

These tasks will help you prepare a piece of writing to enter the Orwell Youth Prize, on the theme for 2023
'Who's in Control?'



LESSON 1 – Behind the scenes: Orwell the Dishwasher!

George Orwell: 'plongeur' – and observer.

Being poor in Paris gave the writer the chance to think carefully about the role of each worker in a restaurant – and how much control each one has.

Orwell wrote this:

The waiter's ... work gives him the mentality, not of a workman, but of a snob. He lives perpetually in sight of rich people, stands at their tables, listens to their conversation, sucks up to them with smiles and discreet little jokes. He has the pleasure of spending money by proxy. Moreover, there is always the chance that he may become rich himself, for, though most waiters die poor, they have long runs of luck occasionally. At some cafés on the Grand Boulevard there is so much money to be made that the waiters actually pay the patron for their employment. The result is that between constantly seeing money, and hoping to get it, the waiter comes to identify himself to some extent with his employers. He will take pains to serve a meal in style, because he feels that he is participating in the meal himself. (Down and Out in Paris and London, by George Orwell, Ch. 14)

Now it's your turn to find out Who's in Control – in today's workplace.

1) **Research:**

Choice 1: Think of a place of work near you – perhaps where a family member or family friend works. Interview at least one employee (ideally two, at different levels in the organisation) with the same questions. You could do this via email, or in person if they're in your own family.

1. How is your organisation led and managed? How would you describe the style of management? How much autonomy do you and other employees have?
2. How are the interests of employees represented to management? Trade union? Professional association? Formal or informal procedures?
3. How do employees express their preferences and grievances?
4. How are conflicts resolved?

Choice 2: Alternatively, research an organisation online and find out the answers to the same questions.

Choice 3: Workplace tour or visit

- Please note: any visits must be arranged with permission of parent or guardian – and following the safeguarding procedures of your school/college and the workplace

Many employers are happy to host students as visitors or for work experience. Careers Guidance personnel at school are often eager to help.

At the visit, observe all you can about who is in control and in what ways. For instance, do managers regularly check workers or give frequent instructions? Do workers seem to be autonomous, making most decisions themselves? And so on. You can use the four questions above as guidance.

- 2) **Share:** bring the findings from your research to the class, ready to summarise them and share one or two things you found interesting.
- 3) **Think:** always the trickiest part! What have you learnt about 'who's in control' in the workplace? Do certain jobs or roles give more or less control? Is control always a matter of negotiation or is it sometimes enforced? What makes some people *feel* less in control than others?
- 4) **Write:** persuasive letter or neutral report:

Imagine you are an unhappy employee. Write a letter to your employer or manager, to persuade them to give employees more control. Explain how the changes would make you happier and more productive workers.

OR

Imagine you are a consultant, hired to help a company understand its employees better. Write a neutral report which describes how much or how little control the workers feel they have. Then recommend specific changes to help workers feel more in control and become more productive.