critically.** Before you share or believe a text — a post, an article, a speech — ask four questions:

1. **Claim:** what exactly does it want me to believe?
2. **Source:** who produced it, and who pays for it?
3. **Evidence:** what facts, data or documents does it give? Can I check them?
4. **Purpose:** does it want to inform me, sell me something, or make me angry or afraid?

Online, use **lateral reading** (*lettura laterale*), the method researchers at Stanford University observed in professional fact-checkers: leave the page at once and open new tabs to see what reliable sources say about the site and its claim. The same four questions work for a speech of Cicero, an Italian editorial or the sources of your history essay.

## 12.6 Connections: Orwell and Italy; Codes and Chain Reactions

### 12.6.1 Orwell's Italian soldier

*Homage to Catalonia* begins in the Lenin Barracks in Barcelona, in December 1936, where Orwell met an Italian militiaman who shook his hand. He remembered him in "Looking Back on the Spanish War" (written 1942, published 1943), which ends with a poem whose first stanza is:

> The Italian soldier shook my hand
> Beside the guard-room table;
> The strong hand and the subtle hand
> Whose palms are only able
> To meet within the sound of guns,
> But oh! what peace I knew then
> In gazing on his battered face
> Purer than any woman's!
>
> — George Orwell, "Looking Back on the Spanish War" (text from the Orwell Foundation's site; checked against Project Gutenberg Australia, *Fifty Orwell Essays*)

**Glosses.** *guard-room*: the room where soldiers on guard wait · *subtle*: clever, refined (Orwell's own, educated hand) · *battered*: damaged by hard life.

The stanza contrasts two hands — the worker's strong one and the intellectual's "subtle" one — that can meet only in war.

### 12.6.2 Gramsci, and a war on a pronoun

Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), a founder of the Italian Communist Party, was arrested in November 1926 and spent the rest of his life in prison or under guard. In his notebooks, the *Quaderni del carcere* (1929–1935), he developed the idea of **hegemony** (*egemonia*): a ruling group stays in power not only by force but by making its view of the world seem natural. In a letter to his brother Carlo of 19 December 1929 he described the attitude that kept him going:

> *Il mio stato d'animo sintetizza questi due sentimenti e li supera: sono pessimista con l'intelligenza, ma ottimista per la volontà.*
>
> — Antonio Gramsci, *Lettere dal carcere*, a Carlo, 19 dicembre 1929 (text from LiberLiber)

"My state of mind brings together these two feelings and goes beyond them: I am a pessimist because of my intelligence, but an optimist because of my will." (translation by the editors). Like Orwell, Gramsci saw that power works through culture and language as well as through police.

The fascist regime also tried to change Italian itself. On 15 January 1938 the novelist Bruno Cicognani attacked the polite pronoun *Lei* in the *Corriere della Sera* as a servile Spanish import, and proposed *tu* between equals and *voi* as the mark of respect for hierarchy. The same year the regime banned *Lei* for party members and state employees, who had to say *voi*. The ban failed: Benedetto Croce, who had written *voi* in his letters, switched to *Lei*, and after the war *Lei* returned to normal use. Orwell's Newspeak had real precedents.

### 12.6.3 Screen, music and art

Picasso painted *Guernica* in Paris in May and June 1937 for the Spanish Republic's pavilion at the Paris International Exposition. The canvas, about 3.5 by 7.8 metres, uses only black, white and greys, like a newspaper photograph. It shows no aircraft, only victims: a screaming horse, a bull, a mother with her dead child, a fallen fighter with a broken sword, a lamp, flames. It stayed at the Museum of Modern Art in New York until 1981, after Franco's death, and is now in Madrid (Museo Reina Sofía).

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* has often been adapted. The BBC's television version (December 1954, with Peter Cushing) shocked many viewers; Michael Radford's film, with John Hurt and Richard Burton, came out in 1984 itself.

**COLLEGAMENTI**

**Computer science: Turing, Enigma and the bombe.** German forces enciphered radio messages with **Enigma**, whose rotors changed the cipher with every letter typed. Polish mathematicians led by Marian Rejewski had broken early versions and shared their methods with Britain and France in July 1939. At Bletchley Park Alan Turing (1912–1954) designed the **bombe**, a machine that tested rotor settings against a **crib** (*parola probabile*), a guessed piece of plain text such as a weather report. The first bombe, "Victory", was installed in March 1940; an improvement by Gordon Welchman made it far more effective. Enigma never enciphered a letter as itself, a weakness that helped. The resulting intelligence was called *Ultra*. The historian F. H. Hinsley, who worked at Bletchley, judged that without it the war would have lasted something like two years longer, perhaps more; others warn that no such figure can be proved. Turing returns in chapter 13.

**COLLEGAMENTI**

**Physics: Fermi and the first nuclear reactor.** In **nuclear fission** (*fissione nucleare*), discovered in 1938 by Hahn and Strassmann and explained by Meitner and Frisch, a uranium-235 nucleus that absorbs a neutron splits into two lighter nuclei, releases energy and emits two or three neutrons. If those neutrons split further nuclei, a **chain reaction** (*reazione a catena*) begins (Figura 12.4). Physicists describe it with the multiplication factor $k$, the average number of neutrons from one fission that cause another: with $k = 1$ the reaction is steady ("critical"), with $k > 1$ it grows — with $k = 2$ the number of fissions doubles at every generation, so that after ten generations one fission has become $2^{10} = 1{,}024$.

Enrico Fermi collected his Nobel Prize in Stockholm in December 1938 and did not return to Italy, where the racial laws threatened his Jewish wife, Laura. In Chicago he built **Chicago Pile-1**, a stack of graphite and uranium under the stands of a university sports ground. On 2 December 1942 the pile went critical: the first controlled, self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction. Arthur Compton reported the success by telephone in an improvised code: the Italian navigator had landed in the New World. Less than three years later came Hiroshima.

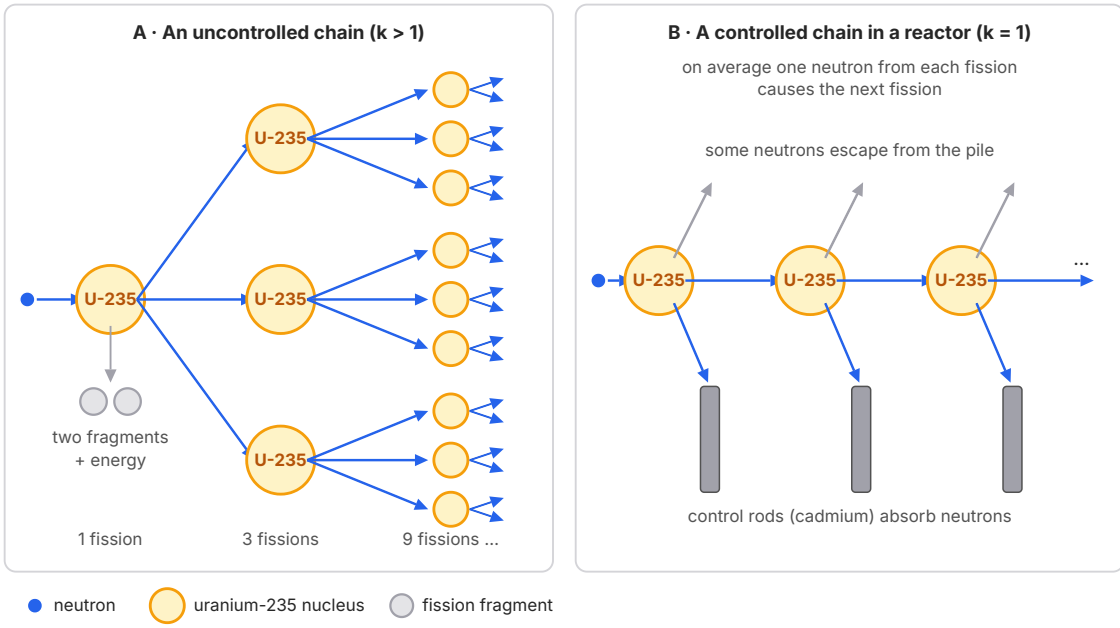



**Figura 12.4** A nuclear chain reaction (simplified, not to scale). A: each fission of a uranium-235 nucleus releases neutrons that cause new fissions, so the number grows from one generation to the next (k > 1); three neutrons are drawn per fission, the real average is about 2.5. B: in a reactor such as Chicago Pile-1, control rods absorb some neutrons and others escape, so that on average one neutron from each fission causes the next (k = 1).

**DA RICORDARE**

**For the exam.** Starting point: the three slogans of the Party in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* —

**WAR IS PEACE**
**FREEDOM IS SLAVERY**
**IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH**

- **Another English author:** Huxley's *Brave New World* — control by pleasure instead of fear; or Margaret Atwood (chapter 15).
- **An Italian author:** Gramsci and hegemony; the regime's campaign against *Lei*; Calvino's "antilingua".
- **Another subject:** history (totalitarian regimes and propaganda) or philosophy (Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1951).

**SINTESI**

- The Depression of the 1930s hit the old industrial regions of Britain hardest; the **Jarrow March** (October 1936) became the symbol of the "hungry thirties".
- Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and Stalin's USSR are described as **totalitarian** states, a word first used in Italy in 1923; Britain's response to Hitler until 1939 was **appeasement** (Munich, 30 September 1938).
- In the **Spanish Civil War** (1936–39) Italy and Germany supported Franco; volunteers joined the International Brigades; Orwell fought with the POUM militia and was wounded in 1937.
- Britain declared war on 3 September 1939; 1940 brought Churchill, Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain; the **Blitz** (September 1940 – May 1941) killed about 40,000–43,000 civilians.
- The **Holocaust** murdered about six million European Jews; the war ended in Europe on 8 May 1945 and in Asia after the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki; the **Cold War** followed.
- A **dystopia** is an imagined, much worse society that warns about present tendencies; Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) controls people through pleasure, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* through fear.
- **George Orwell** (Eric Arthur Blair, 1903–1950) wrote from experience — Burma, poverty, Spain — and against totalitarianism.
- *Animal Farm* (1945) is a fable and an allegory of a revolution betrayed; its last commandment keeps the word *equal* and reverses its meaning.
- *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) gave English **Newspeak**, **doublethink**, *Big Brother* and *thoughtcrime*; its opening mixes ordinary realism with one impossible detail.
- In "Politics and the English Language" (1946) Orwell links bad prose to political dishonesty and proposes six rules for plain writing.
- The **language of power** hides responsibility through euphemism, the agentless passive, nominalisation, vague abstractions and loaded words; plain English names the agent and the fact.
- Connections: Orwell's Italian militiaman, Gramsci's **hegemony** and the regime's campaign against *Lei*; Picasso's *Guernica*; Turing's **bombe** at Bletchley Park; Fermi's **chain reaction** in Chicago (2 December 1942).

## ESERCIZI

### History and Literature

1. ● What did the Munich Agreement of 30 September 1938 decide?
   - **A.** the end of the Spanish Civil War
   - **B.** that Czechoslovakia must give the Sudetenland to Germany
   - **C.** the creation of NATO
   - **D.** Italy's entry into the war on Germany's side

2. ● With which force did Orwell fight in the Spanish Civil War?
   - **A.** the International Brigades
   - **B.** Franco's Nationalist army
   - **C.** the British Expeditionary Force
   - **D.** the militia of the POUM

3. ●● True or false? Correct the false statements. a) The Blitz began in September 1940. b) Britain declared war on Germany when Germany invaded France. c) *Brave New World* was published after *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. d) The word *doublespeak* appears in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. e) *Animal Farm* was published in August 1945. f) The first controlled nuclear chain reaction took place in Chicago in 1942.

4. ●● Match each work with its author and its date. Works: a) *We* · b) *Brave New World* · c) *Down and Out in Paris and London* · d) *Homage to Catalonia* · e) *Animal Farm*. Authors: Orwell, Huxley, Zamyatin. Dates: 1920–21 (written), 1932, 1933, 1938, 1945.

5. ●● Explain each term in one or two sentences, with an example from the chapter: a) dystopia b) appeasement c) totalitarianism d) doublethink.

6. ●●● Short answer (10–12 lines, 100–130 words): How did Orwell's experience in the Spanish Civil War shape *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*? Give a definition, an example and a link.

### Text Analysis

7. ● In T1, which detail first tells the reader that this world is not ours?
   - **A.** the clocks striking thirteen
   - **B.** the vile wind
   - **C.** the smell of boiled cabbage
   - **D.** the glass doors of Victory Mansions

8. ●● T1. Find in the extract: a) two details that suggest poverty or neglect; b) a phrase which shows that the poster is everywhere; c) a word that draws the reader into the scene; d) a name that says the opposite of what we see.

9. ●● T2. Answer briefly. a) Why does Clover need Benjamin? b) What has happened to the Seven Commandments? c) Why is "more equal" a contradiction? d) In the next paragraph (not printed) the pigs carry whips, buy a wireless and put on Mr Jones's clothes. What does this suggest about them?

10. ●● T3. Paraphrase each of Orwell's six rules in plain words for a fourteen-year-old (one line each).

11. ●●● Write a PEE paragraph (80–100 words): How does Orwell show power working through written words in T1 and T2?

12. ●●● Compare the last commandment of *Animal Farm* with the fascist campaign against *Lei* (section 12.6). What does each show about the relation between power and language? (80–100 words)

### Language

13. ● Name the device in each sentence (euphemism, agentless passive, nominalisation, loaded word). Some sentences contain two. a) *The plant will undergo a rationalisation of its workforce.* b) *Several civilians were hit.* c) *The regime's mouthpiece claimed victory.* d) *Our forces are carrying out the pacification of the area.* e) *Mistakes have been made.*

14. ●● Rewrite in the active, using the agent in brackets. a) *The decision was taken to raise the fees.* (the university) b) *Your application has been rejected.* (the committee) c) *The documents were destroyed.* (the ministry) d) *It has been decided that the trip will be cancelled.* (the school)

15. ●● Turn the nominalisations into verbs and give each sentence a clear subject. a) *The implementation of the new timetable will take place in May.* b) *There has been a reduction in the number of buses.* (the council) c) *Completion of the form is required of all students.* d) *The prevention of accidents is our priority.*

16. ●● Say plainly what each euphemism means. a) *collateral damage* b) *negative growth* c) *let someone go* d) *friendly fire* e) *pass away*

17. ●● Correct the errors. a) ✗ *The mistakes were done by the government.* b) ✗ *It was decided to closing the canteen.* c) ✗ *The informations were hidden from the public.* d) ✗ *Censorship prevented the newspapers to publish the story.* e) ✗ *In 1945 Orwell has published* Animal Farm.

18. ●●● Rewrite this notice in plain English (one or two sentences): *In the event of the occurrence of a fire, it is required that all occupants of the building proceed to the designated assembly point in an orderly fashion, utilising the nearest available exit.*

19. ●● Translate into English. a) Si è deciso di chiudere la biblioteca il sabato. b) Orwell usa parole semplici per dire verità difficili. c) Il regime cercò di cambiare il modo di pensare degli italiani cambiando la loro lingua.

### Vocabulary

20. ● Complete with: *propaganda, censorship, surveillance, dissent, slogan, erase, totalitarian, dictatorship*. a) Spain was a ___ from 1939 to 1975. b) Squealer is a master of ___ . c) In a ___ state, even private life is controlled. d) Wartime ___ removed place names from soldiers' letters. e) The Party tries to ___ inconvenient people from the records. f) A ___ is short, so that people remember it without thinking. g) Telescreens make ___ continuous. h) Any sign of ___ is punished by the Thought Police.

21. ●● Word formation. a) Explain how each word was formed: *doublespeak*, *Orwellian*, *thoughtcrime*, *management-speak*. b) Invent one word with *-speak* and one with *-gate* for your school life, and define them.

22. ●● Collocations. Match each verb with a noun: *spread, impose, express, launch, break, monitor* + *a code, censorship, communications, dissent, propaganda, a campaign*. Then write a sentence with three of them about the period 1936–1945.

### Writing and Speaking

23. ●●● **Writing.** Rewrite this school notice in plain English (100–130 words) and add a note of about 60 words explaining your changes.
*Students are hereby reminded that, in accordance with the regulations governing work-based learning placements, the submission of the attendance record form is mandatory upon the completion of each placement period. Forms must be duly signed by the host organisation's designated tutor and returned to the school office no later than five working days subsequent to the conclusion of the placement. Failure to submit the documentation within the prescribed timeframe may result in the hours in question not being recognised for the purposes of the student's overall placement requirement. In instances where the host tutor is unavailable to provide a signature, students are advised to notify the school's placement coordinator without delay in order that alternative arrangements may be made. Students are further reminded that forms which have been altered or which are incomplete cannot be accepted. Any queries in relation to the above should be addressed to the coordinator.*

24. ●● **Speaking.** Your partner says: *"If you've got nothing to hide, you've got nothing to fear."* Challenge the argument politely for two minutes, using at least four phrases from Tabella 12.7.

### Towards INVALSI

25. ● (B1) Listening: Who's Watching? Choose the correct answer. a) How many screens does Sam have in his room? A two · B three · C four · D five. b) Who calls the devices people buy freely "the Huxley version"? A Aoife · B Callum · C Giulia · D Sam. c) What did Callum's class use location data for? A to catch criminals · B to map how people move around Edinburgh · C to sell advertising · D to plan a new hospital. d) What does Aoife's team tag with GPS? A seals · B sharks · C whales · D seabirds.

26. ●● (B2) Listening. True, false or not given? a) Sam's seminar group said the devices had been forced on them. b) The location data Callum used was anonymous. c) Callum's class shared its results with the city council. d) For Aoife, the main difference between the people and the seals is consent. e) Giulia spent more than five hours on her phone the day before the call. f) Giulia remembered giving three apps permission to use her location.

27. ●● (B1) Listening. Answer in no more than four words. a) Who is with Giulia during the call? b) What did Sam's mother give him? c) What phrase does Sam call loaded? d) What will everyone switch off next month? e) Who will chair the next call?

28. ●● (B2) Reading. Read the text and complete the sentences with no more than three words from it.
*Bletchley Park is a Victorian country house in Buckinghamshire, in a town that is now part of Milton Keynes. In 1939 it became the home of the Government Code and Cypher School, and the codebreakers worked first in the house and then in wooden huts built in the gardens. The work was so secret that most people who did it told nobody, not even their families, for about thirty years. In January 1945, at the peak of the effort, almost 9,000 people were working at Bletchley and its outstations, and about three-quarters of them were women. Some were mathematicians and linguists; many operated the bombes or typed and sorted messages. Bletchley also built Colossus, an electronic machine designed by the engineer Tommy Flowers to attack a different German cipher, not Enigma. Today the park is a museum.*
a) Before the huts were built, the codebreakers worked in ___ . b) Most of the codebreakers kept their work secret for ___ . c) In January 1945 the number of people at Bletchley and its outstations was ___ . d) About ___ of the staff were women. e) Colossus was built to attack a cipher that was ___ .

### Towards the Exam

29. ●●● Starting point: *a huge painting in black, white and grey; a screaming horse, a mother holding her dead child, a broken sword, a lamp held out of a window; painted in Paris in 1937*. Identify the work, then talk for 3 minutes and link it to two other subjects.

## PER APPROFONDIRE

- [SAN] A. Sanders, *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*: the chapter on literature from 1920 to 1945, with Huxley and Orwell.
- [NOR] S. Greenblatt (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, vol. F: the selections from Orwell, with "Politics and the English Language".
- [WIL] R. Williams, *Culture and Society 1780–1950*: the chapter on George Orwell.
- [HOB] E. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes*: the chapters on the fall of liberalism, on the Second World War and on the Cold War.
- [BRA] M. Bradbury, *The Modern British Novel*: the chapters on the novel of the 1930s and 1940s.
- [ABR] M. H. Abrams, G. G. Harpham, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*: the entries "utopias and dystopias", "allegory" (fable) and "satire".
- [SWA] M. Swan, *Practical English Usage*: the entries on the passive and on formal and informal style.

# Glossario del capitolo

**Appeasement**
*politica di pacificazione* — the British policy of the late 1930s of accepting some of Hitler's demands in order to avoid war.

**Bombe**
*bomba (macchina crittoanalitica)* — the electromechanical machine designed by Alan Turing at Bletchley Park to find the settings of the Enigma cipher.

**Chain reaction**
*reazione a catena* — a process in which each nuclear fission releases neutrons that cause further fissions.

**Cold War**
*guerra fredda* — the long rivalry (1947–1991) between the United States and the Soviet Union, fought without direct battle between them.

**Crib**
*parola probabile* — in codebreaking, a piece of plain text that is guessed to appear in an enciphered message.

**Doublespeak**
*doppio linguaggio* — language that deliberately disguises or reverses the meaning of what it describes.

**Doublethink**
*bipensiero* — in Orwell's novel, the ability to hold two contradictory beliefs and accept both.

**Dystopia**
*distopia* — an imagined society, usually in the future, much worse than ours, created to warn about present tendencies.

**Euphemism**
*eufemismo* — a mild or vague word used instead of a direct one that might be painful or embarrassing.

**Hegemony**
*egemonia* — in Gramsci's thought, the power of a ruling group based on consent and on making its view of the world seem natural.

**International Brigades**
*Brigate internazionali* — units of foreign volunteers who fought for the Spanish Republic in 1936–1938.

**Lateral reading**
*lettura laterale* — checking an online source by leaving it and seeing what other reliable sources say about it.

**Loaded word**
*parola connotata* — a word that carries a judgement and pushes the listener towards an opinion.

**Neologism**
*neologismo* — a new word, or a new meaning of an existing word.

**Newspeak**
*neolingua* — the official language of Oceania in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, designed to make rebellious thought impossible.

**Nuclear fission**
*fissione nucleare* — the splitting of a heavy nucleus, such as uranium-235, into two lighter nuclei, with the release of energy and neutrons.

**Plain English**
*linguaggio chiaro* — clear writing that its intended reader can understand the first time.

**Totalitarianism**
*totalitarismo* — a system in which one party and its leader aim at total control of the state and society.

# Soluzioni

**1.** B.

**2.** D (the POUM militia, an anti-Stalinist Marxist party; not the International Brigades).

**3.** a) T. b) F: Britain declared war on 3 September 1939, after Germany invaded **Poland** (1 September). c) F: *Brave New World* appeared in 1932, seventeen years before *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). d) F: the novel has *Newspeak* and *doublethink*; *doublespeak* was formed later. e) T (17 August 1945). f) T (Chicago Pile-1, 2 December 1942).

**4.** a) Zamyatin, 1920–21 (written) · b) Huxley, 1932 · c) Orwell, 1933 · d) Orwell, 1938 · e) Orwell, 1945.

**5.** Model answers. a) A **dystopia** is an imagined society, usually in the future, much worse than ours, written to warn about present tendencies: Oceania in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. b) **Appeasement** was the British policy of accepting some of Hitler's demands to avoid war, as at Munich in 1938. c) **Totalitarianism** is a system in which one party and its leader aim at total control of state and society through ideology, propaganda and terror: Nazi Germany, Stalin's USSR. d) **Doublethink** is holding two contradictory beliefs and accepting both, like knowing the Party changes the past and believing it does not.

**6.** *Traccia.* Definition: in Spain (1936–37) Orwell saw a revolution betrayed and the truth manipulated. Example: he fought with the POUM, was wounded, and saw his party suppressed and slandered by communist propaganda; newspapers reported events he had witnessed falsely. *Animal Farm* turns this into a fable of a revolution taken over by a dictator (Napoleon) who rewrites the rules; *Nineteen Eighty-Four* imagines a state in which the rewriting of history (the Ministry of Truth) is total. Link: "Why I Write" (1946) says his serious work since 1936 was against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism; *Homage to Catalonia* (1938) is the bridge between experience and fiction.

**7.** A.

**8.** a) boiled cabbage; old rag mats; the gritty dust that blows in with Winston (any two). b) "On each landing … the poster with the enormous face gazed from the wall" (or "too large for indoor display"). c) *you* ("the eyes follow you about when you move"). d) Victory Mansions.

**9.** a) Her sight is failing, and she could never read well; Benjamin can read. b) They have been rewritten one by one and are now replaced by a single commandment. c) *Equal* is absolute: things are equal or not, so there can be no degrees of equality. d) The pigs have become the new masters, adopting the habits and even the clothes of the humans they replaced.

**10.** Model: (i) Do not use comparisons you have read many times before. (ii) Choose the short word if it says the same thing. (iii) Cut every word you do not need. (iv) Say who does what (active), not what was done. (v) Use everyday English, not foreign, scientific or specialist words. (vi) If a rule makes your sentence ugly, break the rule.

**11.** Model in the Esempio svolto of section 12.3. Key points: a public written text (caption, commandment); repetition and visibility; fear in T1, falsification of the past in T2; official words contradict reality (Victory Mansions; "equal" animals with masters).

**12.** *Traccia.* Both show power trying to control people by controlling words. The pigs rewrite a principle so that inequality can be stated in the language of equality: the word survives, its meaning is reversed. The fascist campaign imposed *voi* in place of *Lei* because the regime believed that changing forms of address would change attitudes (hierarchy, "Roman" identity). Difference: Orwell's pigs work secretly and change meanings; the regime acted

openly, by order, and many Italians ignored it — an example of the limits of such control.

**13.** a) nominalisation (*rationalisation*) and euphemism (= dismissals). b) agentless passive (who hit them?). c) loaded words (*regime*, *mouthpiece*). d) euphemism and nominalisation (*pacification*). e) agentless passive.

**14.** a) The university decided to raise the fees. b) The committee has rejected your application. c) The ministry destroyed the documents. d) The school has decided to cancel the trip.

**15.** a) We will introduce the new timetable in May. b) The council has reduced (cut) the number of buses. c) All students must complete the form. d) Our priority is to prevent accidents. / We want above all to prevent accidents.

**16.** a) civilians killed or injured, or buildings destroyed, by accident in an attack. b) the economy is shrinking. c) dismiss someone from a job (sack). d) soldiers killed or wounded by their own side. e) die.

**17.** a) Mistakes were **made** (better: The government made mistakes). b) It was decided **to close** the canteen. c) The **information was** hidden (uncountable). d) Censorship prevented the newspapers **from publishing** the story. e) In 1945 Orwell **published** *Animal Farm* (finished time: past simple).

**18.** If there is a fire, leave the building calmly by the nearest exit and go to the meeting point.

**19.** a) It has been decided to close the library on Saturdays. / They have decided to close the library on Saturdays. b) Orwell uses simple words to tell difficult truths. c) The regime tried to change the way Italians thought by changing their language.

**20.** a) dictatorship b) propaganda c) totalitarian d) censorship e) erase f) slogan g) surveillance h) dissent.

**21.** a) *doublespeak*: a blend of *Newspeak* + *doublethink*; *Orwellian*: eponym, Orwell + *-ian*; *thoughtcrime*: compound noun, thought + crime; *management-speak*: noun + combining form *-speak* ("jargon of"). b) Open answers, e.g. *teacher-speak* (the special phrases of report cards); *Wi-Figate* (a scandal about the school network).

**22.** spread propaganda · impose censorship · express dissent · launch a campaign · break a code · monitor communications. Example: *Both sides spread propaganda, the government imposed censorship on the press, and at Bletchley Park codebreakers worked to break the Enigma code.*

**23.** Model rewrite (about 110 words): *After each work placement (PCTO), you must hand in your attendance form. Ask your tutor at the host organisation to sign it, then bring it to the school office within five working days of the end of the placement. If you are late, the school may not count those hours towards the total you need. If your tutor cannot sign the form, tell the placement coordinator at once, so that we can find another solution. We cannot accept forms that are incomplete or have been changed. If you have any questions, please ask the coordinator.* Note (about 60 words): active verbs with *you* and *we*; everyday words for *submission*, *subsequent to*, *prescribed timeframe*; empty phrases cut (*hereby*, *duly*); facts in the order a student needs them. Assessment: all information kept · clear agent · plain words · length · a note that explains.

**24.** Model answer: *Okay, I see why people say that, but I'm not convinced. What's the evidence that only guilty people need privacy? Isn't "nothing to hide" a bit of a loaded phrase? It assumes privacy is about crime. I don't hide anything when I close the bathroom door, but I still close it. And are those really the only two options — total surveillance or crime? Data collected for one purpose can be used for another, and the rules about what is "wrong" can change, as they did in the 1930s. So fair point that cameras can help investigations, but I'd want limits and clear rules about who sees the data.*

**25.** a) C b) A c) B d) A.

**26.** a) F: someone pointed out that they had bought the devices themselves; nobody forced them. b) T. c) NG (Callum does not say what happened to the results). d) T. e) T (five hours and twelve minutes). f) F (she did not remember giving permission).

**27.** a) Marta. b) a smart speaker. c) nothing to hide. d) (their) location. e) Giulia.

**28.** a) the house. b) about thirty years. c) almost 9,000 (people). d) three-quarters. e) not Enigma.

**29.** *Traccia.* Picasso, *Guernica* (1937), painted in response to the bombing of the Basque town on 26 April 1937 by German and Italian aircraft supporting Franco; shown at the Spanish Republic's pavilion in Paris; now in Madrid. Monochrome like a newspaper photograph; victims only, no enemy shown. Links: **English** — Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* and the Spanish Civil War as the moral test of the 1930s; **history** — the Spanish Civil War and the involvement of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany; the Blitz and the bombing of civilians in the Second World War; **art/physics** — from aerial bombing to the atomic bomb (Fermi, Chicago Pile-1, Hiroshima). Close with the question of how art responds to violence against civilians.