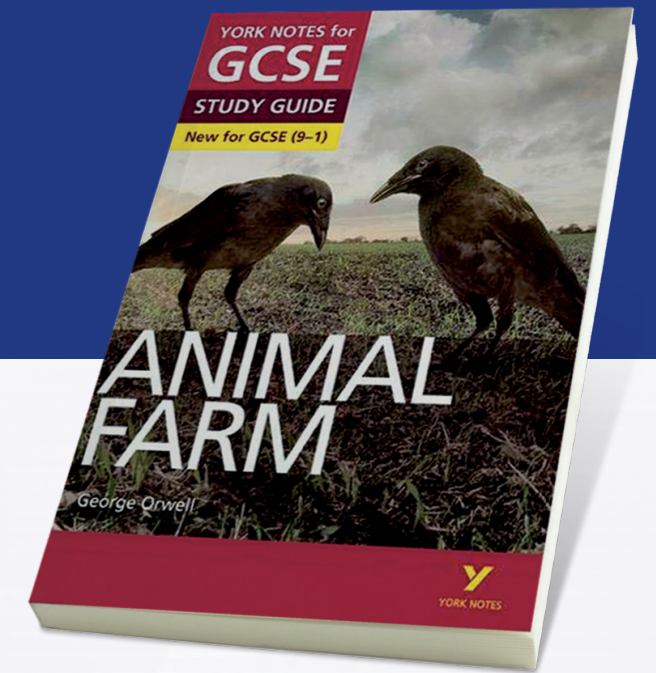# Top 10 Study Tips

The Top 10 things you **need** to know when studying…

Animal Farm

1 Read the book!

Make sure you know the novel inside out. Whilst reading, **highlight** your **favourite moments, any lines that you particularly like** or anything that really **stands out**. By doing this you are **interacting critically with the text**, which will serve you well when you come to study the novel more closely.

2 Historical context is key!

Animal Farm is an **allegory** of historical events in Russia following the fall of the **Tsar** in 1917, the ascent to power of the **Communist Party** under the leadership of **Lenin** and the subsequent struggle for **power** between **Stalin** and **Trotsky**. If you don't know these names or events, then you need to brush up on the key facts about this historical period. Why not **refer to the Contexts section** in our guide? We outline all the key dates and events you need to know!

3 What's in a name?

The names of the characters in *Animal Farm* are **expressive** and give us an instant **insight** into the **personality traits** of each of them. The most obvious names to examine are:

a) Napoleon   b) Snowball
c) Squealer   d) Boxer & Clover

What can you **infer** from these names? Are any of them **ironic**? What **images** are conjured up for you when you read them? You could draw a **spider diagram** for each of the characters, writing down all the connotations and ideas that their names **evoke**. To what extent do the characters live up to their names? To what extent do their names undermine or even mock them?

4 Quotations

Get some **key quotations** under your belt for **themes**, **language** and **characters** – sometimes you can find quotations that touch on all three. Check out our **'Key quotations'** feature in the **'Revise' section** of our online study guide to start you off! Remember: **embed your quotations** into the points in your essay for a more **sophisticated** answer.

5 Literary terms

Examiners will be **impressed** if you can **identify** literary techniques used by an author and then **comment on how they are effective**. Understanding the techniques used by **Orwell** and using the **proper terms** is a good way to **boost your grade**. For example, do you know what **irony** is? How about **subversion** and **dystopia**? Does Orwell use **figurative language**? Remember: always comment on the **effect** of Orwell's techniques.

6 Fairytales and fables

Fairytales and fables are usually short, easy to read, and contain an element of the **fantastical** (e.g. talking animals, magic and imaginary lands). Remember: the subtitle of *Animal Farm* is '**A Fairy Story**' – but, does this 'fairy story' description fit? How does the text differ from your view of a typical fairytale? What elements are fairytale-like?

Think about the **simple language** and the **style of narration**. A fable can be defined as a short story that has a **moral message.** What would the message of *Animal Farm* be, and how does it link to the **themes** of the text?

7 Understanding satire

Satire is a tricky concept to grasp, but it's one that is central to this text. Satire is a form that often uses **humour** to ridicule and attack ideas, institutions or general occurrences of foolish behaviour. *Animal Farm* is seen as a **satire** on **political power.** How does translating or converting the events of **Russian history** into the story of a farm run by pigs ridicule **political power** and **key historical figures**? Look at the way in which Orwell plays on **animal stereotypes** and **political allegory** in this text.

8 Orwell's language

Two things may strike you about this text: firstly, it is quite short; secondly, the language is rather simple. But don't be fooled! Orwell uses **clear**, **economical** language to carefully guide his reader through the events. Why does he do this and how does he do this? Explore the use of **fairytale phrasing**, **repetition of phrases** and the use of **descriptive language** (rather than figurative language). Orwell does not hide his strong opinions about **politics** in this book – far from it – but he does it in such a subtle way that the reader is often unaware that they are being influenced by his points of view. Indeed, one of Orwell's main concerns was how **language** and **clever rhetoric** could be used to manipulate people.

9 Quick check

How much do you really know about the novel? Try to answer these questions – if you don't know the answers, maybe a bit more revision is needed!

a) What does the destruction of the windmill signify?

b) Why is the theme of education central to the novel?

c) What does Manor Farm represent at the start of the book?

d) How is Napoleon described?

e) What does Benjamin finally decide to read to the other animals?

f) What song is banned by the pigs? Why?

10 Further questions

It is important to practise for exams or assessments by writing extended written responses. Here are a few exam-style questions to get you started. For more, see our **Progress Booster section** in the **print** and **online** *York Notes* study guide:

a) Explore the way Orwell presents the relationship between Napoleon and Snowball. How does it alter as the story progresses?

Write about: a) the methods Orwell chooses to present their relationship; b) what others think and say about them.

b) How does Orwell explore the breakdown of the ideals of *Animal Farm*?

Write about: a) the original reason for the Seven Commandments; b) how the lives of the animals change.

c) How does Orwell present Snowball as a potential leader?

Write about: a) how Snowball is contrasted with Napoleon; b) how and why his downfall occurs.