

# CHARACTERS Old Major

## Five key things about Old Major

Old Major is important because his speech presents the ideology on which the revolution is based, but his words sound **ironic** after the pigs take control.

1. Just as Karl Marx set out the theory of **Communism**, so Old Major devises **Animalism**.
2. He is twelve years old and considered **wise**, so everyone comes to listen.
3. His dream of a **better life** for all animals is explained in the song '**Beasts of England**', which is similar to the left-wing political anthem 'The Internationale'.
4. He views all **humans** as the enemy of animals.
5. His teaching is finally **overturned** by the pigs, who exhibit all the human vices he warns against. Even his skull, a **symbol** of his teaching, is removed from beneath the flagpole and buried.



## What does Old Major think of humans?

- Humans are responsible for everything that is wrong in the animals' lives.
- For their own purposes, humans use animals' labour, take what animals produce and slaughter them.
- Man only cares about himself, but '**Tyrant Man shall be o'erthrown**'.

## How can the animals' lives change?

- They can rebel and then be free and well fed.
- They will have a glorious future, including '**Riches more than mind can picture**'.

## How do Old Major's words become ironic?

- Old Major warns the animals about false arguments: they believe Squealer.
- He says animals have no common interests with Man: Napoleon trades with the neighbouring farmers. He says man is the only enemy and all animals are friends: Pilkington dines with Napoleon and animals are executed.
- He warns that no animal must ever '**tyrannize over his own kind**': purges take place and the pigs carry whips.
- He dreams of '**the golden future time**': things worsen by the end of the novel.

## Five key quotations

1. Old Major identifies what he sees as the problem: **'Man is the only real enemy we have.'** (Chapter 1)
2. He is wrong in his vision of the future: **'Remove Man from the scene, and the root cause of hunger and overwork is abolished for ever.'** (Chapter 1)
3. Equally ironically, he thinks that without a change, even Boxer will be sold: **'Jones will sell you to the knacker'** (Chapter 1)
4. He has a clear vision: **'All men are enemies. All animals are comrades.'** (Chapter 1)
5. He devises Animalism: **'we are all brothers'** (Chapter 1)

### Note it!

Look through Old Major's speech and notice how he convinces the animals of his ideas, by giving examples and using persuasive phrasing, including **rhetorical questions**.

## Exam focus

### How can I show the importance of Old Major's speech? AO1 AO2

You can write about how his ideas are at first adopted but then distorted as the plot unfolds.

At the beginning of the novel, the animals find Old Major's words inspiring, but they never achieve the benefits he expects. He criticises Man: 'Remove Man from the scene, and the root cause of hunger and overwork is abolished for ever' but Orwell shows that the root of the animals' problems is actually greed. This is shown through the pigs, who only pretend to follow Old Major's ideas and instead adopt men's vices, becoming just as greedy and tyrannical as Farmer Jones ever was.

Topic sentence introduces the point

Point is further explained

Quotation embedded to support point

Further development of point

## Now you try!

Finish this paragraph to show how Orwell uses irony in Old Major's speech. Use one of the quotations from the list.

The irony of the example Old Major gives, of Farmer Jones selling even Boxer . . . . .

# THEMES Power and corruption

## Five key things about power and corruption

*Animal Farm* does not just mirror the Russian Revolution – it is about dictatorships in a more general sense, too.

1. **Lord Acton**, a nineteenth-century **British politician**, said ‘All power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.’ This happens in the novel.
2. Both Jones and Napoleon use their power corruptly so the animals **suffer**.
3. Jones is **violent** and **uncaring**; Napoleon uses **terror**, **propaganda** and **lies** to maintain his position.
4. Napoleon **rewrites history** to boost his reputation and control the animals, ending up working with the enemy – the humans.
5. The **Soviet collective farms** should have provided a good standard of living – but instead, workers were **exploited**. It is the same on *Animal Farm*.

## In what ways is Jones corrupt?

- Jones owns the farm but mistreats his animals (as do Frederick and Pilkington).
- He exploits animals for profit – their lives are miserable.
- He even fires his gun to stop the animals’ noise.

## What does Napoleon do to maintain his power?

- Napoleon’s dogs suppress any dissent.
- He employs Squealer to convince the animals with lies.
- History is rewritten so he is presented as responsible for the victories (**‘Comrade Napoleon sprang forward with a cry of “Death to Humanity!”’**) and the farm’s development.



## To what extent is Napoleon corrupt?

- He betrays the revolution, taking the gains and growing fat on the profits.
- He too exploits the animals, selling eggs, and selling Boxer to the knacker.
- He breaks the commandments.
- He ends up a friend to the humans, **symbolically** even looking like them and **‘casting haughty glances from side to side’**.

## Five key quotations

1. The farm is a frightening place under Jones: **'every one of you will scream your lives out at the block within a year'** (Chapter 1)
2. The pigs take the milk and apples: **"'Never mind the milk, comrades," cried Napoleon'** (Chapter 2)
3. Napoleon's bodyguards: **'enormous dogs wearing brass-studded collars' with 'snapping jaws'** (Chapter 5)
4. Napoleon is elevated above the other animals: **'He was always referred to in formal style as "our Leader, Comrade Napoleon"'** (Chapter 8)
5. The pigs start to look and dress like humans: **'Napoleon himself appeared in a black coat, rat-catcher breeches, and leather leggings'** (Chapter 10)

### Note it!

Notice how the intellectual power of the pigs allows them to become leaders – the way they learn to read and write, and their ability to plan and organise enables them to become leaders and tyrants.

## Exam focus

### How can I write about the corruption of the pigs? AO1

You can show how Snowball seems to care about the animals, while Napoleon turns into a self-interested tyrant.

Although he is not perfect, Snowball does think about the wellbeing of the animals. In contrast, Napoleon cares only for himself. He uses the dogs to terrorise the animals: enormous dogs wearing brass-studded collars. In addition, through Squealer he effectively rewrites history and establishes a personality cult around him, so that he is acclaimed and reaps all the benefits as dictator at the farm.

Topic sentence introduces the point

Point is further explained

Appropriate supporting quotation

Extends the point

## Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about how the pigs are just as corrupt as the humans. Use one of the quotations from the list.

By the end of the novel, the pigs are as corrupt as Jones, Pilkington and Frederick, even dressing similarly, as .....