

## Dystopian Literature

*A utopia is a world in which everything is perfect: a dystopia is the opposite of this. Writers often create dystopian worlds in order to warn us how our world could end up if we are not careful. As such dystopian worlds tend to share large similarities with the real world with some key differences such as, in the example below, the lack of freedom and individuality.*

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. Winston made for the stairs. It was no use trying the lift. Even at the best of times it was seldom working, and at present the electric current was cut off during daylight hours. It was part of the economy drive in preparation for Hate Week. The flat was seven flights up, and Winston, who was thirty-nine and had a varicose ulcer above his right ankle, went slowly, resting several times on the way. 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.

Inside the flat a fruity voice was reading out a list of figures which had something to do with the production of pig-iron. The voice came from an oblong metal plaque like a dulled mirror which formed part of the surface of the right-hand wall. Winston turned a switch and the voice sank somewhat, although the words were still distinguishable. The instrument (the telescreen it was called) could be dimmed, but there was no way of shutting it off completely. He moved over to the window: a smallish, frail figure, the meagerness of his body merely emphasised by the blue overalls which were the uniform of the Party. His hair was very fair, his face naturally sanguine, his skin roughened by coarse soap and blunt razor blades and the cold of the winter that had just ended.

Taken from '1984' by George Orwell

**Comment [K1]:** An everyday event such as the striking of the clocks is made to sound unusual by the fact of the clocks striking thirteen, which (when his book was written, before the advent of digital watches) would have had strange militaristic connotations

**Comment [K2]:** Clear use of the pathetic fallacy to paint a picture about this possible world

**Comment [K3]:** The opening description of April and the harshness of the dust suggests some kind of desolation and destruction

**Comment [K4]:** This unusual feature is introduced and then left unexplained (who is the man in the poster?) until the end of the paragraph raising questions for the reader

**Comment [K5]:** Unusual terms are just introduced, as if the reader were aware of them, increasing the sense that this is a real world which does not need explanation. The bizzareness of this phrase however further piques the readers curiosity and imagination

**Comment [K6]:** The pathetic description of the main character enhances the repulsive description of the building and world outside to enhance the picture of a dystopian, unpleasant world

**Comment [K7]:** The poster is now explained – the theme of constant surveillance and a lack of freedom which will run through the novel is beginning to be established here

**Comment [K8]:** An everyday object perverted and made unusual. Less so today in the world of plasma screens and interactive whiteboards but 50 years ago the idea of having a TV hanging on the wall would have been incredibly outlandish

**Comment [K9]:** New terms introduced again without explanation – obvious word combinations mean that the reader can understand what is going on but the re-naming implies that this is not the same world as the reader's

**Comment [K10]:** Again, a lack of freedom

**Comment [K11]:** Once again, a key phrase introduced without explanation – the implication is that this is a powerful and influential group

**Comment [K12]:** The extract ends with an emphasis on the hard conditions which Winston has to endure