



themes
symbols
connections

1984

GEORGE ORWELL

1984

questions*concepts*characters*symbols

The novel, *1984*, is a reaction to an historical era that saw the possibility of a world without freedom, maintained by fear and paranoia. It is a "fantasy" or "nightmarish" scenario that uses a combination of cryptic concepts, adapted historical figures/characters and "symbols" that connect the reader with the historical possibilities and reality of the narrative.

A rich understanding of Orwell's ideas requires you, the reader, to think abstractly (critically and analytically) about the various concepts (terms and ideas), characters and symbols (settings, artifacts, etc.) that pop up throughout the novel.

When reading the novel, keep an ongoing LOG of the various concepts, characters, and symbols from the following list.

- The "Three" Paradoxes: War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength
- Winston Smith
- Big Brother/Big Brother is Watching You
- Emmanuel Goldstein
- the diary
- thought police
- orthodoxy
- The Party
- The Proles/If there is hope, it lies with the proles
- Junior Anti-Sex League
- sex
- The Brotherhood
- Newspeak
- Oldspeak
- memory/memory hole/ancestral memory
- the past/the mutability of the past
- Ministry of Peace (minipax)
- Ministry of Truth (minitrueth)
- Ministry of Plenty (miniplenty)
- Ministry of Love (miniluv)

Track each by creating a chart like the one below:

concept / character / symbol (meaning and characteristics)	page number	ideas/examples from novel	connection to modern Reality/ contemporary society (importance, revelations about human nature and society)

1984

thematic elements and things

1. social conformity and orthodoxy

- “popular” enemies, like Goldstein, to focus public hysteria
- violence as entertainment (Hate Week, 2 Minutes Hate)

2. ignorance and deprivation

- altering or abolishing history
- destroying education
- “news” manipulation
- taking love away from sex

3. surveillance and state induced paranoia

- invasion of privacy (Big Brother is Watching)
- use and abuse of technology

4. fear, torture and terrorism

- disappearing people
- government kidnapping

5. war and hatred

- war as a stabilizing force (War is Peace)
- impact of globalisation

6. the “cult of leadership” and the “cult of personality”

- larger than life political leaders

7. reality and mind control

- propaganda
- NEWSPEAK – using language to control independent thought (advertising, slogans, TV, movies)
- DOUBLETHINK – political lies and distortions
- brainwashing and torture as political tools

8. class structure and social inequality

- urban decay and poverty – the gap between the rich (powerful) and the poor (powerless/no power)
- environmental decay; destruction/abuse of nature
- the Proles
- class and power – the rich work to remain powerful, the middle class works to become powerful and the poor just seek to survive

THINKING FIGURATIVELY

1. Review the the thematic elements.
2. Arrange the figurative images in any order.
3. Match the thematic element(s) to the images. More than one is acceptable.
4. Imagine a story being told. Use the the thematic elements and the images to tell a story.
5. Tell the story.













EXPLORING THE ORWELLIAN REAL WORLD

-media & oral analysis-

Fiction is often a (distorted?) mirror of the real world. It tells us things about life that maybe we are not entirely cognizant or aware of. Or maybe fiction just exposes the real world/life to a mass audience in a new way. George Orwell's, *1984*, is a fictional work that in many ways mirrors the world that we live in today. It's frightening and enlightening all at once.

GOAL

The objective of this **media analysis and oral discussion** is for you to see the connections between *1984* and today's world by proving that aspects (see themes/things to look for) in the novel were foreseen by Orwell and have indeed come true.

TASK A: THE PROOFS (ku/a/th)

1. Explore the media world for "proofs" that Orwell's futuristic and dystopian vision of the world has come true.
2. Work in your group and find a **recent** (within a year) in-depth and informative "article" that reflects an idea or theme in the part of the novel that your group has been assigned.
3. The article must be from a reputable source and have depth enough material to elicit a robust discussion and conversation. The following are a list of reputable sources:

Globe and Mail
Walrus Magazine
The New Yorker Magazine
The New York Times
The Economist
The Guardian
The Independent

4. Actively read (i.e. new vocabulary, connections, reflections, literary devices, questions) the article.
5. This process should be done individually and collaboratively. Take note of the personal interpretations and personal connections each member has after reading the article. This is vital for a robust discussion. **HAND IN PERSONAL COPIES OF THE ARTICLE BEFORE THE DISCUSSION.**

TASK B: THE CONNECTION (th/a)

1. Connect the article directly to the text.
2. Create powerful and concrete statements connecting the article to the themes/ideas in the text, for example: *War is peace is an strangely popular strategy used and justified by "revolutionary" movements and revolutionary supporters, such as in Libya, that make truly peaceful resolutions are impossible.*
3. Create questions based on 3 of the 4 Literary Theories (Marxist, Psychoanalytic, Structuralism, New Historicism).
4. Provide specific textual proof (direct quotes) that supports the ideas in the article. Minimum of three (3).
5. Send a copy of the article, as well as a maximum TWO-PAGE snapshot of interesting:
 - title of the article
 - brief summary of the article (100 words)
 - vocabulary, phrases and ideas within the article
 - concrete statements connecting article to themes/ideas in 1984
 - direct quotes from 1984 connected to ideas/quotes in the article
 - questions based on Literary Theories, Identify what question reflects what literary theory.
 - properly formatted bibliography

TASK D: THE DISCUSSION (c)

- Discuss the article in-front of your classmates.
- Your group is responsible for "educating" the class on how the ideas in the article reflect the content of the novel.
- Your group is responsible for making the connections clearly, creatively and concretely (i.e. visually).
- Your group is responsible for being confident and knowledgeable about the connections between the novel and the article.
- Your group is responsible for asking and discussing some of the literary-theory based questions
- Your group MUST be prepared to explain and discuss (not read!) how the real world example is proof of Orwell's vision. The group discussion should take no longer than twenty (20) minutes.

name :

EXPLORING THE ORWELLIAN REAL WORLD: oral analysis

[literature studies + reading; oral; media studies]

focus	no	somewhat	yes
content of oral analysis is delivered clearly and creatively	0- 0.5 (ku/th/a)	1 - 1.5 (ku/th/a)	2 (ku/th/a)
connects material for audience with insight into key issues, ideas and themes (ie. modern reality and themes)	0- 0.5 (ku/th/a)	1 - 1.5 (ku/th/a)	2 (ku/th/a)
analyses the material through lens of literary theories; questions are well constructed, discussed and analysed	0- 0.5 (ku/th/a)	1 - 1.5 (ku/th/a)	2 (ku/th/a)
uses gestures (body language) to enhance presentation / analysis	0 - 0.5 (c)	1 - 1.5 (c)	2 (c)
oral analysis uses pauses, stress, various tones and emphasis effectively to convey important information/ideas to pitch effectively	0 - 0.5 (c)	1 - 1.5 (c)	2 (c)
prepared for oral interpretation	0 - 0.5 (c)	1 - 1.5 (c)	2 (c)
snapshot follows instructions and use concrete statements, direct (relevant) quotes	0- 0.5 (th/a)	1 - 1.5 (th/a)	2 (th/a)
article is actively read (questions, and vocabulary/literary devices) with evidence of connection between article and 1984	0- 0.5 (th/a)	1 - 1.5 (th/a)	2 (th/a)
comments	k/u	/6	
	t h	/10	
	c	/6	
	a	/10	

C O N N E C T E D T E X T S

Part of oral and media analysis will require you to select and identify real examples that can be connected to the themes in 1984. This is practice.

1. Read each article/poem and highlight important ideas and/or lines. **What ideas in the article/poem do you think are related to George Orwell's, Nineteen Eighty-Four?**
2. Create five questions that MAKE US THINK, for example: what literary device is being used in the following passage and why do you think the author used it? How does the idea in the following passage reflect current contemporary culture?
3. Create one question for each of the four Literary Theories.
4. Choose an image (from the previous activity) that you think best reflects the ideas expressed in the article/poem. Explain how the image is connected to the thematic element.

from

THE GUARDIAN

How one man escaped from a North Korean prison camp

an excerpt from

ESCAPE FROM CAMP 14

by

Blaine Harden

The Guardian, UK. Friday 16 March 2012

Escape from Camp 14: One Man's Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West by Blaine Harden

There was torture, starvation, betrayals and executions, but to Shin In Geun, Camp 14 – a prison for the political enemies of North Korea – was home. Then one day came the chance to flee...

His first memory is an execution. He walked with his mother to a wheat field, where guards had rounded up several thousand prisoners. The boy crawled between legs to the front row, where he saw guards tying a man to a wooden pole.

Shin In Geun was four years old, too young to understand the speech that came before that killing. At dozens of executions in years to come, he would listen to a guard telling the crowd that the prisoner about to die had been offered “redemption” through hard labour, but had rejected the generosity of the North Korean government.

Guards stuffed pebbles into the prisoner's mouth, covered his head with a hood and shot him. In Camp 14, a prison for the political enemies of North Korea assemblies of more than two inmates were forbidden, except for executions. Everyone had to attend them.

The South Korean government estimates there are about 154,000 prisoners in North Korea's labour camps, while the US state department puts the number as high as 200,000. The biggest is 31 miles long and 25 miles wide, an area larger than the city of Los Angeles. Numbers 15 and 18 have re-education zones where detainees receive remedial instruction in the teachings of Kim Jong-il and Kim Il-sung, and are sometimes released. The remaining camps are "complete control districts" where "irredeemables" are worked to death.

Shin's camp, number 14, is a complete control district. Established around 1959 near Kaechon County in South Pyongan Province, it holds an estimated 15,000 prisoners. About 30 miles long and 15 miles wide, it has farms, mines and factories threaded through steep mountain valleys. Shin and his mother lived in the best prisoner accommodation the camp had to offer. They had their own room, where they slept on a concrete floor, and they shared a kitchen with four other families. Electricity ran for two hours a day. There were no beds, chairs or tables. No running water.

If Shin's mother met her daily work quota, she could bring home food. At 4am, she would prepare breakfast and lunch for her son and for herself. Every meal was the same: corn porridge, pickled cabbage and cabbage soup. Shin was always hungry and he would eat his lunch as soon as his mother left for work. He also ate her lunch. When she came back from the fields at midday and found nothing to eat, she would beat him with a shovel.

Her name was Jang Hye Gyung. She never talked to him about her past, her family, or why she was in the camp, and he never asked. His existence as her son had been arranged by the guards. They chose her and the man who became Shin's father as prizes for each other in a "reward" marriage.

Single men and women slept in dormitories segregated by sex. The eighth rule of Camp 14 said, "Should sexual physical contact occur without prior approval, the perpetrators will be shot immediately." A reward marriage was the only safe way around the no-sex rule. Guards

announced marriages four times a year. If one partner found his or her chosen mate to be unacceptably old, cruel or ugly, guards would sometimes cancel a marriage. If they did, neither the man nor the woman would be allowed to marry again. Shin's father, Shin Gyung Sub, told Shin that the guards gave him Jang as payment for his skill in operating a metal lathe.

After their marriage, the couple were allowed to sleep together for five consecutive nights. From then on, Shin's father was permitted to visit Jang a few times a year. Their eldest son, Shin He Geun, was born in 1974. Shin was born eight years later. The brothers barely knew each other. By the time Shin was four, his brother had moved into a dormitory.

The guards taught the children they were prisoners because of the "sins" of their parents but that they could "wash away" their inherent sinfulness by working hard, obeying the guards and informing on their parents.

One day, Shin joined his mother at work, planting rice. When she fell behind, a guard made her kneel in the hot sun with her arms in the air until she passed out. Shin did not know what to say to her, so he said nothing.

On summer nights, boys would sneak into a nearby orchard to eat unripe pears. When they were caught, the guards would beat them. The guards, though, did not care if Shin and his friends ate rats, frogs, snakes and insects. Eating rats was essential to survival. Their flesh could help prevent pellagra, which was rampant, the result of a lack of protein and niacin in their diet. Prisoners with the disease suffered skin lesions, diarrhoea and dementia. It was a frequent cause of death. Catching rats became a passion for Shin. He would meet his friends in the evening at his primary school, where there was a coal grill to roast them.

One day in June 1989, Shin's teacher, a guard who wore a uniform and a pistol on his hip, sprang a surprise search of the six-year-olds. When it was over, he held five kernels of corn. They all belonged to a slight girl Shin remembers as exceptionally pretty. The teacher ordered the girl to the front of the class and told her to kneel. Swinging his wooden pointer, he struck her on the head again and again. As Shin and his classmates watched in silence, lumps puffed up on her skull, blood leaked from her nose and she toppled over on to the concrete floor. Shin and his classmates carried her home. Later that night, she died.

On a hillside near Shin's school, a slogan was posted: "All according to the rules and regulations." The boy memorised the camp's 10 rules, and can still recite them by heart. Subsection three of Camp 14's third rule said, "Anyone who steals or conceals any foodstuffs will be shot immediately." Shin thought the girl's punishment was just. The same man continued to teach Shin. In breaks, he allowed students to play rock, paper, scissors. On Saturdays, he would sometimes grant children an hour to pick lice out of each other's hair. Shin never learned his name.

Primary school students attended class six days a week. Secondary students attended seven days, with one day off a month. In the winter, the student body (about 1,000 students) was mobilised to clean privies in the village where the guards lived. Shin and his classmates chipped out frozen faeces, dumped the waste on racks with their bare hands, then dragged it outside to be used as fertiliser. In summer, students worked in the fields from 4am until dusk, pulling weeds.

Soap was a luxury. Shin's trousers were stiff from dirt and sweat. When it was too cold to bathe in the river or stand in the rain, Shin, his mother and classmates smelled like farm animals.

Shin went through school with a boy called Hong Sung Jo and a girl called Moon Sung Sim. Shin viewed Hong Sung Jo as his closest companion. They played jacks and their mothers worked at the same farm. Neither boy, though, ever invited the other to his house to play. Trust among friends was poisoned by constant competition. Trying to win extra food rations, children told guards what their neighbours were eating, wearing and saying.

Shin was nine years old, and he and his classmates were walking towards the train station, where their teacher had sent them to pick up coal. To get there they had to pass below the guards' compound. From above, the guards' children shouted: "Reactionary sons of bitches are coming." Rocks rained down on the prison children. Shin and his classmates shrieked and cowered. A rock struck Shin on the head, knocking him to the ground. When his head cleared, many of his classmates were moaning and bleeding. Moon Sung Sim had been knocked out.

When their teacher discovered his bloodied students sprawled in the road, he became angry. “What are you doing not getting yourselves to work?” he shouted. The students timidly asked what they should do with their classmates who were unconscious. “Put them on your backs and carry them,” the teacher instructed.

When Shin and his classmates entered secondary school, they were barely literate. But by then classroom instruction had come to an end. Teachers became foremen. Secondary school was a staging ground for work in mines, fields and forests. At the end of the day, it was a gathering place for long sessions of self-criticism. At night, 25 boys slept on the dormitory floor.

On Friday 5 April 1996, Shin’s teacher told him he could go home and eat supper with his mother as a reward for good behaviour. There was a surprise when he got there. His brother, who worked at the camp’s cement factory, had come home, too. Shin’s mother was not delighted when her youngest son showed up. She did not say welcome or that she had missed him. She cooked, using her daily ration of 700 grams of cornmeal to make porridge in the one pot she owned. Shin ate, then went to sleep.

Some time later, voices from the kitchen woke him. He peeked through the bedroom door. His mother was cooking rice. For Shin, this was a slap in the face. He had been served the same tasteless gruel he had eaten every day of his life. Now his brother was getting rice. Shin guessed she must have stolen it, a few grains at a time. Shin fumed. He also listened. Shin heard that Shin He Geun had not been given the day off. He had walked out without permission. His mother and brother were discussing what they should do.

Escape. Shin was astonished to hear his brother say the word. He did not hear his mother say that she intended to go along. But she was not trying to argue, even though she knew that if he escaped or died trying, she and others in her family would be tortured and probably killed. Every prisoner knew the first rule of Camp 14, subsection 2: “Any witness to an attempted escape who fails to report it will be shot immediately.”

His heart pounded. He was angry that she would put his life at risk for the sake of his brother. He was also jealous that his brother was getting rice. Shin’s camp-bred instincts took over: he

had to tell a guard. Shin ran back to school. It was 1am. Who could he tell? In the crowded dormitory, Shin woke his friend Hong Sung Jo. Hong told him to tell the school's night guard. "I need to say something to you," Shin told the guard, "but before I do, I want something in return." Shin demanded more food and to be named grade leader at school, a position that would allow him to work less and not be beaten as often. The guard agreed, then told Shin and Hong to go back to get some sleep.

On the morning after he betrayed his mother and brother, uniformed men came to the schoolyard for Shin. He was handcuffed, blindfolded and driven in silence to an underground prison.

"Do you know why you are here?" The officer did not know, or did not care, that Shin had been a dutiful informer. "At dawn today, your mother and your brother were caught trying to escape. Were you aware of this fact or not? If you want to live, you should spit out the truth." Shin would eventually figure out that the night guard had claimed the credit for discovering the escape plan. But on that morning Shin understood nothing. He was a bewildered 13-year-old. Finally, the officer pushed some papers across his desk. "In that case, bastard, your thumbprint."

The document was a family rap sheet. The papers explained why his father's family had been locked up in Camp 14. The unforgivable crime Shin's father had committed was being the brother of two young men who had fled south during the Korean war. Shin's crime was being his father's son.

Shin's cell was barely large enough for him to lie down. Without windows, he could not distinguish night from day. He was given nothing to eat and could not sleep.

On what seemed to be the morning of the third day, guards wordlessly entered Shin's cell, shackled his ankles, tied a rope to a hook in the ceiling and hung him upside down. They did not return until evening. On the fourth day, the interrogators wore civilian clothes. Marched from his cell, Shin met them in a dimly lit room. A chain dangled from a winch on the ceiling. Hooks on the walls held a hammer, axe, pliers and clubs. On a table, Shin saw the kind of pincers used for carrying hot metal.

“If you tell the truth right now, I’ll save you,” the chief interrogator said. “If not, I’ll kill you. Understand?”

The chief’s lieutenants pulled off Shin’s clothes and trussed him up. When they were finished, his body formed a U, his face and feet toward the ceiling, his bare back toward the floor. The chief interrogator shouted more questions. A tub of burning charcoal was dragged beneath Shin, then the winch lowered towards the flames. Crazy with pain and smelling his burning flesh, Shin twisted away. One of the guards grabbed a hook and pierced the boy in the abdomen, holding him over the fire until he lost consciousness.

Shin awoke in his cell, soiled with excrement and urine. His back was blistered and sticky. The flesh around his ankles had been scraped away. As his burns became infected, he grew feverish and lost his appetite.

Shin guesses it was 10 days before his final interrogation. It took place in his cell because he was too weak to get up. For the first time, he found the words to defend himself. “I was the one who reported this,” he said. “I did a good job.” His interrogators didn’t believe him. He begged them to talk to Hong Sung Jo.

Shin’s fever grew worse and the blisters on his back swelled with pus. His cell smelled so bad, the guards refused to step inside. After several days Shin was carried to another cell. He’d been granted a reprieve. Hong had confirmed his story. Shin would never see the school’s night guard again.

By the standards of Camp 14, Shin’s new cellmate was notably old, somewhere around 50. He refused to explain why he was locked up but he did say he had been there for many years and that he sorely missed the sun. Pallid, leathery skin sagged over his fleshless bones. His name was Kim Jin Myung. He asked to be called “Uncle”. For about two months, Uncle nursed Shin, rubbing salty cabbage soup into his wounds as a disinfectant and massaging Shin’s arms and legs so his muscles would not atrophy. “Kid, you have a lot of days to live,” Uncle said. “They say the sun shines even on mouse holes.”

The old man's medical skills and caring words kept the boy alive. His fever waned, his mind cleared and his burns congealed into scars. Shin was grateful but he also found it puzzling. He had not trusted his mother to keep him from starving. At school, he had trusted no one and informed on everyone. In return, he expected abuse and betrayal. In the cell, Uncle slowly reconfigured those expectations.

"Uncle, tell me a story," Shin would say. The old man described what food outside the fence looked, smelled and tasted like. Thanks to his loving descriptions of roasting pork, boiling chicken and eating clams at the seashore, Shin's appetite came back with a vengeance. Shin guessed he had once been an important and well-educated man.

One day a guard unlocked the door of Shin's cell and handed him his school uniform.

"Let me hold you once," Uncle said, grasping both of Shin's hands tightly. Shin did not want to leave. He had never trusted – never loved – anyone before. In the years ahead, he would think of the old man far more often than he thought of his parents. But he never saw Uncle again. Instead, Shin was led to the room where, in April, he had first been interrogated. Now, it was November. Shin had just turned 14. He had not seen the sun for more than half a year. What he saw startled him: his father knelt in front of two interrogators who sat at their desks. Kneeling beside him, Shin saw his father's right leg canted outwards in an unnatural way. Shin Gyung Sub had also been tortured.

After signing a secrecy form, father and son were handcuffed, blindfolded and driven away. Shin guessed they would be released but when the car stopped after about 30 minutes and his blindfold was removed, he panicked. A crowd had gathered. Shin was now certain he and his father were to be executed. He became acutely aware of the air passing into and out of his lungs. He told himself these were the last breaths of his life.

"Execute Jang Hye Gyung and Shin He Geun, traitors of the people," the senior officer said. Shin looked at his father. He was weeping silently. When guards dragged her to the gallows, Shin saw that his mother looked bloated. They forced her to stand on a wooden box, gagged her, tied her arms behind her back and a noose around her neck. She scanned the crowd and found Shin. He refused to hold her gaze. When guards pulled away the box, she jerked about desperately. As he watched his mother struggle, Shin thought she deserved to die.

Shin's brother looked gaunt as guards tied him to the wooden post. Three guards fired their rifles three times. He thought his brother, too, deserved it.

Back at school, Shin's teacher was furious he had not received any credit for uncovering the escape plot. Shin was made to kneel for hours and denied permission to use the toilet. Classmates snatched his food, punched him and called him names. Shin had lost much of his strength and his return to hard labour made him almost insanely hungry. In the cafeteria, he dipped his hand in soup that had spilled on the floor and licked his fingers clean. He searched for grains of rice, beans or cow dung that contained undigested kernels of corn.

Since prison, Shin was conscious of what he could never eat or see. The filth, stink and bleakness of the camp crushed his spirit. He discovered loneliness, regret and longing. Most of all, he was angry with his parents. He blamed his mother for his torture and the abuse at school. He despised both his mother and father for selfishly breeding in a labour camp, for producing offspring doomed to die behind barbed wire.

In the moments after Shin's mother and brother were killed, Shin's father had tried to comfort the boy. "You OK? Are you hurt anywhere?" his father asked repeatedly. Shin was too angry to reply.

On his rare days off from school, Shin was expected to see his father. During the visits, Shin would often refuse to speak. His father tried to apologise. "I know you're suffering because you have the wrong parents," he told Shin. "You were unlucky to be born to us. What can you do? Things just turned out this way."

By March 1997, about four months after his release, starvation had become a real possibility. Harassed by his teacher and fellow students, Shin could not find enough nourishment. His scars still bled. He grew weaker and often failed to complete his work assignments, which led to more beatings, less food, more bleeding.

But then Shin had a break. One morning, the teacher who tormented him was gone. The new teacher sometimes sneaked food to Shin. He also assigned him less arduous work and stopped

the bullying. Shin put on some weight. The burns healed. Why the new teacher made the effort, Shin never knew. But Shin is certain that without his help he would have died.

In 1998 Shin was working alongside thousands of prisoners building a hydroelectric dam on the Taedong river. Labour continued round the clock, with most of the digging and construction done by workers using shovels, buckets and bare hands. Shin had seen prisoners die in the camp before – of hunger, illness, beatings and at executions – but not as a routine part of work. The greatest loss of life occurred when a flash flood rolled down the Taedong in July 1998, sweeping away hundreds of dam workers and students. Shin was quickly put to work burying their bodies.

The following year, secondary school came to an end. At 16, it was time for a permanent job. Shin's teacher handed down assignments without explanation, curtly telling students where they would spend the rest of their lives. More than half of Shin's class were sent to the coalmines, where accidental death from cave-ins, explosions and gas poisonings was common. Most miners developed black lung disease and died in their 40s, if not before. Moon Sung Sim was assigned to the textile factory. Hong Sung Jo was sent to the mines. Shin never saw him again.

Shin was assigned the pig farm where he snacked on corn, cabbage and other vegetables, and sometimes even sneaked an afternoon nap. Turning 20 on the farm, Shin believed he had found the place where he would grow old and die. But in March 2003 he was transferred to the camp's garment factory where 1,000 women stitched military uniforms during 12-hour shifts. When their foot-powered sewing machines broke down, Shin fixed them.

In the summer of 2004, while he was carrying one of these cast-iron machines, it slipped and broke beyond repair. Sewing machines were considered more valuable than prisoners: the chief foreman grabbed Shin's right hand and hacked off his middle finger just above the first knuckle. Nevertheless, in October the factory superintendent ordered Shin to mentor an important new prisoner. Shin was to teach Park Yong Chul how to fix sewing machines and to become his friend. Shin was to report back on everything Park said about his past, his politics and his family. "Park needs to confess," the superintendent said. "He's holding out on us."

Park paid polite attention to Shin's instructions and just as politely avoided questions about his past. After four weeks of near silence, Park surprised Shin with a personal question: "Sir, where is your home?"

"My home?" Shin said. "My home is here."

"I am from Pyongyang, sir," Park said.

Park was a dignified man in his mid-40s, but this linguistic fussiness annoyed and embarrassed Shin.

"I'm younger than you," Shin said. "Please drop the honorific with me."

"I will," Park said.

"By the way," Shin asked, "where is Pyongyang?"

Shin's question stunned Park. He explained that Pyongyang, located about 50 miles south of Camp 14, was the capital of North Korea, the city where the country's powerful people lived. Park said he had grown up there, studying in East Germany and the Soviet Union. After returning home, he had become chief of a taekwondo training centre. Park explained what life was like outside Camp 14. He told Shin about money, television, computers and mobile phones. He explained that the world was round.

Much of what Park talked about was difficult for Shin to understand, believe or care about. What delighted him – what he kept begging for – were stories about eating. Park described chicken, pork and beef in China, Hong Kong, Germany, England and the former Soviet Union. Intoxicated, Shin made perhaps the first free decision of his life. He chose not to snitch.

Park's stories became an addiction but when he burst into song one night, Shin was alarmed, afraid a foreman might hear.

"Stop at once," Shin told him.

Shin had never sung a song. His only exposure to music had been on the farm, when trucks with loudspeakers played military marching music. To Shin, singing seemed unnatural and insanely risky.

Park asked why he was so afraid of a little song when he was willing to hear seditious stories about how Kim Jong-il was a thief and North Korea was a hellhole.

In December 2004, Shin began thinking about escape. Park's spirit, his dignity and his incendiary information gave Shin a way to dream about the future. He suddenly understood where he was and what he was missing. Camp 14 was no longer home; it was a cage. And Shin now had a well-travelled friend to help him get out.

Their plan was simple – and insanely optimistic. Shin would get them over the fence. Park would lead them to China, where his uncle would help them travel on to South Korea. Before he suggested they escape together, Shin had fretted for days that Park might be an informer and that he would be executed like his mother and brother. Even after Park embraced the idea, Shin was paranoid: he had sold out his own mother; why shouldn't Park sell him out?

But Shin's excitement overcame his fear. For the first time, he had something to look forward to. Every working day became a marathon of whispered motivational stories about the fine dining awaiting them in China. They decided that if guards discovered them at the fence, Park would take them out using taekwondo.

Shin stole warm clothes from a fellow prisoner and waited. Their chance came at New Year, a rare holiday when machines in the factory went silent for two days. Shin learned in late December that on 2 January his crew of repairmen would spend the day trimming trees and stacking wood on a mountain ridge near the fence.

Shin paid a final visit to his father. Their relationship, always distant, had grown colder still. They shared a sullen New Year's supper. Shin made no reference to his escape plan, there was no special goodbye. Shin expected that when the guards learned of his escape, they would come for his father and take him back to the underground prison.

Early the next morning, Shin, Park and about 25 other prisoners set to work near the top of a 1,200ft slope. The sun shone brightly on a heavy snow pack. A guard tower rose from the fence line about a quarter of a mile to the north. Guards patrolled the inside perimeter with automatic weapons. Shin noticed lengthy intervals between patrols.

Shin and Park had decided they would wait until dusk, when it would be more difficult for guards to track their footsteps in the snow. At four o'clock, they sidled towards the fence, trimming trees as they moved. Shin found himself facing 10ft of high-voltage barbed wire.

"I don't know if I can do this," Park whispered. "Can't we try it some other time?"

Shin feared it would be months, even years, before they would have another chance. "Let's run!" he yelled and grabbed Park's hand. He slipped and Park was first to the fence. Falling to his knees, he shoved his arms, head and shoulders between the two lowest strands of wire. Shin saw sparks and smelled burning flesh. Before he could get to his feet, Park had stopped moving. The weight of his body pulled down the bottom wire, creating a small gap. Without hesitation, Shin crawled over his friend's body. He was nearly through when his legs slipped off Park's torso and came into contact with the wire.

When he cleared the fence, Shin ran downhill for about two hours. He heard no alarms, no gunfire, no shouting. As the adrenaline began to ebb, he noticed that his trouser legs were sticky. He rolled them up, saw blood and began to comprehend the severity of his burns. It was very cold, well below 10F, and he had no coat.

Park, dead on the fence, had not told him where he might find China.

Shin broke into a farmer's shed. Inside, he discovered a military uniform. No longer a runaway prisoner, he had become just another ill-clothed, ill-nourished North Korean.

Before Shin crawled through that electric fence and ran off into the snow, no one born in a North Korean political prison camp had ever escaped. As far as can be determined, Shin is still the only one to do so.

He was 23 years old and knew no one. He slept in pig pens, haystacks and freight trains. He ate whatever he could find. He stole and traded on the black market. He was helped, exploited and betrayed. His legs hurt and he was hungry and cold, yet he was exhilarated. He felt like an alien fallen to earth.

In late January 2005, he walked all day – about 18 miles – looking for a stretch of the Tumen river to cross into China. Pretending to be a soldier, he bribed his way through border checkpoints with crackers and cigarettes. “I’m dying of hunger here,” the last soldier said. He looked to be about 16. “Don’t you have anything to eat?” Shin gave him bean-curd sausage, cigarettes and a bag of sweets.

Shallow and frozen, the river here was about a hundred yards wide. He began to walk. Halfway across, he broke through and icy water soaked his shoes. He crawled the rest of the way to China.

Within two years, he was in South Korea. Within four, he was living in southern California, an ambassador for Liberty in North Korea (LiNK), an American human rights group.

His name is now Shin Dong-hyuk. His overall physical health is excellent. His body, though, is a roadmap of the hardships of growing up in a labour camp that the North Korean government insists does not exist. Stunted by malnutrition, he is short and slight – 5ft 6in and about 120lb (8.5 stone). His arms are bowed from childhood labour. His lower back and buttocks are covered with scars. His ankles are disfigured by shackles. His right middle finger is missing. His shins are mutilated by burns from the fence that failed to keep him inside Camp 14.

This is an edited extract from *Escape From Camp 14*, by Blaine Harden

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HARPER REBRANDS THE GOVERNMENT OUT OF SPITE

by

Heather Mallick / Columnist

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The Canadian government is no more. It has been privatized. All government communications are now headed Harper Government™, “Government of Canada” apparently being an old-fashioned name like Muriel or Earl.

I added the trademark symbol because I have learned the hard way that companies, like countries, aren't happy when you play fast and loose with their brands.

You didn't know the government of Canada had a brand name? If Harper gets his majority, everything is up for privatization. It's part of the hard-right ethos. If you pay tolls on airports and highways, there's no reason you can't pay taxes to a private-label government. It won't be the Canadian government assessing you for income tax on April 30, it'll be more like getting an invoice from Kleenex™ or Tampax™ or Harpertext™.

I'm going to call it the “Harper administration” from now on, an American phrasing but if it will get me out of paying royalties to Harper, it's worth it. Words are my trade, I know lots of them, and we can wriggle out of Harper user-fees if we try.

The whole enterprise reminds me of a failed 1980s attempt by realtors to call themselves REALTORS™ and the brusque letters their lawyers used to send to editors, sorry, EDITORS™. We would giggle and bin the things, but the audacity of it rankled. (Is “audacity” trademarked? No, just ridiculed, another word ruined by a politician.)

Public servants told to rephrase the heading on documents are probably too frightened to say anything beyond a whispered okay. They're unionized but if Harper gets a majority in the next election they will be rallying for their bargaining rights next winter, and ordering all-new stationery will be the last thing on their minds.

The Harper Government™ is changing other words too. Anything that reeks of liberalism or feminism or even niceness is being altered. His UN initiative on "maternal health" in practice meant a ban on abortions and probably on birth control and counselling. So more "obedience" than "health" then.

In the Foreign Affairs Department, "child soldiers" is being replaced by "children in armed conflict." Here's why. The oxymoronic phrase "child soldier" might make you sad, like "sudden infant death" or "candle in the wind." But a "child in armed conflict" might be just hanging around the place while grown-ups messed around with blowpipes. I don't know why we get so upset and want to bring them to Canada as "tiny refugees." Oh, I see why he changed it.

Harper doesn't like "international humanitarian law." I'm sure he doesn't. But he has excised the word "humanitarian" because it sounds good, like something the Allies rushed to do after they discovered Belsen. Law is just law. Laws regulating human kindness act like they're so special. He hates that.

He has banned "gender equality." I sort of agree on this one because feminist theory does bleed the life out of words. "Gender studies" is a phrase feminists started using when Women's Studies began disappearing from university campuses for lack of interest. But the awful replacement is "equality of men and women," quite absurd when applied to grade school. This might bite Harper back. Now that girls are gaining confidence in the classroom, the hard-right will demand reparations for the failures of "infant men" and then we're headed into something disgusting. This is a morass.

George Orwell, wintry conscience of the English language, said that the great enemy of clear language was insincerity. "When there is a gap between one's real and one's

declared aims,” one turns one’s claws on language. Harper has always been a spiteful man, a yeller at work who was forced to tone it down in public.

But he cannot help himself. The terrorizing of officials and the rewriting of language are revealing the malevolence that lies beneath Harper’s hair. It is ungood, to use Orwell’s Newspeak. It is crimethink.

