

# Animal Farm: The Dogs

Matthew Williams • English Literature • May 11, 2026

The nine dogs are not characters in the way that the other animals are. They are an institution. Orwell gives them no individual names and no individual personalities. They are taken from their mothers by Napoleon in the first days after the Rebellion, trained in secret over the following year, and produced at the decisive moment to expel Snowball. After that, they are always near Napoleon, always growling, and always ready.

Their transformation from ordinary farm puppies into trained enforcers is the novel's clearest image of how authoritarian regimes build their security apparatus: take the young before they can form independent loyalties, isolate them from ordinary social bonds, and condition them to identify obedience to a single leader as virtue.

## Who They Are

The dogs are force in its most mechanical form. They do not decide who to attack; they respond to Napoleon's signal. When the show trials produce confessions, the dogs tear the confessing animals to pieces before anyone can respond. They have no independent moral agency. They are violence institutionalised.

They are also, crucially, former members of the farm community who were taken from it and repurposed. Their mothers, Jessie and Bluebell, are ordinary farm dogs who had recently given birth. Napoleon takes the puppies to educate them himself. No animal questions this. By the time the dogs reappear, they are no longer recognisable as the litter the other animals knew.

## Their Arc

**The puppies:** Napoleon takes the nine strongest puppies of Jessie and Bluebell's litters immediately after the Rebellion, on the pretext of education. He installs them in the loft above the harness room. The other animals forget about them.

**Snowball's expulsion:** At the decisive Sunday meeting, when Snowball has all but won the windmill debate, Napoleon utters a high-pitched whimper. "At this there was a terrible baying sound outside, and nine enormous dogs wearing brass-studded collars came bounding into the barn. They dashed straight for Snowball." Snowball escapes through a hedge. The other animals are stunned into silence.

**The show trials:** Napoleon assembles all the animals and has four pigs and various other animals brought forward. They confess to conspiring with Snowball and are executed

immediately by the dogs, in public, in front of the entire farm. The executions continue until the yard is covered with corpses. This is the most direct representation in the novel of Stalin's Great Purge of 1936 to 1938.

**As permanent presence:** After the purges, the dogs accompany Napoleon everywhere. Their presence means that dissatisfaction never becomes speech, and speech never becomes action.

## Key Quotes

Quote	Chapter	Significance
"Napoleon stood up and, casting a peculiar sidelong look at Snowball, uttered a high-pitched whimper of a kind no one had ever heard him utter before. At this there was a terrible baying sound outside, and nine enormous dogs wearing brass-studded collars came bounding into the barn."	5	The moment of Snowball's expulsion; the dogs appear as a mechanical response to a pre-arranged signal

## Narrative Techniques

**Anonymity as technique:** The dogs have no individual names. This is deliberate. To name them would be to humanise them and complicate their allegorical function. They are a force, not persons. Their anonymity makes them interchangeable, which is the point: they represent an institution rather than individuals.

**The signal:** Napoleon's "peculiar sidelong look at Snowball" and his high-pitched whimper before the dogs appear establishes that the expulsion was planned well in advance. What looked like a political debate was already predetermined. The signal is one of the novel's most chilling details because it retrospectively reveals the entire previous chapter, the Sunday meetings, the public debates, as theatre.

**The brass-studded collars:** The collars are a visual detail with ironic force: they are the kind of decoration that, in a different context, marks a working animal's condition. The dogs wear markers of their own servitude as they enforce the servitude of others. They are enslaved to Napoleon just as the other animals are, but their enslavement expresses itself as power over everyone else.

**Education as indoctrination:** The dogs are the novel's clearest example of what Napoleon means when he says he believes in educating the young. His education produces obedience

to a single authority, not independent thought. The result is animals who cannot distinguish justice from orders.

## Thematic Significance

The dogs make the novel's argument about violence and power explicit. Napoleon's authority does not rest on consent or even on persuasion; it rests on the knowledge that dissent will be physically punished. Every decision the animals accept after Snowball's expulsion is made in the presence of the dogs.

They also represent the danger of a private army: force that answers to a person rather than to a law or institution. One of the original Seven Commandments is that no animal shall kill any other animal. Napoleon does not abolish this commandment; Squealer amends it to read without cause, and the dogs provide the cause. The violence is not illegal under the new dispensation; the law has been redefined around it.

### Exam Tip

The dogs work well for questions about power, violence, or the mechanisms of totalitarian control. For power: they represent the final argument, the one that cannot be answered in debate. For totalitarianism: trace their origin as puppies, their secret training, and their function as enforcers to show how authoritarian states build institutional violence. For the commandments: note that their existence leads directly to the amendment of "No animal shall kill any other animal" to "without cause," showing how the rules are adjusted around the violence rather than the violence being prevented by the rules.