

# Assessment highlights 2021

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## English

### Internal assessment 1

Extended response — written response for a public audience

### Lucy Johnston

Biloela State High School

### Assessment overview

#### Context

In this unit, students studied George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and James McTeigue's film *V for Vendetta* to understand the representations of systematic power that is evident in both texts.

Students were given the scenario of writing an online literary article for Electric Lit, an authentic online publication, as part of a series of articles recognising the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

The syllabus conditions require students to produce a written response of 1000–1500 words that may be accompanied by digital elements appropriate to the type of publication.

#### Task

Students were asked to write an online literary article that analyses the representations of systematic power across George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and James McTeigue's *V for Vendetta*. To focus the analysis, students were given a choice of three questions that address a different element of systematic power.

## Student response

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# Why Governments are at the Mercy of Their Citizens

The authorities in George Orwell's classic novel *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* and the film *V for Vendetta* seem utterly unconquerable, but hope isn't lost yet.

Every human being possesses the ability of independent thought. It is simply part of the human condition. You are doing it right now. You are reading this sentence, unpacking it, understanding its meaning, and judging it. You remember it. These are natural processes which we all undergo. While these qualities are usually considered unequivocal advantages, they are the greatest adversary of the strict regimes of totalitarian societies found in the fiction works *V for Vendetta* (directed by James McTeigue) and George Orwell's *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*. In these texts, many of the struggles, much of the work and nearly all the resources are devoted to minimizing and eliminating these essential qualities. The worst enemy of the state is the individual, for being just that – individual. People contribute to the disruption of unity and expose the falsification of the past, which the authorities in the respective texts depend on most to maintain power and control. The invention and use of techniques such as “doublethink,” the forgery of the past and

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**“People should not be afraid of their government; governments should be afraid of their people.”**

~ *V for Vendetta*



**Lucy Johnston**

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the constant surveillance in *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, as well as curfews and threat of torture in *V for Vendetta* are some of the ways these texts attempt to annihilate the attributes of human beings. However, you and I both know that it is impossible to entirely quash our instincts. In both texts, the power and control of the establishment is retained through unity of the population, control of the past, and torture, which can easily be undermined by even the most fundamental characteristics of the individual – memory, creativity and thought.



## Strength Through Unity, Unity Through Faith



**“You had to live – did live, from habit that became instinct – in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinised.”**

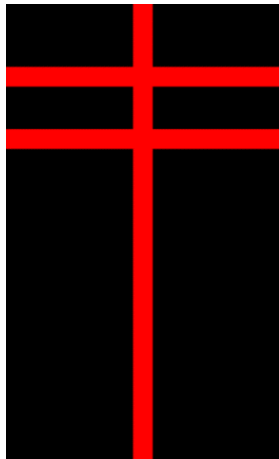
**~George Orwell,  
1984 p5**

As a measure of control, the regimes in both texts have a strong emphasis on unity. In *V for Vendetta*, this is achieved through mandating of religion, and the systematic persecution of minorities. Further, the government controls much smaller aspects of people’s lives. There are curfews, private conversations are monitored, and media is strictly controlled. You may be asking yourself, what motivates the government do this? To what end? By slowly chipping away at what makes you, you, and limiting the basic freedoms of citizens, individualism is slowly but surely diminished. In this way, the authority regulates its greatest threat.

In *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, similar methods of control are adopted, the main difference being surveillance. Privacy is eliminated with the devices called “telescreens,” with which the Thought Police watch your every move. Although laws in the traditional sense aren’t in effect, a wrong look, a deviant thought, or a whispered word whilst asleep results in almost certain death. Terrifying, right? This strict control of thought and emotions by the Party makes individuals less like people, and more like the cells of an

organism. “Can you not understand, Winston, that the individual is only a cell? The weariness of the cell is the vigour of the organism.” (*Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, p276). The clever use of this analogy by O’Brien demonstrates the vital necessity of the individual to the power of the Party. Nevertheless, one deviant individual can destroy the whole organism, like a few cancerous cells. In this way, the individual is both essential and destructive to the power of the Party.

Another feature of both these societies is the control of the arts and the use of language. In *V for Vendetta*, a blacklist of music is created by High Chancellor Sutler. By limiting media output, individuals are stripped of their right to freedom of expression. In *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* the control of language and entertainment is taken to the



(Wikiquote, 2011)

extreme. All media and entertainment in Oceania are manufactured in the Ministry of Truth. Additionally, the use of the

hybrid language Newspeak further limits individuals’ ability to express themselves by containing fewer and fewer word choices with each new edition. By doing this, it isn’t only the range of words which is narrowed. With the destruction of every word comes the oppression of opinions and the butchery of beliefs. Dissenting views are impossible to harbour without words to express them. This is the states’ attempt at eliminating its greatest enemy – individualism.

**“Can you not understand, Winston, that the individual is only a cell? The weariness of the cell is the vigour of the organism.”**


**~George Orwell,  
1984 p276**



## Who Controls the Past Controls the Future: Who Controls the Present Controls the Past

History is one of our most important tools as a society. It prevents us from repeating mistakes of the past, helps us to move forward and build on past knowledge. However, the aim of the ruling

bodies in both texts is not to advance or become more knowledgeable. There is only one objective. Power. For this reason, the past is no longer a necessity, but a burden.



**“We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power. Not wealth or luxury or long life or happiness: only power, pure power.”**

**~George Orwell,  
1984 p275**

In *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, an entire department – the Ministry of Truth – is dedicated to the destruction and falsification of records, which prevent the Party or Big Brother from being incriminated by their past words. It is done in such a way that all existing documents paint the picture the Party wants, without a hint that they had ever been tampered with. The generations to come will be unable to distinguish between the lies and truth. In the end, the only evidence exists in human memories, which will only live as long as they do. This is the true power of the Party. Power over the past is power over everything. But human nature gives individuals a deadly weapon against the Party, and it come from our own minds. Memories.

The establishment in *V for Vendetta* is not as meticulous as the Party, so while most records are destroyed and the media falsifies the past, human memories are not altered and no techniques such as doublethink exist. Instead, it is up to the media to fabricate events, for example, that the destruction of the Bailey statue was purposeful.

This is part of the reason this regime was eventually overcome by individualism: it did not effectively control the past or memories.



## T for Torture

One stomach-churning way of destroying individualism is through torture. The essence of a person can be molded and sculpted through torture. In this way, governments control their most lethal threat. Many forms of torture are used by the ruling bodies in the texts: physical cruelty, humiliation, starvation, sleep deprivation and psychological torment.

In *Nineteen-Eighty-Four*, the torture techniques are used to convert non-conformists to the ideology of the Party. This is done by confusing the victim, rendering them unsure if the torturer is friend or enemy. While Winston hates O'Brien for the pain inflicted, he simultaneously admires and trusts him. Winston must accept the Party truth, despite what he knows is reality. This mind-boggling use of juxtaposition is simply incomprehensible to us, but for the victims, it is overwhelming to the point of insanity. Inevitably, their personality morphs into the Party's ideology.

The torture in *V for Vendetta* takes a slightly different approach in controlling individualism. In



fact, it isn't the torture itself that changes individuals, but the threat of detainment constantly looming over people's heads. The techniques used by Creedy are never shown on screen, so it's the dreaded black bags that go over people's heads as they are arrested that shape the behaviours of people. In the film, the black bag is a symbol for terror and death. This fear

instilled in the citizens causes many of them to succumb to the views of the government and suppress their individuality. Although none of Creedy's torture is shown, the audience sees V torture Evey while impersonating Creedy. V is portrayed as the hero of the movie, yet his techniques are similar to that of a tyrannical, suppressive government. The newly transformed Evey is fearless and strong – exactly what V needs her to be. To him, the individual is not useful, only people willing to conform to his standards rather than the establishment's. What's more, V motivates a whole army to march in uniformity in order to escape the constraints of uniformity! Ironic, right? Although his motives are equality and freedom, his techniques seem awfully familiar. The parallel between V and High Chancellor Sutler begs the question: do the ends justify the means?



While the defeat of an indestructible, totalitarian regime appears to be out of reach, hope is not lost. Without citizens, the government does not exist, and it has power over nothing. With citizens, the state faces its most deadly threat. In this way, the individual is both an enemy and friend; simultaneously necessary and dangerous. The government may attempt to control individualism through uniformity, control of the past, and torture, but hope prevails. For the oppressors to maintain their power and control, the essential qualities of the individual – thought, creativity, and memory must be repressed. However, these qualities can never be completely stifled. We mere individuals hold an extraordinary amount of power against our rulers. So why don't we start using it?



(C, Date Unknown)



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