

Argumentative Mentor Text

Prompt: How do the pigs use propaganda techniques to influence the animals' behavior?

Can one person's words change the way that others see the world? People in power may use propaganda techniques to shape how others think and behave, generally to promote a particular political cause or point of view. In George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, the pigs regularly use different propaganda techniques to **manipulate** the other animals and maintain their position of power. This is especially clear after Napoleon's rival Snowball is run off the farm, and as the animals are **toiling** to build their windmill. The pigs use the propaganda techniques of scapegoating and gaslighting to ensure they maintain full control of Animal Farm.

One propaganda technique that the pigs use to manipulate the other animals is scapegoating. Scapegoating is when a leader blames all problems on one person or group. For instance, Napoleon scapegoats Snowball when the windmill is destroyed. Although it is obvious to the reader that an intense storm caused the damage, Napoleon uses it as an opportunity to vilify Snowball. He declares, "Do you know who is responsible for this? Do you know the enemy who has come in the night and overthrown our windmill? SNOWBALL" (69–70). Instead of admitting that the windmill was destroyed by a natural disaster—and therefore out of anyone's control—Napoleon manipulates the animals into believing that just one pig in particular caused the extraordinary destruction. In doing this, he establishes his old rival Snowball as the one true enemy of Animal Farm and affirms his own position of power as the leader of the animals.

In addition to maintaining control through scapegoating, Napoleon's spokesperson Squealer uses the propaganda technique of gaslighting when some animals begin to question the pigs' actions. Gaslighting is a propaganda technique that manipulates people into doubting their own memories or **perceptions** of reality so that the propagandist can maintain control. After the animals witness the pigs trading with human beings, they recall that this was forbidden under old Major's rules of Animalism. Squealer responds by gaslighting them, asking, "Are you certain this is not something that you have dreamed, comrades?" (64). Squealer uses his authority to make the animals doubt what they know to be true, and they ultimately believe him and allow the pigs to continue trading with humans. Later, when the animals learn that the pigs are sleeping in beds, Squealer continues to lie to them. They recall that old Major warned them never to live in a house or sleep on a bed, but Squealer says, "You did not suppose, surely, that there was ever a ruling against *beds*?" (67). Squealer makes the animals question their own memories to convince them that they are wrong about beds. Squealer is taking advantage of his position of power and the other animals' trust by blatantly lying so that he and the other pigs can continue doing whatever they want. In both circumstances, Squealer gaslights the other animals so that he and the pigs can keep the material comforts they have come to enjoy.

As a reader, it is easy to see that the pigs in *Animal Farm* are manipulating the other animals to maintain power. Scapegoating and gaslighting are just two of the many propaganda techniques they use throughout the text to control the thoughts and behaviors of the animals. While the pigs' actions and motivations may be obvious to the reader, the animals seem oblivious. Orwell's book may be an allegory for the Russian Revolution, but it should also be taken as a lesson for the present and future. People must be able to identify for themselves when their own leaders try to use propaganda as a tool of manipulation.