George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*

Background Notes

**Literary Vocabulary:**

Allegory: An extended metaphor told as a story in which the characters, setting, and events stand alone as a narrative, but are also symbols for some other moral or spiritual concept. Allegories have both a literal meaning and a symbolic meaning.

Fable: A story meant to teach a moral lesson in which animals, mythical creatures, or inanimate objects are main characters.

Anthropomorphism: The presentation of animals with human shapes or human characteristics.

Theme: the main idea or message of a piece of literature. In this case, one must consider what Orwell is trying to say about humanity’s ability to carry out good and noble ideals and create a society based on equality.

Satire: The use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people’s stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues.

**Historical Vocabulary and Notes:**

Totalitarianism: A system of government where the group in power seeks to have complete control over the lives of its people. Totalitarian governments do not allow meetings or demonstrations, heavily censor all types of media in order to suppress any criticism from people who oppose them, and have powerful secret police forces who enforce the rules of the party in charge by any means necessary, including torture and murder. **A dictatorship is a type of totalitarian government where a single person rules indefinitely and controls everything.**

Characteristics of Totalitarianism:

* Organized Violence and Terror: Any opposition is violently crushed without any regard for human rights.
* Propaganda: Information that presents only one side of an issue or situation which is meant to influence or persuade people to support a certain cause. It is often used to get an emotional, instead of a rational, response. Governments use propaganda to convince citizens to follow a certain cause or agenda.
* Censorship: When the government suppresses any information, speech or public communication that it feels is harmful. The government determines what people are allowed to say publically, print in newspapers, or show in any other type of media.
* Cult of Personality: Created using propaganda or other methods to create an idealized image of someone. In a dictatorship which creates a cult of personality, the leader is treated as a hero or god and is glorified.
* State Control over the Individual: The government demands total, blind obedience and sacrifice for the good of the state.
* State Control over Society: The government controls all aspects of business, education, housing, religion, family life, etc.

Utopia: An ideal society or community that provides the perfect existence for humanity on Earth.

Historical Background: The novel is based on the historical events of the Russian Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The Bolshevik’s ideas followed the teachings of Karl Marx, a political philosopher who co-wrote *The Communist Manifesto*. Marx called for an end to the inequalities that existed between those with power and money, and those laborers who worked to barely make a living. In theory, under communism the government would be restructured and the land and riches redistributed so that everyone could equally share the wealth of their work. In reality, those who took power after the revolution abused that power and communist Russia became a totalitarian dictatorship.