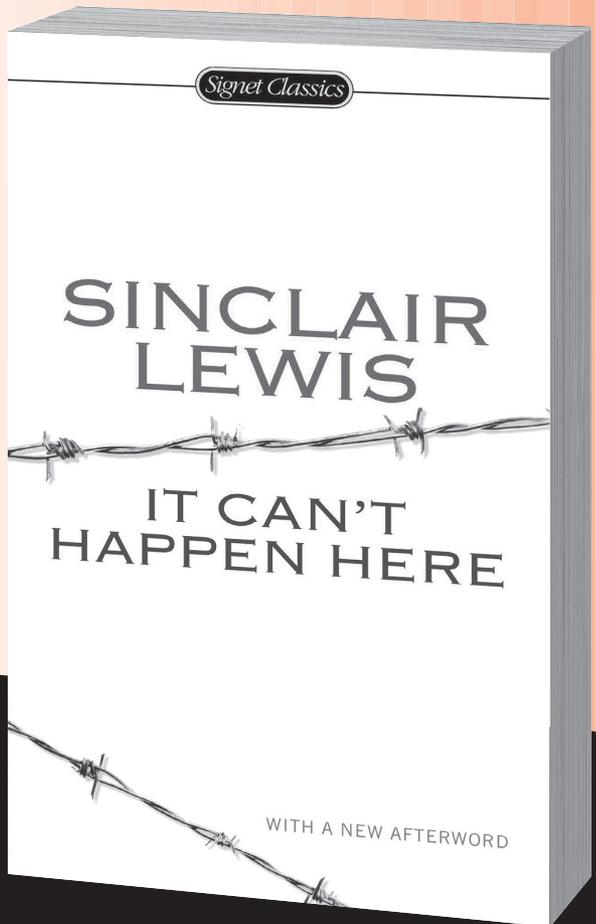


TEACHER'S GUIDE
A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE SIGNET CLASSICS EDITION OF

IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE

BY SINCLAIR LEWIS



TEACHER'S GUIDE
BY JEANNE M. McGLINN

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INTRODUCTION

The plot of *It Can't Happen Here*, published in 1935, has an uncanny resemblance to political events of the 21st century. In the novel, a populist leader who promises to bring America back to her former glory is elected president of the United States. Liberal leaders are stunned and his supporters, the “Forgotten Men,” rejoice. Within eight days of his presidency, new rules are implemented and draconian measures are instituted to enforce his executive orders. This new president has created his own personal militia, “The Minute Men,” who intimidate and terrorize the people into submission. The press is censored, and centralization of power leads to labor camps and unfettered bureaucracy. The novel follows the career of one small town newspaper editor, Doremus Jessup, who observes the arc of these events from the rise of a charismatic leader and the subversion of constitutional principles to the first stirrings of resistance.

Sinclair Lewis, a critic of middle class hypocrisy throughout the 1920s, wrote in the face of the rise of Fascism in Europe and the popularity of populist leaders in the mid-1930s. The novel's references to political and cultural figures of the 1930s may overwhelm contemporary readers, but its main focus is on the actions of individual citizens who are faced with authoritarian rule. Lewis ponders the questions of what people will do and of what they are willing to give up when they are scared or threatened. In this way the novel is as contemporary as today's headlines, sound bites, and tweets.

The activities in this guide are a resource for planning to teach the novel. Pre-reading activities stimulate and build students' background knowledge about the historical, cultural, and political context in which Lewis wrote the novel. During reading activities, encourage students to track specific ideas and character development. Post reading activities are designed to engage students in re-reading, to promote analysis of the novel, and to provide opportunity for discussion and debate.

BUILDING BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Lewis was immersed in the zeitgeist of his time, as his series of satiric novels of the 1920s clearly demonstrate. The following activities will deepen students' knowledge about some of his key influences and prepare students to understand the many contemporary allusions in the novel.

1. Dorothy Thompson, Lewis's wife, interviewed Adolf Hitler and wrote articles between 1931 and 1935 about what was happening in Germany—the propaganda, anti-Semitism, and growing persecution of the Jews. She was also the first journalist expelled by Hitler from Nazi Germany. Ask students to read the March 1932 article, “I Saw Hitler,” written by Thompson for *Cosmopolitan*. <https://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic1292219.files/Week%205/I%20Saw%20Hitler!.pdf>

As students read, ask them to outline the following topics covered in the article:

- How does Hitler plan to get power?
- To whom does he particularly appeal and why?
- What does he offer the German people?
- How does he plan to organize the German state?

In 2015, Peter Carlson of *American History Magazine* wrote a brief article about Thompson's failure to assess the threat that Hitler posed and how she reacted when he later came to power (<http://www.historynet.com/encounter-dorothy-thompson-underestimates-hitler.htm>). This article summarizes the main points in the longer *Cosmopolitan* article and might be used as a substitute reading, depending on time and students' abilities.

2. Huey Long was the inspiration for Buzz Windrip. Review these videos and brief article that outline Long's career and his political agenda:
 - Ken Burns' film about Huey Long (we recommend the section titled "Kingfish" beginning at 22:00 minutes) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cxw9mV_VbyY
 - Long's speech, "Share the Wealth": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hphgHi6FD8k>
 - The Strange Career of Assassinated Louisiana Politician Huey Long by Jennifer Latson, Sept. 8, 2015: <http://time.com/4020709/huey-long-anniversary/>

[Note: Teachers can screen YouTube videos using Safe Share TV to avoid comments and ads: <https://safeshare.tv/>]

Based on their review of these resources, ask students to create a poster or use Glogster (<http://edu.glogster.com>) to create an interactive multimedia poster that depicts facets of Long's personality and political philosophy. Once students have shared their posters in a Gallery Walk or online, discuss:

- What were Long's political principles?
 - Why was he loved and hated by so many?
 - What might have happened if he had been elected president? Do you think he would have been able to carry out his programs? Why or why not?
3. In Sinclair Lewis's novel, Buzz Windrip's followers are called the "Forgotten Men." Roosevelt used this label in a radio address April 7, 1932 (William Graham Sumner first used this term in an 1883 lecture). Roosevelt's complete speech is available at <http://newdeal.feri.org/speeches/1932c.htm>. Roosevelt took office in March 1933.

Roosevelt said: "These unhappy times call for the building of plans that rest upon the forgotten, the unorganized but the indispensable units of economic power, for plans like those of 1917 that build from the bottom up and not from the top down, that put their faith once more in the *forgotten man* [emphasis added] at the bottom of the economic pyramid."

Donald Trump used the phrases, "forgotten men and women" and "forgotten Americans" in campaign speeches as well as his presidential victory speech on November 9, 2016: "Every single American will have the opportunity to realize his or her fullest potential. *The forgotten men and women* [emphasis added] of our country will be forgotten no longer."

The complete speech is available at <http://www.cnn.com/2016/11/09/politics/donald-trump-victory-speech/>.

Ask students to read each speech or excerpts from them and then analyze what each president means when he uses the phrase. Discuss as a whole class:

- Do Roosevelt and Trump mean the same thing by the term "forgotten men"?
 - How do they differ in the use of this term?
 - Given the time in which the speech was given, what is each president's goal?
 - To whom are they appealing?
4. Early in the novel, Doremus Jessup explains why Fascism could thrive in the U.S. by listing people who have swayed the American public. He says, "There's no country in the world that can get more hysterical... than America" (p. 17). His list is a "who's who" of celebrities and contemporary events of the 1930s. Have students conduct research individually or in pairs and then create a two-minute PowerPoint presentation about the person and his/her ideological impact on popular or political culture. Ask students to consider how the person or the movement they inspired reflects the "hysterical" reactions of the time. Here is a list of some of the better-known celebrities of this period and Jessup's comments on them:

- Huey Long: “absolute monarch over Louisiana”
 - Father Coughlin: “divine oracles, to millions”
 - Billy Sunday: “the million-dollar evangelist”
 - Aimee McPherson: “who swam from the Pacific Ocean clear into the Arizona desert and got away with it”
 - Al Smith: “the Republicans campaigning against Al Smith told the Carolina mountaineers that if Al won the Pope would illegitimize their children” (Catholic Scare)
 - Tom Heflin: U.S. Senator from Alabama 1920–1931, white supremacist (Lynchings; Ku Klux Klan)
 - William Jennings Bryan: “who learned his biology from his pious old grandma, [legislators] set up shop as scientific experts and made the whole world laugh itself sick by forbidding the teaching of evolution”
5. Ask students to read an excerpt from Benito Mussolini’s “The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism,” starting with the paragraph that begins: “The years preceding the march on Rome cover a period during which the need of action forbade delay and careful doctrinal elaborations.” The complete document is available at <http://www.worldfuturefund.org/wffmaster/Reading/Germany/mussolini.htm>.

Like many essays of definition, Mussolini devotes a good part of the description of Fascism to what it is not. Ask students to make a chart or table with three columns to list the characteristics of Marxism, democracy, and liberalism, according to Mussolini. Then discuss as a whole class:

- How does Mussolini define Fascism?
 - How does Fascism reject Marxism, democracy, and liberalism?
 - What is the role of violence in the Fascist worldview?
 - Why does individual freedom ultimately fail according to Mussolini?
 - What does Fascism give to individual citizens?
 - What might make Fascism appealing to citizens?
6. Ask students to react to an Anticipation Guide to activate their background knowledge and to generate interest in the ideas they will encounter in the novel. Students should respond to each statement on a scale of 1–5 with 1 representing “Very False” and 5 representing “Very True.” Then ask students to select the statement to which they have the strongest reaction, positive or negative, and write about their response. Engage the whole class in discussion about the statements to which they have the strongest reactions.
1. America is a land of equality.
 2. Newspapers are an important source of information about national issues.
 3. Citizens in a democracy are responsible for staying informed about national issues.
 4. Appeals to reason are more effective with the average U.S. citizen than appeals to emotion.
 5. When human rights are threatened, citizens must resist.
 6. The U.S. is susceptible to becoming a dictatorship.

Read more about using an Anticipation Guide as a pre-reading strategy at <http://www.adlit.org/strategies/19712/>.

ANALYZING THE NOVEL

KEY CHARACTERS

Doremus Jessup: Editor of a small town, Vermont daily newspaper

Berzelius Windrip: Senator and candidate for president of the United States

Lee Sarason: Windrip's secretary/publicity agent and the brain behind Windrip's campaign

Shad Ledue: Jessup's handyman who becomes an ardent supporter of Windrip

Lorinda Pike: Proprietor of a local boarding house and Jessup's mistress

Walt Trowbridge: Republican candidate for president in 1936 who escapes to Canada and engages in a secret war against Windrip's agents

Buck Titus: Friend to the Jessup family who plans a failed escape to Canada

PART 1: POLITICAL CONTEXT AND RISE OF A POPULIST PRESIDENT, CHAPTERS 1–12

Set in 1936, well into the Great Depression, *It Can't Happen Here* describes the mind-set of Americans that makes them vulnerable to the rhetoric of a populist leader, Senator Windrip. People long for “old time” values, discipline, isolationism, and militarism. In the novel, fears abound: twenty-eight million people on welfare are making greater demands; communists and Jewish financiers are trying to take over the country; labor unions are trying to overrule management. Doremus Jessup, editor of a small town, Vermont daily newspaper, identifies these developments, warning that America is ripe for a Fascist dictator. Through the summer leading up to the Democratic National Convention, pundits predict that Windrip, who calls for a redistribution of wealth and promises that individuals will get several thousand dollars each year, will be the nominee of the party. Lee Sarason, Windrip's secretary, is purported to be the author of Windrip's autobiographical and ideological book, *Zero Hour—Over the Top*, as well as the mastermind behind his campaign.

Supported by radio-show preachers, the League of Forgotten Men, and the public relations spectacle orchestrated by Sarason, Windrip ultimately wins the nomination. Then he issues his philosophy of governance, “Fifteen Points of Victory for the Forgotten Men”—an agenda for the complete control of all aspects of government by the executive, which includes calls for an expansion of the military, censorship, and the codification of sexist and classist ideology.

During the campaign, Jessup is amazed by Windrip's “power of bewitching large audiences,” even though his speeches are full of easily detected lies. He is “an actor of genius” with a talent to excite and be excited by the people who come to hear him. He presents himself as the consummate Common Man who mirrors the ideas of the common people, and their emotional response leaves no room for reasonable discourse. At the finale of the campaign, a rally at Madison Square Garden, Jessup for the first time encounters Windrip's private militia, The Minute Men, and hears Windrip called “The Chief.”

Discussion Questions: Part 1

1. According to speakers at the Annual Ladies' Dinner, what is wrong with American society? What would they like to see happen?
2. How is Doremus Jessup viewed by members of his community? What values does he express?

3. Since Jessup is an editor and journalist, what might Sinclair Lewis be suggesting about the role of journalists in society?
4. Why is Windrip attractive as a presidential candidate according to Jessup? How does he win the peoples' enthusiasm and support?
5. What are Sarason's beliefs, and what is his relationship to Windrip?
6. What is the role of evangelical preachers in determining political outcomes according to Jessup?
7. What public relations (PR) strategies are used to advance Windrip's nomination and campaign?
8. How does Windrip project that he is an exemplar of the "Common Man"?
9. Windrip criticizes the press, but how does the press inadvertently give Windrip publicity?
10. Which of Windrip's "Fifteen Points of Victory for the Forgotten Men" are the most attractive to you? Which are the least attractive? Explain why.
11. How does Windrip compare to the other two presidential candidates, and why is his campaign more effective?
12. What motivates Shad Ledue and how does he represent the reaction of the common man to Windrip's campaign?
13. At the final rally of his campaign, Windrip mesmerizes the crowd. How? What are his oratorical skills? What logical fallacies does he use? What are the dominant emotions evoked in the crowd?

PART 2: WINDRIP'S PRESIDENCY AND AUTHORITARIAN REGIME, CHAPTERS 13–17

Following Windrip's election, Jessup's first response is anger and isolation. Thinking about all the varied ideas that have been put forward about the best form of government, Jessup says the only solution is to realize that there is no perfect government—no matter how many prophets come forward "to stir up the masses to save the world, and save it in the prophets' own way, and do it right now, and most violently" (p. 113). He talks with his mistress, Lorinda Pike, about the changes that are coming—loss of women's rights, censorship of the press—and wonders if he should head to Canada. She insists that he is needed now more than ever.

Windrip is inaugurated and immediately begins to institute his policies: complete control over all branches of government, imposition of martial law, use of his private Minute Men militia to arrest resisters and kill rioters, and imprisonment of journalists. To consolidate his power and control, Windrip proclaims the elimination of the states, replacing them with eight "provinces" and local subdivisions, and he continues to increase the number of Minute Men. Shad Ledue is named the Commissioner for northern Vermont.

All political parties are ended, replaced by one party, The American Corporate State and Patriotic Party, and all occupations are divided into six classes. Men are now assembled into labor camps to work on state projects, and the grant of \$5,000 per family becomes a distant promise. Meanwhile, persecutions grow for black and Jewish citizens and anyone who is seen as critical of or "out-of-step" with the state. Although carefully guarded, Walt Trowbridge, Windrip's rival in the election of 1936, escapes to Canada and begins to publish an anti-Windrip exposé, "A Lance for Democracy." Trowbridge also organizes the "New Underground" to help people resist Windrip's propaganda and escape to Canada.

Discussion Questions: Part 2

1. Following the election of Windrip, what does Jessup think is the best solution to political reform? Why? What does he see as a result of mass efforts at reform?
2. What generalizations can you make about Windrip's appointees to cabinet and diplomatic positions? What do they tell you about Windrip's political agenda?
3. List the policies that are implemented once Windrip is inaugurated. What are the overall effects of these policies? Are these policies/actions consistent with Windrip's campaign promises (check the 15th promise in his "Fifteen Points of Victory for the Forgotten Men," p. 64)?
4. Why does a mob turn against Windrip when they had previously supported him for election? What does this say about the common people and their ability to choose a political leader?
5. What policies does Windrip use to consolidate his power as president?
6. How do citizens react to the loss of statehood compared to their reactions to the loss of two branches of government? Why do they react this way?
7. How are the workers "persuaded" to accept their worsened conditions of employment?
8. What groups of citizens are exploited and punished by the Windrip government and why?

PART 3: RESISTANCE, CHAPTERS 18–38

Jessup's "wait and see" attitude is broken when he discovers that his former college classics professor has been fired for being too radical and that the Secretary of Education has terrorized and killed two university professors who are accused of being Jews. Jessup writes an editorial against Windrip and his "pirate gang." Knowing the danger this will bring, he asks Lorinda for advice and she counsels him to resist, saying they must stand for something. She too has been called to court for her refusal to work with Shad and his Minute Men.

The next day Jessup is arrested and brought before Military Judge Effingham Swan, who threatens that Jessup must support the new order in his paper or risk bringing harm to his family. Jessup will be released on parole to assist the government-appointed editor of his paper. When Jessup's son-in-law, Doc Fowler, breaks in to the courtroom to demand his release, Fowler is summarily tried and executed.

The Corporate (commonly called Corpo) State continues to implement its policies. The government's secret police punish anybody considered a criminal with execution and imprisonment. Universities and colleges are consolidated and put under government control. Concentration camps are opened to relieve overcrowding in prisons. Some rebellions take place, but most citizens hesitate to speak out against the regime for fear of being arrested. Journalists are among those most commonly imprisoned. With this threat hanging over his head, Jessup and his family—with the help of Buck Titus—try to escape to Canada, but are stopped at the border.

Released from his role of helping the government's editor, Jessup is approached by a man from the New Underground, which is distributing information about Corpo violence and is helping people to escape across the borders of the U.S. Soon, Jessup and his allies are printing an illegal pamphlet of articles written under Jessup's pen name, Spartan.

Jessup and the other resisters are arrested for their "propaganda" work, beaten brutally, and tortured before being tried and sentenced to hard labor in a concentration camp. There Jessup finds that the worst thing, beside the flogging, is the waiting: the anxiety of not knowing what might happen next and the strong but hopeless longing to escape.

While the men are in prison, Jessup's daughters, Mary and Sissy, continue the work of resistance. Mary wants to avenge the death of her husband, Doc Fowler, and devises an audacious plan to bomb Commissioner Swan's airplane. When her plan fails, she dies crashing her own plane into his in a last effort to exact revenge.

Meanwhile things are falling apart for Windrip. He wants more and more power and trusts no one. His secretary, Sarason, has Windrip deposed and himself appointed as President. This regime is soon replaced by another coup. Jessup is able to escape with help from his friends and gets across the border to Canada where he works on publications for the New Underground. There are uprisings against the Corpo regime and Jessup is recruited to bring people back to their senses by spreading news about the failure of the Corpo State.

Discussion Questions: Part 3

1. What causes Jessup to decide to resist the Corporate State?
2. Why does Jessup blame himself for Windrip's dictatorship (p. 186)? Is he right?
3. What is Jessup's punishment? Why does the state want to use his journalism skills?
4. What does Doc Fowler's execution show about the political situation?
5. How does Jessup justify his continued work on the newspaper?
6. Why are Jessup's books considered dangerous?
7. What does Jessup realize when he and his family fail to escape to Canada?
8. What do you think Jessup's son Philip represents?
9. What is the New Underground, and what does Jessup do for them?
10. What is the role of Jessup's daughters, Mary and Sissy, and his mistress, Lorinda, in the resistance?
11. What is the "triple process" that Windrip and other Fascist leaders use to control the population (p. 260)?
12. How is media used to expand the power of the state?
13. Why do the police go so far as to torture Jessup after arresting him on suspicion of printing seditious materials?
14. What happens to Shad Ledue? What does this say about the Corporate State?
15. How do Windrip and Sarason change as they continue to consolidate their power?
16. When Windrip is ousted as president, what is the response of the Idealists of Corpoism? What does this say about them?
17. Following the coup against Sarason, Haik grabs power and tells the people that instead of getting \$5,000 a year, they are going to get "the profits of Discipline and of the Scientific Totalitarian State not in mere paper figures but in the vast dividends of Pride, Patriotism, and Power" (p. 354). Eventually a rebellion breaks out "against the whole Corpo regime" (p. 370–371). What factors lead the people to revolt against the government? According to Jessup, why does the revolt halt? Why don't the people know what they want?
18. What does Jessup decide about political ideologies? What does he think is the best course for a citizen to follow?
19. What is Jessup's mission after he is released from prison? Do his actions at the end seem hopeful? Why?

ACTIVITIES DURING READING

1. In the novel, Jessup evolves from an observer to an active resistance fighter. As students read, ask them to note the stages in Jessup's development at key points in the novel. At the beginning of Part 1, ask students to describe Jessup's character by detailing what he does and says. Then, while reading Part 2, ask students to watch for changes in Jessup's attitudes. When does he begin to get uncomfortable? What finally causes him to act? In Part 3, how does Jessup decide what is most important to him, and what he is willing to give up to meet these ends?

Students can create a multi-level timeline to track the process of Jessup's changing attitudes. Ask students to list the year, the month, or other seasonal detail on one line. Below it, list local or national events in the U.S. described by the author. Then in the line below, list what Jessup is doing and thinking.

2. Throughout the novel Lewis defines different political ideologies: Liberalism, Communism, and Fascism. Ask students to collect descriptions of each of these concepts as they read by creating a chart with three columns, one for each term. Students should note the page numbers where the concept is discussed and list key ideas that they take from the section. After reading each Part, ask students to share their notes, and, as a whole class or in small groups, create a graphic organizer that illustrates each concept, using examples or quotes from the novel.
3. Lewis wrote the novel quickly, within a span of 4 months, and filled it with details from the contemporary political and social scene of the 1930s. He also used the novel as a sounding board to discuss his own ideas about the political challenges of the Great Depression, including the spread of fascist ideas.

Ask students to keep a Double-Entry Journal as they read to record and react to quotes from the novel about how individuals act politically and as citizens. Ask students to divide their paper down the middle. On one side, they record the quote and page number. On the other side, they reflect on the ideas and make connections to their own lives. As students read the novel, ask them to share their quotes and reflections to initiate whole class discussions.

4. At his final campaign rally in Madison Square Garden, Senator Windrip delivers a powerful speech (pp. 98–100). It is so persuasive that even Jessup falls under its spell for a brief period. Analyze what makes this speech so effective by applying Aristotle's concepts of ethos, pathos, and logos. A brief presentation of these concepts can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/m3fp5re>. Discuss: Does Windrip employ one of these strategies more than the others in this speech?
5. Ask students to create a political cartoon presenting their reactions to the events taking place in the novel. Students could create a different cartoon for Parts 1 through 3 as they read. To support students in this assignment, refer to the National History Education Clearinghouse's website focused on "Interpreting Political Cartoons in the History Classroom" (available at <http://teachinghistory.org/teaching-materials/teaching-guides/21733>). This site provides a guide for interpreting cartoons as well as descriptions of core characteristics of political cartoons, including: Symbol and Metaphor, Visual Distortion, Irony in Words and Images, Stereotype and Caricature, An Argument Not a Slogan, and The Uses and Misuses of Political Cartoons.
6. *Zero Hour*, Windrip's autobiographical story, political philosophy, and economic program which was actually written by his secretary, Lee Sarason (pp. 29–30), becomes the "Bible of Economic Justice" (p. 75) to his followers. Divide the class evenly into small groups assigning them to different sets of chapters. Ask students to re-read the excerpts at the top of chapters 5–20 which reflect Windrip's political philosophy and agenda to determine whether the excerpt connects with actions that take place in the chapter. Ask students to select a key sentence or phrase from the excerpt and then pair it with actions or ideas in the

chapter and report to the class, showing whether there is a connection between the excerpt and the actions in that particular chapter.

POST READING RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

1. Shortly after the publication of *It Can't Happen Here*, it was adapted to the stage through the Federal Theater Project and was an immediate hit when “Twenty-one different productions opened simultaneously in eighteen different cities on October 27, 1937” (p. 392). Recently the play has been revived by the Berkeley Repertory Company which invited theaters, universities and libraries to host their own readings. Tony Taccone and Bennett S. Cohen wrote a new adaptation, choosing not to use the version Lewis wrote in 1936.

Ask students to work in small groups to create either a Reader's Theater of one scene or to dramatize a scene from the novel. To get ideas for a scene, students can skim several reviews of the modern adaptation of *It Can't Happen Here* performed at the Berkeley Repertory Theatre on September 30, 2016.

“Getting Close to Fascism with Sinclair Lewis's ‘It Can't Happen Here’” by Alexander Nazaryan, October 19, 2016. <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/getting-close-to-fascism-with-sinclair-lewiss-it-cant-happen-here>

“A Play Timed to Trump's Candidacy Asks What If?” by Michael Paulson, September 25, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/26/theater/a-play-timed-to-trumps-candidacy-asks-what-if.html>

2. In the novel, beginning at the convention, songs are used to promote Windrip's candidacy and agenda. Sung to the tune of “Yankee Doodle,” Buzz Windrip is hailed as the hero of the “Forgotten Men.” This whimsical song is followed by an “anthem...befitting the seriousness of crusading Americans” (p. 53), “Bring Out the Old-Time Musket.” Windrip is first called “Chief” in one of the versions of the chorus of “Buzz and Buzz” (p. 153). Discuss with students what makes songs and music so persuasive and why political campaigns often have a theme song.

Then ask students to plan a presentation in which they identify a modern day song that connects with the action and themes of the novel. To present their song, students should include: a 30–40 second clip from the song, two to three PowerPoint slides that briefly outline why they have chosen this song, and its connections to the novel. Students should address the following questions in their presentation:

- What artistic elements contribute to the meaning of the song?
 - How does the meaning of the song connect with an action, theme, or idea in the novel?
3. In a 2012 History.com article, “10 Winning Presidential Campaign Slogans,” Christopher Klein says, “Equal parts marketing catchphrase and mission statement, a presidential campaign slogan encapsulates a candidate's political brand and serves as a rallying cry for supporters” (<http://www.history.com/news/10-winning-presidential-campaign-slogans>). Ask students to check out the list of campaign slogans available at <http://www.president-susa.net/campaignslogans.html> and to choose ones that they believe are most effective. Ask students to tell why the slogan works for them.
 - What makes the slogan memorable?
 - What does the slogan reveal about the political agenda of the candidate?

Then ask students to create one slogan for each of the three parts of *It Can't Happen Here* that reflect Windrip's policies or appeal to the people at each stage.

4. In an excerpt from Windrip's book, *Zero Hour*, Windrip criticizes the Press as "men without thought of Family or Public Interest . . . plotting how they can put over their lies. . ." (p. 34). News sources are taken over and controlled in the Windrip administration so that they will glorify the president and his policies. Facts are ignored in favor of propaganda. When Jessup writes an anti-Windrip editorial, he is arrested and forced to comply with government control of the newspaper he owns. These events in the novel may remind students of some of the recent criticism of the media in the 2016 campaign and the administration of President Donald Trump. One relevant example is President Trump's speech to the Conservative Political Action Conference in February 2017 in which he speaks out against "fake news": <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/us-politics/trump-escalates-media-criticism-in-cpac-speech/article34128368/>

After viewing this clip, ask students to review the First Amendment to the Constitution of the U.S.: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. Discuss as a class and record key ideas:

- Is the "press" which is listed in the First Amendment the same as the media of today?
- In what ways does the press differ from the media? Do they have different purposes?

Ask students to research these two terms to identify the role of each. Students can present their findings in a comparison/contrast report or use a two-columned table to list the key practices of each. Then return to the earlier discussion and make additions and clarifications to the list of key ideas.

Returning to the clip of President Trump's speech, ask students:

- What are President Trump's charges against the media?
- What evidence is offered to back up these charges?
- What is fake news?
- What could be a reason for labeling the media "fake news"?

As a follow up, ask students to conduct online research looking at the lists of "fake news" sites and which ones they may have encountered. Two sources with lists of common fake news sites are:

- <https://www.benzinga.com/general/education/17/03/9108299/8-of-the-most-popular-fake-news-websites>
- <https://www.dailydot.com/layer8/fake-news-sites-list-facebook/>

Then ask students to read this editorial, "Solving the Problem of Fake News" by Nicholas Lemann from November 30, 2016 at <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/solving-the-problem-of-fake-news>, and discuss:

- What is the solution to the issue of fake news?
- Is fake news being used in the world of Windrip? To what end?
- What solution is proposed by Lewis to the problem of fake news?

5. Ask students to read an essay from the *New York Times Sunday Book Review*, "Does Fiction Have the Power to Sway Politics?" by Mohsin Hamid and Francine Prose (February 22, 2015) and to collect three to four quotes that represent the point of view of the authors. Then ask students to respond to the quotes they have collected, agreeing or disagreeing about the impact of fiction on political thinking. As a whole class, share the quotes and

responses and then debate if this novel by Sinclair Lewis could have an impact on politics today. What might be its impact?

The essay can be found at <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/22/books/review/does-fiction-have-the-power-to-sway-politics.html>.

- The 2006 film *All the King's Men* directed by Steven Zaillian is based on the novel by Robert Penn Warren (1946) which tells the story of Willie Stark, a fictional character based on Huey Long. Ask students to view the film and, using a graphic organizer, compare and contrast the character of Willie Stark with Windrip. What are the similarities and differences with respect to their backgrounds, their ambitions, their campaign styles, and their governing practices? After reviewing the similarities and differences between the two characters, discuss:
 - What does the movie suggest about the ironic title of *It Can't Happen Here*?
 - Does Huey Long's rise to political power suggest that a tyrannical government could take power in the U.S.?

SYNTHESIZING QUESTIONS

- Jessup goes from being an uninvolved, ironic observer to becoming a lone resister against Windrip's Fascist regime. Trace what he has to say at each stage of this development. What do these statements suggest about how citizens should respond to an authoritarian and unjust government that violates inalienable rights? What is Sinclair Lewis saying about the role of citizens in a democracy?
- Does Sinclair Lewis adequately support his argument that "it could happen here"? What specific evidence or examples does he offer in the novel about how this type of political regime could be elected in the U.S.? Is his evidence compelling? Why or why not?
- Compare and contrast how the different members of Jessup's family react to the authoritarian government and their loss of rights. Who best represents the author's view of the appropriate response to tyranny? Provide textual evidence for your assessment.
- The twelfth point in Windrip's political philosophy expresses his ideal for women—"to return to their incomparably sacred duties as home-makers and as mothers of strong, honorable future Citizens of the Commonwealth" (p. 63). Analyze how suitable this ideal is for the women portrayed in the novel, like Mrs. Gimmitch, Emma, Lorinda, Sissy, and Mary. Which, if any, of the women represent the ideal for Lewis? Why?
- Write a character sketch of Shad Ledue. Discuss his background, how he gets power, and his behavior as an officer for the Windrip regime. What motivates Shad? What accounts for his cruelty? Is he a good example of what can happen to citizens in the U.S. today? Why or why not?
- What types of media were used by Buzz Windrip in his rise to power? Compare these with the kinds of media used by politicians and candidates today. Is the media today any more effective in holding political leaders accountable for truth in their speeches and for keeping their promises than as portrayed in the novel?
- Consider how Windrip uses religion in his rise to power, how it fails Jessup in his search for renewed courage, and how Haik is supported by ministers "to whom Corpoism had given a chance to be noisily and lucratively patriotic" (p. 354). Also review how various religious characters in the novel act, such as Father Coughlin, Bishop Prang, Father Perfixe, and Mr. Falcke. What is Lewis's view of the role of religion in political life?

8. When Trowbridge sends Jessup out as an underground agent in Minnesota, Lewis comments, "... he set off on his new task of being a spy and professional hero without even any funny passwords to make the game romantic" (p. 374). Why does Lewis call this action a game? Is he being ironic? If so, why? Again, at the novel's end, Lewis says, "And still Doremus goes on in the red sunrise, for a Doremus Jessup can never die" (p. 381). How do you interpret this final comment? Is the author being ironic? Or does he believe in the type of man Jessup is and the kind of work that Jessup is committed to doing? Use quotes from the novel to support your interpretation.

NOTE TO TEACHERS

Given time restraints in the curriculum, teachers may find it difficult to read the entire novel with students. In that case, a selection of pertinent chapters can provide students with a sense of the plot and an overview of Sinclair Lewis's ideas. To understand the appeal of a populist candidate like Windrip, his election, and the resulting impact, select the following chapters: 7, 8, 12, and 15. For the reaction of a citizen, like Jessup, who represents Lewis's point of view, select the following chapters: 2, 18, 20, 30, and 38.

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

CONTEXT FOR THE NOVEL

"Hitler's Rise to Power"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CFWH4Fhkak>

"How Did Hitler Rise to Power?" Alex Gendler and Anthony Hazard

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jFICRFKtAc4>

"Roman Catholic Priest Father Coughlin: Jews and Communism"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXKei'TTN7Wc>

[Note: teachers can screen YouTube videos using Safe Share TV to avoid comments and ads:

[https://safeshare.tv/.](https://safeshare.tv/)]

REVIEWS

It Can't Happen Here, one of Lewis's most popular novels, has enjoyed a resurgence of interest since the election of President Trump. There are multiple reviews and opinion pieces on the web. Here are a few resources teachers may wish to consult:

"Buzz Can Happen Here: Sinclair Lewis and the New American Fascism" by Michael Mark Cohen, *New Ohio Review*, Fall 2016. <https://www.ohio.edu/nor/a/content/pdfs/Cohen.pdf>

"It Could Happen Here" by Joshua Rothman, December 17, 2015. <http://wrehistory.org/sinclair-lewis/>

"Reading the Classic Novel that Predicted Trump" by Beverly Gage, January 17, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/17/books/review/classic-novel-that-predicted-trump-sinclair-lewis-it-cant-happen-here.html>

Review of *It Can't Happen Here* Time Magazine, October 28, 1935. <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,847561-1,00.html>

RELATED BOOKS

Use this list of novels, which describe totalitarian political systems and the use of propaganda to further political agendas, to recommend supplemental reading for students or to set up Literature Circles. A complete discussion about setting up Literature Circles is available at <http://vhstigers.org/ourpages/auto/2006/6/20/1150825013488/Lit%20Circles%20in%20High%20School.pdf>.

***1984* by George Orwell**

The government uses alternative news and history to control its citizens.

***All the King's Men* by Robert Penn Warren**

The main character, Willie Stark, is based on Huey Long.

***Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley**

People fill predetermined different roles and castes in this futuristic society.

***The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood**

Women are subjugated in a religious totalitarian society set in the future.

***The Manchurian Candidate* by Richard Condon**

A brainwashed prisoner of war is sent home to assassinate a U.S. president.

***The Mandibles: A Family, 2029–2047* by Lionel Shriver**

A chronicle of the decline of the dollar which leads to the collapse of American society.

***Wag the Dog* by Larry Beinhart**

Satire that suggests Operation Desert Storm was a propaganda media event to get George Bush re-elected.

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