

Animal Farm: Snowball

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Snowball is the pig who comes closest to making Animalism work. He is energetic, intellectually serious, and genuinely committed to improving the lives of all animals. He teaches literacy, plans the windmill that would reduce the animals' working hours, and leads the defence of the farm at the Battle of the Cowshed. He is the stronger debater and, in the early chapters, the more trusted leader.

He is also, for all of these reasons, the most dangerous rival for Napoleon. Napoleon cannot defeat him in argument. So Napoleon ends the argument.

Who He Is

Snowball believes that power should be won by better argument. He explains his proposals in public, submits them to discussion, and trusts that the most persuasive case will prevail. His weakness is that this belief requires the other party to compete by the same rules. Napoleon does not.

He is not, however, presented without flaws. Orwell is careful not to idealise him. He accepts the pigs' superiority over the other animals as a basic assumption; he reduces the complex principles of Animalism to the slogan "Four legs good, two legs bad" for animals who cannot manage more; his windmill plans are visionary but also somewhat intoxicated with their own grandeur. If he had kept power, Orwell implies, his certainty in his own intelligence might have produced its own version of authoritarianism in time.

His Arc

After the Rebellion: Snowball organises the Animal Committees (the Egg Production Committee, the Clean Tails League), leads literacy classes, and develops Animalism as a practical system. He condenses the Seven Commandments into a single slogan for animals who cannot retain more. His energy and commitment are genuine.

The Battle of the Cowshed: When Jones and his allies return to retake the farm, Snowball leads the defence, having studied Julius Caesar's campaigns. He is wounded in the back but continues fighting. The animals award him "Animal Hero, First Class." This decoration is later revoked by Napoleon.

The windmill debate: Snowball's most ambitious proposal is a windmill to generate electricity, reducing the animals' working hours and providing heating and lighting. He designs the

plans in chalk on the floor of a shed over several weeks. Napoleon urinates on them without comment. At the decisive vote, Snowball's speech is winning the animals over when Napoleon signals the dogs.

Expulsion and absence: After his expulsion, Snowball becomes the farm's all-purpose scapegoat. Every failure is blamed on his sabotage. He reportedly sneaks onto the farm at night to trample the crops and destroy machinery. He was, Squealer later insists, working for Jones from the very beginning. His Animal Hero medal was a forgery. The animals dimly remember differently, but Squealer assures them they are mistaken.

Key Quotes

Quote	Chapter	Significance
"The distinguishing mark of Man is the Hand, the instrument with which he does all his mischief."	2	Snowball's articulation of Animalism's logic: what makes humans the enemy
"All animals are comrades."	1	His instinctive application of Old Major's vision to practical decisions
His speech on the windmill, describing electricity for lighting, heating, and machinery	5	The fullest statement of his vision; also the moment Napoleon ends it

Narrative Techniques

Presence through absence: Snowball is more powerful in the novel after his expulsion than before it. Every time his name is invoked to explain a failure or justify a purge, the reader registers the gap between what the animals are told and what the reader witnessed. His physical absence keeps the question of what was lost alive throughout the novel.

The rewriting of history: Napoleon's systematic erasure of Snowball's record is Orwell's most direct reference to Soviet historical revisionism: the alteration of photographs, encyclopaedias, and official records to remove inconvenient figures. The animals cannot check the revised history because they cannot read the documents Squealer cites, and their memories are unreliable. What was seen becomes uncertain; what was invented becomes fact.

Contrast as characterisation: Snowball is most clearly defined by contrast with Napoleon. Where Napoleon is silent and strategic, Snowball is vocal and ideological. Where Napoleon acts, Snowball argues. The contrast is not simply between good and evil but between two competing theories of how leadership works: one honest, one not.

The unanswerable question: Orwell never resolves whether Snowball would have been a good long-term leader. The reader is left with his virtues and his potential flaws, with no way to test either. This unresolvability is part of the novel's point: history does not offer the alternative version, and the question of whether things could have been better under Snowball is genuinely open.

Thematic Significance

Snowball represents the road not taken. His expulsion is the moment Animal Farm stops being a revolution and becomes a regime. But Orwell does not allow him to be straightforwardly heroic: his confidence in public debate is a strategic error, and his willingness to accept pig superiority as a premise undermines the equality he claims to believe in.

He also illustrates how totalitarian systems require enemies. Napoleon's power depends not only on controlling the present but on controlling the past. Snowball must be converted into a traitor because the alternative, that he was right and was expelled for being right, cannot be permitted to exist in the animals' memory. An enemy outside the state keeps the population united behind the leader; a suppressed true history keeps them unable to think about what was taken from them.

Exam Tip

Snowball works well for questions about revolution, leadership, propaganda, or historical revisionism. For revolution: he represents the possibility that the revolution could have worked, and his expulsion is the moment it stops working. For propaganda: his transformation from hero to villain shows exactly how Squealer manipulates the historical record. For leadership: contrast him with Napoleon to show Orwell's argument about what kind of leader survives. Always note that Orwell does not idealise him: his flaws are part of the argument.