1984 by George Orwell - Answers to the questions:

How is the society in 1984 structured?

There are three large superstates: Eurasia, Eastasia, and Oceania. The latter consists of the Americas and Great Britain, so Winston Smith is a citizen of Oceania working in London. The three superstates are at constant war with each other, in varying combinations.

The structure is pyramidal, i.e. few people are at the top, and most people are at the bottom of the hierarchy. On the very top we find Big Brother, who is the great leader of The Party (INGSOC) and has absolute power. However, whether Big Brother exists as a real person is not clear. Winston asks O'Brien this question during his "treatment" at the Ministry of Love, and O'Brien answers, 'Of course he exists. The Party exists. Big Brother is the embodiment of the Party.' 'Does he exist in the same way as I exist?' asks Winston. - 'You do not exist,' is O'Brien's answer.

The Inner Party follows in the hierarchy. They Inner Party members are the few people with collective and individual power, the oligarchs. They determine everything that happens in Oceania. They are 'limited to six millions, or something less than 2 per cent of the population of Oceania'.

'Below the Inner Party comes the Outer Party, which, if the Inner Party is described as the brain of the State, may be justly likened to the hands.' Winston Smith and Julia, Syme and Parsons, and others working in various sections of the ministries are members of the Outer Party. They have no power, are observed and controlled at all times and at all levels.

Below that come the dumb masses who are habitually referred to as 'the proles', numbering perhaps 85 per cent of the population. The proles 'don't count'; they are like animals, we learn several times throughout the novel. Winston Smith hopes that the proles might one day start a rebellion and overthrow The Party, but he also knows that this is impossible.

What are the three slogans of the Party? What do they signify?

WAR IS PEACE

FREEDOM IS SLAVERY

IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH

The war between the three super states Oceania, Eurasia, and Eastasia is not meant to be won. The main purpose of this constant war is to destroy the products of human labour, and to keep the people poor, very poor, so they can be controlled more easily. Being so poor, they are busy managing to survive, there is no energy left for any initiatives that might endanger the existing order. Thus, the war creates stability, and stability can be seen as peace. After all, the people of Oceania do not fight each other…

Big Brother controls everything: the people, their thoughts, their feelings, the reality, and the laws of nature. In Orwell's dystopian world of 1984 the reality is determined by what happens inside the mind of the people. 'If I think I float, and you think I float, then it happens.' says O'Brien to Winston. The minds of the people are controlled by Big Brother, therefore reality is controlled by Big Brother, and therefore nobody knows anything personally, only what Big Brother tells them to know – if it suits him. The best thing is to be completely ignorant, so your mind is readily available for Big Brother's wishes, for his news, information, or knowledge. Being ignorant makes you strong because you become a perfect cell of The Party – and The Party is strong. Of course, any kind of thought or 'knowledge' that might roam in the mind of a citizen of Oceania can be replaced by anything, anytime, even by its exact opposite, if that is The Party's wish.

O'Brien explains to Winston: 'Alone — free — the human being is always defeated. It must be so, because every human being is doomed to die, which is the greatest of all failures. But if he can make complete, utter submission, if he can escape from his identity, if he can merge himself in the Party so that he is the Party, then he is all-powerful and immortal.'

Being 'free' as Winston or we understand it, in the dystopian society of 1984 means that you are a slave of your own limited individual life, which is weak and temporary, bound to fail, to die. It is much better not to be "free" and instead willingly submitting to Big Brother, because Big Brother, the Party, is strong, all-powerful and immortal.

Why is London in such a terrible state?

London – actually "Airstrip One" in Nineteen Eighty-Four – is in such a terrible state because there is constant war and the people are all kept poor. However, the Party keeps letting its members know through the ubiquitous telescreens or other media that everything is in perfect order and life has never been so good … and if the Party says that everything is ok, then it is ok.

What is Oceania?

Oceania is one of the three super states on the planet, the other ones being Eurasia and Eastasia. Winston lives in Airstrip One – formerly London – which is part of Oceania. It is interesting to see that Orwell put the Bristish Isles in one state together with the American continent.

What is Winston Smith's job?

Winston's job is to forge the records of the past. In Winston's case, these records come in the form of articles from newspapers. He changes the text and the pictures of any article according to the wishes of the Party. The articles that he forges have in most cases already been forged innumerous times, so that nobody actually knows what really happened at any time in the past. Winston knows that he falsifies the past. He actually likes his job because he finds it intellectually challenging. He understands how the system works, yet he

does not understand why the Party wants so much power over its people.

What is the „revolution“ that is mentioned in the novel?

It is the revolution of the working class. According to the Party, before the revolution there were the evil capitalists who amassed private fortunes and had all other people work for them in their private homes and in their factories under horrible conditions. The revolution has turned everything to the better, overthrowing the old system and replacing it with this society under Big Brother, where the workers and all other people have a much better life.

What is the function of the “telescreens” that are everywhere?

The telescreens connect the people to the Party by informing them on a 24/7 basis with no chance to ever switch them off. They can only be dimmed. Also, the people of Oceania are constantly observed visually and acoustically through the telescreens, everywhere they are, even in their private homes.

Who is O’Brien ?

O’Brien is an Inner Party member who gets in touch with Winston and gives him the tenth edition of the newspeak dictionary. This dictionary contains the “Theory of Oligarchical Collectivism”, apparently written by Emanuel Goldstein, the leader of the Brotherhood that is against the Party. Winston thinks and hopes that O’Brien is secretly an agent of Goldstein’s resistance, but that turns out to be a bitter illusion when he is confronted with O’Brien in the Ministry of Love. O’Brien tortures Winston and explains to him how the state works under the rule of Big Brother. Although O’Brien makes Winston suffer, Winston cannot help but admire O’Brien’s intelligence.

Who is Julia ?

Winston’s lover, a beautiful dark-haired girl working in the Fiction Department at the Ministry of Truth. Julia enjoys sex, and claims to have had affairs with many Party members. Julia is pragmatic and optimistic. Her rebellion against the Party is small and personal, for her own enjoyment, in contrast to Winston’s ideological motivation. (from www.sparknotes.com/lit/1984/characters.html)

The love affair between Winston and Julia starts mainly as an act of rebellion against the Party and from a wish to satisfy their sexual needs, but these negative and superficial feelings soon develop into a real, emotional romance. Julia and Winston really love and trust each other, which is almost unthinkable in Big Brother’s society. Of course, such a romance is forbidden, it is – in newspeak - sexcrime, ownlife, thoughtcrime. You may also like to read this.

How does Julia get in touch with Winston ?

Since anything that is not under control of the Party is forbidden and should therefore be avoided, personal relationships outside your workplace are very suspicious. Therefore Julia cannot just stop and talk to Winston casually. Nothing is casual in Big Brother’s society. Everybody is constantly observed. Julia finds a way of giving Winston a little slip of paper with a message directly into his hand. She stumbles – intentionally – and asks Winston for help. On that occasion Winston feels that she has put something into his hand. He later secretly reads the message in his cubicle – his workplace – and immediately throws it into the “memory hole”, where it is burnt. The message says “I love you”, which astonishes Winston. The second time Julia approaches Winston is in a crowd during a public hanging of war prisoners. There they agree to meet outside London.

The voice of the telescreen talks about the “overfulfilment of the ninth three-year plan”. What does this mean?

The economy is planned by the Party and divided into threeyear-plans. What the people get to hear in Oceania is ruthless propaganda. Whatever “news” they hear is not true in the sense we understand that word (In Big Brother’s world it is true, of course). It is only meant to appease the population. Winston himself is one of the producers of the made-up, forged “data” that the female voice keeps spreading over the telescreens.

“We shall meet in a place where there is no darkness”. Who says this? What is meant by it? How does Winston understand it?

In his desperation and helplessness, Winston dreams of a better world, and on some occasions he hears a voice saying “We shall meet in a place where there is no darkness”. In one dream it is O’Brien that says this sentence. When Winston visits O’Brien in his office, before Winston leaves the following conversation takes place:

[O’Brien said] “We shall meet again — if we do meet again-’ Winston looked up at him. ’In the place where there is no darkness?’ he said hesitantly. O’Brien nodded without appearance of surprise. ’In the place where there is no darkness,’ he said, as though he had recognized the allusion.”

This place seems like a promise of a better world, a paradise, but in the end it turns out to be a windowless room in the Ministry of Love, where the lights are never switched off.

What is INGSOC ?

INGSOC is the name of the Party INGSOC is an acronym for "English Socialism”.

What is Newspeak?

Newspeak is the new language created by the Party that restricts the ability of the people to express their thoughts and opinions, or even to think them. This is done by eliminating words that convey meanings not appropriate to the Party, and by simplifying the vocabulary, e.g. good – plusgood – doubleplusgood instead of good-better-best, or ungood – plusungood – doubleplusungood for bad – worse – worst.

In 1984 newspeak has not reached its last stage. As Syme – Winston's friend and newspeak specialist (who is later vaporized by the Party) – explains, the tenth edition of the newspeak dictionary will be smaller than the ninth edition with which Winston is still working, and the eleventh edition will be much thinner still. In the canteen Syme explains to Winston:

'Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed, will be expressed by exactly one word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten. Already, in the Eleventh Edition, we're not far from that point. But the process will still be continuing long after you and I are dead. Every year fewer and fewer words, and the range of consciousness always a little smaller. Even now, of course, there's no reason or excuse for committing thoughtcrime. It's merely a question of self-discipline, realitycontrol. But in the end there won't be any need even for that. The Revolution will be complete when the language is perfect. Newspeak is Ingsoc and Ingsoc is Newspeak,' he added with a sort of mystical satisfaction.'

Why does Julia want to see Winston Smith again ?

Before the treatment at the Ministry of Love: She wants to see him because she wants to eonjoy herself, she wants sex, and then Winston's love.

After the treatment, when both Julia and Winston have learnt to love Big Brother: She meets him in the Chestnut Tree Café only to tell him that she betrayed him and told them everything about him. The encounter is very superficial: They no longer love each other; they both love only Big Brother.

Why does Winston begin to write in his diary?

Winston begins to write his diary because he feels a strong desire to communicate what he thinks and feels about the world he lives in to somebody. Since there is nobody around the only place he can conceive is a diary, where he writes to himself, or - as he thinks when he starts the first lines - for the future, for the unborn. Read the following excerpt:

He sat back. A sense of complete helplessness had descended upon him. To begin with, he did not know with any certainty that this was 1984. It must be round about that date, since he was fairly sure that his age was thirty-nine, and he believed that he had been born in 1944 or 1945; but it was never possible nowadays to pin down any date within a year or two. For whom, it suddenly occurred to him to wonder, was he writing this diary? For the future, for the unborn. His mind hovered for a moment round the doubtful date on the page, and then fetched up with a bump against the Newspeak word doublethink. For the first time the magnitude of what he had undertaken came home to him. How could you communicate with the future? It was of its nature impossible. Either the future would resemble the present, in which case it would not listen to him: or it would be different from it, and his predicament would be meaningless.

Freedom is the freedom to say that 2+2=4. If that is granted all else follows. What does this mean?

In the society of 1984 the Party controls everything, even the laws of nature, even the result of the addition 2+2. Therefore there can be no common ground for a mutual agreement on anything. Nobody has the chance to bring up any arguments other than the arguments provided and approved by the Party. There can be no opinion that differs from the Party's view. Since the Party controls everything, nobody can say that an argument is not accurate or even wrong. On what grounds could it be seen as wrong? Nobody can say "In my opinion what the Party does should be done differently; nobody can say that in their opinion what the Party says is not true; and nobody can argue on the grounds of the laws of physics or on mathematical axioms or theorems.

Example: The Party says that Big Brother can fly. You say, "That is impossible, he does not have wings, and there is the gravity of the planet earth that attracts him and keeps him on the ground. Even if he had wings, he would not be strong enough to operate them.

The Party says: Gravity does not exist. Big Brother can fly. There he is, flying in the sky! Can you see him? A good (= fully compliant) outer Party member like Mr. Parsons will answer, "Oh yes, I can see him; there he is!" Anybody who cannot see him will end up in room 101…

In a world where people agree on common principles and acknowledge the laws of nature, arguments can be built on them, thus "Freedom is the freedom to say that 2+2=4. If that is granted all else follows."

What is the "theory of oligarchical collectivism"?

Relatively few (=oligo) people constitute the Inner Party *collectively* and rule Oceania *collectively*, embodied in Big Brother.

Why does the Party kill the people if they love Big Brother ?

As O'Brien explains to Winston, the individual is not important, the collective mind of the Party is important, immortal. If an individual is no longer needed the Party will vaporize him or her. That is no big deal. It is important not to kill anybody as long as they do NOT love Big Brother, because in that case he or she might become a martyr.

Is Winston Smith sentenced to death?

No, he is not sentenced to death. There is no death penalty in 1984. Of course, the Party might shoot an individual, they might decide to do so anytime, on any grounds.

Why does Winston begin to write in his diary?

In the world of Airstrip One (=London), simply writing in a diary is an unpardonable crime. Winston hates Big Brother and the totalitarian rule in Oceania, but there is nobody he can talk or write to because everybody is constantly observed and controlled at all levels. So, in his helplessness, he decides to start writing a diary, addressing his thoughts to himself or rather to an imagined future without Big Brother: "From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of doublethink — greetings!"

Who is Goldstein?

Goldstein is the leader of the 'Brotherhood' that is against Big Brother, against the Party. The people of Oceania must learn to hate him, and they are reminded of Goldstein's evil plans every day, during the Two Minutes Hate.

What is the "Two Minutes Hate"?

During the "Two Minutes Hate" that take place regularly every day the people of Oceania must learn to focus their negative feelings and thoughts on Emmanuel Goldstein, the leader of the Brotherhood / the resistance.

Who does Winston think O'Brien is?

He thinks and hopes that he is a secret agent of Goldstein's Brotherhood. Later, in the Ministry of Love, he finds out that O'Brien is an Inner Party member.

Why is Parsons arrested?

Parsons is arrested because his daughter denounced him. Apparently, he said something bad about Big Brother in his sleep.

What is room 101, and what happens in it?

In room 101 the people are confronted with their deepest fears so that all their inner resistance against Big Brother collapses.

What happens to Winston in room 101? Why?

In Winston's case, his biggest fear are the rats. When he is confronted with rats in front of his face, when he is terrorized by the fear that they will jump on his face he finally betrays his feelings for Julia. "Do it to Julia, not me!" he shouts. That crushes his soul, his innermost self, and he ends up loving Big Brother.

Why does O'Brien torture Winston? Why does he not simply kill him?

O'Brien says to Winston during the torture:
'And why do you imagine that we bring people to this place?'
'To make them confess.'
'No, that is not the reason. Try again.'
'To punish them.'
'No!' exclaimed O'Brien. His voice had changed extraordinarily, and his face had suddenly become both stern and animated. 'No! Not merely to extract your confession, not to punish you. Shall I tell you why we have brought you here? To cure you! To make you sane! Will you understand, Winston, that no one whom we bring to this place ever leaves our hands uncured? We are not interested in those stupid crimes that you have committed. The Party is not interested in the overt act: the thought is all we care about. We do not merely destroy our enemies, we change them. Do you understand what I mean by that?'

Later he says:
'You are thinking,' he said, 'that since we intend to destroy you utterly, so that nothing that you say or do can make the smallest difference — in that case, why do we go to the trouble of interrogating you first? That is what you were thinking, was it not?' 'Yes,' said Winston.
O'Brien smiled slightly. 'You are a flaw in the pattern, Winston. You are a stain that must be wiped out.'

First Winston must be 'cured', otherwise he might become a martyr; then he may or may not be killed – that is not so important.

What is artsem?

All children were to be begotten by artificial insemination (artsem, it was called in Newspeak) and brought up in public institutions. The Party plans to abolish marriage and sex, as they involve feelings and emotions that are outside their control.

Why is there constant war?

See the question about the three slogans of the Party.

Who are the proles?

See the first question.