

## Informational Focus: Author Biography - George Orwell



Courtesy of American Memory  
at the Library of Congress.

George Orwell was born June 25, 1903 in Motihari, India as Eric Arthur Blair. Considered by many to be one of the most influential writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Orwell is known for his witty satires and savvy political commentaries.

The Blair family was not particularly well-off: Orwell would later describe them as "lower-upper-middle class." At the age of one, Orwell's mother Ida moved him to England, where he lived until 1922. He attended a private preparatory school in Sussex at the age of eight, and continued his education later at Wellington and Eton, two of the most renowned schools of England. After neglecting to win a university scholarship because of poor marks, Orwell joined the Indian

Imperial Police in 1922. After years of training and service in Burma, Orwell quit in order to return to writing. His first novel *Burmese Days* (1934) described his life in Burma and his profound hatred for Imperialism, spurred by his experiences.

In order to improve his writing and compassion for his subjects, Orwell decided to live the life of the hopeless and downtrodden. He worked at menial jobs and struggled in Paris and London living among the poor. His book based upon these experiences, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933), was initially rejected by publishers. But rather than throwing out the transcript as a secretary at the publishing office was instructed to do, she took it to another publisher, who decided to publish it. Orwell did not want to have the name Eric Blair attached to his novel, however. He wanted to take on a new persona—that of a fictional and anti-establishment revolutionist—so he decided on the pen name of George Orwell.

Orwell continued to write and published *A Clergyman's Daughter* (1935), *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1936), and *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), which was a documentary-type account of poor miners in England. He also became a socialist and traveled to Spain to report on their civil war. He fought with the United Workers Marxist Party which refueled his aversion to Communist beliefs. His novel *Homage to Catalonia*, inspired by this period in Orwell's life, was published in 1938.

During World War II, Orwell worked as a journalist for the *BBC*, *The Observer*, and as an editor for *The Tribune*. In 1944, he began writing one of his most famous and controversial works: *Animal Farm*. It was with this anti-Stalinist allegory that Orwell was finally able to live comfortably. Late in 1945, he moved to an island off the Scotland coast, where he began writing another famous novel: *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, which was published in 1949 as Orwell suffered with tuberculosis, gave a gloomy account of a dystopia of repression and propaganda.

After living in and out of hospitals for several years, Orwell succumbed to tuberculosis on January 21, 1950, in London. He was 46 years old.

### On ***Animal Farm***:

In explaining how he came to write *Animal Farm*, Orwell says he once saw a little boy whipping a horse. Later he wrote about the incident: "It struck me that if only such animals became aware of their strength we should have no power over them, and that men exploit animals in much the same way as the rich exploit the [worker]."