

## Room to Read Report March 2019 **1984** by George Orwell.

This book has had two very different but popular TV Spin Offs! *Big Brother* and *Room 101* are infinitely more benign than the phenomena which inspired them: the omnipotent tyrant whose eyes can never be avoided, and the “worst thing in the world” that is Room 101 in Oceania in *1984*.

Orwell wrote this, his last novel, in 1948 as he was dying of tuberculosis. He was born into a colonial family in Bengal, was public school educated, then ‘radicalised’ from his class roots. He fought in the Spanish Civil War, watched the rise of Totalitarianism in Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, and in this novel predicted a nihilistic, hopeless, de-individualised future where all that was aspired to was **power**. “There will be no art, no literature, no science...There will be no curiosity, no enjoyment of the process of life. All competing pleasures will be destroyed. But always, always there will be the intoxication of power, constantly increasing and constantly growing subtler. Always, at every moment, there will be the thrill of victory, the sensation of trampling on an enemy who is helpless”.

Not a cheery read then, and not for the faint-hearted. The novel graphically portrays the steady vicious erosion of Winston Smith, a Party member who dared to doubt, until he is absolutely broken. The final capitulation of his personhood is achieved in Room 101.

Contained within the novel are some ingenious extracts from a heretical work by Goldstein (Big Brother as agent provocateur? Big Brother’s nemesis?) that explain why War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, and Ignorance is Strength, a consummate illustration of *Doublethink* and *Newspeak*, essential components of INGSOC (English Socialism) in action.

We all agreed that this is a great book group book, and it is obvious why it is included in school curricula. It is a book for dialogue, for questioning, for resisting all those forces that close down debate and reinforce orthodoxy: “Orthodoxy means not thinking - not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness”. On this basis we gave it a 4.5 score for recommending to other book groups. However, we thought we might give it a miss in the dentist’s waiting room, or on the beach in Corfu.

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