

London Toast Theatre company presents

Animal Farm



original story by George Orwell
stage adaptation by Vivienne McKee

*All animals are equal,
but some are more equal than others.*

CONTENTS

Synopsis

Cast & creatives

A word from the director

A brief introduction to George Orwell

Exploring the characters

Key concepts

Topics for discussion & group activities

Synopsis

Animal Farm tells the story of a group of farm animals who are driven to rebel against the ruling farmer who is cruel and neglects them. When he and his fellow humans are driven off the farm, the animals, led by the pigs, develop their own system which they call “animalism“. The animals aim to create a farm where all animals are equal and free, and humans are not welcome. However, this sense of equality does not last long. The pigs quickly take over the running of the farm and one of the stronger pigs, Napoleon, eventually takes power and starts to make changes that benefit his own supporters at the expense of the other animals. Eventually, the pigs become indistinguishable from the humans they were originally fighting against.

Cast & Creatives

Writer	George Orwell
Director	Vivienne McKee
Designer	Kirsten Brink
Lighting Designer	Mark Jones
Sound Designer	Søren Brunsgaard Petersen
Actors	Andrew Jeffers, Vivienne McKee, Kevin Kieran Molloy



Photo: Sarah Coghill



Photo: Søren Kuhn



Photo: Lachy Woods

A Word from the Director

George Orwell's *Animal Farm* was adapted for the stage by London Toast Theatre Artistic Director, Vivienne McKee, who is also the director of this production. Here she explains the themes and thoughts behind the play and her adaptation of the story.

The 20th and 21st centuries have seen the failure of a series of ideological narratives. Fascism, Communism, and finally, western liberalism have fallen short and left the modern world struggling to find a unifying story to stitch our lives around. George Orwell, however, saw in the world around him more than just political movements. He was also concerned with how deeply rooted blind belief, cowardice and selfishness are in all of us. He exposes this by means of this parable, about a farmyard of animals who rise up and rebel against their cruel master - man ! Orwell provides a warning about the sad repetition of human nature. He shows us how we experience power and what its limits are, and teaches that we are all at fault when a tyrant is allowed to rise into a position of power.

My adaptation

It was quite a challenge to adapt Orwell's story into a play for 3 actors. There are many different animals living on Manor Farm. Pigs, carthorses, a donkey, a cat, dogs, hens, sheep, cows and the human beings who exploit them.

At first I thought that one of the actors could be the "narrator", a neutral character who explains to the audience what is happening as the story unfolds. But I decided that one of the animals could perform this function and at the same time, be part of the action. I chose as my "narrator", the carthorse Clover, because, in the book, she supports, but also questions the decisions of the pigs after the Rebellion.

Each actor plays at least 3 roles, and the changes from one animal into another animal happen swiftly using voice changes and body movements as the essential differences. The three actors wear a basic costume with the addition of a headdress to distinguish which animal they are playing. I resisted the idea of animal masks because I felt that the actors must be allowed to show their facial expressions. Unsure if it would work, I also planned to involve the audience to represent some of the animals when it comes to joining in the voting and in vocally reacting to the decrees of the pigs.

Theatre, to me, has always been a place to share stories. It's an exchange that is linked to our childhood and understanding of the world around us.

But to be simple and direct is often the hardest thing to achieve on stage. Having written the adaptation of the book as a play, I then work and develop the script with a team of backstage collaborators, (for sound and lighting effects) and with the talents of the actors, to create what we hope is a stirring, thought-provoking theatre experience for all ages. We want to bring the book to life and to make an audience “feel” the book rather than just think about it in an intellectual way.

Orwell’s story resonates with contemporary issues

A great deal of George Orwell’s writing still resonates with contemporary issues and is relevant today, which is a very scary thing. Orwell was writing largely in reaction to the massive political shift that happened during the first half of the 20th century – with the rise of both western liberalism and communism. I think the reason that it’s still relevant is that none of those systems worked. It’s very easy to say fascism and communism, (which became Stalinism) didn’t work, but I think the scary thing is to admit that western liberalism hasn’t worked. Many of us are richer than we have ever been – and yet, the world is more unequal than it has ever been.

The novel tells the story of farm animals who overthrow their human owner in the hope of creating a fair and equal society. However, the pigs gradually take control and become as oppressive as the rulers they replaced. Leaders may begin with good intentions but can become more interested in maintaining their own authority than serving the people they represent. This remains a concern in many countries where governments, corporations, or influential groups accumulate excessive power.

The novel also highlights the importance of truthful information. In *Animal Farm*, the pig Squealer, manipulates facts and spreads propaganda to persuade the animals that the leadership is always right. In today's world, discussions about misinformation, social media, and "fake news" make Orwell's warnings especially relevant. Orwell is absolutely ruthless and unforgiving about human nature. Many of the animals fail to question what they are told, allowing the pigs to rewrite history and change the farm's rules.

With his parable, Orwell suggests that citizens must remain informed, think critically, and hold leaders accountable. We love to give over permission to charismatic leaders or to systems of power so that we don’t have to take responsibility for our own actions and all the difficult parts of human existence. It can seem easier to give power to the authoritarians than to fight them.

A Brief Introduction to George Orwell

Eric Blair (George Orwell) was born in 1903 in India, where his father worked for the civil service. The family returned to England where Orwell attended the exclusive private school - Eton. He hated his school days and decided not to follow his fellow students to Oxford University. Instead, he chose to serve with the Indian Imperial Police in Burma. This experience of British Imperialism horrified him and inspired his first novel, *Burmese Days* (1934). He resigned from the Imperial Police Force and returned to Europe. Several years of poverty followed in Paris and in London, until he eventually got work as a schoolteacher and contributed reviews and articles to a number of periodicals. *Down and Out in Paris and London* was published in 1933.

In 1936, he was commissioned to visit areas of mass unemployment in Lancashire and Yorkshire, and *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) is a powerful description of the poverty he saw there. At the end of 1936, Orwell went to Spain to fight for the Republicans in the Civil War against Franco. He was badly wounded in battle and from then on was never fully fit. "*Homage to Catalonia*" is his account of the civil war. He spent six months in Morocco and there wrote *Coming Up for Air*.

During the second world war, too ill to fight, he served in the Home Guard and worked for the BBC. As literary editor of the *Tribune* he contributed a regular page of political and literary commentary. *Animal Farm - a fairy tale* was published in 1945, and it was this novel, together with *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), which brought him worldwide fame. Orwell died of tuberculosis in London in January 1950 at the age of 46.



Exploring the characters

While *Animal Farm* contains broad themes about leadership, power and corruption that can be applied to many political circumstances and historical events, Orwell made direct parallels to the Russian Revolution.

To better understand the links between *Animal Farm* and the Russian Revolution, here is a brief description of the historical figure or concept each major character represents, along with a general description of the characters.

The pigs

Old Major is a wise, well-respected old pig who inspires the animals to rebel against the farmer and other humans. He dies before the animal's revolt against Mr Jones. Old Major represents Karl Marx, who inspired a communist uprising against the ruling class in 1848 with his book *The Communist Manifesto*. He also represents Vladimir Lenin, a key leader in the Russian Revolution in October 1917 who followed Marxist principles.

Snowball is one of the leaders of the revolt and is popular among the animals. He seeks to carry on the dream and ideal of Old Major and to continue making improvements to Animal Farm. He is eventually driven off the farm by Napoleon and the dogs. This is similar to the role of Leon Trotsky, an associate of Lenin's, who was driven out of the Soviet Union, and later assassinated by Joseph Stalin.

Napoleon is a large boar who leads the Rebellion together with Snowball. Napoleon and Snowball think very differently about how things should run after the Rebellion. Napoleon eventually grabs power for himself. Napoleon represents Joseph Stalin who came to power through force after the revolution. He used his power to improve conditions for his supporters. His policies led to the deaths of millions, many as a result of famine or public executions.

Squealer is the pig who communicates new developments on the farm to the other animals. He frequently twists the truth and deflects questions in order to win the support of the other animals for Napoleon. Rather than representing a specific historical figure, Squealer represents government tactics, particularly propaganda. Propaganda is information or media used to promote a particular political message or point of view, often in misleading or biased ways. Propaganda was used by Stalin during the Russian Revolution to keep control of the masses. Squealer is sometimes viewed as a stand-in for Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov, a loyal follower of Joseph Stalin.

The other animals

Boxer is a loyal, hard-working cart-horse and the strongest of the farm animals. He is easily convinced by Squealer's lies and wishes to believe that Napoleon is always right. He is exploited and ultimately discarded by the regime he serves. Boxer thus represents The Working Class, especially the agricultural workers.

Clover is a compassionate and preceptive horse. She realises that the ideals of the Rebellion are being betrayed but she cannot fully understand or resist what is happening. She represents the ordinary working people.

Benjamin is a cynical donkey. He sees through the propaganda from the start, but remains passive. He represents the sceptical intellectual or the educated observer.

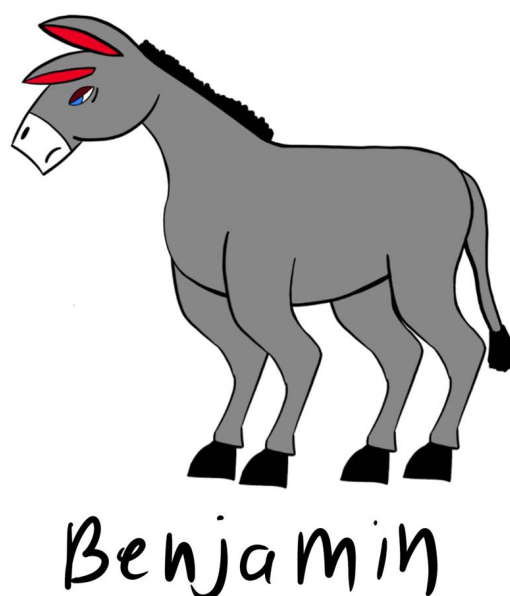
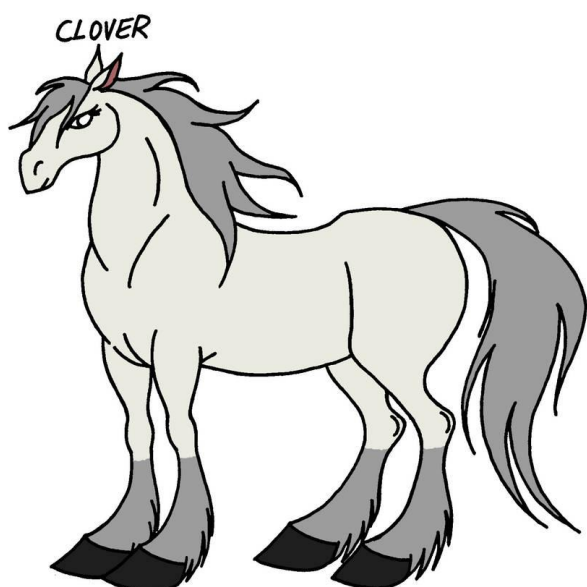
Mollie is a horse who cares more for her personal comfort than political ideals. She represents the privileged classes who preferred the old order or the ones who fled after the Revolution

The dogs represent Stalin's bodyguards and secret police (now known as the KGB)

The sheep repeat official slogans and they represent citizens who blindly followed Stalin

The hens rebel against Napoleon when he expects them to give up all their eggs. They represent the peasants who resisted Stalin's policies

Mr Jones represents Tsar Nicolas II



The humans

Mr Jones is the owner of Manor Farm (later renamed Animal Farm). The animals revolt against him because he whips them and doesn't feed them enough. He represents Tsar Nicholas 11 who was driven from power in Russia during the February 1917 revolution.

Mr Frederick is the farmer of Pinchfield, a smaller neighbouring farm. Frederick briefly enters into an alliance with Napoleon and the animals, but cheats them and attempts to invade the farm. He represents Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany. The relationship between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany was strong for a number of years, but their agreements were abruptly terminated when Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941.

Mr Pilkington is the owner of Foxwood, a large neighbouring farm. He and his farm represent the United States of America.



Key concepts

Beasts of England

“Beasts of England” is a song Old Major shares with the other animals and it becomes their anthem, inspiring them in their Rebellion and their work towards equality.

“Beasts of England, Beasts of Europe, Beasts of every land and clime. Listen to our joyful tidings of the golden future time. Sooner or later, the day will come, Tyrant Man shall be o’erthrown, and the fruitful fields, shall be trod by beasts alone.”

The song is later banned by Napoleon.

Animalism

Animalism is the system of beliefs the pigs create and enforce after they overturn Mr Jones. Animalism enforces the idea that humans are bad and that animals should continue to act like animals rather than adopting human behaviour.

The Seven Commandments of Animalism

The seven commandments (listed below) are simplified for the less intelligent animals to: “Four legs good, two legs bad”.

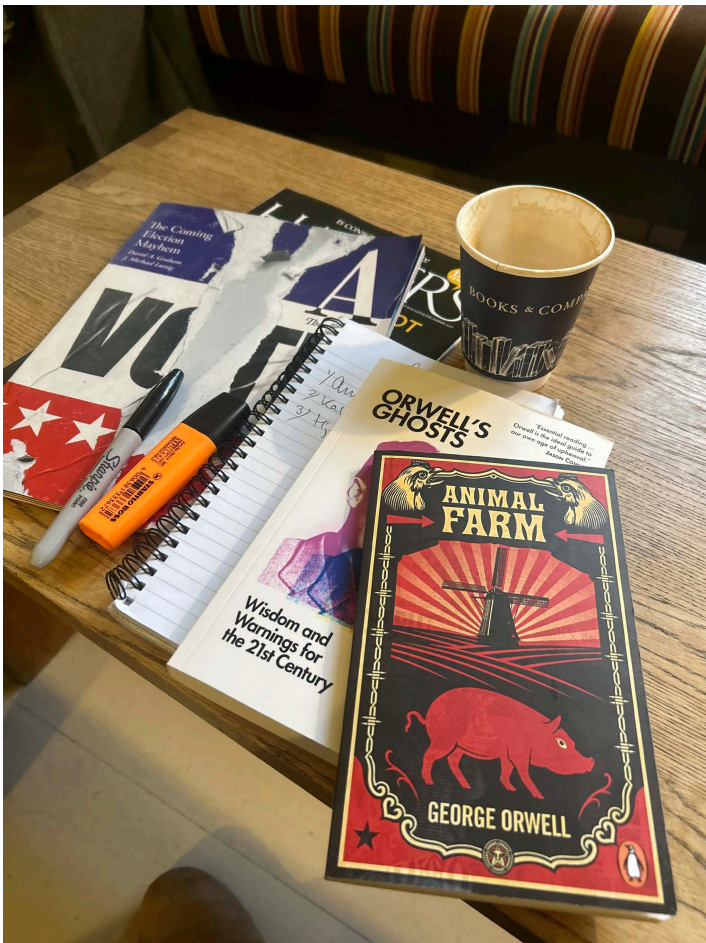
The commandments are altered according to the changing agenda of the pigs, and by the end of the story, all of the commandments have been erased - except one. “All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others”.

Before this, the seven commandments of Old Major were these:

1. Whatever goes on two legs is an enemy.
2. Whatever goes on four legs, or has wings, is a friend.
3. No animal shall wear clothes.
4. No animals shall sleep in a bed.
5. No animal shall drink alcohol.
6. No animal shall kill any other animal.
7. All animals are equal.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do the animals rebel against Mr Jones? Are their reasons justified?
2. Which character do you feel most sympathy for, and why?
3. At what point do you think the revolution begins to fail?
4. Why are the pigs able to gain so much power over the other animals?
5. What role does propaganda play in the story? Can you think of modern examples of propaganda or misleading information?
6. Boxer often says, "I will work harder" and "Napoleon is always right." Are these admirable attitudes, dangerous attitudes, or both?
7. Why do the animals find it difficult to challenge Napoleon's authority?
8. Is Benjamin wise because he sees through the lies, or is he partly responsible because he does nothing?
9. What does the final scene of the novel suggest about power and leadership?
10. Do you think Orwell's message is still relevant today? Why or why not?



Small-Group Activities

Character Investigation

Assign each group a character (Napoleon, Snowball, Boxer, Clover, Benjamin, Squealer, or Mollie). Students should:

- Describe the character.
- Explain what the character represents.
- Find three important quotations.
- Present their findings to the class.

The Seven Commandments Project

Ask students to track how the Seven Commandments change throughout the novel.

Questions:

- Why are the commandments altered?
- Why do most animals fail to notice the changes?
- What does this tell us about power and memory?

Propaganda Detective

Students examine speeches by Squealer and identify techniques such as:

- Repetition
- Fear
- Exaggeration
- Blaming others and emotional appeals.

Then ask: "How might these techniques be used in advertising, politics, or social media today?"

Creative Tasks

1. Modern Animal Farm

Imagine *Animal Farm* takes place in the 2020s.

Students can write:

- Social media posts from different characters.
- News reports from Animal Farm.
- A podcast interview with Napoleon or Snowball.

Higher-Level Thinking Questions

1. Is Orwell criticising all revolutions, or only revolutions that become dictatorships?
2. Could the outcome of the revolution have been different? What would have needed to change?
3. Which is more important in *Animal Farm*: the actions of the leaders or the behaviour of the followers?
4. Does Orwell suggest that power always corrupts? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
5. Compare *Animal Farm* with a modern political or social issue. What similarities and differences can you identify?



Final Reflection Task

Ask students to complete the statement:

"The most important lesson of *Animal Farm* for people today is _____ because _____."



PODCAST

Vivienne McKee / Lydmyren's exciting podcast about Animal Farm will be available for free download from our website (and other places where you can listen to podcasts such as Spotify

<https://open.spotify.com/show/6HmsoUMMgQtnbYoefe2d0K>

and Apple Podcasts

<https://podcasts.apple.com/dk/podcast/crazy-podcast/id1715489801>

BOOKS

The English version of Animal Farm and other George Orwell material in the original language can be ordered / purchased in the lovely international bookstore in Hellerup, Books & Company <https://www.booksandcompany.dk>

Q&A

Q&A sessions can be arranged by arrangement with London Toast Theatre at mail@londontoast.dk

TICKETS

The fantastic offer for youth groups starting at only 40kr + fee can be ordered directly at

billet@londontoast.dk_or

<https://londontoast.dk/for-schools.html>

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