

These tasks will help you prepare a piece of writing to enter the Orwell Youth Prize 2024, on the theme of 'HOME'



## LESSON 3: ENGLAND YOUR ENGLAND



A great place to start when preparing your Orwell Youth Prize entry is by reading work by the man himself! On the next page, you'll find an extract from the start of a famous Orwell essay about the idea of a country as home – 'England Your England'.

First, read the full extract. Then, work through the questions below, which will help you think about how Orwell uses language and structure, and how this might help you with your own writing. This will take about **45 minutes**.

- 1) "As I write, highly civilized human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me." How has Orwell combined the three clauses of this very **first sentence** to hook his readers' attention?
- 2) How does Orwell use language to develop a strong argument about the power of patriotism ('national loyalty') **in paragraphs 2, 3 and 4**? Think about the imagery, similes, examples, adjectives and verbs he uses. Come up with at least **two** points and explain why they're effective.
- 3) "When you come back to England from any foreign country, you have immediately the sensation of breathing a different air." **Reread paragraph 5**. Orwell writes about his ideas about what makes England different from other places. What are some distinctive qualities that you associate with your home country? Come up with at least **two** points.
- 4) **In paragraph 6**, Orwell also talks about the differences between different parts of England: "The clatter of clogs in the Lancashire mill towns, the to-and-fro of the lorries on the Great North Road, the queues outside the Labour Exchanges, the rattle of pin-tables in the Soho pubs..."  
Think about your town/city/village. What makes it different from other parts of the country? Think about the landscape, accent, dialect (local slang), shops, jobs, food, clothes, animals, plants, weather, people's attitudes, etc. Write **one paragraph**.
- 5) **In paragraph 7**, Orwell directly addresses the reader: "And above all, it is your civilisation, it is you." How does this help him to strengthen his argument?
- 6) This is part I of a longer essay. How does Orwell **end** this section leaving his readers wanting to read on?

## England Your England – Part I

As I write, highly civilized human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me.

They do not feel any enmity against me as an individual, nor I against them. They are 'only doing their duty', as the saying goes. Most of them, I have no doubt, are kind-hearted law-abiding men who would never dream of committing murder in private life. On the other hand, if one of them succeeds in blowing me to pieces with a well-placed bomb, he will never sleep any the worse for it. He is serving his country, which has the power to absolve him from evil.

One cannot see the modern world as it is unless one recognizes the overwhelming strength of patriotism, national loyalty. In certain circumstances it can break down, at certain levels of civilization it does not exist, but as a *positive* force there is nothing to set beside it. Christianity and international Socialism are as weak as straw in comparison with it. Hitler and Mussolini rose to power in their own countries very largely because they could grasp this fact and their opponents could not.

Also, one must admit that the divisions between nation and nation are founded on real differences of outlook. Till recently it was thought proper to pretend that all human beings are very much alike, but in fact anyone able to use his eyes knows that the average of human behaviour differs enormously from country to country. Things that could happen in one country could not happen in another. Hitler's June purge, for instance, could not have happened in England. And, as western peoples go, the English are very highly differentiated. There is a sort of back-handed admission of this in the dislike which nearly all foreigners feel for our national way of life. Few Europeans can endure living in England, and even Americans often feel more at home in Europe.

When you come back to England from any foreign country, you have immediately the sensation of breathing a different air. Even in the first few minutes dozens of small things conspire to give you this feeling. The beer is bitterer, the coins are heavier, the grass is greener, the advertisements are more blatant. The crowds in the big towns, with their mild knobby faces, their bad teeth and gentle manners, are different from a European crowd. Then the vastness of England swallows you up, and you lose for a while your feeling that the whole nation has a single identifiable character. Are there really such things as nations? Are we not forty-six million individuals, all different? And the diversity of it, the chaos! The clatter of clogs in the Lancashire

mill towns, the to-and-fro of the lorries on the Great North Road, the queues outside the Labour Exchanges, the rattle of pin-tables in the Soho pubs, the old maids hiking to Holy Communion through the mists of the autumn morning – all these are not only fragments, but *characteristic* fragments, of the English scene. How can one make a pattern out of this muddle?

But talk to foreigners, read foreign books or newspapers, and you are brought back to the same thought. Yes, there *is* something distinctive and recognizable in English civilization. It is a culture as individual as that of Spain. It is somehow bound up with solid breakfasts and gloomy Sundays, smoky towns and winding roads, green fields and red pillar-boxes. It has a flavour of its own. Moreover it is continuous, it stretches into the future and the past, there is something in it that persists, as in a living creature. What can the England of 1940 have in common with the England of 1840? But then, what have you in common with the child of five whose photograph your mother keeps on the mantelpiece? Nothing, except that you happen to be the same person.

And above all, it is *your* civilization, it is *you*. However much you hate it or laugh at it, you will never be happy away from it for any length of time. The suet puddings and the red pillar-boxes have entered into your soul. Good or evil, it is yours, you belong to it, and this side the grave you will never get away from the marks that it has given you.

Meanwhile England, together with the rest of the world, is changing. And like everything else it can change only in certain directions, which up to a point can be foreseen. That is not to say that the future is fixed, merely that certain alternatives are possible and others not. A seed may grow or not grow, but at any rate a turnip seed never grows into a parsnip. It is therefore of the deepest importance to try and determine what England *is*, before guessing what part England *can play* in the huge events that are happening.