

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION CONTINUED

10. How does Marcus feel about “razorblade” corporations? Are all razorblade corporations bad? What are some of the recognizable technology companies Marcus mentions in the novel and what are his opinions of them?
11. How does Marcus use the Xbox Universal and the XNet to undermine government surveillance? How does he use the internet to organize real-world protests? Is he surprised by the results of his actions? What are the most surprising similarities/differences between an ARG crowd and a crowd in a real public space?
12. What is Bayesian probability and how does it relate to Marcus and Jolu’s strategies for safely encrypting XNet communiqués? How does Pigspleen fit into this plan? Why does this company appeal to Marcus?
13. What historical events inspire Marcus to form a protest community? Is protest the only way to determine the acceptable level of sacrificed personal freedom for the good of the nation? Cite the novel or real, historical examples in your answer.
14. Describe Marcus’s key system for creating an ever-enlarging circle of trusted community members. Is this a good system? What are its flaws or risks?
15. Why do Van and Jolu break away from Marcus? If you had been part of Marcus’s group, would you have stuck with him? Why or why not?
16. Does the media overemphasize identity theft and internet predators while underplaying the danger of being “watched” by legal government and corporate agencies through credit card use, transportation monitoring, etc.? How has this imbalance occurred and is surveillance the greater danger?
17. “Don’t Trust Anyone Over 25” becomes an XNet motto and then a merchandized slogan. How does today’s internet quicken public adoption of new ideas? Is this a good thing, a dangerous thing, or both?
18. How does Marcus’s physical relationship with Ange affect his actions and attitudes? Is the absence of physical contact an important consideration when studying the internet? Do people treat others the same way in internet conversations as they do face-to-face? If not, what are the differences?
19. Who ultimately betrays Marcus, and how and why? Whom does Marcus ultimately trust to save himself and his friends? Is this a surprising choice? What actions do Marcus and his confidantes take to help him regain a certain type of freedom? How does Marcus feel about going down this path?
20. Is widely disseminated information always less lethal than a carefully kept secret (e.g., a how-to on weapons building or an encryption method)? Is this a great paradox of the information age?
21. Marcus and his friends all seem to be quite intelligent and share a passion for figuring out how things work. Do these qualities make them safer than other characters in the world of *Little Brother*? Is smarter safer in general?
22. Are government attempts to “protect” citizens through surveillance ridiculous to anyone with an understanding of security technology? Would America be safer if all of its citizens learned more about the computers upon which they rely? How else could/should America be made safe? By whom? From whom?
23. What is Marcus’s job at the end of the novel? What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages, satisfactions and frustrations of this job? Is it important to have people like Marcus on the internet? Why or why not?
24. How do the afterwords affect your reading of *Little Brother*? Has the experience of reading this book changed your understanding of—or your standards for—security, privacy, and freedom? If so, how?

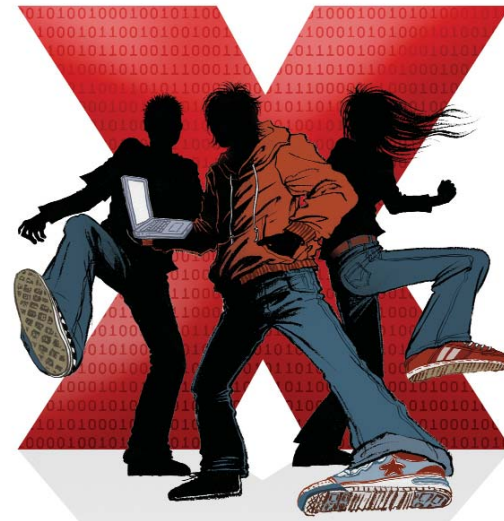


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TOR TEEN TEACHER’S GUIDE

LITTLE BROTHER



CORY DOCTOROW

ABOUT *LITTLE BROTHER*

Sometime in the near future, tech-savvy teenager Marcus Yallow finds himself in the wrong place at the wrong time and becomes a terrorism suspect. Suddenly his casual objection to being monitored—via his internet use, the school-employed gate sensors, and public transit fast-passes—becomes a critical, life-altering protest. But, how do you thwart the efforts of overzealous watchers without becoming as guilty of the invasion of others’ privacy as your enemy? Where is the line between public safety and personal freedom? This intelligent romp through the worlds of surveillance, code-writing, and internet communication also offers a compelling examination of the question: What will be the legacy of the young people who grow up in an age of high-tech “anti-terrorism”?

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The information, activities, and discussion questions which follow are intended to enhance your reading of *Little Brother*. Please feel free to adapt these materials to suit your needs and interests.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cory Doctorow, a coeditor of the influential blog Boing Boing, writes columns for *Make*, *InformationWeek*, *Locus*, and the *Guardian*. A three-time Locus Award winner, and a Hugo and Nebula nominee, he was named one of the Web’s twenty-five influencers by *Forbes* magazine and a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum.

WRITING AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Three questions frame the writing and research activities for this novel. It may be useful to explore some of the discussion questions below before embarking on these projects.

I. What is real?

- A. Write your own definition for the term “reality,” then find at least two dictionary definitions. Write “reality” in the center of a large piece of paper and surround it with a collage of images, phrases, definitions, and quotations inspired by the term. Share your collage with friends or classmates, using it as the starting point for a discussion of the question, “Can you change reality?”
- B. Look through the text for examples of the government employing technology to “protect” citizens from terrorism, and of Marcus using it to sabotage these efforts. Make a list of technology-based modes of deception having a negative impact on people today, such as identity theft. Then, in the role of a “security expert,” write a memo to the Director of Homeland Security outlining the ways in which the government’s interpretation of reality (as in “real terrorists,” “real security risks,” and “real danger”) is affected by such uses of technology.
- C. Read George Orwell’s *1984*. Write a short essay explaining Doctorow’s choice of the title *Little Brother* in terms of the themes of *1984*. Research the controversy surrounding the cameras currently surveying London, England, or Orson Welles’s frightening 1938 radio broadcast of H. G. Wells’s novel, *War of the Worlds*. Conclude your essay with thoughts about these real-life events.
- D. Define “Live Action Role Playing” and “Alternate Reality Gaming.” Survey classmates regarding their interest in and playing of LARPs and ARGs. Summarize survey results on a table or chart to which you can refer during a discussion of the appeal, value, and shortcomings of such games. How is the term “reality” used in these types of games? Have two groups of students debate the proposition that “cyber-friendships are as real as traditional friendships.”
- E. Create an annotated timeline of historical events mentioned in the novel, from the Declaration of Independence to the Enigma code to 1960s activism to September 11th and homeland security. Then, write a 3–4 paragraph answer to the question, “Is history repeating itself in cyberspace?”

II. What is true?

- A. Repeat exercise I A, above, substituting the term “truth” for the term “reality.” Finish with a discussion of the question “How can you be sure something is true?”
- B. Do you agree with Marcus’s plea for everyone to try to write at least a bit of computer code? Is technical knowledge power? Write a short speech in support of, or against, Marcus’s arguments. Give your speech to friends or classmates.
- C. Learn how information is collected, edited, and used on the website Wikipedia.com. What are your teachers’ opinions of Wikipedia? Have you ever used Wikipedia for a school project? What online research resources do you use with confidence? Create an informative pamphlet about information-sharing and reference websites, including facts about Wikipedia. Include a list of good research websites and answers to the questions (1) Does the search engine you choose affect the information you find and the risks you engender? (2) Can you frame a question to get a more truthful, realistic, or free answer?

III. What is free?

- A. Repeat exercise I A, above, substituting the term “freedom” for the term “reality.” Finish with a discussion of the questions, “Is anyone every really free? How free is free enough?”

- B. In the role of another teen imprisoned along with Marcus by Homeland Security officers, write at least three journal entries describing your experience and how it affected your sense or understanding of freedom.
- C. Research the history of Napster music sharing, the ongoing record industry lawsuits against individuals distributing free music downloads, the Linux operating system, or the larger free software movement. Create a short video report, computer slideshow, or other technology-based presentation based on your research to share with friends or classmates. Consider the questions (1) If music files, software, and other program creations were free, would artists and engineers create them in the same way and in such abundance? and (2) If code for such things as security and encryption programs were always published freely on the internet, why would/wouldn’t the resulting software be better, more reliable, or safer?
- D. The biblical quotation “The truth shall make you free” (John, viii.32) has been used in many literary and historical contexts. Create a drawing, sculpture, poem, or other creative work interpreting this quote in light of your reading of *Little Brother*.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How does Marcus’s comment that he’s “one of the most surveyed people in the world” set the tone for the novel? Is the statement true? Compare the school Marcus describes in the opening chapters to your own in terms of surveillance, discipline, and student-administrator relationships.
2. In what year or decade do you think *Little Brother* takes place? Cite passages from the novel to support your answer. Do you think the story could happen today? Why or why not?
3. Is Marcus a good kid or a bad kid? Can he be defined by either of those terms? How might Marcus describe his code of ethics regarding being “surveyed” and his right to circumvent the efforts of the surveyors? How might you define the “moral dilemma” of reprogramming RFIDs, as explained in the novel?
4. Why do Darryl and Marcus leave school in Chapter 2 and what are the consequences? Have your seemingly harmless actions ever gotten others in trouble? How did you feel? What actions did you take as a result?
5. What is Harajuku Fun Madness? Why does Marcus trust HFM organizers, and follow their clues to real-world encounters with “enemy teams,” while he is highly suspicious of government operatives attempting to similarly control him?
6. Describe Marcus’s capture and imprisonment. What happens to Darryl? What conclusions does Marcus reach about his government and his community as a result of his imprisonment?
7. What does Marcus’s refusal to give passwords to and answer questions from government interrogators reveal about his character? How are passwords a recurring motif in the novel?
8. How does the author use Marcus’s mother and father to represent different points of view about government oversight of individuals? Which parent best represents your perspective?
9. List some of the technologies Marcus explains in the novel. How much of this information did you already know? How are the explanations in the novel similar to, or different from, your previous encounters with this information? Do you view the internet differently after learning this information?

