

$$2 + 2 = 5$$

The bell rang. The students awoke and put on their blue uniforms for Monday, then exited the sleeping quarters. They sat down at the long, polished wooden tables of the cafeteria and ate their breakfast. The bell rang. The students stood up and walked to their separate classrooms. They received their assignments and worked until noon. The bell rang. The students stood and walked to their classrooms. They worked. The bell rang. The students ate dinner. Then they entered the sleeping quarters and changed into sleep clothes. They entered their bunks and slept silently.

The bell rang. The students awoke and put on their green uniforms for Tuesday, then exited the sleeping quarters. They sat down at the long, polished wooden tables of the cafeteria and ate their breakfast. One student wore a blue uniform. He was taken to Room 103 by the Monitors. The bell rang. The students stood up and walked to their separate classrooms. They received their assignments and worked until noon. The bell rang. The students walked to the cafeteria to eat lunch. The student taken to Room 103 did not return. No one ever returned from Room 103. The bell rang. The students stood and walked to their classrooms. They worked. The bell rang. The students ate dinner without thinking of the missing student. #264 wondered why uniforms were so important as to imprison an innocent student. The students entered the sleeping quarters and changed. They climbed into their bunks to sleep. #264 thought about how the student was beaten and dragged off into the mysterious Room 103. Something about the event bothered him, although he knew not what. He had seen it happen many times. #264 ignored this thought and slept with the rest.

The bell rang. The students got up and dressed in their red uniforms for Wednesday. They ate breakfast in the cafeteria. #264 still could not forget the incident from yesterday. He twirled his spoon in his oatmeal and thought. All the others surrounding him ate in unison, not stopping once to talk or look up from their food. #264 recalled how the student had pleaded over and over not to be taken to the horrid Room 103. He had apologized profusely for his mistake. The Monitors had ignored his pleas, simply striking him with their truncheons and dragging him off to the feared room without a second thought. The bell rang. #264 and the others stood and marched to their classrooms.

#264 sat at a rectangular table propped against a wall. Other students sat beside him at the same table, working diligently. A pneumatic tube protruded from the corner. This tube regularly spat out cylinders containing assignments. The students were to complete the work, then submit

it by placing it in the tube once more. Presently, a cylinder shot from the tube and onto #264's desk area. He unscrewed the cap and unfolded the paper. It read:

**Answer all questions then submit.**

**1. Who is #000?**

#264 scratched his head. This test was much too simple. #000 was the master of the world. Under his leadership, Educational Center 8928 and the remaining parts of the world could unite as one. His face hung everywhere, on posters, banners, and book covers. How could one forget who he was? #264 scribbled on the answer sheet:

#000 is supreme master of the world.

#264 looked down at the remaining questions. They were all simple questions. One example:

**18. If #000 declares that  $2 + 2 = 5$ , is he correct?**

#264, without thinking, automatically scrawled on his paper:

Yes.

At lunch, #264 thought further on the student's oppression. Why would such a great leader as #000 create such an imbecilic rule as multiple uniforms for separate days? Perhaps there was some sort of mistake. There had to be, otherwise...

That Thursday, the bell rang, but #264 did not awaken. He slept as the others all mindlessly followed daily routines. He suddenly sprang awake, realizing his mistake. Quickly, he grabbed his orange uniform and rushed out to breakfast. He arrived at the cafeteria, and suddenly realized that the entire student body was wearing yellow, not orange. #264 dashed back to the sleeping quarters and switched uniforms.

He ran back into the cafeteria, only to realize breakfast was over and class had almost begun. #264 fell in line behind a group of students and marched to class. The bell rang. Class began as #264 hurriedly sat in his chair. He pulled open a cylinder lying on his desk and read the lone words on its mostly blank face:

**If #000 declares that  $2 + 2 = 5$ , is he correct?**

#264, without thinking, automatically scrawled on his paper:

Yes.

That night, #264 thought deeply on his beliefs. Was #000 always right? Should you always follow his orders? Or could he be wrong? Should you follow your own opinions? #264 struggled with these thoughts long into the night.

The bell rang. The students awoke and put on their orange uniforms for Friday, then exited the sleeping quarters. They sat down at the long, polished wooden tables of the cafeteria and ate their breakfast. The bell rang. The students stood up and walked to their separate classrooms. They received their assignments and worked until noon. The bell rang. The students walked to the cafeteria and ate lunch. The bell rang. The students stood and walked to their classrooms. They worked. The bell rang. The students ate dinner. Then they entered the sleeping quarters and changed into sleep clothes. They entered their bunks and slept.

A lone paper sat on #264's desk. It read:

**If #000 declares that  $2 + 2 = 5$ , is he correct?**

#264, without thinking, automatically scrawled on his paper:

No.

And it was then that #264, no that *I*, realized that nothing was more important than the freedom to think. I was no longer #264. I was no longer a brainwashed one among many. I could think for myself, and #000 no longer held any sway over my thoughts.

That night, I was taken to Room 103.