
The Inability of the Animals to Read and Its Effect on Their Lives in the Animal Farm, a Novel by George Orwell

The animals' inability to read greatly affected their daily lives and how power was wielded amongst them. The ability to read and write makes the pigs considered to be more clever than others, and, therefore, more privileged. Soon enough, a hierarchy is established where the pigs rule the farm and the rest of the animals are basically enslaved. The pigs begin to sabotage the original plans of Old Major for their advantage as a result of the animals' inability to read the Seven Commandments for themselves.

Although Old Major's goals excluded the adopting of Man's vices, once they experienced what it was like, they began to resemble him in his ways. For instance, when the pigs moved into the houses with the excuse of needing a quiet place to work, "some of the animals were disturbed when they heard that the pigs not only took their meals in the kitchen and used the drawing-room as a recreation room, but also slept in the beds." (Orwell, 79). The fact that the pigs were copying their enemies made the other animals uneasy about their leadership. They were obviously not abiding by the original rules, or so it seemed. Furthermore, when Clover, "who thought she remembered a definite ruling against beds," heard what was happening, she "went to the end of the barn and tried to puzzle out the Seven Commandments which were inscribed there. Finding herself unable to read more than individual letters, she fetched Muriel... Curiously enough, Clover had not remembered the Fourth Commandment mentioned sheets; but as it was there on the wall, it must have done so." (Orwell, 79). Muriel was able to fool Clover thanks to her inability to read, and their power was wielded. The pigs were able to live in comfort while breaking the rules by convincing them using their power of literacy. The pigs maintained complete control of the animals due to their illiteracy.

Napoleon used Squealer's intelligence to make his vigorous actions reasonable. Moreover, when Old Major was alive, he commanded that "No animal must ever kill any other animal." (Orwell, 32). All the animals came to an agreement that no animal should ever murder another animal because they were all on the same team. Killing each other was just an unthinkable action because unity was necessary in order to achieve their main goal of overcoming Man. However, when Napoleon ordered his guard dogs to kill the "traitors," they requested for the Commandments to be read again and noticed "Somehow or other, the last two words had slipped out of the animals' memory. But they saw now that the Commandment had not been violated; for clearly there was good reason for killing the traitors who had leagued themselves with Snowball." (Orwell, 98). Muriel took his chance to include the words "without cause" to validate Napoleon's actions, and the animals could not argue otherwise because they could

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only rely on their memories. Using his ability to read, he was able to make the unacceptable acceptable. No one was able to go against Napoleon's crimes because they had no proof or backup.

The pigs' habits were becoming more similar to Man's habits of drinking, which was the starting cause of this revolution. Furthermore, when the animals first established the rules, they stated, "No animal must ever live in a house, or sleep in a bed, or wear clothes, or drink alcohol, or smoke tobacco, or touch money, or engage in trade." (Orwell, 31). Everything Man had done was considered cruel and evil in the eyes of the animals. They despised all the ways of Man, for it only brought hardship in the animals' lives. However, when Muriel once again read the commandments to them, "They thought the Fifth Commandment was 'No animal shall drink alcohol,' but there were two words that they had forgotten. Actually the Commandment read: 'No animal shall drink alcohol to excess.'" (Orwell, 113). These exceptions began to happen more frequently, allowing the pigs to do whatever they pleased. Squealer used his ability to write to his advantage and made it acceptable to drink. Alcohol was the one thing that animals hated, but now, it seemed that it was okay as long as it was not abused.

Ultimately, the animals' identities and values were changed because of the pigs' cleverness. Moreover, after his speech, Old Major ultimately concluded, "No animal must ever tyrannise over his own kind. Weak or strong, clever or simple, we are all brothers... All animals are equal." (Orwell, 31-32). This was the official and most important rule of the animals' main objective. It kept them together because they saw the flaw in the human hierarchy. Nevertheless, after Clover observed the wall with the Seven Commandments, she noticed, "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." (Orwell, 133). Thanks to Benjamin's honesty, Clover realized that the pigs were sabotaging the rules and using it for their own pleasures. She realized a little too late that they were being stripped of their rights from right under their noses. In the end, the pigs were able to take all the power for themselves and control everyone else.

The pigs took advantage of the other animals' illiteracy and abused their literacy to live in comfort. Their abusive power was made acceptable in the eyes of the animals because of their ability to reason and deceive. The animals were treated unfairly compared to the pigs who hogged all the power and comfort for themselves. If all the animals had been literate, things might have been different.

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