
UNIT 16 READING THE NOVEL

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16.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this Unit it is expected that you will be able to:

- describe the main events in the novel
- begin to understand the nature of the society of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*
- describe the relationship between Winston and Julia
- outline the role of O'Brien
- describe "Newspeak"
- identify the rebels who are imprisoned
- comment upon the nature of censorship carried out in the Ministry of Truth

- understand the purpose of the telescreen
- see the ambiguity of the ending.

We hope that you will approach this only as a working summary and read the complete novel. While reading the novel, pay attention to the language, to the manner in which the world of the senses is being rendered inaccurate and redundant, the uses to which science is put and the general dilapidated condition of the life described. Also pay attention to the class-structure.

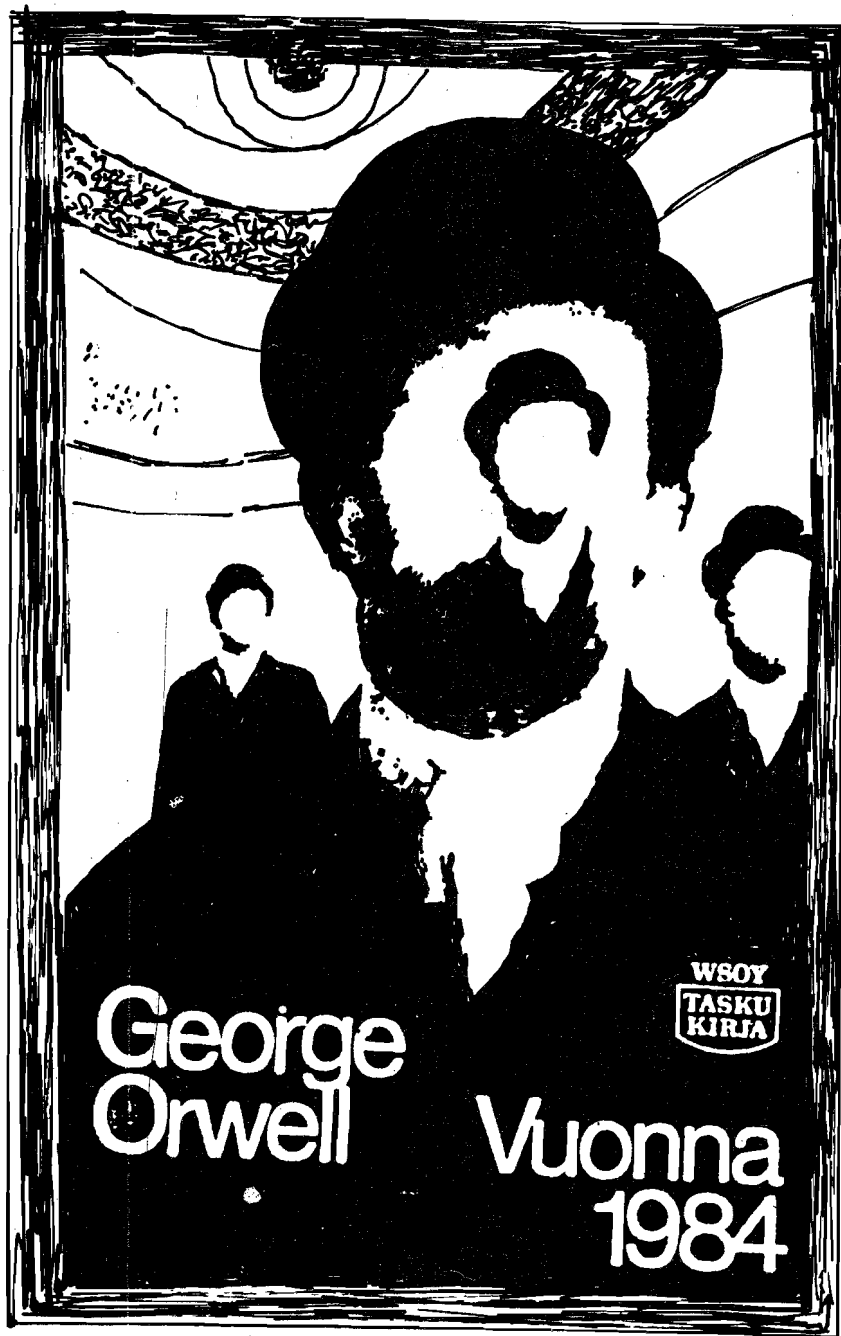
16.1 INTRODUCTION

First published in 1949, George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a novel which can be read in many ways. It is unlike realistic novels as it projects the narrative into the future and adopts a narrative point of view which places Winston Smith at the centre. The world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is seen through the consciousness of the main protagonist, Winston Smith. The novel can be read as a dystopian (an anti-utopian) view of the future, or as a war-novel, or as one which expresses the experience of total alienation, or as a novel which questions and destroys individualism. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, though ostensibly concerned with political ideas and ideology, is in reality concerned with philosophical questions which relate to the nature of truth, of reality, and of the self.

Divided into three unequal parts, it is the story of a post revolutionary society, the Revolution being identified as a Socialist Revolution in the period after the Second World War. The countries of the world are organized in three federations, Oceania, Eastasia and Eurasia. Winston Smith lives in London now known as Airstrip One which is located in Oceania. Conditions of emergency prevail as these countries are perpetually at war with each other. The only change that occurs is in the nature of their alliances.

Of the three parts of the novel, Part I introduces us to Winston Smith, his living conditions, the problems he faces in trying to understand his world, his desire for the past and the uncertainty of the present. Part I also introduces us to a number of important terms used in the novel like thoughtcrime, thought police, doublethink, Newspeak and Ingsoc. Part II is the middle section and the longest part where Winston enters into a relationship with Julia and they build a private little world of romance and domesticity in a hired room over a bookshop. Politically they establish contact with the members of the Inner Party and have access to the book which lays down the political ideas of the party. Part III, deals with the capture of Winston and Julia, their imprisonment and the physical torture which leads to their confessions and destroys almost everything they have been trying to achieve—love, privacy, identity, integrity and a relationship. The novel ends in Winston's death.

Like the three parts of the novel, and the three geographical units, the political world is also divided into three units: the Inner Party, the Outer Party, and the Proles. The world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a curious mixture of the old and the new, of primitive living conditions and the most highly developed and sophisticated technological equipment. Everything which is needed for comfort is outdated and worn out, while everything which is needed for control and the exercise of power is developed to perfection. While reading the novel, pay attention to the descriptions of nature and to words and adjectives which relate to the senses like touch and smell, and also to the contrast between instinct and control. A chapterwise summary is being provided so that you may be able to recapitulate the details.



Nineteen Eighty-Four in Finnish, published 1967

16.2 Part I

Chapter I

The novel opens on a cold day in April, with Winston Smith, a man of about thirty-nine years of age walking up seven flights of steps to his flat on the eighth storey of an old, dilapidated building. The lift is perpetually out of order. There is a strong smell of boiled cabbage all around. And there are posters everywhere with a huge face looking down on the passers by. These posters carry one inscription: BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU.

Winston Smith is living in London which is *Airstrip One*; several of the buildings are severely damaged because of bombing. The country is managed by four major ministries: The Ministry of Truth whose main function is to fabricate records and constantly alter

them to suit political purposes, the Ministry of Peace which deals with war, the Ministry of Love which concerns itself with law and order, the Ministry of Plenty which is concerned with creating shortages.



The world of 1984

At the time when the novel begins, Oceania is busy preparing for a Hate Week. During this period the focus is going to be on generating hatred, on entering into a frenzy and denouncing your friends. In short it means participating in a communal exercise of hatred. Winston, in search of some privacy and certainty decides to keep a diary. When he enters his flat, it is with the hope of finding some peace. However, there is a telescreen installed in his flat as it is in every other flat and most public places. This telescreen not only relays messages, and gives directions but it also acts like a watchful observer and monitors people's behaviour. It is difficult to escape the telescreen. Winston Smith seeks a corner of the room which does not fall within its line of vision so that he may sit down and write his diary. The act of writing necessitates the use of a pen, which is an outdated tool in 1984 and also emphasizes the need to communicate.

16.2.1 Chapter 2

While thus engaged in communication with himself, Winston is interrupted by the ringing of his doorbell. Mrs. Parsons, one of his neighbours, has come to seek his help for some repair in the plumbing system. She is the wife of Parsons who is a stupid, slow drudge, a man who has not outgrown adolescent attitudes. The Parsons's flat is in a dilapidated condition, clearly indicating the poor standard of maintenance in these residential buildings. The Parsons's children represent the violence and the aggression of the younger people who are well-trained in the Party's policy of minimizing individual freedom. They

play at catching spies and enjoy watching the public hangings of Eurasian prisoners which are carried out every month.

Surrounded and hedged in by these intrusions, Winston Smith is worried about the destruction of the past, about the timelessness which their existence has now come to represent. He is also worried about the diminishing area of privacy. He realizes "Nothing was your own, except the few cubic centimetres inside your skull."

16.2.2 Chapter 3

Winston Smith is lost in the memories of the past, memories which he realizes are gradually becoming less and less certain, specially as there is no stability in the world outside. The correspondence between external records and internal memory is important. He is lost in dreaming of the time when he was a child and under the protection of his mother. He dreams of the Golden Country. These dreams are isolated, unconnected happenings in his present life which is overburdened by economic constraints.

16.2.3 Chapter 4

Working in the Ministry of Truth, Winston uses a new speech which seeks to limit language and is called Newspeak. His job is to bring the past in accord with the present. Whenever there is any change in policy all the old references to it in newspapers, books and records are altered to suit the new policy. A large number of people in the Ministry of Truth are engaged in this constant alteration of the past. Past records, names, happenings are all pushed into oblivion. Similarly at the human level, purges are carried out in the Party, and people who are no longer politically useful are got rid of. They become non-existent.

16.2.4 Chapter 5

The fifth chapter introduces us to another aspect of Winston Smith's life and we see him in the building canteen during his lunch hour where he is accosted by Syme, an intelligent and very articulate Party member. Syme is engaged in the preparation of the Eleventh Edition of the Newspeak Dictionary. Their conversation at first is about the shortage of razor blades and about public hangings, but later they begin to discuss the complexities of Newspeak. Syme, an authority on it, enjoys coining new words which destroy language: "It's a beautiful thing, the destruction of words." The whole aim of Newspeak is to "narrow the range of thought". Winston is afraid that an intelligent person like Syme will not survive, he will soon be "vaporized", that is eliminated. Syme has no saving stupidity around him.

16.2.5 Chapter 6

The diary which Winston Smith has been attempting to write, right from the beginning of the novel, finally begins to take shape in this chapter. Without the help of external records, he finds it difficult to be accurate about time, yet he tentatively dates it as April 4, 1984. The urge to write and to communicate at some level can no longer be repressed. Winston Smith wants to write a diary as a constant reminder to himself that he is a human being. He puts down his experience of having visited a prostitute. Visiting a prostitute is illegal, but this illegality is often overlooked. Winston's thoughts of this experience lead him to recall his shortlived marriage with Katherine, his wife who was a perfect Party member in every sense. Katherine was frigid and cold and did not enjoy sex. In fact the main purpose of the Party was to render sex unenjoyable, to take away all pleasure from the relationship of marriage, Katherine's attitude was an embodiment of this desire. Sex was meant for procreation and for nought else.

16.2.6 Chapter 7

Once again the constant refrain of shortages is carried forward to this chapter. Almost everything is in short supply reminding one of war-time shortages. From razor-blades to cooking pans, things are in short supply. There are two main events which take place here. One is Winston's awareness of the section of society classified as 'proles' (from the word proletariat). They are "natural inferiors" and are outside the Party. They are almost like

animals and thus left free to indulge in their instinctive response to life. They live less restricted lives and are less under the purview of the telescreen. "If there is hope, it lies in the proles" becomes an added refrain in the novel. It highlights one of the main themes.

The second event is Winston's awareness of the constant falsification which takes place in the Ministry of Truth. He remembers three Party members - Jones, Aaronson and Rutherford who had disappeared in 1965 and subsequently resurfaced. Later when Winston had chanced to visit Chestnut Tree Cafe, he had seen the three men in the cafe and two of them had broken noses (an indication that they had been beaten and tortured). Soon after they were rearrested, they confessed their betrayal and were executed. Years later Winston had come across a photograph in which they were at a Party function in New York. The evidence of the photograph proved that their confessions were forced and were lies. It was a "fragment of the abolished past". It was this denial of stability and objectivity which worried Winston. He was beginning to understand how the falsification took place, but he did not understand the ultimate motive, the why of it.

Winston Smith realized that the Party wanted one to disbelieve "the evidence of one's senses". The "heresy of heresies was common sense". He is bewildered by the fluctuations in the external world. Freedom is not always the freedom to think what one likes, but to believe everyday truisms, to believe the evidence of one's senses. "Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four."

16.2.7 Chapter 8

This chapter continues Winston's belief in the proles. They live in a world of chance, buying lottery tickets and placing their faith in them. Yet their uncertain world has greater continuity, than the highly controlled world of the Party. Wandering through the prole area, Winston is curious to find out about the pre-Revolution days and wishes to corroborate the information he has gathered from history books. He visits a bookshop and the owner of the bookshop shows him a room which has an old mahogany bed and a picture framed above the bed. He recites parts of an old nursery rhyme awakening in Winston the desire to know the complete rhyme. Thus fragments of the past float into his mind making him restless.

Exercise I

- 1. Can you describe the weather at the opening of the novel? Describe some of the physical details.

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- 2. Why does Winston wish to maintain a diary?

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3. Why is the past important to Winston?

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4. Describe the nature of Winston's work.

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5. Who was Katherine? Does she appear in the novel? What kind of a person is she?

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16.3 Part II

Chapter 1

In this chapter, Winston meets a girl who for some time had been trying to catch his attention and who one day stumbles and falls right into his arms. As he helps her to get up she passes him a slip of paper. Winston had suspected the girl to be a member of the Thought Police but her profession of love indicates that she is not. She works in the Fiction department where romantic stories are churned out endlessly to provide escapist literature designed to stunt intelligence at a certain level. Winston on receiving her note experiences a restlessness combined with a desire to meet her. But in the tightly controlled

world of Big Brother it is not an easy task to do so. They try and meet fleetingly in public places, carefully avoiding the telescreen.

16.3.1 Chapter 2

Winston and Julia arrange an outing to the countryside where they can talk at length and where there are no telescreens. The possibility of hidden microphones cannot be totally ruled out but with care they can avoid detection. This trip out into the country is like being in the Golden country, the paradise of their dreams, the utopia of their conscious desires. Both feel that this act of defiance of the authorities, this act of rebellion is a political act. And as a political act it asserts the supremacy of the animal instincts which cannot be controlled by rational thought.

16.3.2 Chapter 3

Julia is far more practical than Winston. She is the one to take the initiative in arranging their meetings. She has learned to hide and control her feelings. As member of the Junior Anti-Sex League she understands the official policy towards sex and love. Sex is sanctioned only for procreative purposes and love relationships are discouraged. Suppressed love is controlled energy. By controlling love, the bottled up energy can easily be redirected towards hatred. Through hatred, family loyalties can be subverted. Children learn to spy on their parents. Julia and Winston by trying to defy the Party line try to build a secret world which they share. Winston is of the view that if "human beings remain human, death and life are the same thing".

16.3.3 Chapter 4

Winston is attracted by the possibility of hiring the room above Mr. Charrington's shop. This room, once hired, becomes a meeting place for them. Julia brings real coffee (from the black market), and uses lipstick and scent to satisfy her feminine need for beauty. These are the things not available in the open, and Party members do not use cosmetics or dress up in frocks. There is a picture of a church building and Winston associates the room with the half-remembered rhyme:

Oranges and lemons, say the bells of St. Clement's
You owe me three farthings, say the bells of St. Martin's

16.3.4 Chapter 5

One day Winston realizes that Syme has disappeared. He has simply vanished. The list of the chess committee members does not include his name. He has ceased to be. He is non-existent. This only strengthens Winston's will to find some meaning in his existence. The Party appears to be increasingly ruthless. By leading life at a private level, he is aware that he is heading for this own destruction. He is interested in rebellion, in the continuity of defiance. But Julia is interested in a personal life and the fulfilment of personal desire. For her there is no higher political thought while Winston strives to understand the political motives.

16.3.5 Chapter 6

This is a short chapter but a very significant one. O'Brien who is an Inner Party member invites Winston home by asking him to come and fetch the Tenth edition of the Dictionary. This visit would finally help Winston to establish contact with the Inner Party.

16.3.6 Chapter 7

Winston dreams of his mother and recalls his early life. He remembers the disappearance of his father, the sudden change and passivity in his mother. He also remembers his younger sister. One day he had run away with her share of the chocolate and on his return had found them both absent. He was not quite sure as to what had happened to them, and whether they were dead or alive. Winston still remembers his mother with a great deal of reverence. She had possessed a kind of nobility. The Party had destroyed not only family relationships and the freedom of the individual but had tried to persuade people that "mere impulses, mere feelings, were of no account". By thinking of the past, Winston

becomes aware of the changes which have taken place. He also realizes that the proles had remained human, outside the control of the Party. Perhaps if one could adhere to private loyalty, one could stay human.



'Big Brother is watching you'

16.3.7 Chapter 8

The visit to O'Brien finally takes place. Julia and Winston visit him and he invites them in. O'Brien is able to turn off the telescreen which is a rare privilege allowed to the Inner Party members. He also serves them real wine. Ordinarily only synthetic wine, gin or coffee are available. And so used is Winston to the synthetic products that he is unable to enjoy the real stuff. Winston is excited about this meeting with O'Brien. He tells him about his disbelief in the Party's policies, about the belief that there is an underground movement, a Brotherhood, aiming to overthrow the Party. O'Brien gives them the book which explains the power structures.

16.3.8 Chapter 9

It is in this chapter that the relationship between Julia and Winston works itself to a climax. One afternoon Winston reads the book which he has borrowed from O'Brien: *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, and on Julia's arrival explains to her the political motivation behind the continuous war, the enforced shortages and poverty, and the sophisticated use to which science is put in the Party's effort to alter the past and control the human mind. In all the useful arts the world is either standing still or going backwards. The book goes on to explain that inequality is the law of life. It is the price of civilization. It outlines the class system which is not hereditary and is not based on birth. Winston realizes the total negation of human instincts on which the power of the Party is based. And in this moment of realization, as he stands admiring the washerwoman who is hanging clothes to dry, a woman from the Proles, a woman who represents life as opposed to the death represented by the Party - as Winston realizes this, the Thought Police overtakes them. Their secret is out. They are caught. Mr. Charrington, the kind shop owner, is a member of the Thought Police. There is a telescreen hidden behind the picture in the frame. The private world of emotions and feelings, the world of freedom is at an end.

Exercise II

1. Who is Julia? Why is Winston suspicious of her?

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2. Describe the outing in the countryside.

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3. How does the Party view sex? What is the function of the Anti-Sex League?

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4. Why does Winston want to hire a room?

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5. What kind of a life do Winston and Julia build for themselves in the room?

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6. Who is O'Brien? Describe the first meeting between O'Brien and Winston and Julia.

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7. What do the proles symbolize?

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8. Give an account of Winston's childhood from your reading of his fragmentary recollections.

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16.4 Part III

Chapter 1

This chapter deals with Winston's imprisonment. Winston is not aware where he has been imprisoned. It appears to be in the Ministry of Love where people are brought if they had committed any crime. There are two kinds of prisoners - ordinary prisoners and Party or political prisoners. The political prisoners are tortured. Winston is hungry as he hasn't been given any food; the room has four telescreens so that the prisoners have no privacy and cannot eat any hidden food. Winston meets some of his old friends and neighbours in the prison, people who have been caught committing some kind of heresy. There is Ampleforth whose crime is to have left the word 'God' in a revised version of Kipling's poems. There is Parsons, the stupid, stodgy Parsons brought here on the charge of thoughtcrime. He is guilty of having said 'Down with Big Brother' in his sleep. And this crime was detected and reported by his children. Then there is an old woman bearing the name Smith and old enough to be his mother. Winston as he tries to adjust to his captivity, realizes that this is the place where there is no darkness. Hidden lights flood the room. There is no difference between night and day.

Winston meets O'Brien here also but soon realizes that O'Brien is not a prisoner--he is the person in control of the prisoners.

16.4.1 Chapter 2

Endless beatings go on—with fists, boots, truncheons. Winston's intellectual self is determined to hold on to his inner self and not to betray Julia. O'Brien is the inquisitor and questions Winston's memory of the past. He wants Winston to realize that human memory is unreliable. He tortures him repeatedly and through this torture wishes to distance him from empirical reality. There comes a point when Winston begins to doubt whether he had actually seen Aaronson and Rutherford in the Chestnut Tree Cafe, or had ever seen their photographs. He begins to doubt the evidence of his own eyes. No longer do two plus two make four; they make five. The great advance in science is being put to use here in the torture chamber, in Room 101. The aim of torture is not mere punishment, nor is it simply to make Winston, or others like him, confess. But the aim is to change them, to correct their view of reality, and their perception of the past.

16.4.2 Chapter 3

The long dialogues with O'Brien and the torture sessions continue. O'Brien spells out the threefold aim of the torture. It is learning, understanding, and acceptance. Winston has learnt that he is wrong. He has understood the nature of power, but he has not truly accepted it. O'Brien has set upon himself the task of proving that human nature can be changed. Winston has changed in his appearance. He is a shadow of his former self and looks starved and emaciated. He is bald and grey, his nose is crooked, broken by the beatings he has received. O'Brien points out this change and tells him that he has betrayed everybody and every value he has ever had. Winston replies that he has not betrayed Julia.

16.4.3 Chapter 4

Winston is allowed some respite. He is allowed to put on some flesh, he gets fatter and stronger. He is also allowed cigarettes and a pencil butt. In almost everything he has capitulated and has accepted the contradictions of the world of Oceania. He is waiting to be shot, so that he can die. But in all this he experiences hallucinations of Julia's presence.

16.4.4 Chapter 5

Once again Winston is taken to Room 101 and this time the nature of torture is different. A cage of rats is to be brought and opened on his face, so that the rats can gnaw at his face. Winston is mortally afraid of rats, they represent one terror he possibly cannot withstand and as the dreaded moment draws closer, he screams "Do it to Julia". This is the final betrayal. His inner self is completely violated. He has failed to resist this last onslaught on his private self.

16.4.5 Chapter 6

After the final betrayal, Winston is released. He spends almost all his time in the Chestnut Tree Cafe watching the telescreen and drinking gin. He is conscious of the fact that they—the Party—can get inside you, that two plus two do not necessarily make four. He is conscious of the fact that the human body cannot stand too much of torture and there is a point at which human resistance breaks down. Once he meets Julia. Her body gives the appearance of a dead body, rigid and stiff. No longer is there any affection between them. Julia tells him that she has betrayed him, and he also confesses his act of betrayal of her. After that it is not the same. The ability to feel and to love are destroyed and the inner being is completely violated.

Thus the last hope is lost. Winston waits for his death which still defies him. It is only when he wills himself to love Big Brother that he is shot. The bullet enters his head, and he is finally able to escape life. The end is ambiguous. It is murder-cum-suicide. Death is possible through transformation. It is self-defeating. If the purpose of life is to negate life then it is an irrational world. It is the final message, the warning as to the direction towards which humankind is heading.

Exercise III

- 1. Write a note on the different people Winston meets in the prison.

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- 2. What is Room No. 101?

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- 3. Describe the final capitulation of Winston.

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- 4. Why does the Party wish to destroy individual will?

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5. **Why is Winston not killed?**

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6. **Describe his life after he has been released.**

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7. **Write a note on his meeting with Julia after his release.**

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8. **Write a short note on Newspeak.**

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9. How do you react to Winston's death?

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10. Is it possible to build a civilization on fear and hatred?
Discuss the possibility keeping in mind Winston's and O'Brien's arguments.

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16.5 LET US SUM UP

In this Unit, we have studied a chapterwise summary of the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. This has given us an idea of the main events that take place in the novel. It has also introduced us to the main characters: Winston, Julia, O'Brien, Big Brother and others. We have seen how individuals are controlled in a totalitarian state by the use of various apparatuses: the Thought Police, torture chambers, telescreens, censorship, Newspeak.

We hope that you have read the novel as well as its not a long text. Now you are ready to analyze the different aspects of this text in the next three Units.

16.6 GLOSSARY

dilapidated	-	broken and old; falling to pieces
synthetic	-	artificial
oligarchy	-	government or rule by a few, (often) for their own interests
heresy	-	holding a belief against what is accepted
truncheon		short thick stick carried as a weapon by policemen

inquisitor	-	a person carrying out an inquiry especially one who has little regard for the rights of the people
empirical	-	based on practical experience
emaciated	-	very thin
respite	-	rest, during a time of great effort, pain or trouble
capitulate	-	yield; surrender
hallucination	-	something that is imagined although it is not really there, often as a result of a drug or an illness of the mind.

16.7 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

Exercise I

1. Refer to 16.2
2. Refer to 16.2
3. Refer to 16.2.1
4. Refer to 16.2.3
5. Refer to 16.2.5

Exercise II

1. Refer to 16.3
2. Refer to 16.3.1
3. Refer to 16.3.2
4. Refer to 16.3.3
5. Refer to 16.3.3
6. Refer to 16.3.5 and 16.3.7
7. Refer to 16.3.8
8. Refer to 16.3.6

Exercise III

If you have read Section 16.4 of this Unit and Part III of the novel, you should be able to answer these questions easily.