

Deconstructing Power, Crafting Critical Writers: A Classroom-Based Study on Teaching *Animal Farm* through Deconstruction

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Abstrak

This study employed a qualitative textual analysis using Jacques Derrida's deconstruction approach to examine George Orwell's Animal Farm. The research aims to uncover how language constructs and destabilizes power relations in totalitarian contexts by analyzing key binary oppositions, such as leader versus people, freedom versus oppression, and justice versus corruption. The analysis reveals that Orwell's narrative exposes ideological contradictions through slogans like "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others," illustrating how language manipulation legitimizes political control. The study also highlights how deconstructive reading encourages students to critically interpret textual ambiguities and power structures through reflective writing and classroom discourse. The findings show that integrating deconstruction into literature learning fosters students' critical thinking and analytical writing skills. This research contributes to literary education by offering a pedagogical framework that promotes deeper engagement with literary texts, enabling students to relate literature to contemporary socio-political realities. It emphasizes the relevance of deconstructive pedagogy in cultivating critical and reflective readers within the framework of 21st-century education.

Keywords: Animal farm, Critical thinking, Deconstruction, Literary education, Power and ideology

INTRODUCTION

In the era of 21st-century education, critical literacy has emerged as a core competency that enables students to engage with texts beyond surface-level comprehension. Literature serves as an effective medium for fostering this skill, as it often contains complex ideological, political, and cultural layers that demand analytical interpretation. Students must be trained not only to understand what a text says but also to interrogate how it says it, why, and with what implications. This pedagogical need positions literary education as a key platform for cultivating reflective, socially aware learners

(Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016; Burnett & Merchant, 2019).

One literary work that continues to be pedagogically significant in this context is *Animal Farm* by George Orwell. As a political allegory, the novel reflects how revolutionary ideals can be co-opted by authoritarian powers, ultimately reproducing the oppression they were meant to eliminate (Al-Hilo & Gebreen, 2021). Orwell utilizes symbolism and animal characters to depict the dynamics of power, ideology, and manipulation. This makes the novel not only a compelling literary text but also a relevant educational tool for discussing themes of

justice, equality, and resistance (Giroux, 2015; Albloly & Nour, 2019).

Language is central to Orwell's critique of totalitarianism. Slogans like "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" reveal how discourse can be weaponized to distort meaning and reinforce power hierarchies. These paradoxes of meaning exemplify how seemingly simple language can conceal deeper ideological contradictions (Pardede et al., 2023; Talbot, 2019). Teaching students to analyze such slogans offers them the opportunity to explore how texts construct and destabilize meaning simultaneously.

Many scholars have examined *Animal Farm* through sociological, Marxist, or feminist lenses, contributing valuable insights into its political symbolism and thematic structure (Ali et al., 2024; Al-Hilo & Gebreen, 2021). However, few studies have linked deconstruction theory with pedagogical practices in EFL or literature classrooms, particularly in ways that empower students as critical readers and writers. Deconstruction, a theoretical framework introduced by Jacques Derrida, has primarily been applied in literary theory but is seldom extended into practical teaching strategies (Norris, 2020; Sterner, 2022). This gap suggests the need for research that bridges theory and pedagogy.

Deconstruction challenges binary oppositions and explores the instability of meaning, encouraging readers to question fixed interpretations and uncover underlying contradictions. This perspective offers a rich analytical lens through which students can read literature reflectively and critically.

Incorporating deconstruction into classroom activities can foster higher-order thinking by prompting students to interrogate the ideological dimensions of texts (Wolfreys, 1998; Johnson, 2015). As such, deconstruction is not only a critical theory but also a pedagogical strategy that aligns with the goals of critical literacy and 21st-century learning (Ungkang, 2013).

This study responds to the identified gap by applying Derrida's deconstruction to *Orwell's Animal Farm* and proposing its classroom applications in literary education. The research examines how binary oppositions and linguistic contradictions function within the narrative to reveal Orwell's critique of political manipulation. It further explores how these insights can inform instructional strategies that cultivate critical writing and reflective discussion. By integrating literary theory with pedagogy, this study contributes to the development of literature learning practices that foster critical awareness, ideological sensitivity, and academic writing competence (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016; Borsheim-Black et al., 2014).

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research method based on textual analysis, with a focus on Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory. The approach allows for a critical interpretation of how language, structure, and symbolism function in *George Orwell's Animal Farm* to reveal instability of meaning and ideological contradictions

(Wolfreys, 1998; Nealon, 1992). This method is suited for analyzing how texts construct, obscure, or deconstruct social and political power dynamics (Johnson, 2015; Chiasson & Davidson, 2012).

Object and Unit of Analysis

The object of this research is *Animal Farm*, a political allegory written by George Orwell that critiques the distortion of revolutionary ideals under authoritarian regimes. The novel is rich with linguistic, symbolic, and narrative devices that serve as powerful instruments for ideological critique. In this study, the analysis centers on three primary units: (1) ideological slogans and quotations, (2) character constructions, and (3) narrative structures. These units were selected for their central role in revealing how Orwell constructs meaning, questions authority, and destabilizes fixed ideological assumptions (Sternier, 2022; Pardede et al., 2023).

The first unit, slogans and quotations, serves as a linguistic tool that both reflects and subverts the ideals of equality and justice. Orwell's famous line, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others," is a prime example of semantic contradiction and ideological irony. Other slogans such as "Four legs good, two legs bad" and "Napoleon is always right" illustrate how language becomes a mechanism for manipulation, where surface-level simplicity masks deeper political control. These repeated phrases are not only persuasive tools within the narrative but also function as artifacts of ideological conditioning, making them essential for deconstructive analysis (Pardede et al., 2023; Albloly & Nour, 2019).

The second and third units of analysis focus on character construction and narrative structure. Characters like Napoleon represent the corrupt revolutionary leader who slowly morphs into the very tyrant he once opposed, while Snowball embodies the idealistic figure silenced by power politics. Boxer, with his blind loyalty and tragic demise, symbolizes the exploited working class whose labor is co-opted by those in control. These characters, viewed through the lens of deconstruction, reveal deep contradictions in how power is acquired, justified, and normalized. Meanwhile, the narrative structure which follows a cyclical pattern of rebellion, hope, betrayal, and oppression mirrors the instability of meaning in political discourse. These elements, when critically interpreted, demonstrate how Orwell embeds ideological ambiguity and rhetorical paradoxes into the core of the novel's form and content (Wolfreys, 1998; Hamlen, 2000).

Deconstructive Analytical Procedures

The interpretive analysis in this study followed three systematic stages adapted from Jacques Derrida's deconstruction framework, as outlined in previous works by Wolfreys (1998), Ungkang (2013), and Gnanasekaran (2015). These stages identifying binary oppositions, tracing internal contradictions, and interpreting socio-political contexts were designed to uncover the instability of meaning and ideological ambiguities within *George Orwell's Animal Farm*. Each stage contributed to a layered reading of the text, revealing how Orwell constructs and

simultaneously destabilizes ideological structures.

The first stage focused on identifying binary oppositions within the narrative. Key opposing concepts such as freedom versus oppression, equality versus hierarchy, and justice versus corruption were mapped across characters, events, and dialogue. These dichotomies serve as ideological anchors that shape the moral and political tensions of the novel. By exposing how these oppositions are established and then blurred, the analysis revealed the underlying instability of the narrative's moral logic (Ali et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2022).

The second stage involved tracing internal contradictions in both character development and narrative progression. A notable example is the slogan, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others," which embodies Orwell's satirical critique of political manipulation and semantic distortion. The shift from revolutionary idealism to authoritarian control is reflected in the betrayal of values through seemingly rational yet paradoxical language. These contradictions highlight the erosion of ethical clarity within the story and underscore how ideology is disguised through rhetorical inversion (Pardede et al., 2023; Albloly & Nour, 2019).

The third and final stage focused on interpreting the socio-political implications of the novel. Orwell's fictional narrative was contextualized within broader discussions of totalitarianism, propaganda, and systemic oppression. The symbolic representation of regimes and revolutions in *Animal Farm*

resonates with historical and contemporary patterns of ideological control. This stage linked the deconstructive textual analysis with real-world concerns, demonstrating how literature can both reflect and critique dominant socio-political structures (Giroux, 2015; Burnett & Merchant, 2019).

To improve clarity and support comprehension, the analytical flow is summarized in the figure 1. below:

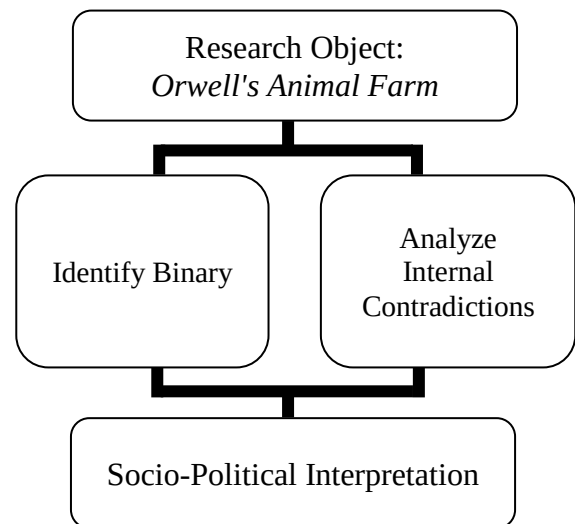


Figure 1. Analytical Flow of Deconstructive Approach

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the deconstructive analysis of *George Orwell's novel Animal Farm*, focusing on binary oppositions, internal contradictions, and the instability of meaning in the text (Gnanasekaran, 2015; Ali et al., 2024). Through key character and textual analyses, this study highlights Orwell's critique of totalitarian power and explores how language is a manipulative tool in maintaining oppressive systems (Al-Hilo & Gebreen, 2021; Pardede et al., 2023).

In the novel *Animal Farm*, deconstruction analysis shows the existence

of a straightforward binary opposition between the leader (Napoleon) and the people (other animals), as well as between justice and corruption. Napoleon, who initially emerged as a revolutionary leader, became a symbol of corrupt tyranny. This opposition reflects an endless cycle of power, in which revolutions intended to achieve equality instead turn into even worse systems of oppression. The instability of meaning is also seen in the slogan "All animals are equal," which ultimately contradicts Napoleon's authoritarian actions, highlighting the deep irony in the text (Hamlen, 2000; Wolfreys, 1998).

Analysis of other characters, such as Boxer, shows the tragic irony inherent in pursuing a better world. Boxers, as the most loyal workers and symbols of selfless hard work, are exploited by the power elite. His unquestioning loyalty and determination to "work harder" became the instruments used by corrupt leaders to maintain power. The novel thus highlights how proletarian idealism is often destroyed by the manipulation and exploitation of the ruling class (Inch, 2016).

Boxer's character embodies the tragic cost of ideological loyalty within a corrupted system. Despite increasing signs of injustice, he continuously affirms, "I will work harder" and "Napoleon is always right," trusting leadership without question. These repeated slogans illustrate how language internalized by the oppressed can function as a mechanism of self-subjugation. Orwell exposes this contradiction when Boxer, after sustaining serious injuries, is not given the promised retirement but instead sold to a glue factory

betrayed by the very system he upheld. This moment, as dramatized through the pigs' deceitful reassurance, highlights Orwell's broader critique of how revolutionary ideals are not only distorted by those in power, but also sustained by the obedient silence of the working class. The use of these slogans simple yet powerful illustrates the deconstructive instability of language. Words intended to express loyalty are reappropriated to justify exploitation.

Furthermore, the concept of deconstruction allows readers to see the contradictions inherent in every revolutionary act in this novel. Every promise of change made by new leaders ultimately turns into the same or worse oppression than before. For example, banning all forms of communication that do not conform to the official narrative reflects propaganda strategies in real-world authoritarian systems. This shows how meaning in texts can continue to change according to the interests of dominant authorities (Johnson, 2015).

This interpretation is strengthened by analysis of the instability of meaning that appears in important events in the novel. For example, changes to the farm's rules are carried out cunningly and manipulatively, showing that law and justice are tools that can be twisted to maintain the dominance of power. The meaning of justice, which was initially celebrated in the revolution, was ultimately distorted to become a means of legitimation for tyrannical rulers (Hamlen, 2000).

By understanding the novel *Animal Farm* through a deconstruction lens, readers

can dig deeper into George Orwell's criticism of totalitarianism and abuse of power. Orwell's allegory reflects a sharp criticism of a political system that allows structural injustice to continue. The concept of binary opposition and instability of meaning in this novel allows readers to view the text as a dynamic representation of a political world whole of contradictions and manipulation (Wolfreys, 1998).

Main Findings

The main finding of this analysis shows that the *Animal Farm* text ironically destroys the meaning of the ideology it promotes. Revolutionary slogans that initially fought for equality turned into propaganda tools to cover up oppression. Thus, deconstruction reveals how Orwell's narrative dismantles the illusion of social justice, exposing the internal contradictions that continue to repeat the cycle of power. Binary oppositions, such as leader versus people and justice versus corruption, are key elements that show the transformation of revolution into a new tyranny (Wolfreys, 1998).

In addition, this analysis proves that meaning in literary texts is only partially stable and is always open to reinterpretation. This novel remains relevant in contemporary social and political discussions because it depicts an endless cycle of power. George Orwell pointed out that corrupt political systems often disguise exploitation with idealistic rhetoric, which reflects manipulation in the real world (Johnson, 2015).

The characters in *Animal Farm* reinforce the concept of meaning instability through their actions and statements. Boxer, a symbol

of hard work and blind loyalty, becomes a victim of the system he wholeheartedly supports. His loyalty and determination to "work harder" were used to sustain Napoleon's tyrannical rule, showing that labour was often exploited by those at the top of the hierarchy (Inch, 2016).

Furthermore, the slogans used in the novel also reflect a distortion of meaning. Slogans like "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" are the biggest irony in this story. The equality initially promoted as a cornerstone of revolution was ultimately used to legitimize greater oppression. This shows that language in the world of politics can be easily manipulated to create a reality that benefits those in power (Ali et al., 2024). To clarify the important elements in this analysis, the following Table 2. summarizes the primary quotes from the novel *Animal Farm* and their deconstructive interpretations.

Table 1. Deconstructive Analysis of Key Quotes in *Animal Farm*

Text Citation	Deconstructive Analysis
"Four legs good, two legs bad."	A simplification of the world that is ultimately violated by the animals themselves.
"All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."	False equality that masks new oppression.
"Napoleon is always right."	Personality cults and manipulation of political ideology.
"I will work harder!" (Boxer)	Exploitation of workers with empty and misleading promises.

Overall, the findings underscore that Orwell's *Animal Farm* is a critical commentary on the cyclical nature of power and the manipulation of meaning through

language (Al-Hilo & Gebreen, 2021; Pardede et al., 2023). The novel reveals the inherent instability of meaning in political rhetoric through binary oppositions, irony, and character actions, making its message relevant to modern socio-political discussions (Albloly & Nour, 2019; Gnanasekaran, 2015).

Implications in Literature Learning

The findings from this deconstructive analysis of *Animal Farm* offer valuable insights for developing critical literacy and reflective learning practices in literature education (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016; Borsheim-Black et al., 2014). This approach encourages analytical thinking by exposing ideological contradictions and teaching students how to interpret texts from multiple perspectives (Gnanasekaran, 2015; Pardede et al., 2023). The results of this analysis have important implications for literature learning, especially in the context of 21st-century education. A deconstruction-based approach trains students to identify contradictions in texts and think critically about the meaning conveyed in literary works (Ramadhana et al., 2022). By exploring ambiguity and implied meaning, students can develop deeper analytical skills, enabling them to understand literary texts in a broader social and political context. In this case, *Animal Farm* becomes an ideal text that provokes in-depth discussions about power, language manipulation, and social justice (Wolfreys, 1998).

This approach aligns with the principles of 21st Century Learning, which emphasizes developing critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity skills (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). In analyzing *Animal Farm*,

students are invited to understand the storyline and assess how meaning in the text is produced and manipulated. For example, analysis of the slogan "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" teaches the importance of reflective thinking about the discourse around them.

Pedagogical implications in literature learning include several important aspects. The main goal of the deconstructive approach is to encourage students to think critically by finding contradictions and ambiguities in texts, thinking critically about the ideology contained in literary works, and reinterpreting meaning based on social and political context. This learning strategy can be applied through group discussions where students work together to identify binary oppositions in the text, deconstructive analysis of significant quotes from the novel, and reflective writing in the form of critical essays that explore alternative meanings in the text (Borsheim-Black et al., 2014).

Building on this foundation, a deconstructive approach fosters individual analysis and collaborative learning through group projects and discussions. A deconstructive approach to learning literature has significant benefits in developing students who are more critical and reflective (Language Development and Development Agency, 2022). By exploring ambiguity and implied meaning, students can relate the themes of literary works to contemporary issues, understand that the meaning of texts is unstable, and are always open to new interpretations. This process aligns with implementing the Pancasila Student

Profile/Proyek *Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5)* in the Merdeka Curriculum, which aims to train students to have critical awareness, independent thinking and a sense of social responsibility (Badan Pengembangan dan Pembinaan Bahasa, 2022).

In the context of analytical writing, the implementation of CEFR-aligned assessments has been proven to significantly enhance ESL/EFL learners' writing competence (Sunengko, 2024). This finding supports the use of reflective essay assignments within a deconstructive approach, where students can develop critical writing skills while examining ambiguities in literary texts such as *Animal Farm*

In class discussions, students can discuss the relevance of socio-political issues in novels to the real world, involving them in project-based learning that fosters effective communication and collaboration skills (Purba & Harahap, 2023). Using *Animal Farm*, students are taught how the meaning in the text sometimes matches the literal interpretation. They are invited to explore deeper meaning by considering the historical and ideological context behind the work.

This process builds reflective thinking skills and critical awareness, which are very important for literary learning in the modern era. Through this approach, students also learn to question existing narratives, developing the higher-order thinking skills expected in 21st-century education (Burnett & Merchant, 2019). Thus, a deconstructive approach to *Animal Farm* enriches the understanding of literature and prepares students to become critical and active learners in a complex

world. They are invited to understand literary texts as a dynamic reflection of social life and full of hidden meanings, equipping them with relevant thinking skills in an ever-changing global world (Ungkang, 2013). The findings of this study provide meaningful insights for literary education, emphasizing the need for reflective and critical learning (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016; Borsheim-Black et al., 2014). Through project-based and discussion-oriented learning, students can analyze texts like *Animal Farm* not only as literary works but also as representations of real-world power dynamics (Albloly & Nour, 2019; Pardede et al., 2023). This approach prepares them to engage critically with complex social and political issues in their personal and academic lives (Burnett & Merchant, 2019; Giroux, 2015).

For practical classroom application, teachers can design analytical essay assignments focusing on key themes such as power, corruption, and resistance. Students can engage in group discussions where they identify binary oppositions and debate how meaning changes through character development and symbolic language (Gnanasekaran, 2015; Ali et al., 2024). By applying deconstructive analysis in literature education, students are empowered to think critically, question narratives, and interpret texts in socially and politically conscious ways (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016; Borsheim-Black et al., 2014). This dynamic learning approach ensures that students become active and informed participants in both academic and real-world contexts (Burnett & Merchant, 2019; Giroux, 2015).

Building upon these textual findings, the following discussion interprets the socio-political implications and educational relevance of Orwell's *Animal Farm* through a deconstructive lens. Rather than simply reiterating the narrative, this section emphasizes how Orwell's symbolic language unveils the recurring cycles of political corruption and ideological distortion. Literary elements such as ironic slogans and character dynamics underscore the instability of meaning where concepts like "equality" or "justice" shift according to those in power thereby offering students a lens through which to interrogate texts critically (Albloly & Nour, 2019; Pardede et al., 2023; Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016; Wolfreys, 1998).

The analysis of ideological contradictions in *Animal Farm* provides a framework to examine similar contradictions in current sociopolitical contexts. For example, contemporary political discourse such as the use of populist slogans or manipulated media narratives mirrors Orwell's critique of language as a tool of control. The slogan "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" resonates with modern realities in which policies promoting "equality" are used to mask structural inequalities in education, law, or economic opportunity (Giroux, 2015; Burnett & Merchant, 2019). Through such parallels, the text transcends its historical setting and encourages students to connect fiction with contemporary issues.

In the classroom, the deconstructive approach promotes reflective learning by inviting students to question textual

assumptions and trace meaning beyond literal interpretations. However, this interpretive depth requires careful scaffolding. Students unfamiliar with post-structuralist theory may struggle with the abstract nature of binary oppositions and semantic instability (Ramadhana et al., 2022). Teachers, too, may feel ill-equipped to facilitate discussions on ideological subtext if they lack training in critical theory. These challenges highlight the need for pedagogical strategies that balance open-ended interpretation with clear guidance (Borsheim-Black et al., 2014).

Moreover, the institutional focus on standardized testing and fixed curriculum goals can hinder the integration of deconstructive methods into the school context. In many educational systems, literature instruction emphasizes comprehension and surface-level analysis rather than encouraging critical engagement with ideology. As a result, efforts to apply deconstruction may conflict with existing assessment models and time constraints. These limitations must be acknowledged when proposing deconstruction as a viable pedagogical strategy (Bobkina & Stefanova, 2016; Al-Hilo & Gebreen, 2021).

Despite these challenges, the value of deconstruction lies in its capacity to foster critical literacy and social awareness. Through literary analysis, students learn to identify the mechanisms of ideological control embedded in everyday discourse, such as biased news reports or institutional propaganda. The skills developed through this approach critical questioning, interpretive reading, and reflective writing equip learners

to become thoughtful citizens capable of navigating the complexities of modern information systems (Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Burnett & Merchant, 2019).

In conclusion, the discussion reinforces the importance of bridging literary interpretation with real-world critique. Orwell's *Animal Farm* is not simply a story about animals or revolution; it is a text that illustrates the enduring relevance of language in shaping, distorting, and contesting power. When approached through deconstruction, literature becomes a site for ideological inquiry and student empowerment, making reading an act of resistance against passive consumption of meaning (Giroux, 2015; Borsheim-Black et al., 2014).

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that *George Orwell's Animal Farm*, when analyzed through the lens of Derrida's deconstruction, presents profound critiques of ideological manipulation, power dynamics, and the instability of meaning. Through the analysis of binary oppositions, internal contradictions, and narrative ambiguity, the study demonstrates how Orwell subverts the ideals of equality and justice using symbolic language and irony. Slogans such as "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" highlight how language is weaponized to legitimize oppression. The characters, particularly Napoleon and Boxer, serve as representations of how revolutionary ideals can be distorted by authoritarian regimes. These findings confirm that literary texts, especially political allegories like *Animal Farm*, offer rich

material for exploring how meaning is never fixed but is always subject to reinterpretation depending on ideological contexts.

Based on these findings, the study recommends the implementation of deconstructive literary analysis as a tool to enhance critical literacy in educational contexts. This approach encourages students to engage with texts more deeply, question dominant narratives, and connect literature with real-world socio-political issues. However, applying deconstruction in school settings also presents challenges, including its abstract nature and the limited familiarity of students and teachers with post-structuralist concepts. Therefore, future research should explore the development of practical models or scaffolding strategies to integrate deconstructive approaches effectively into literature curricula. Additional studies might also examine how students in diverse educational contexts respond to deconstructive reading and how this method impacts their critical thinking skills over time.

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