

# Massachusetts Letters About Literature Honors, Level III | 2011

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Dear Mr. Orwell,

As I write this letter it is a bright cold day in October and the clocks have just struck fifteen. My school's intercom module, a gray box with an intercom speaker and a clock, gazes down upon me writing. While I doubt my school's intercom module is listening and watching my every move, I would like to remark that, with all due credit to your book *1984* for inspiration, it somewhat worries me just how easy turning our intercom modules into the equivalent of telescreens would be. Of course, I live in no Oceania. We're still free. I can say that two plus two makes four. But as controversy over issues of freedom increases (or perhaps it is not that the controversy that increases, but rather my awareness of it) I now frequently look to the likes of *1984* as a cautionary guide. I feel that this wisdom which humans have been able to rationalize must be taken very seriously. To quote the inscription etched upon the Copley Library in Boston, "The Commonwealth requires the education of the people as the safeguard of order and liberty". It is to such texts as *1984* that I believe we must be educated in order to look to in times of controversy so that we may assure our liberty, and that we are not letting ourselves be led down the path of Oceania.

As of this time the United States still holds true to the values it was founded on. We still hold freedom of speech (and thought) to be among the highest of self-evident truths. Two and two still make four. However as time goes on one can only be wary of how long that will be maintained. The United States, while nowhere close to being alone in its embracing of freedom, is not joined by every nation. Indeed, one of the rising superpowers, China, while not within grasp of the totalitarian regime that your book represents, heavily censors their nation and silences dissidents. To their west, while not internationally powerful, the nation of North Korea is probably the closest thing today (and it is very close) to the negative utopia portrayed. Although North Korea's power in the world is not that of a superpower, the very fact that such a civilization has been able to rise comes as a worry to me. Despite the world's diligence and clear knowledge of the evils of totalitarianism, for whatever reasons these totalitarian states are still allowed to survive and oppress the people which they govern.

In many nations worldwide, the people are still very strongly in support of freedom, but as time passes and new technology develops, it not only becomes much easier to control and monitor the population. Controversy spreads about government surveillance for alleged terrorism. There is a debate over whether government has rights to censor the internet. With terrorism a large threat to safety, and what entertainment industries lose because of copyright violation on the internet, these actions may be well intentioned, but as humans we often tend to drift toward extremes, and we must take caution in what we do.

It seems to me that wariness, or, more appropriately, caution, is precisely the message I picked up from your book. A tool is good or bad depending on the user. As civilizations, we will continue to make decisions designed to benefit our future welfare. But we must be cautious in what we do. If we do not check ourselves then we could let ourselves be led into ruin. As a people we cannot allow power to fall into the hands of those who could use it to suppress and harm us, no matter how charming they seem or how convincing they are. We must be aware of the dangers of totalitarianism in order to protect ourselves and safeguard our freedom.

The message of *1984*, I believe, is not meant for the individual, but for the people as a whole, reminding them to remain individuals. Winston Smith could have very easily been replaced by any other dissident, and the message would have very well have been the same. Totalitarianism does not care for the individual, aside from ridding its domain of them. But, Mr. Orwell, your book has taught me as an individual that in order to remain an individual we, as a people, regardless of national boundaries or other factors which may distinguish us, must be united in the common pursuit of remaining individuals. Your book has taught me this: if we allow our individualism and freedom to be taken from us then we are allowing our very humanity to be taken from us.

With you in the common cause to remain a human,

Sincerely,

*Steve*

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