



TODAY'S MOST POPULAR STUDY GUIDES

---

# Lord of the Flies

William Golding

SMARTER **BETTER** *FASTER*



# LORD OF THE FLIES

William Golding



**SPARKNOTES**

Contributors: Brian Phillips, Ellen Feldman, Jeremy Zorn

Copyright © 2002 by SparkNotes LLC

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without the written permission of the Publisher.

SPARKNOTES is a registered trademark of SparkNotes LLC.

This edition published by Spark Publishing

Spark Publishing  
A Division of SparkNotes LLC  
76 9th Avenue, 11th Floor  
New York, NY 10011

ISBN 1-4014-0393-X

*Text design by Rhea Braunstein*  
*Text composition by Jackson Typesetting*

Printed and bound in the United States of America

01 02 03 04 05 SN 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

RRD-C

[www.sparknotes.com](http://www.sparknotes.com)



## INTRODUCTION

### STOPPING TO BUY SPARKNOTES ON A SNOWY EVENING

Whose words these are you *think* you know.  
Your paper's due tomorrow, though;  
We're glad to see you stopping here  
To get some help before you go.

Lost your course? You'll find it here.  
Face tests and essays without fear.  
Between the words, good grades at stake:  
Get great results throughout the year.

Once school bells caused your heart to quake  
As teachers circled each mistake.  
Use SparkNotes and no longer weep,  
Ace every single test you take.

Yes, books are lovely, dark, and deep,  
But only what you grasp you keep,  
With hours to go before you sleep,  
With hours to go before you sleep.



## CONTENTS

<b>CONTEXT</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>PLOT OVERVIEW</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>CHARACTER LIST</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>ANALYSIS OF MAJOR CHARACTERS</b>	<b>8</b>
Ralph	8
Jack	9
Simon	9
 <b>THEMES, MOTIFS, AND SYMBOLS</b>	 <b>11</b>
Civilization and Savagery	11
Loss of Innocence	12
Christian Iconography	12
The Conch Shell	13
Piggy's Glasses	14
The Signal Fire	14
The Beast	14
The Lord of the Flies	15
Ralph, Piggy, Jack, Simon, Roger	15
 <b>SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS</b>	 <b>16</b>
Chapter 1	16
Chapter 2	18
Chapter 3	21

## vi • CONTENTS

Chapter 4	23
Chapter 5	26
Chapter 6	28
Chapter 7	30
Chapter 8	32
Chapter 9	36
Chapter 10	38
Chapter 11	40
Chapter 12	42
 <b>IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS EXPLAINED</b>	 45
<b>KEY FACTS</b>	48
<b>STUDY QUESTIONS AND ESSAY TOPICS</b>	50
<b>REVIEW AND RESOURCES</b>	53
Quiz	53
Suggestions for Further Reading	58



William Golding was born on September 19, 1911, in Cornwall, England. After graduating from Oxford, he worked briefly as an actor, then became a schoolteacher. When England entered World War II, Golding joined the Royal Navy. After the war, he resumed teaching and also began writing novels. His first and greatest success came with 1954's *Lord of the Flies*, after which he was able to retire from teaching and devote himself fully to writing. Although he never again attained the kind of popular and artistic success he enjoyed with *Lord of the Flies*, on the basis of that book he remained a respected and distinguished author for the rest of his life, publishing several novels and a play, *The Brass Butterfly* (1958). He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1983. William Golding died in 1993, one of the most acclaimed writers in England.

*Lord of the Flies*, which tells the story of a group of English boys marooned on a tropical island after their plane is shot down during a war, is fiction. But the book's exploration of the idea of human evil is to some extent based on Golding's experience with the violence and savagery of human beings during World War II. In exploring the breakdown into savagery of a group of boys free from the imposed moral constraints of civilization and society, *Lord of the Flies* dramatizes a fundamental human struggle: the conflict between the impulse to obey rules, behave morally, and act lawfully and the impulse to seek brute power over others, act selfishly, behave in a way that will gratify one's own desires, scorn moral rules, and indulge in violence. The first set of impulses might be thought of as the "civilizing instinct," which encourages people to work together toward common goals and behave peacefully; the second set of impulses might be thought of as the "barbarizing instinct," or the instinct toward savagery, which urges people to rebel against civilization and instead seek anarchy, chaos, despotism, and violence. The novel's structure and style are extremely straightforward. The book largely excludes poetic language, lengthy description, and philosophical interludes. The novel is also allegorical, meaning that

## 2 • LORD OF THE FLIES

characters and objects in the book directly represent the novel's central thematic ideas.

Because its story is allegorical, *Lord of the Flies* can be interpreted in many ways. During the 1950s and 1960s, many readings of the book connected it with grand historical, religious, and psychological schemes: the book was said to have dramatized the history of civilization, the history of religion, or the struggle among the Freudian components of unconscious identity—id, ego, and superego. Since the book does deal with fundamental human tendencies, there is a glimmer of truth in each of these readings, but it is important to remember that the novel's philosophical register is really quite limited—almost entirely restricted to the two extremes represented by Ralph and Jack—and is certainly not complex or subtle enough to offer a realistic parallel to the history of human endeavors as a whole. Every element of *Lord of the Flies* becomes meaningful in relation to the book's exploration of its *particular* philosophical conflict.





## PLOT OVERVIEW

In the midst of a raging war, a plane evacuating a group of English boys from Britain is shot down over a deserted tropical island. Marooned, the boys set about electing a leader and finding a way to be rescued. They choose Ralph as their leader, and Ralph appoints Jack to be the leader of the hunters. Ralph, Jack, and Simon set off on an expedition to explore the island. When they return, Ralph declares that they must light a signal fire to attract the attention of passing ships. The boys begin to do so, using the lens from Piggy's eyeglasses to ignite dead wood, but they are more interested in playing than in paying close attention to their duties, and the fire quickly ignites the forest. A large swath of dead wood burns out of control. One of the youngest boys disappears, presumably having burned to death.

At first, the boys enjoy their life without grown-ups. They splash in the lagoon and play games, though Ralph complains that they should be maintaining the signal fire and building huts for shelter. The hunters have trouble catching a pig, but Jack becomes increasingly preoccupied with the act of hunting. One day, a ship passes by on the horizon, and Ralph and Piggy notice, to their horror, that the signal fire has burned out; it had been the hunters' responsibility to maintain it. Furious, Ralph accosts Jack, but the hunter has just returned with his first kill, and all the boys seem gripped with a strange frenzy, reenacting the chase in a kind of wild dance. When Piggy criticizes him, Jack hits him across the face.

Ralph blows the conch shell used to summon the boys and reprimands them in a speech intended to restore order. Yet there is a larger, more insidious problem than keeping the signal fire lit and overcoming the difficulties of hunting: the boys have started to become afraid. The littlest boys (known as "littluns") have been troubled by nightmares from the beginning, and more and more boys now believe that there is some sort of beast or monster lurking on the island. At the meeting, the older boys try to convince the others to think rationally: if there were a monster, where would it hide during the daytime? One

#### 4 • LORD OF THE FLIES

of the littluns suggests that it hides in the sea, a proposition that terrifies the whole group.

Not long after the meeting, an aircraft battle takes place high above the island. The boys are sleeping, so they do not notice the flashing lights and explosions in the clouds. A parachutist drifts to earth on the signal fire mountain. He is dead. Sam and Eric, the twins responsible for watching the fire at night, have fallen asleep, so they do not see him land. But when they wake up, they see the enormous silhouette of his parachute and hear the strange flapping noises it makes. Thinking the beast is at hand, they rush back to the camp in terror and report that the beast has attacked them.

The boys organize a hunting expedition to search for monsters. Jack and Ralph, who are increasingly at odds, travel up the mountain. They see the silhouette of the parachute from a distance and think that it looks like a huge, deformed ape. The group holds a meeting, at which Jack and Ralph tell the others of the sighting. Jack says that Ralph is a coward and that he should be removed from office, but the other boys refuse to vote him out of power. Jack angrily runs away down the beach, calling all the hunters to join him. Ralph rallies the remaining boys to build a new signal fire, this time on the beach instead of on the “monster’s” mountain. They obey, but before they have finished the task, most of them have slipped away to join Jack.

Jack declares himself the leader of this new tribe, and organizes a hunt and violent, ritual slaughter of a sow to solemnize the occasion. They then decapitate the sow and place its head on a sharpened stake in the jungle as an offering to the beast. Encountering the bloody, fly-covered head, Simon has a terrible vision, during which it seems to him that the head is speaking. The voice, which he imagines to belong to the Lord of the Flies, says that Simon will never escape him, for he exists within all men. Simon faints; when he wakes up, he goes to the mountain, where he sees the dead parachutist. Understanding then that the monster does not exist externally but rather within each individual boy, Simon travels to the beach to tell the others what he has seen. But they are in the midst of a chaotic revelry—even Ralph and Piggy have joined Jack’s feast—and when they see Simon’s shadowy figure emerge from the jungle, they fall upon him and kill him with their bare hands and teeth.

The following morning, Ralph and Piggy discuss what they have

done. Jack's hunters attack them and their few followers, stealing Piggy's glasses in the process. Ralph's group travels to Jack's stronghold, called Castle Rock, in an attempt to make Jack see reason. But Jack orders Sam and Eric tied up and fights with Ralph. In the ensuing battle, one boy, Roger, rolls a boulder down from the mountain, killing Piggy and shattering the conch shell. Ralph barely manages to escape a torrent of spears.

All night and throughout the following day, Ralph hides and is hunted like an animal. Jack has the other boys ignite the forest in order to smoke him out of his hiding place. Ralph discovers and destroys the sow's head in the forest; eventually, however, he is forced out onto the beach, where he knows the other boys will soon arrive to kill him. Ralph collapses in exhaustion, but when he looks up, he sees a British naval officer standing over him. His ship noticed the blazing fire now raging in the jungle. The other boys reach the beach and stop in their tracks at the sight of the officer. Amazed at the spectacle of this group of bloodthirsty, savage children, the officer asks Ralph to explain. Ralph is overwhelmed by the knowledge that he is saved, but thinking about what has happened on the island, he begins to weep. The other boys begin to sob as well. The officer turns his back so that the boys may regain their composure.



## CHARACTER LIST

**Ralph**—The novel’s protagonist, a twelve-year-old English boy. Marooned on a tropical island with a group of boys when their transport plane is shot down, Ralph is elected leader of the group and attempts to coordinate efforts to build a miniature civilization on the island. Ralph represents the civilizing instinct within human beings, as opposed to the savage instinct symbolized by Jack.

**Jack**—The novel’s antagonist, one of the older boys stranded on the jungle island. On the island, Jack is the leader of the hunters, but he longs for total power and becomes increasingly wild, barbarous, and cruel as the novel progresses. He is also adept at manipulating the other boys. Jack represents the instinct of savagery within human beings, as opposed to the civilizing instinct represented by Ralph.

**Simon**—Simon is in some ways the only naturally “good” character on the island. He behaves kindly toward the younger boys and is willing to work for the good of their community. Moreover, because his motivation seems rooted in his deep feeling of connectedness to nature, Simon is the only character whose sense of morality does not seem to have been imposed by society. Simon represents a kind of natural goodness, as opposed to the unbridled evil of Jack and the imposed morality of civilization represented by Ralph and Piggy.

**Piggy**—Ralph’s lieutenant. A whiny, intellectual boy, Piggy’s inventiveness frequently leads to innovation, such as the **makeshift sundial**, which the boys use to tell time. Piggy represents the scientific, rational side of civilization.

**Roger**—Jack’s lieutenant. A sadistic, cruel older boy who brutalizes the littluns and eventually murders Piggy by rolling a boulder onto him.

**Sam and Eric**—A pair of twins closely allied with Ralph, Sam and Eric are always together and are often treated as a single entity by the other boys; they are frequently referred to as “Samneric.” They are young and easily excitable, and are subject to manipulation and coercion by Jack and his cronies.

**The Lord of the Flies**—The name given to the sow’s head impaled on a stake and erected in the forest as an offering to the “beast” after Jack’s most brutal hunt. It comes to symbolize the primordial instincts of power and cruelty that take control of Jack’s tribe.



### RALPH

Ralph, a twelve-year-old boy marooned with a group of other boys on a deserted island, is the athletic, charismatic protagonist of *Lord of the Flies*. Elected the leader of the boys at the beginning of the novel, Ralph is the primary representative of order, civilization, and productive leadership in the novel. While most of the other boys are concerned with playing, having fun, and avoiding work at the beginning of the novel, Ralph sets about building huts and thinking of ways to maximize their chances of being rescued. For this reason, Ralph's power and influence over the other boys are extremely secure at the beginning of the novel. However, as the book progresses and the group succumbs to savage instincts, Ralph's position declines precipitously as Jack's station rises. Eventually, all the boys except Piggy leave Ralph's group for Jack's, and Ralph is left alone to be hunted by Jack's tribe. Ralph never seriously considers joining Jack's tribe in order to save himself.

Ralph's commitment to civilization and morality is very strong, and his main wish is to be rescued and returned to the society of adults. In a sense, this strength gives Ralph a moral victory at the end of the novel, when he casts the Lord of the Flies to the ground and takes up the stake it is impaled on to defend himself against Jack's hunters. Ralph understands, as Simon did, that savagery exists within all the boys, but he is determined not to let it overwhelm him.

For much of the novel, Ralph is simply unable to understand why the other boys would give in to base instincts of bloodlust and barbarism. The sight of the hunters chanting and dancing is baffling and distasteful to him. But when Ralph hunts a boar for the first time, he experiences the exhilaration and thrill of bloodlust and violence, and when he attends Jack's feast, he is swept away by the frenzy, dancing on the edge of the group and participating in the killing of Simon. This firsthand knowledge of the evil that exists within him, as within all human beings, is tragic for Ralph, and it plunges him into listless despair

for several chapters. But this knowledge also enables him to cast down the Lord of the Flies at the end of the novel. Ralph's story ends semi-tragically; although he is rescued and returned to civilization, when he sees the naval officer, he weeps with the burden of his knowledge about humanity.

## **JACK**

Jack, the strong-willed, egomaniacal boy who is the novel's prime representative of the instinct of savagery, violence, and power, is the antithesis of Ralph. From the beginning of the novel, Jack desires power above all other things; he is furious when he loses the election to Ralph and continually pushes the boundaries of his subordinate role in the group. Early on, Jack retains the sense of moral propriety and behavior that was instilled in him by society—he was the leader of the choirboys, after all. The first time he encounters a pig, he is unable to kill it. But Jack soon becomes obsessed with hunting and devotes himself to the task, painting his face like a barbarian and giving himself over to bloodlust. The more savage Jack becomes, the more he is able to control the rest of the group, which, apart from Ralph, Simon, and Piggy, largely follows him in casting off moral restraint and embracing violence and savagery. By the end of the novel, Jack has learned to use the boys' fear of the beast to control their behavior, giving Golding a chance to explore how religion and superstition can be used as instruments of power. Jack's love of authority and violence are intimately connected, as each enables him to feel powerful and exalted.

## **SIMON**

If Ralph stands at one end of a line, representing civilization, and Jack stands at the other end of the line, representing savagery, where does Simon stand? The answer is that, unlike all the other boys, Simon is not on the line at all; he stands on a different plane from every other character in the novel. Simon seems to represent a kind of innate, spiritual human goodness that is deeply connected with nature and, in its own way, as primal as Jack's evilness. The other characters in the novel abandon moral behavior as soon as civilization no longer imposes it upon

them; they are not *innately* moral but have simply been conditioned to act morally by the adult world, by the threat of punishment for misdeeds. To an extent, even the civility of Ralph and Piggy is a product of social conditioning, as can be seen in their participation in hunt-dance. In the psychology of the novel, the civilizing impulse is not as deeply rooted in the human psyche as the savage impulse. Alone of all the children on the island, Simon acts morally not out of some guilt or shame but because he believes in its inherent value. He behaves kindly toward the younger children, and he is the first to realize the problem posed by the beast and the Lord of the Flies—that is, that the monster on the island is not some physical beast, but rather a savagery that lurks within each human being. This idea finds representation in the sow's head and eventually stands as the moral conclusion of the novel. The main problem of the book is the idea of inherent human evil. Against this, Simon seems to represent an idea of essential human goodness. Yet his brutal murder by the other boys indicates the scarcity of that goodness amid an overwhelming abundance of evil.





## THEMES, MOTIFS, AND SYMBOLS

### THEMES

*Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.*

#### **Civilization and Savagery**

The overriding theme of the novel is the conflict between two competing impulses that exist within all human beings: the instinct to live by rules, act peacefully, follow moral commands, and value the good of the group on the one hand; and the instinct to gratify one's immediate desires, act violently to obtain supremacy over others, and enforce one's will on the other. These two instincts may be called "the instinct of civilization" and "the instinct of savagery," as one is devoted to values that promote ordered society and the other is devoted to values that threaten ordered society. The conflict might also be expressed as order vs. chaos, reason vs. impulse, law vs. anarchy, or in any number of other ways, including the more generalized good vs. evil. Throughout the novel, the instinct of civilization is associated with goodness, while the instinct of savagery is associated with evil.

The conflict between the two instincts is the driving force of the novel, explored through the dissolution of the young English boys' civilized, moral, disciplined behavior as they accustom themselves to a wild, brutal, barbaric life as savages in the jungle. *Lord of the Flies* is an allegorical novel, which means that its main ideas and themes are frequently represented by symbols. Appropriately, the conflict between civilization and savagery is represented most directly by the novel's two main characters: Ralph, the protagonist, represents order and leadership, while Jack, the antagonist, represents savagery and the desire for power.

In the novel's presentation of human psychology, different people experience the instincts of civilization and savagery to different degrees. Piggy, for instance, has no savage feelings, while Roger seems barely capable of comprehending the rules of civilization. But, generally, the

## 12 • LORD OF THE FLIES

novel portrays the instinct of savagery as far more primal and fundamental to the human psyche than the instinct of civilization. Moral behavior, in Golding's view, is often merely a forced imposition of civilization, rather than a natural expression of human individuality. When left to their own devices, the novel seems to argue, people will become cruel, wild, and barbaric. This idea of innate human evil is central to *Lord of the Flies*, and finds expression in several important symbols, most notably the beast and the Lord of the Flies. Only Simon seems to possess anything like a natural, unforced goodness.

### Loss of Innocence

As the boys on the island progress from well-behaved, orderly children who hope to be rescued to cruel, bloodthirsty hunters who have no desire to return to civilization, they naturally lose the sense of innocence that they possessed at the beginning of the novel. The painted savages in Chapter 12 who have hunted, tortured, and killed animals and human beings are a far cry from the simple children swimming in the lagoon in Chapter 3. But Golding does not portray this loss of innocence as something that is done *to* the children; rather, it results naturally from their increasing contact with the innate evil and savagery within themselves. Civilization, in other words, can mitigate but never wipe out the innate evil that exists within all human beings. The loss-of innocence-theme is represented symbolically by the forest glade in which Simon sits in Chapter 3: at first, it is a place of natural beauty and peace. But when Simon returns later in the novel, he discovers the bloody sow's head impaled upon a stake in the middle of the clearing. The paradise has been disrupted by the bloody offering to the beast, a powerful symbol of innate human evil disrupting childhood innocence.

### MOTIFS

*Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.*

### Christian Iconography

*Lord of the Flies* is often described as a retelling of Christian parables. While that may be an oversimplification, the book does echo certain

Christian images and themes. Christian iconography is not explicit or even directly symbolized in the novel; instead, it functions as a kind of subtle motif in the novel, adding thematic resonance to the main ideas of the story. The island itself, particularly Simon's glade, functions as a kind of Garden of Eden that is gradually corrupted by the introduction of evil. The Lord of the Flies may be seen as a symbol for the devil, since it works to promote evil among mankind. Further, because Simon is the character who arrives at the moral truth of the novel, and because he is killed sacrificially as a consequence of having discovered this truth, his life has certain strong parallels with that of Jesus Christ. His conversation with the Lord of the Flies also parallels the confrontation between Christ and the devil in Christian theology.

However, it is important to remember that the parallels between Simon and Christ are not complete, and to read the novel as a pure Christian allegory would overstate the case and thereby reduce the range of possible readings. For one thing, Simon lacks the supernatural connection to the divine that is the main characteristic of Jesus. Simon is wise in many ways, but he is not the son of God, and his death does not bring salvation to the island. Rather, his death plunges the island deeper into savagery and moral guilt. For another, Simon dies before he is able to tell the boys what he has discovered, while Christ was killed only after spreading his moral philosophy. In this way, Simon (and the novel as a whole) echoes Christian ideas and themes without developing precise parallels with them. Because *Lord of the Flies* uses its religious motifs to enhance its moral theme, Christian iconography is an artistic technique in the book, but it is not necessarily the primary key to interpreting the story.

## SYMBOLS

*Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.*

### The Conch Shell

The conch shell is the first important discovery Piggy and Ralph make on the island, and they use it to summon the boys together after they are separated by the crash. As a result, the conch shell becomes a powerful

symbol of civilization and order. It is used to govern the boys' meetings: the boy who holds the shell is given the right to speak, making the shell more than a symbol; it is an actual vessel of political legitimacy and democratic power. As the island civilization erodes and savagery begins to dominate the boys, the conch shell loses its power and influence among them. Ralph clutches it desperately when he talks about his role in murdering Simon. Later, he is taunted and pelted with stones when he attempts to blow it in Jack's camp at Castle Rock. When Roger kills Piggy with the boulder, the conch shell is crushed, signifying the complete demise of the civilized instinct among almost all the boys on the island.

### **Piggy's Glasses**

Piggy is the most intelligent, rational boy in the group, and his glasses represent the power of science and intellectual endeavor in society. This is most clearly demonstrated when Piggy's glasses are used to make fire by intensifying sunlight with their lenses. Thus, when Jack's hunters raid Ralph's camp and steal the glasses, the savages have taken the power to make fire, and Ralph's civilization is left helpless.

### **The Signal Fire**

The signal fire burns on the mountain, and later on the beach, to attract the notice of passing ships that might be able to rescue the boys. As a result, the signal fire becomes a symbol for the boys' connection to civilization. As long as the fire is well maintained, the boys exhibit a desire to return to society, but when the fire burns low or goes out, the boys lose sight of their desire to be rescued, having accepted their savage lives on the island. The signal fire thus functions as a kind of measuring stick by which the strength of the civilized instinct on the island can be judged. Ironically, at the end of the novel, it is a fire that finally summons a ship to the island, but not the signal fire: it is the fire of savagery—the forest fire Jack starts as part of his quest to hunt and kill Ralph.

### **The Beast**

One of the most important symbols of the novel, the imaginary beast, which frightens all the boys, stands for the primal instinct of savagery that exists within all human beings. The boys are afraid of the beast, but only Simon realizes that they fear the beast because it exists within

each of them. As the boys grow more and more savage, their belief in the beast grows stronger and more pronounced. By the end of the novel, they are leaving it sacrifices and treating it as a totemic god. Because the boys' behavior is what brings the beast into existence, the more savagely they act, the more real the beast seems to become.

### **The Lord of the Flies**

The Lord of the Flies is the bloody sow's head that Jack impales on a stake in the forest glade as an offering to the beast. This complicated symbol becomes the most important image in the novel when Simon confronts it in the glade and it seems to speak to him, telling him that evil lies within every human heart and promising to have some "fun" with him. (This "fun" foreshadows Simon's death in the following chapter.) In this way, the Lord of the Flies becomes both a physical manifestation of the beast, a symbol of the power of evil, and a kind of Satanic figure who evokes the beast within each human being. In a reading of the novel's religious iconography, the Lord of the Flies represents the devil, just as Simon represents Christ. In fact, the name "Lord of the Flies" is a translation of the name of the biblical Beelzebub, a powerful demon in hell sometimes thought to be the devil himself.

### **Ralph, Piggy, Jack, Simon, Roger**

Because the novel is an allegory, each character signifies an important idea or theme. **Ralph represents order**, leadership, and civilization; **Piggy represents the scientific** and intellectual aspects of civilization; **Jack represents savagery** and the desire for power; **Simon represents natural human goodness**; and **Roger represents brutality** and bloodlust at their most extreme. In the sense that the boys' society functions as a political state, the littluns can be said to represent the common people, while the older boys represent the ruling classes and political leaders. The developing relationships of the older boys to the younger ones further symbolize their connection to either the civilized or the savage instinct: civilized boys such as Ralph and Simon use their power to protect the littler boys and advance the good of the group; savage boys such as Jack and Roger use their power to gratify their own desires, treating the littler boys as objects for their own amusement.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

### CHAPTER 1

#### Summary

In the midst of a war, a transport plane carrying a group of English boys is shot down over the ocean. It crashes in a thick jungle on a deserted island. Scattered by the wreck, the surviving boys lose each other. The pilot is nowhere to be found. Wandering down from the jungle to the water, one of the older boys, Ralph, meets Piggy, a chubby, intellectual boy, on the beach. Ralph and Piggy look around the beach, wondering what has become of the other boys from the plane. They discover a large white conch shell; Piggy realizes that it could be used as a kind of makeshift trumpet. He convinces Ralph to blow it to find the other boys. Summoned by the blast of sound from the shell, boys begin straggling onto the beach. The oldest among them are around twelve; the youngest are only five. Among the group is a boys' choir, dressed in black gowns and led by an older boy named Jack. They march to the beach in two parallel lines. The boys taunt Piggy, mocking his appearance and his nickname. Jack snaps at them to stand at attention.

The boys decide to elect a leader. The choirboys vote for Jack, but all the other boys vote for Ralph. Ralph wins the vote, although Jack clearly wants the position. To placate Jack, Ralph asks the choir to serve as the hunters for the band of boys and asks Jack to lead them. Mindful of the need to explore their new environment, the boys choose Ralph, Jack, and a choir member named Simon to explore the island, ignoring Piggy's whining requests to be picked. The three explorers leave the meeting place and set off across the island.

The boys feel exhilarated by the prospect of exploring the island and feel a bond forming between them as they play together in the jungle. Eventually they reach the end of the jungle, where high, sharp rocks jut toward steep mountains. The boys climb up the side of one of the steep hills. From the peak, they can see that they are on an island with no signs of civilization; the view is stunning, and Ralph feels as though they

have discovered their own land. As they travel back toward the beach, they find a wild pig caught in a tangle of vines. Jack, the newly appointed hunter, draws his knife and steps in to kill it, but he hesitates, unable to bring himself to do it. The pig frees itself and runs away, and Jack vows that the next time he will not flinch from the deed. The three boys make the long trek through the dense jungle, eventually emerging near the group of boys waiting for them on the beach.

## Analysis

*Lord of the Flies* dramatizes the conflict between the civilizing instinct and the barbarizing instinct that exists in all human beings. Every artistic choice that Golding makes in the novel is designed to emphasize the struggle between the ordering elements of society, which include morality, order, law, and culture, and the chaotic elements of humanity's savage animal instincts, which include anarchy, bloodlust, the desire for power, amorality, selfishness, and violence. His dramatic technique is to show the rise and swift fall of an isolated, impromptu civilization, which is torn to pieces by the savage instincts of the people who comprise it. In this first chapter, Golding establishes the parameters within which this civilization will function.

To begin with, it will be populated solely with boys, the group of young English boys shot down over the wild jungle island on which the action is set. Golding's choice to make his characters boys is significant: the young boys are only half formed, perched between culture and savagery in such a way as to embody the novel's thematic conflict. Golding's assumption throughout the novel is that the constraints of morality and society are learned rather than innate, that the human tendency to obey rules, behave peacefully, and follow orders is imposed by a system of power and control and is not in itself a fundamental part of human nature. Young boys are a fitting illustration of this premise, as they exist in a constant state of tension with regard to the rules and regulations they are expected to follow. Left on their own, they often behave with instinctive cruelty and violence. By making his civilization a product of preadolescent boys' social instincts, Golding endangers it from the beginning.

In Chapter 1, the boys, still unsure of how to behave with no adult presence to control their behavior, largely stick to the learned behaviors

of civilization and order, attempting to re-create the structures of society on their deserted island: they elect a leader, establish a division of labor, and set about systematically exploring the island. But even at this early stage, the danger posed to their civilization by their innate instincts is visible in their taunting of Piggy and in Jack's ferocious desire to be elected leader of the boys.

One of Golding's main techniques for presenting his dramatic conflict involves the use of symbols. *Lord of the Flies* is a highly symbolic novel, and many of its symbols are readily interpreted. In this chapter, for instance, the bespectacled Piggy is used to represent the scientific and intellectual aspects of civilization, as he thinks critically about the conch shell and determines a productive use for it—summoning the other boys to the beach. Other symbols that appear later in the book are more complex and open to multiple interpretations.

Chapter 1 introduces one of the most important symbols in the novel: the conch shell. The conch shell represents law, order, and political legitimacy, as it grants its holder the right to speak and summons the boys to democratic assemblies. Later in the book, this natural object will be sharply contrasted with another—the sinister pig's head known as the Lord of the Flies, which will come to symbolize primordial chaos and terror.

## CHAPTER 2

### Summary

When the explorers return, Ralph blows the conch shell, summoning the boys to another meeting on the beach. Ralph tells the group that there are no adults on the island, but that if they remain calm and orderly, they will eventually be rescued. He says that there is a great deal of edible fruit on the island, and that if they work together, they will be able to survive. Jack reminds Ralph of the pig they found trapped in the jungle creepers, and Ralph agrees that they will need hunters to kill animals for meat. For now, Ralph says, it is important that they live by a set of rules, an idea with which Jack agrees enthusiastically.

Ralph declares that, at meetings, the conch shell will be used to determine which boy has the right to speak. Whoever holds the conch



shell will speak, and the others will listen silently until they receive the shell in their turn. Piggy haughtily informs the group that the wisest course of action would be to try to find a way to improve their chances of being rescued, but he is largely ignored by the other boys. One of the younger children, a small boy with a mulberry-colored mark on his face, claims that he saw a snakelike “beastie” or monster the night before. A wave of fear ripples through the group at the idea that a monster might be prowling the island. Though they are frightened, the older boys try to reassure the group that there is no monster; the little boy’s vision, they say, was only a nightmare.

Thinking about the possibility of rescue, Ralph proposes that the group should build a large signal fire on top of the island’s central mountain, so that if a ship passes, it will see the fire and know that someone is trapped on the island. Excited by the thought, the boys rush off to the mountain, while Ralph and Piggy lag behind, Piggy still whining about the childishness and stupidity of the group.

The boys collect a mound of dead wood and use the lens from Piggy’s glasses to refract sunlight and set it on fire. They manage to get a large fire going, but it quickly dies down; in their frenzied, disorganized efforts to rekindle it, they set a swath of trees ablaze. Piggy angrily declares that the boys need to act more proficiently if they want to get off the island, but his words carry little weight. The boys hold a meeting, during which they decide that Jack’s group of hunters will be responsible for keeping the signal fire going. Now enraged at the boys’ reckless disorganization, Piggy tells them furiously that one of the littlest boys—the same boy who told them about the snake-beast—has been missing since the fire started and probably burned to death. The boys are crestfallen and struck with shame, but they are nevertheless unable to discuss their feelings. Instead, they pretend that nothing has happened.

### **Analysis**

Golding wastes no time in developing the conflict between the instincts of civilization and savagery: the boys, especially Piggy, know that they must act with order and forethought if they wish to be rescued from the island, but the longer they remain separate from the society of adults, the more difficult it becomes for them to adhere to the disciplined behavior of civilization. In Chapter 1, the boys seem determined to re-create the

society they have lost; but as early as Chapter 2, their instinctive drive to play and to gratify their immediate desires has undermined their ability to act for the good of their new society. The result is that the signal fire nearly fails, and a young boy is burned to death. Because they are still conditioned by society, the boys react with confusion and shame, a sign that their behavior remains guided by a sense of morality. But ten chapters later, they begin to kill one another with hardly a second thought.

*Lord of the Flies* adds to its allegorical representations in Chapter 2 with its depiction of the various characters: Ralph, the book's protagonist, stands for civilization, morality, and leadership, while Jack, the antagonist, stands for the desire for power, selfishness, and amorality. Piggy represents the scientific and intellectual aspects of civilization, as his glasses—a symbol of rationality and intellect—enable the boys to light fires, both for heat and to attract rescuers. Already the boys' savage instincts lead them to value strength and charisma above intelligence: although Piggy has a great deal to offer the boys' fledgling civilization, they see him only as a whiny weakling and thus despise him and refuse to listen to him, even when his ideas are good. For example, when Piggy suggests that they find a way to improve their chances of being rescued, the boys ignore him; only when the stronger and more charismatic Ralph suggests the same thing do they agree to make the signal fire. The signal fire itself comes to represent the boys' grasp on the idea of civilization: as long as it burns, they retain some hope that they will be rescued and returned to society, but as they become increasingly obsessed with power and killing, they lose interest in the fire. The burned-out fire symbolizes the boys' disconnection from the structures of society.

Apart from the building of the signal fire, the most important development in this chapter is the introduction of the monster, called a "beastie" by the little boy who claims to have seen it. At this stage of the book, the beast is merely an idea that frightens some of the boys. But as the novel progresses, the beast's existence is tacitly accepted by all of them. One of the novel's most important symbols, the beast represents the instincts of power, violence, and savagery that lurk within each human being.

## CHAPTER 3

**Summary**

Carrying a stick sharpened into a makeshift spear, Jack trails a pig through the thick jungle, but it evades him. Irritated, he walks back to the beach, where he finds Ralph and Simon at work building huts for the children to live in. Ralph is irritated because the huts always fall down before they are completed, and though they are vital to the boys' ability to live on the island, none of the other boys besides Simon will help him. As he and Simon work, most of the other boys splash about and play in the lagoon. Ralph gripes that few of the boys are doing any work. He says that all the boys act excited and energized by the ideas and plans that they make at meetings, but none of them is willing to work to make the plans successful. He also worries about the smaller children, many of whom have nightmares and are unable to sleep. He tells Jack about his concerns, but Jack, still trying to think of ways to kill a pig, is not interested in Ralph's problems.

Ralph, annoyed that Jack, like all the other boys, is unwilling to work on the huts, implies that Jack and the hunters are using their hunting duties as an excuse to avoid the real work. He points out that they have failed to catch a single pig. In Ralph's opinion, the hunters ought to help with the hut building rather than stalking uselessly through the forest. Jack protests that the work of the hunters is central to the group's survival, because the boys need meat to eat. He claims that although they have so far failed to bring down a pig, they will soon have more success. As Jack and Ralph bicker, the bond between the two boys seems to crack, and hostile feelings well up in each of them. Hoping to regain their sense of camaraderie, they go swimming together in the lagoon. But their feelings of mutual dislike remain and fester.

In the meantime, Simon wanders through the jungle alone. He helps some of the younger boys—known in the emerging parlance of the island civilization as “littluns”—to reach fruit hanging from a high branch. He walks deeper into the forest and eventually finds a thick jungle glade, a peaceful, beautiful open space full of flowers, birds, and butterflies. Simon looks around to make sure that he is alone, then sits down to take in the scene, marveling at the abundance and beauty of life surrounding him.

**Analysis**

The conflict between Ralph and Jack symbolizes the main conflict of the novel, with Ralph representing civilization and the desire for order and Jack representing savagery and the desire for power and self-gratification. The conflict between the two boys has been brewing since the election scene in Chapter 1, but until Chapter 3 it has been hidden beneath the surface, masked by the camaraderie the boys feel as they work together to build a community. In this chapter, the conflict between the two boys erupts into verbal argument for the first time, symbolically illustrating the divisions undermining the boys' community and setting the stage for further, more violent developments.

As they argue, each boy tries to give voice to his most basic conception of human purpose, as Ralph advocates building huts and Jack champions hunting. Ralph, who thinks about the overall good of the group, deems hunting frivolous; Jack, drawn to the exhilaration of hunting by his bloodlust and desire for power, has no interest in building huts and no real concern for what Ralph thinks. But because Ralph and Jack are merely children, they are unable to state their feelings articulately. It is important to note that, at this point, the conflict between civilization and savagery is still heavily tilted in favor of civilization. Jack, who has no real interest in the welfare of the group, is forced to justify his desire to hunt rather than build huts by claiming that it is for the good of all the boys. Additionally, though most of the boys are more interested in play than in work, they continue to re-create the basic structures of civilization on the island. They even begin to develop their own language, calling the younger children "littluns" and the twins Sam and Eric "Samneric."

In addition to the development of the Ralph/Jack conflict and the continued development of the boys' island civilization, the emergence of Simon as a symbolic figure is another important development in Chapter 3. Simon's basic characteristics become clear from his actions in this chapter. He helps Ralph build the huts when the other boys would rather play, indicating his helpfulness, discipline, and dedication to the common good. He helps the littluns reach a high branch of fruit, indicating his kindness and sympathy; many of the older boys would rather torment the littluns than help them. And he sits alone in the jungle glade marveling at the beauty of nature, indicating his basic connection with

the natural world. Whereas most of the boys seem to have their ideas of goodness and morality imposed on them by the external forces of civilization, so that the longer they are away from human society the more eroded their moral sense becomes, Simon's basic goodness and kindness seem to come from within him, tied to his connection with nature. As this idea develops in the novel, Simon emerges as an important figure to contrast with Ralph and Jack. Where Ralph represents the "good" of civilization and Jack the "evil" of uncivilized instinct, Simon represents a third quality—a kind of natural, uncivilized goodness. In this way, Simon complicates the symbolic structure of *Lord of the Flies* and adds a great deal of moral nuance.

## CHAPTER 4

### Summary

Life on the island soon develops a daily rhythm. Morning is pleasant, with cool air and sweet smells, and the boys are able to play happily. By afternoon, though, the sun becomes oppressively hot, and the boys nap fitfully, often troubled by bizarre images that seem to flicker over the water. Piggy dismisses these images as mirages caused by the sun's bright rays striking the water. Evening again brings cooler temperatures, but darkness falls quickly, and nighttime is difficult, as the boys are increasingly frightened by the idea of beasts and monsters lurking in the thick jungle foliage.

The littluns, who spend most of their days eating fruit and playing with one another, are particularly troubled by visions and bad dreams. They continue to talk about the "beastie" and to fear that a monster hunts in the darkness. The large amount of fruit that they eat causes them to develop chronic diarrhea and stomach ailments. Their lives are quite separate from those of the older boys, and they are often tormented by the older hunters. One vicious boy named Roger joins Jack in cruelly stomping on a sand castle they have built. Roger even throws stones at one of the boys. But the harassment is still rather tame, as he is careful not to actually hit the boy with his stones.

*Here, invisible yet strong, was the taboo of the old life. Round*

*the squatting child was the protection of parents and school and policemen and the law.*

Jack, obsessed with the idea of killing a pig, camouflages his face with clay and charcoal, then enters the jungle to hunt, accompanied by several other boys. On the beach, Ralph and Piggy see that a ship has appeared on the horizon; they also see that the signal fire has gone out. They hurry to the top of the hill, but it is too late to rekindle the flame, and the ship does not come for them. Ralph is furious with Jack, because it was the hunters' responsibility to see that the fire was maintained.

Jack and the hunters return from the jungle, covered with blood and chanting a bizarre song. They carry a dead pig on a stake between them. Furious at the hunters' irresponsibility, Ralph accosts Jack about the signal fire, but the hunters, having actually managed to catch and kill a pig, are so excited and drunk with bloodlust that Ralph's anger fails to affect them. When Piggy shrilly complains about the hunters' immaturity, Jack slaps him hard, breaking one of the lenses of his glasses. Piggy begins to cry, and Jack taunts him by mimicking his whining voice. Angered anew, Ralph lunges toward Jack. At last, Jack admits his culpability in the failure of the signal fire. But he refuses to apologize to Piggy. The boys again use Piggy's glasses to light a fire; they roast the pig, and the hunters dance wildly around the fire, singing and reenacting the savagery of the hunt. Ralph declares that he is calling a meeting, and he stalks down the hill toward the beach alone.

### **Analysis**

Like much of Chapter 3, Chapter 4 is devoted to describing the civilization that emerges as time passes on the island and to developing the dramatic conflict between Ralph and Jack that will define the shape of the rest of the novel. The issue of power and control has been central to the boys' lives since the beginning of the book; their first act was to elect a leader, and from the moment that Ralph was elected, Jack has been deeply covetous of his power. Now that the group has been living on the island for some time, their society more clearly resembles a political state. Indeed, Golding intends for it to symbolize one, with the faceless and frightened littluns serving as surrogates for the masses of common people and the various older boys filling positions of power

and importance with regard to these underlings. Some of the older boys, such as Ralph and especially Simon, are kind to the littluns; others, such as Roger and Jack, are cruel to them.

In this way, two basic conceptions of power slowly emerge on the island, each corresponding to one of the novel's philosophical poles—civilization and savagery. Simon, Ralph, and Piggy represent the idea that power should be used for the good of the group and the protection of the littluns; this notion is associated with the instinct toward civilization, order, and morality. Roger and Jack represent the idea that power should enable those who hold it to gratify their own desires and act on their impulses, treating the littluns as servants or objects for their own amusement; this notion is associated with the savagery and amorality that they constantly exhibit.

When Jack's irresponsibility leads to the failure of the signal fire, an important symbol of the boys' connection to civilization, and thwarts the boys' first chance at being rescued, Ralph flies into a rage, indicating that he is still governed by order, morality, and a desire to achieve the good of the whole group. But Jack has killed a pig, and he is too excited and gratified by his accomplishment to care very much about the missed chance to escape the island; his bloodlust and thirst for power have overwhelmed his interest in civilization. Whereas he previously justified his commitment to hunting by claiming that it was for the good of the group, now he no longer feels the need to justify his behavior at all. Instead, he indicates his new orientation toward savagery by painting his face like a barbarian; leading wild, eerie chants among the hunters; and apologizing for his failure to maintain the signal fire only when Ralph seems ready to fight him over it.

But Ralph is hardly the main practitioner of physical force at this stage of the novel, in which the disintegration of the instinct of civilization is indicated by the extent to which the strong begin to bully the weak rather than protect them. Since the beginning, the boys have bullied the whiny, intellectual Piggy whenever they needed to feel powerful and important; now their harassment of him intensifies. Jack begins to hit him openly. Despite his position of power and responsibility in the group, Jack shows no qualms about abusing the other boys physically. Some of the other hunters, especially Roger, seem even crueller and less swayed by moral impulses. The civilized Ralph is

unable to understand this monomaniacal behavior: he simply cannot conceive of the ways in which physical bullying creates a self-gratifying sense of power. The boys' failure to understand each other's points of view creates a gulf between them, one that will widen as resentment and open hostility set in.

## CHAPTER 5

### Summary

Ralph walks alone along the beach, thinking with frustration about the disintegration of the boys' efforts to improve their lives on the island in an orderly, civilized way that will maximize their chances of being rescued. The cruel behavior, love of savagery, and lack of discipline have accelerated to such a degree, especially among the hunters, that Ralph fears for the whole group. He decides to call a meeting to attempt to bring the group back into line. Late in the evening, he blows the conch shell, and the boys gather on the beach.

At the meeting place, Ralph grips the conch shell and berates the boys for their failure to uphold the group's rules. They have not done anything required of them: they refuse to work at building shelters, they do not gather drinking water, they neglect the signal fire, and they do not even use the designated toilet area. He restates the importance of the signal fire and attempts to allay the group's growing fear of beasts and monsters. The littluns, in particular, have been increasingly plagued by nightmare visions. When Piggy seconds Ralph's rational claim that there are no monsters on the island, Jack interrupts him and talks about the beasts that might lurk on the island. A ripple of fear runs through the group. One of the littluns claims to have actually seen a beast, and when he is pressed by the others about where it could hide during the daytime, he suggests that it might come up from the ocean at night. This previously unthought-of explanation terrifies all the boys, and the meeting plunges into chaos. Jack torments Piggy and runs away, and many of the other boys run after him. Eventually only Ralph, Piggy, and Simon are left. In the distance, the hunters who have followed Jack dance and chant.

Piggy urges Ralph to blow the conch shell and summon the boys back to the group, but Ralph is afraid that the summons will be ignored



and that any vestige of order will then disintegrate. He tells Piggy and Simon that he might relinquish leadership of the group, but his friends reassure him that the boys need his guidance. As the group drifts off to sleep, the sound of a littlun crying echoes along the beach.

## Analysis

*“What I mean is . . . Maybe it’s only us . . .”*

The boys’ fear of the beast has been an increasingly important aspect of their lives, especially at night, ever since the first littlun claimed to have seen a snake-monster in Chapter 2. In Chapter 5, the fear of the beast finally explodes, ruining Ralph’s attempt to restore order to the island and precipitating the final split between Ralph and Jack. The beast does not really exist, but it nevertheless serves as one of the most important symbols in the novel. The beast represents both the terror and the allure of the ancient, primordial instincts toward violence, power, and savagery that lurk within every human soul.

Because the symbolism of this novel is so resonant, it can be interpreted allegorically in many different ways. In a religious reading, for instance, the beast can represent the devil; in a Freudian reading, it can represent the id, or the amoral desires of the mind. But however one interprets the notion, it is quite clear that the littlun’s idea of the monster rising from the sea terrifies the boys, for it represents the beast’s emergence from their own unconscious minds. As Simon eventually realizes, the beast is not something that exists outside in the jungle. Rather, it exists inside each boy’s mind and soul, and it is the capacity for savagery and evil that slowly overwhelms them.

Lurking in the darkness of their psyches, the idea of the beast increasingly fills the boys, especially the hunters, with bloodlust, cruelty, and savagery, as represented in the hunters’ wild and violent dance. Jack manipulates the boys’ fear of the beast, hinting that it exists when he knows that it probably does not. This is one source of his power, but another explanation for his charisma is that he enables the boys to *act* as the beast—to express the instinct for savagery that civilization has previously held in check. Because that instinct is natural and present within each human being, Golding asserts that we are all capable of becoming

the beast. This notion will take on symbolic clarity later in the book, when the other boys, mistaking Simon for the beast, fall upon him and kill him like animals, with their bare hands and teeth.

## CHAPTER 6

### Summary

In the darkness late that night, Ralph and Simon carry the littluns back to the shelter before going to sleep. As the boys sleep, military airplanes battle fiercely above the island. Yet none of the boys see the explosions and flashes in the clouds, because Sam and Eric, who were supposed to watch the signal fire, have fallen asleep. A dead parachutist drifts down from the sky onto the island; his chute becomes tangled in some rocks and flaps in the wind, while his shape casts fearful shadows on the ground. His body is covered up by the parachute, but his head seems to rise and fall in the wind.

When Sam and Eric awake, they tend to the fire to make the flames brighter. In the flickering firelight, they see the twisted form of the dead parachutist. They mistake the shadowy image for the figure of the dreaded beast and rush back to the camp, claiming breathlessly that they have been attacked by the beast. They wake Ralph and tell him what they have seen. Ralph immediately calls for a meeting, at which the twins reiterate their claim of having been assaulted by a monster. The boys, electrified and horrified by their claims, organize an expedition to search the island for monsters. Most of the boys are afraid to go, but they are even more afraid to be left behind. Armed with wooden spears, they set out to find the beast. Only Piggy and the littluns remain behind.

As they set out on the search, Jack insists to Ralph that he is now in charge, because he is the head of the hunters and the search for the beast is a kind of hunt. Ralph is irritated, but in the exertion of the search the conflict quickly recedes. The boys soon reach a part of the island that none of them has ever explored before, a hill dotted with dark caves and grottoes. The boys are afraid to go into the dark grottoes, so Ralph goes in to investigate them alone. He finds that while he is frightened to go into the darkness when he is among the other boys, he quickly regains his confidence once he is alone in the dark. Soon, Jack

joins him in the cave.

The group climbs the hill, and Ralph and Jack feel the old bond between them rekindling. But the other boys begin playing games, pushing rocks into the sea, and many of them lose sight of the purpose of their expedition. Ralph angrily reminds them that they are looking for the beast, and says that they must return to the other mountain so that they can rebuild the signal fire. The other boys, lost in whimsical plans to build a fort on the new hill, are displeased by his commands, but they grudgingly obey.

### Analysis

At the beginning of the novel, Ralph's hold on the other boys was quite secure; they all understood the need for order and purposive action, even if they did not always want to be bothered with rules. By this point in the book, however, as the learned conventions of civilization begin to erode among the boys, Ralph's hold on them is slipping, and Jack is becoming a more powerful and menacing figure in the camp. In Chapter 5, Ralph's attempt to reason with the boys was ineffective; by Chapter 6, Jack is able to manipulate Ralph's behavior by calling him a coward, forcing him to act irrationally simply for the sake of preserving his status among the other boys. This breakdown in the group's desire for morality, order, and civilization is increasingly enabled (or excused) by the presence of the monster, the beast that has frightened the littluns since the beginning of the novel and that is quickly assuming an almost religious significance in the camp.

Chapter 6 also serves to remind us of the larger setting of *Lord of the Flies*: though the boys lead an isolated life on the island, we know that a bloody war is being waged elsewhere in the world, a war in which England is involved. The war is apparently a terrible holocaust; all we know is that England has been threatened by atom bombs in a war against "the reds" and that the boys were evacuated just before the impending destruction of their civilization. The war is also responsible for the boys' crash landing on the island in the first place, because their transport plane was gunned down by enemy aircraft. Now the war is responsible for another important development in their lives. The air battle above the island results in Sam and Eric's encounter with the dead parachutist and fosters their subsequent belief that they have seen

the beast.

Although the war remains in the background of the novel, it is nevertheless an important extension of the main themes of the book. Just as the boys struggle with the conflict between civilization and savagery on the island, the outside world is gripped in a similar conflict. War represents the savage outbursts of civilization, when the desire for violence and power overwhelms the desire for order and peace. The outside world has imposed a moral sense and an instinct for civilization upon the boys, but even within the civilization that has nurtured them, the danger of savagery remains real.

## CHAPTER 7

### Summary

As they travel toward the mountain, the boys stop to eat. Ralph gazes disconsolately at the choppy ocean, thinking that the boys have become slovenly and undisciplined. As he looks out at the vast expanse of water, he feels that the ocean is like an impenetrable wall blocking any hope the boys have of escaping the island. But Simon lifts his spirits by reassuring him that they will be rescued soon.

That afternoon, the hunters find pig droppings, and Jack suggests that they should hunt the pig while they continue to search for the beast. The boys agree and quickly track a large boar, which leads them on a wild chase. Ralph has never been on a hunt before, and he quickly becomes caught up in the exhilaration of the chase. He excitedly flings his spear at the boar. It glances off the animal's snout, but Ralph is thrilled with his marksmanship, nonetheless. Jack holds up a bloodied arm, which was grazed by the boar's tusks. The boar escapes, but the boys are in a frenzy in the aftermath of the hunt. Excited, they reenact the chase among themselves with a boy named Robert playing the boar. They dance and chant and jab Robert with their spears, eventually losing sight of the fact that they are only playing a game. Beaten and in danger, Robert tries to drag himself away. The group nearly kills Robert before they remember themselves. When Robert suggests that they use a real boar in the game next time, Jack replies that they should use a littlun instead. The boys laugh, delighted and stirred up by Jack's audacity. Ralph tries to remind

everyone that they were only playing a game.

Darkness falls, and Ralph proposes that they wait until morning to climb the mountain, since it will do no good to hunt the monster at night. Jack calls him a coward, and Ralph finally agrees to go on the hunt simply to regain his position in the eyes of the group. Simon volunteers to return to the beach to tell Piggy and the littluns that they will not return until late that night. Ralph, Roger, and Jack start to climb the mountain; then Ralph and Roger wait at the halfway point while Jack climbs alone to the top. He returns, breathlessly claiming to have seen the monster. Ralph and Roger climb up to have a look and see a terrifying specter: a large, shadowy form, with the shape of a giant ape, making a strange flapping sound in the wind. Horrified, the boys hurry down the mountain to warn the group.

### **Analysis**

Chapter 7 continues to explore the subtheme of power and its connection to the primitive instincts represented by the beast and the bloodlust of the hunt. Ralph's power has already eroded among the boys, but until Chapter 7 he was largely baffled about why the group was increasingly more concerned with hunting, dancing, bullying, and feasting than with building huts, maintaining the signal fire, and trying to be rescued. Now even Ralph cannot avoid the instinctive excitement of the hunt, as he is caught up with the other boys in bloodlust and egomania. The scene following the failed hunt is the most suggestive symbol we have yet seen of the inextricable connection between the thrill of the hunt and the desire for power. Robert is nearly killed, as the boys, caught up again in their excitement, lose sight of the limits of the game in their mad desire to kill a pig. Afterward, when Jack suggests killing a littlun in place of a pig, the group laughs. Probably none of them (except possibly Jack and Roger) would go so far as to actually initiate such a plan, but instead of being horrified at the possibility, they find it titillating.

Golding also continues to develop the conflict between Ralph and Jack, now escalated to a real struggle for power, as Jack's brand of violence and savagery almost completely replaces Ralph's disciplined community in the boys' conception of their lives on the island. Ralph's exhilaration in the hunt and his participation in the ritual that nearly kills Robert is, in a sense, a major victory for Jack, since the experience

shakes Ralph's confidence in the primacy of his civilized, moral ideals. As befits a power struggle in a savage group, the conflict between the boys manifests itself not as a competition to prove who would be the better leader but as a competition of sheer strength and courage. Just as Ralph went boldly into the dark caves alone to prove his bravery in the previous chapter, Jack goes up the mountain alone now. (It is also significant that Ralph discovers nothing, while Jack discovers what he thinks is the beast: Ralph does not believe in the beast, while it forms a major part of Jack's attitude toward life on the island.)

Additionally, Jack gains leverage within the group by using the competition in bravery to force Ralph to commit unwise acts of leadership, such as his decision to go up the mountainside at night. Ralph realizes that it is foolish to hunt the beast at night, but, in a society based on strength, he cannot risk appearing to be a coward. In this way, Jack manages to weaken Ralph's position in the group. Tellingly, Ralph's decision to explore the mountain at night means that he loses the opportunity to prove to everyone that Sam and Eric did not see the beast. Had the boys climbed the mountain in the daylight, they would have seen the dead parachutist for what it was; because they go at night, they see it distorted by shadows and believe that they are seeing the beast. In this way, each boy is prone to see the beast to the exact extent that he gives in to the demands of savagery, strengthening the idea that the beast is a symbolic manifestation of the boys' primitive inner instincts.

## CHAPTER 8

### Summary

The next morning, the boys are back at the beach, and the news of the monster has them in a state of uproar. Piggy, who was not at the mountain, is baffled by the other boys' claims to have seen the monster. Jack seizes the conch shell and blows into it clumsily, calling for an assembly. Jack tells the others that there is definitely a beast on the mountain and goes on to claim that Ralph is a coward who should be removed from his leadership role. The other boys, however, refuse to vote Ralph out of power. Jack is enraged, and he storms away from the group, saying that he is leaving and that anyone who likes is welcome to join him.

Deeply troubled, Ralph does not know what to do. Piggy is thrilled to see Jack go, and Simon suggests that they should return to the mountain in search of the beast. The other boys are too afraid to act on his suggestion. Ralph slips into a depression, but Piggy cheers him up with an idea: they should build a new signal fire, on the beach instead of the mountain. Piggy's idea restores Ralph's hope that they will be rescued. The boys set to work and build a new fire, but many of them disappear, sneaking away into the night to join Jack's group. Piggy tries to convince Ralph that they are better off without the deserters.

Along another stretch of sand, Jack gathers his new tribe and declares himself the chief. In a savage frenzy, the hunters kill a mother sow, Roger driving his spear forcefully into the sow's anus. Then the boys leave its head on a sharpened stake in the jungle as an offering to the beast. As they place the head upright in the forest, something suddenly seems wrong to them; the black blood drips down the sow's teeth, and the boys, suddenly terrified, run away.

As Piggy and Ralph sit in the old camp discussing the desertion, the hunters from Jack's tribe descend upon them, shrieking and whooping. The hunters steal burning sticks from the fire on the beach. Jack tells Ralph's followers that they are welcome to come to his feast that night, and even to join his tribe. The hungry boys are tempted by the idea of pig's meat.

Before the raid, Simon slips away from the camp, returning to the jungle glade where he previously sat marveling at the beauty of nature. Now, however, he finds the sow's head impaled on the stake in the middle of the clearing. Simon sits alone in the clearing, staring with rapt attention at the impaled pig's head, which now swarms with flies. The sight mesmerizes him; it even seems as if the head comes to life. The head speaks to him in the voice of the "Lord of the Flies," ominously declaring that Simon will never be able to escape him, for he lies within all human beings. He also promises to have some "fun" with Simon. Terrified and troubled by the apparition, Simon collapses in a faint.

### **Analysis**

The titillation the boys felt when Jack suggested killing a littlun comes to grotesque fruition in the vicious and bloody hunt following Jack's rise to power among members of his new tribe. Jack's ascent is directly con-

nected to the supposed confirmation of the existence of the beast. Once the boys, who have seen the silhouette of the dead parachutist and mistaken it for a monster, come to believe fully in the existence of the beast, all the remaining power of civilization and culture begins to diminish rapidly; in a world where the beast is real, rules and morals become weak and utterly dispensable. The original democracy led by Ralph devolves into a cult-like despotism, with Jack as a tyrant and the beast as both an enemy and a god. The boys' devotion to the idea of the beast deepens with their leaving the sow's head on the stake as an offering. No longer simply a childish nightmare, the beast has assumed a primal, religious importance in their lives. Jack will use the beast ingeniously to rule his savage kingdom, and each important character will struggle to come to terms with it. Piggy, who still seems to have no irrational side at this point in the book, is simply baffled and disgusted. Ralph, who has seen what he thinks is the beast, is listless and depressed, unsure of how to reconcile his civilized ideals with the sight he saw on the mountaintop. But the most complex reaction of all belongs to one of the book's most complex characters, Simon.

*"There isn't anyone to help you. Only me. And I'm the Beast . . .  
Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and  
kill!"*

Simon's confrontation with the Lord of the Flies—the sow's head impaled on a stake in the forest glade—is in some ways the most important scene in the book. It is also one of the most complex. Numerous readings of the book have centered on the scene in which Simon confronts the Lord of the Flies. Critics have asserted that the story parallels the history of civilization, that its symbols correspond exactly to the elements of the Freudian unconscious (with Jack as the id, Ralph as the ego, and Simon as the superego), and that it demonstrates the origin of human religious belief in systems of power based on fear of the unknown. The book may indeed support each of these readings, but it is crucial to remember that all of the novel's characters and episodes are thoroughly sublimated to its primary purpose: dramatizing the conflict between the civilizing and savage instincts in human beings.

Nevertheless, the subtheme of religious belief is important to the



novel and stands as one of its most complex issues, especially as it relates to Simon. Simon is often described as a Christ figure, a character with a mystical connection to his environment, who possesses a saintly and selfless disposition and whose death is tragic and sacrificial. Each of these characterizations is accurate, but connecting Simon too overtly with Christ limits his role in the novel. Simon does not fit neatly into the matrix framed by Jack at the one end and Ralph at the other. He is kindhearted and firmly on the side of order and civilization, but he is also intrigued by the idea of the beast and feels a deep connection with nature and the wilderness on the island. While Jack and Roger connect with the wilderness on a level that plunges them into primal lust and violence, Simon finds it a source of mystical comfort and joy. Simon's rapport with the jungle combined with his behavior throughout the novel therefore makes him the only character not to feel morality as an artificial imposition of society but as a way of life proceeding directly and easily from nature. The book is deeply preoccupied with the problem of fundamental, natural human evil; Simon is the sole exponent of fundamental, natural good. In a wholly nonreligious way, Simon complicates the philosophical statement the novel makes about human beings, proposing an alternative to the natural-savage model presented by Jack and the obedient-civilized model presented by Ralph. In a world where such a thing is barely possible, Simon is both natural and good.

Simon's confrontation with the Lord of the Flies, then, is more than a Christian allegory representing the meeting of Jesus and Satan. Simon, unlike Jesus, is not a supernatural being, and none of the boys could possibly find salvation from the Lord of the Flies through faith in Simon. Rather, Simon's terror and his swoon indicate the horrific persuasive power of the chaos-impulse represented by the Lord of the Flies. Simon has a deep human insight, realizing that the hunters' behavior is not inspired by any monstrous beast but by a principle of savagery embedded deep within all of them. Fearing that it is embedded within himself as well, he seems to hear the Lord of the Flies speaking to him, threatening him with what he most fears. Unable to stand the sight any longer, Simon collapses into a very human faint. Simon's complicated position in the novel's thematic structure will be emphasized by the manner of his death in the next chapter—foreshadowed by the Lord of the Flies' promise to have some “fun” with him—which further distinguishes

Simon's story from that of Christ.

## CHAPTER 9

### Summary

Simon awakens. The air is dark and humid with an approaching storm. His nose is bleeding, and he staggers toward the mountain in a daze. He crawls up the hill and, in the failing light, he sees the dead pilot with his flapping parachute. Upon seeing the parachute rise and fall with the wind, Simon realizes that the boys have mistaken this harmless object for the deadly beast that has plunged their entire group into chaos. When Simon sees the corpse of the parachutist, he begins to vomit. When he is finished, he untangles the parachute lines, freeing the parachute from the rocks. Anxious to prove to the group that the beast is not real after all, Simon stumbles toward the distant light of the fire at Jack's feast to tell the other boys what he has seen.

Piggy and Ralph go to the feast, hoping that they will be able to keep some control over events. At the feast, the boys are laughing and eating the roasted pig. Jack sits like a king on a throne, his face painted like a savage, waited on by boys acting as his servants and languidly issuing commands. After the large meal, Jack extends an invitation to all of Ralph's followers to join his tribe; most of them accept, despite Ralph's attempts to dissuade them. In the heavy twilight, Jack orders his tribe to do its wild hunting dance. Chanting and dancing wildly around the fire, the boys are caught up in a kind of frenzy; even Ralph and Piggy, swept away by the excitement, dance on the fringes of the group. The boys once again reenact the hunting of the pig, reaching a high pitch of frenzied energy as they chant and dance. Suddenly, the boys see a shadowy figure creep out of the forest: it is Simon. In their wild state, however, they do not recognize him. Shouting that he is the beast, the boys descend upon Simon and start tearing him apart with their bare hands and teeth. Simon tries desperately to explain what has happened and to remind them of who he is, but he trips and plunges over the rocks onto the beach. The boys fall upon him violently and kill him.

The storm explodes over the island. In the whipping rain, the boys run for shelter. Howling wind and waves wash Simon's mangled corpse

into the ocean, where it drifts away, surrounded by glowing fish. At the same time, the body of the parachutist is blown out into the lagoon, never to be discovered by the other boys.

### Analysis

Chapter 9 is an important turning point in the novel. With the brutal, animalistic murder of Simon, the last vestige of civilized order on the island is stripped away; savagery now reigns. The boys in Jack's camp are now all but inhuman savages, and Ralph's few remaining allies suffer dwindling spirits and consider joining Jack. Even Piggy is swept up in the ritual dance around Jack's banquet fire. The storm that explodes over the island after Simon's death is a dramatic device that pounds home the importance of the murder as well as the chaos and anarchy that have overtaken the island. The storm is also important because it washes away the bodies of Simon and the parachutist. There will now be no proof that the beast does not exist.

Indeed, Jack has already made the beast into a godlike figure, attributing to it both immortality and the power to change form; he uses it as a kind of totem with which to rule his tribe. The importance of the figure of the beast in the novel cannot be overstated, for it gives Jack's tribe a common enemy (the beast), a common system of belief (belief in the mythical creature), a reason to obey Jack (protection from the beast), and even a developing system of primitive symbolism and iconography (face paint and the Lord of the Flies).

As horrible as Simon's murder is, there is a sense in which it is merely a logical extension of his encounter with the Lord of the Flies in Chapter 8. Recall that the beast had foreshadowed Simon's death by promising to have some "fun" with him. Further, Simon learned that the beast exists inside all human beings. Thus, Simon's confrontation with the beast is not complete until he comes face to face with the beast that exists within the other boys. What prompts the boys to kill Simon is certainly the savage instinct that the beast represents. Additionally, the manner of Simon's death continues the parallel between Simon and Christ: they both die sacrificial deaths after learning profound truths about human morality. But Simon's death is different enough from that of Christ to complicate the idea that Simon is simply a Christ figure. Again, *Lord of the Flies* is more than a simple religious allegory: Jesus

and Simon both die sacrificial deaths, but while Jesus was killed for his beliefs, Simon is killed because of the other boys' delusions. Jesus died *after* conveying his message to the world; Simon dies before he is able to speak to the boys. In the biblical tradition, Jesus dies to alleviate the burden of mankind's sin; Simon's death simply intensifies the burden of sin pressing down upon the island. Finally, in the Bible, Jesus' death shows others the way to salvation; in *Lord of the Flies*, Simon's death merely exemplifies the power of evil within the human soul.

## CHAPTER 10

### Summary

The next morning, Ralph and Piggy meet on the beach. They are bruised and sore, and they feel awkward and deeply ashamed of their behavior. Piggy, who is unable to confront his role in Simon's death, attributes the tragedy to mere accident. But Ralph, clutching the conch desperately and laughing hysterically, insists that they have been participants in a murder. Piggy whiningly denies the charge. In any case, the two are now virtually alone; everyone except Sam and Eric and a handful of littluns has joined Jack's tribe at Castle Rock.

There, Jack rules with absolute power; Roger is now his lieutenant. Boys who disobey are swiftly and viciously punished. A boy named Wilfred is badly beaten for a minor infraction. Jack convinces the boys who feel guilty about Simon's death that it really *was* the beast that appeared to them, that the beast is capable of assuming any disguise. He states that they must continue to guard against the beast, for it is never truly dead. He warns the boys against Ralph and his small group, saying that they are a danger to the tribe. He says that he and the other hunters should raid Ralph's camp in order to obtain more fire and that they will hunt again tomorrow.

The boys at Ralph's camp drift off to sleep, depressed and losing interest even in the signal fire. Ralph sleeps fitfully, plagued by nightmares. They are awakened by howling and shrieking, and are suddenly attacked by a group of Jack's hunters. They are badly beaten, and when the attack is over, they do not even know why they were assaulted, since they would have gladly shared the fire with the other boys. But Piggy knows why: they have stolen his glasses. Now Jack has taken from them

the power to make fire.

### Analysis

Chapter 10 covers a period of relative calm following Simon's murder, broken only by the vicious raid on Ralph's camp by Jack and his hunters. In the power dynamic of the island, the situation that has been slowly brewing now comes to a full boil; by the end of Chapter 10, Jack's power over the island is complete, and Ralph is an outcast, subject to Jack's whims. As the power of the civilizing instinct has eroded among the boys, so has Ralph's power and influence, to the extent that none of the boys protests when Jack declares him an enemy of the tribe.

Chapter 10 also develops the novel's symbolism by connecting it to the dynamic of power and force on the island. As Jack's power reaches its high point, the figures of the beast and the Lord of the Flies attain prominence. Similarly, as Ralph's power reaches its low point, the influence and importance of other symbols in the novel—such as the conch shell and Piggy's glasses—decline as well. As Ralph and Piggy discuss the murder of Simon on the beach the following morning, Ralph clutches the conch shell to him for solace, but the once-potent symbol of order and civilization is now useless; in the next chapter, Ralph will be laughed at for blowing the shell in an attempt to bring the boys together. Here, Ralph clings to it as a vestige of civilized behavior, but with its symbolic power fading, the conch shell is merely an object. Like the signal fire, it can no longer give Ralph comfort. The other major symbol of civilization, Piggy's glasses, has fallen into Jack's hands. Jack's control of the ability to make fire symbolizes both his power over the island and the demise of the boys' hopes of being rescued.

This chapter also contains an interesting sequence of character development as each of the important boys reacts to the death of Simon, highlighting the natural contrast between them. Piggy, who is used to being right because of his superior intelligence, finds it impossible to accept any guilt for what happened. Instead, he devotes his intelligence to rationalizing his role in the affair. Ralph refuses to accept Piggy's easy rationalization that Simon's death was accidental. He insists that the death was a murder. Yet the word "murder," a category within a rational system of law and a civilized moral code, now seems strangely at odds with the collective madness of the killing. The word serves as a harsh

reminder of just how far the boys have traveled along the moral spectrum since the time when they were forced to follow the rules of adults.

For his part, Jack has become an expert in using the boys' fear of the beast to enhance his own power. He claims that Simon really was the beast, implying that the boys have a better grasp of the truth in their frenzied, chanting orgies of bloodlust than in their calmer moments of reflection. This is perfectly appropriate to Jack's character, which is based on his almost palpable addiction to that state of bloodlust and frenzy. In some sense, his ability to convince the other boys that that state is a valid way of interacting with the world is partially responsible for their eroding moral sense. Here we see his psychological manipulation in action.

## CHAPTER 11

### Summary

The next morning, Ralph and Piggy, along with Sam and Eric, try to light the fire in the cold air. Without Piggy's glasses, the attempt is hopeless. Piggy, squinting blindly without his spectacles, suggests that Ralph hold a meeting to discuss their options. Ralph blows the conch shell, and the boys who have not gone to join Jack's tribe assemble on the beach. They decide that their only choice is to travel to Castle Rock to make Jack and his followers see reason. The signal fire has burned out, and without his glasses Piggy is nearly blind.

Ralph decides to take the conch shell to Castle Rock, hoping that it will remind Jack's followers of his former authority. Once at Jack's camp, however, the group is met by armed guards. Ralph blows the conch shell, but the guards taunt the boys and pelt them with stones. Suddenly, Jack and a group of hunters emerge from the forest, dragging a dead pig. Jack and Ralph immediately face off: Jack commands Ralph to leave his camp, and Ralph demands that Jack return Piggy's glasses. Jack attacks Ralph, and they fight. Ralph struggles to make Jack understand the importance of the signal fire to any hope the boys might have of ever being rescued, but Jack orders his hunters to capture Sam and Eric and tie them up. This sends Ralph into a fury, and he lunges at Jack.

They fight for a second time. Piggy cries out shrilly, struggling to make himself heard over the brawl. But as he tries to speak, hoping to

remind the group of the importance of the fire, Roger shoves a massive rock down the mountain slope. Piggy hears it thundering toward him, but he cannot see it. He is crushed to death, and the conch shell is shattered. Jack throws his spear at Ralph, and the other boys quickly join in. Ralph escapes into the jungle, and Roger and Jack begin torturing Sam and Eric, forcing them to submit to Jack's authority and join his tribe.

### **Analysis**

The conflict between Jack and Ralph, between civilization and savagery, marks the beginning of the book's climax. In the ensuing chaos, the two natural objects that have come to symbolize each side—the conch shell and the Lord of the Flies—are destroyed by allies of the opposite side. Roger, the character least able to understand the civilizing impulse, crushes the conch shell as he kills Piggy, the character least able to understand the savage impulse. In the next chapter, Ralph, the governing exponent of civilization, will destroy the Lord of the Flies, the governing totem of the dark impulses within each individual. With Piggy's death and Sam and Eric's forced conversion to Jack's tribe, Ralph is left alone on the island, doomed to defeat by the forces of bloodlust and primal chaos.

Given the development of the novel to this point, it also seems appropriate that Ralph's defeat should come in the form of the hunt. From the beginning of the book, the hunters have been the characters most swayed by the experience of savagery and violence, simply because they experienced it first and most often. The conflict between Ralph and Jack has often manifested itself as the conflict between the interests of the hunters and the interests of the rest of the group. In Chapter 3, for instance, the boys argued over whether Jack's followers should be allowed to hunt or forced to build huts with Ralph and Simon. Now that Jack and the forces of savagery have risen to unchallenged prominence on the island, the hunt has thoroughly won out over the more peaceful civilizing instinct. Rather than successfully mitigating the power of the hunt with the rules and structures of civilization, Ralph has become a victim of the savage forces represented by the hunt. He has literally become the prey.

**CHAPTER 12****Summary**

Ralph hides in the jungle, thinking miserably about the chaos that has subsumed the island. He thinks about the deaths of Simon and Piggy, realizing that, with the destruction of the conch shell, all vestiges of civilization have been stripped from the island. He stumbles across the sow's head, the Lord of the Flies, now merely a gleaming white skull—as white as the conch shell, he thinks. Disgusted and angry, Ralph knocks the skull to the ground and takes the stake upon which it was perched to use as a weapon against Jack.

That night, Ralph sneaks down to the camp at Castle Rock and finds Sam and Eric guarding the entrance. The twins give him food, but they refuse to join him. They tell him that Jack plans to send the entire tribe after him the next day. Ralph hides in a thicket and struggles to stay awake. In the morning, he hears some boys talking and learns that Sam and Eric have been tortured and have told Jack where he is hiding. A group of boys tries to fight their way into the thicket, but Ralph fends them off. Several boys try to break into the thicket by rolling a boulder, but the thicket is too secure. Then Ralph smells smoke: Jack has set the jungle on fire in order to smoke him out. Ralph abandons his hiding place and fights his way through a group of Jack's hunters. Chased by a group of body-painted warrior-boys wielding sharp wooden spears, Ralph plunges frantically through the undergrowth, fleeing like a hunted animal, looking only for a place to hide. At last he is forced onto the beach, where he collapses in exhaustion, his pursuers close behind.

*Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the air of a true, wise friend called Piggy.*

Suddenly, Ralph looks up to see a naval officer standing over him. The officer tells the boy that his ship has come to the island after seeing the blazing fire in the jungle. Jack's hunters reach the beach; upon seeing the officer, they stop in their tracks. The officer, stunned at the sight of this group of bloodthirsty child-savages, asks Ralph to explain. When



he learns what has happened on the island, the officer is reproachful: how could this group of boys, he asks, and *English* boys at that, have lost all reverence for the rules of civilization in so short a time? For his part, Ralph is overwhelmed by the knowledge that he has been rescued, that he will escape the island after coming so close to a violent death. He begins to sob, as do the other boys. Stuffily, the naval officer turns his back so that the boys may regain their composure.

### Analysis

After Ralph's tense, exciting stand against the hunters, the ending of *Lord of the Flies* is rife with irony. Throughout the book, Ralph has thought that a signal fire was the only way to lure rescuers to the island, and the fire has been a symbol of civilization. Now, the navy ship is lured to the island by fire, but rather than being the ordered signal fire of civilization, it is the haphazard forest fire set by Jack's hunters solely for the purpose of killing Ralph. Throughout the book, Ralph has worked assiduously to retain the structure of civilization and maximize the boys' chances of being rescued. Now, when all he can do is struggle to stay alive as long as possible, the *deus ex machina* (an improbable or unexpected device or character introduced to resolve a situation) of the naval officer appears at the last possible moment to bring the boys back to the world of law, order, and society.

Golding's use of irony in the novel's last chapter complicates the boundaries between civilization and savagery, implying that the two are more closely connected than the story has illustrated. After all, the boys' appalling savagery brings about the rescue that their most coordinated and purposive efforts were unable to achieve. Still, many readers of *Lord of the Flies* have criticized its ending, feeling that Ralph's death would have provided a more appropriate conclusion to this dark novel.

It is certainly true that the biting irony permeating Golding's characterization of the naval officer—who is unable to understand how upstanding British lads could have acted with such poor form—is tonally inconsistent with the dramatic register of the rest of the book. In other words, his appearance is somewhat anti-climactic. But it is important to recognize that the novel's ending is not particularly happy, and that the moment in which the officer encounters the boys is not one of pure, untainted joy. The “civilized” officer adds further irony to the

scene, as he is part of an adult world in which violence and war coexist with civilization and social order. He reacts to the savage children with disgust, yet this disgust is tinged with hypocrisy. Similarly, the children are so shocked by the officer's presence, and are now psychologically so far removed from his world, that they do not instantly celebrate his arrival. Rather, they stand there baffled and bewildered. Even Ralph, whose life has literally been saved by the presence of the ship, weeps tears of grief rather than joy. For Ralph, as for the other boys, nothing can ever be as it was before coming to the island of the Lord of the Flies.



## IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS EXPLAINED

1. Roger gathered a handful of stones and began to throw them. Yet there was a space round Henry, perhaps six yards in diameter, into which he dare not throw. Here, invisible yet strong, was the taboo of the old life. Round the squatting child was the protection of parents and school and policemen and the law.

This quote from Chapter 4 describes the beginnings of Roger's cruelty to the littluns, an important early step in the group's decline into savagery. In Chapter 4, the boys are still building their civilization, and the civilized instinct still dominates the savage instinct. But the cracks are beginning to show, particularly in some of the older boys' willingness to use physical force and violence to give them a sense of superiority over the smaller boys. This quote describes the psychological workings behind the beginnings of that willingness.

Roger wants to torment Henry, the littlun, by pelting him with stones, but the vestiges of socially imposed standards of behavior are still too strong for him to completely give in to his savage urges. He feels constrained by "parents and school and policemen and the law," all agencies that enforce society's moral code. Before long, Roger and most of the other boys will lose their respect for those forces, and violence, torture, and murder will break out as the savage instinct replaces the instinct of civilization among the group.

2. His mind was crowded with memories; memories of the knowledge that had come to them when they closed in on the struggling pig, knowledge that they had outwitted a living thing, imposed their will upon it, taken away its life like a long satisfying drink.

This quote, also from Chapter 4, explores Jack's mental state in the aftermath of killing his first pig, another milestone in the boys' decline into savage behavior. The quote emphasizes Jack's excitement ("his mind was

crowded with memories”) and exhilaration, which is explicitly based on the feelings of power and superiority he experienced in killing the pig. He is not excited to have helped the group but to have “outwitted” another creature and “imposed” his will upon it. Earlier, Jack claimed that hunting was important to provide meat for the group; now, it becomes clear that Jack’s obsession with hunting is due to the satisfaction it provides his primal instincts and has nothing to do with helping the group.

### 3. “What I mean is . . . Maybe it’s only us . . .”

This line is spoken by Simon in Chapter 5, at the meeting in which the boys consider the question of the beast. One littlun has proposed the terrifying idea that the beast may emerge from the water at night, and the boys argue about whether the beast might actually exist. Though it is laughed off by the other boys, Simon’s statement that the boys themselves are the beast is central to the novel’s theme of innate human evil. This is the first moment in which the beast is explained not as an external force but as a component of human nature. Simon does not yet fully understand his own idea; it will become clearer to him during his encounter with the Lord of the Flies in Chapter 8.

### 4. “There isn’t anyone to help you. Only me. And I’m the Beast . . . Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill! . . . You knew, didn’t you? I’m part of you? Close, close, close! I’m the reason why it’s no go? Why things are the way they are?”

The Lord of the Flies speaks these lines to Simon in Chapter 8. Like Simon’s statement in Chapter 5, they are central to the novel’s theme of innate human savagery. The Lord of the Flies identifies itself as the beast and acknowledges to Simon that it exists within all human beings. “You knew, didn’t you? I’m part of you?” The creature’s grotesque language and bizarre appropriation of the boys’ slang (“I’m the reason why it’s no go”) is Golding’s way of making him seem hideous and devilish to the reader, which is appropriate, since “Lord of the Flies” is a translation of Beelzebub, the name of a biblical demon.

### 5. Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man’s

heart, and the fall through the air of a true, wise friend called Piggy.

These lines from the end of Chapter 12 occur at the close of the novel, after the boys have encountered the *deus ex machina* of the naval officer, who has come from nowhere to save them. The sudden realization that he is safe and will be returned to civilization plunges Ralph into a reflective despair as he realizes that although he is saved from death on the island, he will never be the same. He has lost his innocence and learned about the evil that lurks within all human beings. Here Golding explicitly connects the sources of Ralph's despair to two of the main themes of the novel: the end of innocence and the "darkness of man's heart," a consequence of the savage instincts lurking within all human beings, even at the height of civilization.



## KEY FACTS

### FULL TITLE

Lord of the Flies

### AUTHOR

William Golding

### TYPE OF WORK

Novel

### GENRES

Allegory, castaway fiction, loss-of-innocence fiction

### LANGUAGE

English

### TIME AND PLACE WRITTEN

Salisbury, England, early 1950s

### DATE OF FIRST PUBLICATION

1954

### PUBLISHER

Faber and Faber

### NARRATOR

Third-person omniscient

### CLIMAX

Simon's death; the hunting of Ralph by Jack's tribe

### PROTAGONIST

Ralph

### ANTAGONIST

Jack

### SETTING (TIME)

Near future

**SETTING (PLACE)**

A deserted tropical island

**POINT OF VIEW**

Primarily Ralph; also Jack and Simon

**FALLING ACTION**

The arrival of the naval officer to rescue the boys in Chapter 12

**TENSE**

Past

**FORESHADOWING**

The rolling of the boulders off the mountaintop in Chapter 2 foreshadows Piggy's death; the Lord of the Flies foreshadows Simon's death by promising to have some "fun" with him

**TONES**

Lush, tragic, pessimistic, dark, unsparing

**THEMES**

The conflict between the instinct of civilization and the instinct of savagery; the loss of innocence; innate human evil; morality as an imposed set of socially conditioned behaviors; the use of superstition and religion as methods of obtaining power over others

**MOTIFS**

Natural beauty; the bullying of the weak by the strong; the primal thrill of violence; the outward trappings of savagery (face paint, spears, totems, chants); parallels with Christian iconography (Simon as a Christ figure, the Lord of the Flies as the devil)

**SYMBOLS**

Ralph (order and civilization); Piggy (the intellectual and scientific aspects of civilization); Simon (natural goodness, the Christ figure); Jack (the instinct of savagery and the desire for power); Roger (savagery); the littluns (the common people in a political state); the older boys (the leaders in a political state); the boys' group as a whole (human civilization); the conch shell (order and political legitimacy); Piggy's glasses (the power of science and intellectual endeavor in civilization); the signal fire (the boys' connection to civilization); the beast (the primal instincts of savagery and evil that exist within all human beings); the Lord of the Flies (the power of evil, the devil); the war (the conflict between civilization and savagery outside the island)



## STUDY QUESTIONS AND ESSAY TOPICS

### STUDY QUESTIONS

1. *What does it mean to say that Lord of the Flies is an allegorical novel? What are its important symbols?*

*Lord of the Flies* is an allegorical novel because its important characters and objects directly represent the book's themes and ideas. In the same way that the conch shell represents the power of civilization, the sow's head in the jungle represents the power of the impulse to savagery that exists within each person. Each character serves as the representative of a certain idea: Ralph represents the civilizing impulse, Piggy the scientific and intellectual aspects of civilization, Jack the impulse to savagery and the desire for power, and so on.

2. *Compare and contrast Ralph and Simon. Both seem to be "good" characters. Is there a difference in their goodness?*

The two boys are motivated toward goodness by different sources. For Simon, goodness is not a restraint forced upon him by civilization. Instead, his goodness seems to flow from his connection to nature, and he lives according to the moral regulations of civilization simply because he is temperamentally suited to them: he is kind, thoughtful, and helpful by nature. Simon realizes that society's rules are in everyone's best interest. In contrast, like the other boys, Ralph is capable of moral behavior, but this behavior seems learned rather than innate. Like the others, he is swept up by bloodlust during the hunt and subsequent dance. Thus, while Ralph is capable of leadership, it is Simon who recognizes that the beast does not exist in tangible form on the island but exists as an impulse to evil within each individual.



3. How does Jack use the beast to control the other boys? In what way is *Lord of the Flies* a religious novel?

Jack expertly uses the beast to manipulate the other boys. The frightful symbol provides his tribe with a common enemy, a common idol, a common fear, and a common system of beliefs all in one. Jack invokes different aspects of the beast depending on which effects he wants to achieve. The boys' belief in the monster also gives *Lord of the Flies* religious undertones, since the boys' various nightmares about monsters eventually take the form of a single monster that they all believe in. By leaving the sow's head in the forest as an offering to the beast, Jack's tribe solidifies its collective belief in the reality of the nightmare; the skull becomes a kind of religious totem with extraordinary psychological power. Yet, as a religion, the beliefs the boys develop on the island are one-sided, since they are all oriented toward the savage or evil impulse that exists in all human beings. Although Simon seems to represent a kind of innately good alternative to the models of Jack and Ralph, the novel does not really explore the idea of innate human goodness, only that of innate human evil. Thus, positive moral aspects of religion are almost wholly absent from the book.

### SUGGESTED ESSAY TOPICS

1. Of all the characters, it is Piggy who most often has useful ideas and sees the correct way for the boys to organize themselves. Yet the other boys rarely listen to him and frequently abuse him. Why do you think this is the case? In what ways does Golding use Piggy to advance the novel's themes?
2. What, if anything, might the dead parachutist symbolize? Does he symbolize something other than what the beast and the Lord of the Flies symbolize?
3. The sow's head and the conch shell each wield a certain kind of power over the boys. In what ways do their powers differ? In what way is *Lord of the Flies* a novel about power? About the power of symbols? About the power of a person to use symbols to control a group?

4. What role do the littluns play in the novel? Certainly they serve as gauges of the older boys' moral positions; we see whether a boy is kind or cruel depending on how he treats the littluns. But are the littluns important in and of themselves? What might they represent?



## REVIEW AND RESOURCES

### Quiz

1. *Whose responsibility is it to maintain the signal fire?*
  - A. Piggy's
  - B. The hunters'
  - C. Sam and Eric's
  - D. The littluns'
  
2. *What powers does Jack ascribe to the beast after Simon's murder?*
  - A. Immortality and the power to change shape
  - B. Telepathy and the power to change shape
  - C. Immortality and telepathy
  - D. Enormous strength and murderous cunning
  
3. *How does the first boy die?*
  - A. Roger crushes him with a boulder
  - B. The other boys kill him with their bare hands
  - C. He is gored by a boar
  - D. He burns to death when the first signal fire ignites the forest
  
4. *Who is the first boy to die?*
  - A. Piggy
  - B. Simon
  - C. Clark
  - D. A littlun
  
5. *Where does the beast go during the day, according to one littlun?*
  - A. Into the ocean
  - B. Into the air
  - C. Into the fire
  - D. Into the caves near Castle Rock

## 54 • LORD OF THE FLIES

6. *Who sees the dead parachutist first?*
  - A. Ralph
  - B. Sam and Eric
  - C. Jack
  - D. Piggy
  
7. *Which character speaks to the Lord of the Flies?*
  - A. Curtis
  - B. Ralph
  - C. Piggy
  - D. Simon
  
8. *What lures the navy ship to the island?*
  - A. The fire in the jungle
  - B. The roar of the beast
  - C. The signal fire
  - D. The shortwave radio
  
9. *Whom does Jack strike shortly after his first kill?*
  - A. Ralph
  - B. Francis
  - C. Piggy
  - D. Roger
  
10. *When Piggy is killed, what else is destroyed?*
  - A. The shortwave radio
  - B. The conch shell
  - C. The Lord of the Flies
  - D. The signal fire
  
11. *What is Ralph's first act upon being elected leader?*
  - A. Planning the building of the signal fire
  - B. Naming Piggy his chief advisor
  - C. Naming Simon the leader of the mystics
  - D. Naming Jack the leader of the hunters

12. *What object does Ralph clutch when he talks about Simon's murder?*

- A. The sow's head
- B. The conch shell
- C. Piggy's glasses
- D. A spear

13. *Who seems to be the cruelest boy on the island?*

- A. Piggy
- B. Jack
- C. Roger
- D. Robert

14. *What does Jack suggest the boys use as the "pig" in their dance-like reenactment of the hunt?*

- A. A littlun
- B. Piggy
- C. Ralph
- D. A real pig

15. *Which boy treats the littluns with the most kindness?*

- A. Simon
- B. Jack
- C. Piggy
- D. Ralph

16. *Which boy would rather hunt than build huts?*

- A. Simon
- B. Jack
- C. Piggy
- D. Ralph

17. *Where is Jack's tribe located?*

- A. Next to Ralph's
- B. On the mountain of the beast
- C. Deep in the jungle
- D. At Castle Rock

18. *What tool or tools do the boys use to make fire?*

- A. Dry wood and rocks
- B. Ralph's tinderbox
- C. Piggy's glasses
- D. The airplane matches

19. *What is the boys' home country?*

- A. England
- B. France
- C. The United States
- D. Canada

20. *Who kills Piggy?*

- A. Ralph
- B. Roger
- C. Sam and Eric
- D. Simon

21. *What surrounds Simon's body as it floats into the sea?*

- A. Sharks
- B. Eels
- C. A cloud of blood
- D. Glowing fish

22. *Who knocks the Lord of the Flies to the ground?*

- A. Ralph
- B. Roger
- C. Simon
- D. Piggy

23. *On what did the dead parachutist become tangled?*

- A. Tree limbs
- B. Jagged rocks
- C. The roof of the hut
- D. Castle Rock

24. *Who tells Jack where Ralph is hiding in Chapter 12?*

- A. Simon
- B. Roger
- C. A littlun
- D. Sam and Eric

25. *Which character does not dance at Jack's first feast?*

- A. Simon
- B. Ralph
- C. Piggy
- D. Jack

Answer Key:

1: B; 2: A; 3: D; 4: D; 5: A; 6: B; 7: D; 8: A; 9: C; 10: B; 11: D; 12: B; 13: C; 14: A; 15: A; 16: B; 17: D; 18: C; 19: A; 20: B; 21: D; 22: A; 23: B; 24: D; 25: A

**SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING**

Baker, James R. *William Golding*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965.

Bloom, Harold, ed. *Lord of the Flies: Modern Critical Interpretations*. New York: Chelsea House, 1998.

Golding, William. *The Inheritors*. New York: Harvest Books, 1988.

Olsen, Kirstin. *Understanding Lord of the Flies: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents*. New York: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2000.

Swisher, Clarice, ed. *Readings on Lord of the Flies*. New York: Greenhaven Press, 1997.

Williams, Nigel, adaptor. *William Golding's Lord of the Flies: Acting Edition*. London: Faber and Faber, 1996.





**1984**, George Orwell

**Fahrenheit 451**, Ray Bradbury

**All Quiet on the Western Front**, Erich Maria Remarque

**Animal Farm**, George Orwell

**The Awakening**, Kate Chopin

**Beloved**, Toni Morrison

**Beowulf**, Anonymous

**Brave New World**, Aldous Huxley

**The Canterbury Tales**, Geoffrey Chaucer

**The Catcher in the Rye**, J.D. Salinger

**Crime and Punishment**, Fyodor Dostoevsky

**The Crucible**, Arthur Miller

**Their Eyes Were Watching God**, Zora Neale Hurston

**A Farewell to Arms**, Ernest Hemingway

**Lord of the Flies**, William Golding

**Frankenstein**, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

**The Great Gatsby**, F. Scott Fitzgerald

**The Grapes of Wrath**, John Steinbeck

**Great Expectations**, Charles Dickens

**Heart of Darkness**, Joseph Conrad

**Huckleberry Finn**, Mark Twain

**The Iliad**, Homer

**Invisible Man**, Ralph Ellison

**Jane Eyre**, Charlotte Brontë

***The Joy Luck Club***, Amy Tan

***The Jungle***, Upton Sinclair

***Of Mice and Men***, John Steinbeck

***Moby Dick***, Herman Melville

***To Kill A Mockingbird***, Harper Lee

***The Odyssey***, Homer

***The Oedipus Trilogy: Antigone, Oedipus Rex, and Oedipus at Colonus***, Sophocles

***The Old Man and the Sea***, Ernest Hemingway

***Pride and Prejudice***, Jane Austen

***The Red Badge of Courage***, Stephen Crane

***Death of a Salesman***, Arthur Miller

***The Scarlet Letter***, Nathaniel Hawthorne

***A Separate Peace***, John Knowles

***Things Fall Apart***, Chinua Achebe

***A Tale of Two Cities***, Charles Dickens

***Uncle Tom's Cabin***, Harriet Beecher Stowe

***Wuthering Heights***, Emily Brontë

***Dante's Inferno***, Dante Alighieri

***Hamlet***, William Shakespeare

***Julius Caesar***, William Shakespeare

***King Lear***, William Shakespeare

***Macbeth***, William Shakespeare

***A Midsummer Night's Dream***, William Shakespeare

***Othello***, William Shakespeare

***Romeo and Juliet***, William Shakespeare

***The Tempest***, William Shakespeare