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# *Speaking about Newspeak*

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*Teaching Democracy, Critical Thinking and  
Language through Nineteen Eighty-Four*

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## **Abstract**

**Title:** Speaking about Newspeak - Teaching Democracy, Critical Thinking and Language through *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

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**Abstract:** This essay presents how to use George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a literary intergrated project of teach democracy, critical thinking, English language skills and critical language study in the English 6 EFL classroom in upper secondary school in Sweden. This literary study is done through the lens of critical pedagogy with an emphasis on the way language influences power and helps dominant groups, in both the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as well as contemporary society, remain in control.

The issue of language as a means of power over thought and actions is highly relevant in schools today, where the curriculum clarifies the importance of problematizing democratic values and critical ability in order to make students autonomous, freethinking members of society. The project is based on relevant pedagogical theory and suggests ways of fulfilling these goals through the use of literary analysis and discussions pertaining to these subjects.

By the end of the lessons, students should not only have the critical ability to stand up for their own values, but have a proficiency in handling different discourses and a knowledge of how their language and that of others influence their everyday communication.

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## Introduction

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* never fails to stay relevant. In the wake of the recent NSA leak by Edward Snowden and the extensive surveillance done by the US government it is easy to draw parallels to the dystopian world of Air Strip One where Big Brother sees everything. The book is still highly relevant in its portrayal of information control and the hidden dangers of totalitarianism. These prophetic qualities have always been exciting to explore. I remember when I first read the book and how it changed my views on not only the oppressive qualities of the ruling party but their use of language to control the population. These themes become more and more important in schools today, where being critical towards the endless stream of information we take part in necessitates bringing these topics up in class. I chose to pursue this through the EFL classroom, where language learning can be integrated with the meeting of culture and values. Teaching English as a foreign language can take many forms. Today there are a multitude of techniques and possible sources of material to choose from. To me it boils down to the ability to fulfill several different points of the curriculum while appealing to students' interests and nourishing development. A key component of any classroom experience is to have multiple levels of learning and synergy. How can we make students more aware of the consequences of sharing information and how might it be used by others? Can we also provoke critical thinking about their own information-related habits, while still learning new aspects of English? My suggestion is to do this through using relevant literature in the classroom.

Thus the aims of this paper are to present ways to use George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a tool in the upper secondary English classroom to teach language, democracy and critical thinking.

The choice of using Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* stems from several factors. Firstly, the relatively futuristic setting enables the pupils to draw comparisons to their own lives. Secondly, it goes into great detail on how the ruling class of the book (the inner party) uses information to dominate the population, thus making it highly relevant while still maintaining the allure of fiction. The themes in the book also make it a basis for discussions about language, class and democracy. Dystopian works also bring the added benefit of enabling a proactive discussion on how to prevent the societal changes that might make the fiction reality.

Thus my claim is that using Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in the EFL classroom might not only make students more proficient English users, but could also help them become more

aware and critical of the use of information and language in today's society as well as learning the democratic values in the curriculum.

In the first chapter I will lay out the pedagogical pros and cons of using literature, and more specifically *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in the classroom and the benefits and complications of doing so. Chapter two will feature a theoretical survey detailing concepts I will deal with in the essay, namely democracy, critical thinking and critical pedagogy. Chapter three will deal more with an in-depth analysis of the different themes taken up by the book and their application in the classroom, as well as an overall introduction to lesson planning. Chapter four will summarize and conclude what the previous chapters brought up and deal with possible outcomes of the project.

### **Previous Research**

Secondary sources will be split into two main categories: Pedagogical theory and discipline literature. The first one is pedagogical theory to understand how and why to use the literature to enhance the learning of the students as well as present viable pedagogical methods to teach democracy, language and critical thinking. Titles I have thus far found highly relevant are Collie and Slater's *Literature in the Language Classroom* (2008) as well as Tricia Hedge's *Teaching and Learning in the Language Classroom* (2000). Collie and Slater's book will primarily be used as a practical source of how to apply the best technique to the lesson plans, but will also contribute to the reasons why to use literature in the classroom. Hedge's work will focus less on the literary aspects and focus more on the pedagogical factors and issues in the application of the proposed lessons. Another title that brings up similar view of literature as well as general ELT is Bo Lundahl's *Engelsk Språkdiraktik: Texter, kommunikation, språkutveckling* [*English language didactics: Texts, communication, language development*] (2012) which is also revised to reflect the goals in the recently published curriculum and syllabus for elementary and upper secondary school.

The second category of critical sources aims to develop the topics of interest brought up in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that could be relevant to my study and therefore useful in the language classroom. My foremost source on this front is Gleason et al.' *On Nineteen Eighty-Four: Orwell and Our Future* (2005) and Peter Stansky et al.' *On Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1983).

To bring the core concepts of democracy, critical ability and language I will use Ayers et al *Teaching Toward Democracy: Educators as Agents of Change* (2010) for the democratic perspective alongside Joe L. Kincheloe's *Critical Pedagogy Primer* (2005) which also will be used to tie together the pedagogical perspectives with these core concepts. To examine

language and its relation to power I will use *Language and Power – Second Edition*(2001) by Norman Fairclough. Lastly to bring up more specific information on critical ability and thinking, John E. McPeck's *Teaching Critical Thinking: Dialogue and Dialectic* (1990) will be used.

# **1. Teaching Nineteen Eighty-Four In the Language Classroom**

## **1.1 On teaching Literature in the Language Classroom**

In today's classroom there are ample opportunities to use a wealth of resources to teach the English language. Textbooks, newspapers, videos and a wealth of media material made available by the internet make the options available to teachers in choosing materials diverse. So why use literature?

Firstly, the curriculum for English defines the well-known four skills that should be learnt in school: reading, writing, speaking and listening. With the use of literature it is possible to teach and help students to learn all of the above skills (Collie & Slater 36). Literature is what Collie and Slater calls "authentic material" (4), meaning material that is made for native speakers by other native speakers and not for explicitly educational purposes. They are therefore, as proposed, a more authentic way of exposing students to the English spoken and written in English speaking countries (Collie & Slater 3). Students at the intended level for the project (English 6) would presumably like to have source material for exercises and discussions come directly from the English speaking world instead of targeted material supplied by educational publishers. Literature has other qualities apart from being authentic material, one being the telling of a story. People have written down their stories for thousands of years. All these stories share the common denominator of "saying something about fundamental human issues, [...] Its relevance moves with the passing of time, but seldom disappears completely" (Collie & Slater 3). Lundahl (403) also mentions the timelessness of literature and describes it as a universal tool that exists in every culture and can speak of people's experiences in different contexts, be it historical or cultural.

Collie and Slater mentions that literature can also help students "focus their attention beyond the more mechanical aspects of the foreign language system" (5). Thus literature can make students see past hard phrases and expressions, while reading literature, since they become "eager to find out what happens as events unfold; he or she feels close to certain characters and share their emotional responses. The language becomes 'transparent'" (6). This 'sharing' of emotion might also help students relate to characters, despite cultural and historical differences. In turn this might enable them to relate to different life situations, social issues and cultural occurrences as mentioned by the Swedish curriculum for English (54).

Thus literature can be used effectively to tell stories from different times and perspectives to broaden students' horizons. This might also as Collie and Slater point out make literature "an

excellent prompt for oral work” and with the addition of actually reading the material and writing about it “a student working with literature is helped with the basic skills of language learning” (5). This synergistic way of teaching is the focus of this essay, as there are several different ways of teaching English, but teaching English alongside other core values from the curriculum can be harder to do.

## **1.2 Why teach *Nineteen-Eighty Four***

If literature is a great way to share different stories and perspectives, why read Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in particular? It is one of the most famous works of dystopian fiction to date and many interesting themes are brought up. According to the recommendations of the syllabus for English 6, students should take part in “[*themes*], motives of film and [*fiction*]; authorship and literary epochs” (55). The syllabus also brings up the importance of learning about different “living conditions, attitudes, values and traditions as well as social, political and cultural circumstances in different contexts.” (54). The book brings up great themes such as truth, rebellion and the importance of language. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* can be used as a tool to illuminate this importance of language on top of bringing up important issues of what constitutes a democracy and how totalitarian societies work. The critical aspects brought up by the book about information control are highly relevant and can be linked to current events like the Manning leak of NSA surveillance routines, which in turn can start a discussion where students get to process how they look at personal freedom, privacy and what should be allowed in a democracy.

The story in itself is rather simple, Winston yearns for freedom and finds solace in his relationship to Julia. They make the mistake of trying to contact the rebel group the Brotherhood but ultimately get captured and betray each other with the story ending of Winston relenting to thought control and embracing the doctrine of the party. As is said in the introduction by Ben Pimlott the saving grace of the book is not the story’s complexity or character portraits, but the richness of its backdrop and the way it is “[...] analyzing and attacking the political system” (Orwell 8). Teaching *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in particular also has the added benefit of not only facilitating a meta-discussion of hidden motivations in the book, it also lends itself to introducing what Hedge refers to as “critical reading”(197). This concept explains how “texts are constructed in certain ways by writers in order to shape the perceptions of readers towards acceptance of the underlying ideology” (197). Hedge continues by mentioning ‘resisting reading’: to have students read a provocative text for the express purpose of raising questions about different values. This is further problematized by

introducing the risk of exposing students to literature with a provocative content that actively tries to persuade the reader (197).

Orwell's story has the benefit of exposing students to this concept by the proxy of the main character instead of having them actively being persuaded by a provocative text. As is mentioned by Hedge however, it is important that teachers are "teaching school students to assert their own cultural values and resist the morality of the text." (197).

### **1.3 Possible Difficulties**

A problem that might occur when using *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in the language classroom is the somewhat demanding level of proficiency required to fully understand the text. Even though Orwell uses a very factual language, it might come across to students as dry and uninspiring. The language is also somewhat dated and as Collie and Slater bring up, there is support for the fact that vocabulary in the dialogues of most literary texts do not reflect the language spoken in English society today, thus leading to less "lexical appropriacy" (5) from a communicative standpoint. They continue to argue that it is appropriate to supply other alternative material. For this project such texts could be written assignments by fellow students, conversations and discussions in the classroom. Because of this perceived possible language barrier I propose that students should not have to read the book in its entirety by themselves. This should of course be a possibility for students that feel challenged by the text and want to continue, but others might be better served by reading excerpts from the book about the topic of the current lesson. Instead of reading all of the book, other ways to enjoy it could be reading aloud in class and the use of audio books.

Another factor that might make it harder to use the book in the classroom is students being discouraged by the ending of the story and how there is no clear victory for the protagonist, something they most likely are used to in literature up to this point. The main purpose for using the book in my opinion though is not the overall story but the questions that can be posed by the portrait of society and characters in the story. Thus it could prove a good learning opportunity if the teacher makes sure to use the frustration of the students about the ending to have a discussion of how things might have played out differently if circumstances had been different for the characters, and if such an ending would have served as a better way to tell the story.

## **2. Theoretical Survey**

In this chapter I will use the relevant literature brought up in ‘Previous Research’ to relate the concepts of democracy, critical thinking and language to the pedagogical school of thought called ‘critical pedagogy’. I will also present ways to introduce these concepts in the language classroom.

### **2.1 Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy**

I have chosen to explore critical thinking through critical pedagogy, originally an American school of thought with influences from DuBois, Freire and Vygotsky. In this chapter I will start by defining the parameters of how and why it is important to teach critical thinking in school. Following this will be a section on the democratic implications and how to teach democratically.

In schools today there is a lot of focus on making the students critical thinkers. Ironically, there is a serious lack of definition in the curriculum of what critical thinking is and how it should be taught. The wording being to “...develop their [students] ability to think critically, examine facts and relationships, and appreciate the consequences of different alternatives” (Skolverket 7). Thus I feel it is necessary to more closely define what the purpose of critical thinking should be in school. What McPeck describes as the standard approach is to explain this purpose as improving people’s ability to reason about everyday issues and problems. He continues to argue that this approach is far too general and can be interpreted in several different ways, thus making the exercises you design to promote critical thinking hinge on the way you personally interpret the concepts of “reasoning ability” and “everyday problem/issue” (McPeck 3). McPeck argues that having such a general approach to teaching critical thinking will not maximize the transfer of knowledge and give learners the ability to apply critical thinking skills on everyday life, since the applicability of those skills is too far removed from the specific problems faced by students, rendering the acquired critical thinking ability useless in real practice (13-15).

Instead, he argues that a much better approach is to focus on critical thinking exercises in the context of the relevant disciplines, in this case EFL teaching. Fortunately, literary analysis has a strong tradition of applying critical thinking and analysis to works of literature.

A good starting point for such an introduction could be to teach students to always be mindful of the source of information they receive and give them the ability to question authority. Since the proliferation of the internet this has become more and more important due to the nature of this medium and the lack of editorial control. Hedge also brings up this

problem teachers have faced in regards to how students and people in general interact with the internet and the need for the ability to question sources and the people behind them (215). Such an approach could fulfill the goal of the syllabus of giving the students “Strategies for a critical approach when listening to and reading works from different sources and in different media.” (Skolverket 60). Not only do teachers need to help students question remote sources of information and authority, but to make students question the authority of teachers themselves. Kincheloe explains that to give students the ability to self-direct their own pursuit of knowledge, teachers have to give up the position and authority of truth providers and instead act as facilitators of problem posing (17). This process can come with a wealth of problems however and as McPeck argues, students will in most cases not “push for reasons so long as they feel dominated by the authority of teachers and textbooks. The teacher, therefore, must find ways to put his/her authority open to critical examination, and the same for textbooks.” (53). Another aspect that McPeck brings up that is crucial to teaching critical thinking is that teachers need to assess and grade them on “precisely what you are trying to teach them. If you want critical thinking, then you must ask questions that require it, and assess them accordingly.” (51).

This is also partly why the themes of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* make it so suitable for exploring these subjects, it shows a world where authority is unquestionable which can be used to pose questions about authority.

## **2.2 Democracy and Critical Pedagogy**

The Swedish curriculum is very forthcoming with the sort of values it wants teachers to pass down to students. A clear image of acceptance and solidarity is to be instilled in the students by “nurturing in the individual a sense of justice, generosity, tolerance and responsibility” (Skolverket 5). This is an admirable goal but the real problem with such statements is how the school environment works in favor of them. It is one thing to say that you are striving towards democratic teaching and another thing to practically apply it in everyday tuition. A critical aspect of democratic teaching and one of the biggest reasons to use literature to teach it is the ability to share perspectives with others through stories. In order for teachers to nurture this responsibility and tolerance in students, one core aspect of all teaching should be to give different perspectives on life. This can be done through the use of literature and storytelling.

Ayers et al. brings up the importance of arts, like literature and poetry, “to enrich learning” (42) in a democratic classroom. They present an intriguing example of how this might be done through the use of poetry with a group of young girls of African American decent, and

how listening to Lucille Clifton's *Homage to my Hips* gave these girls something they could relate to and how "it stimulated *self-awareness*, centering reflection on the question of 'What is important to you?' It fostered *democracy* by proposing that everyone can participate and every story can be valued" (Ayers et al 44). The notion of allowing different perspectives in the classroom also means that teachers, as mentioned in the previous chapter, make sure to allow for such differences while assessing the work of students. As McPeck argues, students learn quickly what is required in the classroom and what is not (51). Thus one of the most important points of applying a democratic way of teaching is by making sure students get extra credits for thinking and acting democratically.

Critical pedagogy as a concept has solid roots in democratic values and points out the necessity to understand the political environment to be able to challenge knowledge and be mindful of the power structures that exist in the society in which we live and teach. Kincheloe emphasizes that "all teachers need to engage in a constant dialogue with students that questions existing knowledge and problematizes the traditional power relations that served to marginalize specific groups and individuals." (19). Kincheloe chooses to focus much of this debate on disenfranchised students of different marginal groups, but it is no less important for all students to have and try to relate to.

Another factor of critical pedagogy that serves to increase democracy is the focus on context, and the importance of understanding it. Education varies depending on the social context in which it is practiced, and Kincheloe proposes that teachers and students need to understand this context as a way of creating understanding for others (Kincheloe 32). To take Kincheloe's reasoning and applying it to one example from Swedish school can be done by exemplifying that the fact that students in Angered and Örgryte get different scores is not because students in Angered are less intelligent, but that 'social contextual factors' (Kincheloe 32) have an impact.

Kincheloe also argues that "education is a political activity" (8) and that while developing a pedagogy teachers are building a political vision at the same time (8). Thus from the perspective of critical pedagogy, politics and teaching are intertwined and cannot be separated. Trying to advocate a politically neutral pedagogy would be to support the dominant power structure (11). Teachers should be mindful of which ideologies they subscribe to and be upfront with them since they would influence their ways of teaching. The dialogue about the dominant power structures could start out with explanation of "common sense" (Ayers et al 9) as something "we take for granted as the way things are and/or should be." (Ayers et al 9). The assumption that something should be a certain way can be used as a powerful tool of

control and students will have their own common sense assumptions that they have collected during their previous schooling. Having a discussion about what and how we define common sense could clarify its use as such a tool and also bring up questions about our next topic of discussion, language as a means of control.

### **2.3 Critical Language study and Critical Pedagogy**

Critical language study is a concept brought up by Fairclough as a basis for looking at language and its relations to power. The aim of critical language study (CLS) can be summed up by this excerpt:

Critical is used in the special sense of aiming to show up connections which may be hidden from people – such as the connections between language, power and ideology referred to above. CLS analyses social interactions in a way which focuses upon their linguistic elements, and which sets out to show up their generally hidden determinants in the system of social relationships, as well as hidden effects they may have upon that system. (Fairclough 4)

For the purpose of this essay, the focus will be on the need for CLS in the language classroom. Language teaching in schools has traditionally had a focus on language as a tool and on conveying knowledge and proficiency (Fairclough 197). Fairclough criticizes this position as being overly simplistic and instead focuses on the power behind language use, or on *discourse* as “a form of social practice” (16). Thus it is important as a teacher to not just focus on the ability and competence of communication brought up by Hedge’s vision of the “communicative classroom” (43), but also apply CLS and inform students on what decides what is proper form and formality in different language discourses. This is something Fairclough defines as ‘*critical language awareness*’ (198). Understanding these structures also requires the ability to decipher hegemonic structures in society, or put simply, who is enforcing the status quo. Kincheloe proposes that critical pedagogy wants to give students the ability to “question the hidden political assumptions and the colonial, racial, gender, and class biases of schooling and media education” (Kincheloe 34). One important part of this is CLS. Without it students do not have the tools to fully understand the ramifications of how language teaching has the ability to strip away their individual identity and tell them how to speak and adhere to the rules of the dominant discourse. This should serve to empower them and understand “[...] how language contributes to the domination of some people by others, because consciousness is the first step towards emancipation” (Fairclough 193).

Emancipation of this kind rhymes well with the values of critical pedagogy and is an extension of the critical ability of the previous section, as it relates to the English discipline in school. Fairclough remarks about the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL) and its close ties with helping those students not only to develop language, but to also assert themselves in situations where they would otherwise be expected to agree with institutional powers (194).

So to summarize teachers, need to be mindful of language, not only as a tool to communicate with, but a structure that influences class, values and power.

### **3. Analysis**

#### **3.1 General Lesson Plan**

The lesson plan I have chosen to adopt is to divide the book in different chapters instead of reading it in one go. As previously mentioned in problems and difficulties one aspect that makes the book hard to comprehend is the language it is written in that might act as a discouragement for students. The value of the book is the different themes on society and language that can be discussed and negotiated in class with some reading beforehand. The value of reading before the lesson is that most of it can be used to enhance different student skills like speaking, exercises and discussions.

As Hedge argues the reading lesson should focus on “interacting successfully with authentic texts, and to develop critical awareness. This implies developing competence in the foreign language, awareness of the structures of written texts, and knowledge about the world” (221). Much of the classroom work should in my opinion center around the other skills of speaking and listening, i.e. mostly discussions. Reading and writing should be mostly done at home, as the book is quite long and as Collie and Slater propose, it leaves more time to focus on the other skills and “will introduce variety into the classroom” (Collie & Slater 36). A good way to maximize student learning could be to use worksheets as a help in home reading, which then can be used to provide follow-up feedback in the classroom time. A good start to work during lessons activities could be with quickly reviewing the previous reading (Collie & Slater 37). Lesson activities should according to Collie and Slater preferably center around “the book’s highlights” (37).

#### **3.2 Themes for Literary Analysis in School**

The Swedish curriculum is very clear on the point that school should teach students to “develop their ability to think critically, examine facts and relationships, and appreciate the consequences of different alternatives” (Skolverket 7). The way I have chosen to structure the analysis in the classroom to give students this ability is to adhere to the concepts described in previous parts: democracy, critical ability and language. Since the book is written as a critique of totalitarian society, the structure will relate to the mechanics of power in totalitarian society. I have chosen to split the themes according to the three parts of the book and linking each part with one of the previous three concepts. Firstly I will analyze language and its connection to power in the first subchapter. Secondly I will explore the democratic values found in the book and finally, I will link the need for critical thinking to the theme of thought control in the last part of the book. Overall the perspective of totalitarian control should serve

as a good base of reference to discuss and develop students' ability in the three categories. References will be made to topics of discussions and to relevant exercises.

### **3.2.1 Book 1. Influence of Language: Newspeak**

A good starting point for the lesson is to use the first chapters of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to introduce the way in which language influences our capacity to think both critically and democratically. Students are most likely familiar with how politics work but might not be as familiar with the way language in itself shapes our everyday choices. Thus the concept of Newspeak serves as a relevant starting point for introducing the book and the lessons. It is one of the first concepts shared in the book and is introduced in the first few pages (Orwell 5). One way of easing students into this initial focus on language could be to choose excerpts from Orwell's appendix on Newspeak (Orwell 312) and use them to introduce the concept of Newspeak as a pre-reading exercise mentioned by Hedge to "become oriented to the context of the text [...]" (209). One such context could be to place the book in the historical context of the time it was written. Much like Kincheloe's previous comments on the need to understand the social contexts in which educational activities take place, the historical context can help students understand the voice of the book.

To be able to do so we must first look at and define the relationship between power and language in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. As Norman Fairclough notes in the first pages of his book *Language and Power*, power does not solely come from language but several different forms of interaction, the most concrete one being physical force (3). This juxtaposition of language and violence is present throughout *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as one of the main themes; the control through language is made possible by the constant threat of violence. As an entity, the party in the book controls people, and strives towards total ideological power through the use of violence and threat of death, or coercion as Fairclough defines it (28).

It is important to understand however that the power of coercion introduced in the book has no great bearing on the life of students (at least hopefully not). They might instead be subjected to the other strategy Fairclough presents to control ideological power, "consent" (28). A good way to exemplify this and to guide students into understanding the relationship between these two ways of control could be a visual one. Hedge points out the benefit of visual prompts while starting out themes to elicit a response from students (Hedge 18). In the book, Oceania is covered with posters of Big Brother, looking straight at the viewer, with the slogan "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU" (Orwell 4) underneath it. This imposing picture can easily be linked to coercion, which leaves us with a need for an example of

consent. This can be done by hanging such a Big Brother poster next to an advertisement poster, which through the use of consent tries to communicate a message of who you should be, what you should look like and what you should buy. A group discussion should follow where the teacher asks the students to exemplify different areas ruled by either consent or coercion.

Fairclough argues that societal discourse is split in two categories: the power over discourse and the power behind discourse (36). In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston, the protagonist laments in his journal that there is always someone watching and listening to you and there is always someone telling you what to do (Orwell 29). A good while-reading discussion could be to choose a topic in the book and forbid students to use certain words in the discussion. This could potentially become quite frustrating for the students but as an added benefit it could be linked to Winston's frustration with the constant surveillance of his life.

Ingsoc, the party of the book, controls all communication and closely monitors and influences the language and discourse of the population. There are no laws any longer (Orwell 8) and only one rule: to always obey the party. This abolishment of laws adds an interesting factor, a threat of committing 'thoughtcrime' (a concept revisited in 3.2.3.1), any action that can be seen as disobedient to the party, even facial expressions and thoughts, can lead to a death sentence, detention in labor camps or 'reprogramming'. To link this to the concepts of coercion and control, this robs all inhabitants of initiative and enforces passivity.

This notion of reprogramming is further explored in the last part of the book in a dialogue between Winston and O'Brien where O'Brien says "We do not destroy the heretic because he resists us... We [the party] convert him, we capture his inner mind, we reshape him" (Orwell 267). During this conversation O'Brien points out the faults of previous totalitarian societies like Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. The reason for not killing the opposition is not to create martyrs. Thus the people the party gets rid of are either reprogrammed or utterly destroyed by editing any documentation about the individual. This is only possible because of the vast volume of editing and propaganda produced by the Ministry of Truth, which systemically rewrites history to suit the party's needs. The ultimate goal of this revision is thought control and the party goes to great lengths to keep its accumulated power.

In Gleason et al. one point brought up is that because Orwell wrote the book and so many read it he prevented the nightmare scenario in the book from happening (223).

Another point brought up is about the ease of access to information in today's society and because of the free structure of the internet, a world like Orwell's Air Strip One becomes an impossibility because of the need for ignorance. With such ease of access to information as

we have today, trying to control people like the party of the book would be foolish (Gleason et al 226).

Throughout *Nineteen Eighty-Four* we discover that the discourse of the society is created and maintained by copious amounts of propaganda, the daily ritual of the two minute hate being one of the first ones (Orwell 11). Fairclough introduces two different power structures related to discourse, power *over* discourse and power *in* discourse. Power in discourse signifies power being used overtly in a conversation with one part “controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants” (Fairclough 38). It could be helpful to use some references close to the students’ own life, such as arguments they have had amongst themselves or with others and give some examples of this power in and over discourse. An example from the book could be the later dialogues between Winston and O’Brien, where O’Brien uses the threat of torture to guide the conversations and apply his power over discourse (Orwell 251, 254). Despite this clear example, most others are examples of power over discourse. Ingsoc and the inner party “...impose and enforce who has access to which discourses” (Fairclough 52), and in so doing controls the thoughts of the inhabitants of Euroasia and Air Strip One. In conjunction with this Fairclough brings up the notion of free speech which would make for classroom discussion; do we really have free speech in our society? In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, filled with secret police and constant monitoring, the premise that free speech is gone is easily accepted. Another more interesting question to pose to students however is if they have free speech, and if they practice it, what parts of power is closed off to them?

### **3.2.2 Book 2. Democratic Values: Doublethink**

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* is very clearly a book with a political message. Therefore using it to promote a discussion with the students on democratic values comes naturally. The nature of these discussions should not be limited to abstract debate on why democracy is good but how language can change our perception of it. Throughout the book Orwell brings up concepts of how the ruling class controls the population through the use of “Newspeak” (Orwell 5,312). In his essay *Politics and the English Language* Orwell comments on the need for coherent language to have a truthful and direct communication. Of course it seems likely that he would make language such a big part of his dystopian depiction of future totalitarian society when he himself had first-hand experience with how Soviet and British communist propaganda swayed opinion in Britain in regards to justifying the actions of the Spanish Left (Gleason et al 75).

One way in which Orwell chose to criticize and help people understand the process of this propaganda was to describe it as ‘doublethink’ in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. This concept it can be quite hard to wrap your head around. The book defines it as:

To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them; to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it, to believe that democracy was impossible and that the Party was the guardian of democracy; to forget whatever it was necessary to forget, then to draw it back into memory again at the moment when it was needed, and then promptly to forget it again: and above all, to apply the same process to the process itself.  
(Orwell 37)

This way of using language and ideological discourse could be simplified to meaning thought control. To help students understand this process as a means of power it becomes necessary to relate the term to a frame of reference they are more comfortable with, such as modern examples of the same concept. Some concerns brought up by Edward Herman in *On Nineteen eighty-four: Orwell and our future* cement the concept as a democratic issue. He argues that doublethink as a means of thought control is not only possible in today’s society, but has been present for a long time. To use an example he mentions the U.S renaming their “Department of War” as the “Department of Defense” before *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was even published (Gleason et al. 112). This should serve as a good example if the teacher also brings up the historical fact that the U.S has not waged war on their own soil since the revolutionary war, thus they have only “defended” themselves on foreign soil, or as Herman puts it “this country is never an aggressor, terrorist, or sponsor of terrorism, by definition, whatever the correspondence of facts to standard definitions.”(Gleason et al 116). Herman continues to explain how this form of doublethink can be tied to economic factors and how market interests enable them to support non-democratic regimes such as Saudi Arabia or the Taliban in Cold War Afghanistan as long as the market or other ideological factors favored it. As long as these interests continued to be beneficial the status quo was supported, but as Herman continues, democracy became an important factor for the latter example once the usefulness to the national interest disappeared (Gleason et al 117). Thus the U.S could, much like the party of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, remain ‘the guardian of democracy’ even though they

previously supported the regime they later deposed. This should in the classroom be discussed under the umbrella of democracy and the implications of how language as previously mentioned can influence how we judge historical and contemporary events depending on the language used to describe them. This should further empower students to question authority and clarify how dominant discourses work.

Another good entryway into doublethink for students could be to use the earlier mentioned concept of context to compare the situation of living in Oceania with their school context. In order to survive in the conditions of Oceania you need to use doublethink to disguise yourself and be as nondescript as possible. Disguising one's own opinions and supporting the dominant one like this is the same social mechanism as peer pressure, something students most likely can relate to. Having a discussion of doublethink could thus promote democratic values, critical ability and critical language study.

### **3.2.2.1 Proles**

The proles (derived from proletarian, or worker in contemporary vernacular) play a big part in the book, not least to Winston who writes in his journal that hope of ever getting free from the party is not possible without the proles (Orwell 72). It is interesting to see the cultural differences between the party members of the book, whose oppression by the ideological power (presented by Fairclough) of the party takes the form of coercion, differ from the proles' which seem largely through consent. As Fairclough brings up when discussing coercion and consent in his book, "any ruling class finds it less costly and less risky to rule if possible by consent" (28). One could argue that Orwell believed that the educated people of his time would not, like the proles of his book, stay subjugated under an oppressive power without a prevalent need for a threat of violence to control the population.

The proles in the book can be seen as a symbol of the ignorant masses not only in Orwell's days but in the potential future as well. About halfway through the book Winston is beset by a desire to learn about the time before the party. He finds an old man in a pub who lived before the Revolution and starts questioning him on how life was in his youth, to gather information on how society might have been structured before the party came to power. What the man answers with is described as "a rubbish-heap of details" (Orwell 95). The old man does not remember the general feeling and attitude of the age, but like most people focuses on the small pieces that make up life. This can be brought up in discussion with students to see how they feel about the current political climate, perhaps talk about their views about an upcoming election or public issue. The object here is to provoke reflection about how they themselves value their influence in society and if they feel they can affect it. The instruments for the

control of the proles according to the book is keeping them busy with “Heavy physical work, the care of home and children, petty quarrels with neighbours, films, football, beer and, above all, gambling” (Orwell 74). This should be familiar to students as things that take up many people’s time even today. As a teacher, this gives the opportunity to ask students if they question entertainment and what it tells them, or if they believe it has no message. The internet revolution, along with a greater access to information and means of communication, paradoxically also brings much more potential of diversions such as video games, online poker and Facebook updating. During the project, teachers should try starting a discussion with students about how they spend their free time and if these activities can have other qualities than being distractions: Can a videogame be a distraction as well as an opportunity of sharing another social context?

### **3.2.3 Book 3. Critical Thinking: Big Brother**

Big Brother is an interesting concept in the book. He is never discussed in detail and the reader never knows much about him, yet he is ever-present in the society of Air Strip One and a focus for its inhabitants. Above all he is a means by which the party can exert its control over the minds of the population of Oceania. He can be seen as a precursor to the structure in today’s North Korea, which relatively recently went through a change in leadership. Stansky et al. point out that, unlike Kim Jong Un succeeding to power after Kim Jong Ill, Big Brother as a structure “serves a third function of removing the trauma and crisis of successions and transitions” (Stansky et al 192).

One interesting thing to bring up while learning about Big Brother is the way the people of Oceania adore him in a very personal way. During Winston’s first two minute hate described in the book, people start chanting “B-B! .... B-B! .... B-B!” (Orwell 18). This is a fairly intimate term and is explained by Stansky as a way of making Big Brother into a symbol of love. He becomes such a symbol because people are not allowed to love one another (154). This could provide a good starting point for discussing the political concept of “cult of personality”. A discussion on this topic would serve the pedagogical purpose of revealing power structures behind powerful leaders like Big Brother.

Orwell describes how the party uses Big Brother “as a focusing point for love, fear, and reverence, emotions which are more easily felt towards an individual than towards an organization” (217). A contemporary example of such a figurehead could be a president, or a prime minister. Such a figurehead serves the added purpose, to the organization behind him/her, of scapegoat should a political decision fall out of grace with the majority of voters.

Thus we can show students that while the figurehead might be replaced to satisfy voters, many of the power structures behind such an individual remain intact and the status quo of power stays unchanged. Kincheloe brings up the importance of “resisting the harmful effects of dominant power. Advocates of critical pedagogy work to expose and contest oppressive forms of power” (34).

### 3.2.3.1 Thoughtcrime

Another important facet of the mechanics of oppression that can be brought up in regards to critical ability is the concept of Thoughtcrime. Freedom of thought is something that has been valued above most rights in Western society, which also makes the concept of thought control, or thoughtcrime, a provocative topic of discussion. To start a discussion on thoughtcrime one recommendation could be to not only use literature to illustrate the concept. Another alternative could be to have students watch Spielberg’s *Minority Report* (2002), which brings up issues associated with judging people based on their thoughts instead of their actions.

Orwell provides several different examples of the controlling powers of thoughtcrime throughout *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, one of the most striking being our first example of it:

Whether he wrote DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER, or whether he refrained from writing it, made no difference. The Thought Police would get him just the same. He had committed – would still have committed, even if he had never set pen to paper – the essential crime that contained all others in itself. Thoughtcrime, they called it. Thoughtcrime was not a thing that could be concealed for ever. You might dodge successfully for a while, even for years, but sooner or later they were bound to get you. (Orwell 21)

An important point to discuss with students is this example of how resigned Winston becomes after writing in his journal. He is convinced that he will, sooner or later, pay for thinking the wrong thought.

The party manages to vilify the individual, with its promise of force should you become independent, making people afraid of themselves. One such example is in the third part of the book where Winston runs into his neighbor Parsons, who has been arrested on grounds of thoughtcrime. The interesting factor in the conversation between him and Winston is that Parsons clearly blames himself for the actions instead of lashing out at the party for oppressing him, or directing anger at his child, who reported him to the Thought Police.

Instead, he expresses being proud of her (Orwell 244). This is a pointer to how much control the ruling elite has in Oceania due to the comprehensive psychological manipulation and suppression of individualism, or the enforcement of uniformism. The party's slogan reflect their manipulation of history to keep control of the minds of the people: "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past" (Orwell 260). The efficiency of thoughtcrime can be seen through the universal power it gives the Party of Oceania; it has made all other need of laws obsolete. The syllabus provides good grounds of bringing this attack on individuality up in that educators should protect "Människolivets okränkbarhet, individens frihet och integritet [The sanctity of human life, the freedom of the individual and integrity]" (Skolverket 5). At the end of the lessons it is also important to make students review their own opinions of Orwell's tone of voice and thoughts, to apply 'resistant reading'. Even though they might agree with values shared in the book it is also important that they try to apply all the knowledge of language and the power behind it to figure out what they themselves think Orwell wants to tell them. The reason for this questioning should be to promote all the language and critical skills they learnt during the lessons.

## Conclusion

In this essay I have proposed a way to use George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, through the perspective of critical pedagogy, as an instrument to illuminate power structures and to promote the ability of students to question these structures in the language classroom.

Teaching English in today's upper secondary school should not only focus on giving students the tools to become more proficient language users, but should also bring up the importance of understanding the underlying workings of language itself. Doing this while learning the language and its structure through the use of *critical language study* becomes a way to enable the students to understand that language is not only a tool with which one can communicate, but a social action in itself.

Teaching democracy in school is becoming more important as the flow of information in society keeps getting larger. Students need not only understand the discourses of power and politics, they should be given the ability to share in different social and historical contexts to help them shape their own political opinion. This sharing of contexts makes literature a good way to teach it in school. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in particular brings up concepts, such as doublethink, that can be contrasted with contemporary society to show how the language of oppression and power still remains active and relevant in the Western world.

Alongside democratic proficiency, students should also, according to critical pedagogy, be given the language and context to question authority and be given the awareness of how to assert and value their own integrity. Teaching critical thinking in schools has long been a hot topic. There are those that argue that such critical abilities should be taught as a separate curricular goal, while others promote the ability of academic disciplines to teach critical skills relevant to their inherent topics. All in all the critical ability of students, like democratic approaches, increase in relevancy as we move into a global information age with instant access to a great wealth of knowledge.

Hopefully I have shown the potential of using *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and its meta-language as a way for students to draw parallels between the uses of language to control and maintain power over the population of Oceania with the way dominant parts of society use the same form of control today. I also hope to have inspired readers to see the benefits of using literature as a platform from which one could teach many aspects of the English language.

It could be said, however, that the need for critical language study and the hidden powers and agendas behind language should be brought up earlier than English 6. As society develops more ways to communicate it is more important than ever to promote the ability to understand

how language influences opinion and how it can be used as a means of power and thought control.

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