

## OLYMPIADS SCHOOL/GRADE 9 ENGLISH/HANDOUT 10

Read the following article alongside *Chapter 1 to 3 of Lord of the Flies*. Consider how the plot (Chapters 1, 2, and 3) could change or remain the same if all the children were girls instead.

### Why an all-girl remake of *Lord of the Flies* make sense

*It's time to ditch some gendered assumptions we have about kids.*



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Do you remember reading *Lord of the Flies* for English class in middle school? I do. I loved the book, and can still recall my feeling of horror ratcheting up as Piggy was first pushed around, then out-and-out bullied, and then lost his glasses.

As I recall, most of our seventh-grade class really enjoyed the book, and it sparked plenty of conversation with boys and girls alike, even though it's a boys-only story. The girls easily took on the point of view of the boy characters in William Golding's novel, which is typical: Girls and women have long been expected to understand and enjoy stories via boys and men in novels, TV shows and movies. It's a given that men's stories are considered universal human stories. Meanwhile, the opposite is almost never true — boys and men often balk at having to sit through a "chick flick" or "women's stories."

Most of us have gotten the message: Men's stories are for everyone; women's stories are girls-only.

Which is why it's especially frustrating that there has been such a negative outcry over an all-girls film version of *Lord of the Flies*. While I'd prefer to see a movie about young girls with an original script, or get to finally see a big-budget, smart, cool Nancy Drew film adaptation, I can't be the only one who's ready for more stories of girls. After all, there are lots of stories about boys already, from critically acclaimed ones for adults like "Boyhood" and "Millions," to new tween classics like "Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them," to old favorites like "E.T.," "Dead Poets Society" and "Stand By Me" — all of which were feature films for a general audience.

For girls, there's the most recent crop of Disney films and a few gems like "Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants," "Harriet the Spy," and my favorite, "Coraline" — but those are all

for specific audiences of pre-tween and tween girls. There is an absolute dearth of movies about girls that are for adults. Occasionally one will break through, but they are often about teenage girls "growing up too fast" — dealing with what should be adult issues but have been thrust upon them ("Juno," "The Glass Castle," "Precious").

### **Telling a timeless story with a twist**

So why not a *Lord of the Flies* with an all-girl cast? Most movies only use the book they are based on as a general outline, and this novel has been made into two reasonably good movies already, so why not try something different?

The new film is going to be written and directed by two men — Scott McGehee and David Siegel. Here's hoping that they have women on their team who can give them some perspective on how the story might differ from the original. Or not. (I'm not so sure that all the Twitter philosophizers or even brilliant critics like Roxane Gay are right in saying that the cruelty of the boys in the original novel "wouldn't happen" with a group of girls.)

McGehee and Siegel, who excel at telling stories rooted in childhood traumas (like "What Maisie Knew" and "Bee Season") seem enthusiastic about adapting the classic 1954 novel.

"It is a timeless story that is especially relevant today, with the interpersonal conflicts and bullying, and the idea of children forming a society and replicating the behavior they saw in grownups before they were marooned," Siegel told Deadline Hollywood. Why wouldn't that story be relevant today?

I'll definitely consider checking out the film if the trailer looks good. While there are all kinds of wonderful female characters and shows about women on streaming services and television these days, movies have been much slower to catch up.

I like to think that as more boys and men watch and enjoy stories about girls and women, we'll have a more equitable culture as well, a culture that sees men, women and nonbinary people as all being worthy of stories — because we're all human, and seeing life through someone else's eyes is a gift to be cultivated, not complained about.

# Plot and structure

- What are the main events of the novel?
- How do the main storylines develop through the novel?
- What indications are there about the passage of time in the novel?

## Chapter 1 The sound of the shell

- Ralph and Piggy call the other boys together.
- Ralph is made leader but Jack keeps the choir.
- Ralph, Jack and Simon learn that they are on an island.

The novel opens with Ralph clambering through the jungle towards the lagoon. He is accompanied by Piggy (who has not yet told Ralph his nickname).

From the boys' conversation we learn that they were in a plane that had been attacked and which then crashed on the island. It soon dawns on the boys that there are probably no adults left alive.

### Grade booster

The reference to the coral island is a link to the novel *The Coral Island* by R. M. Ballantyne (see notes on boys' adventure books in the *Context* section.). The boys in Ballantyne's novel behave impeccably and are models of old-fashioned Britishness. This novel was clearly in Golding's mind when writing *Lord of the Flies*. Commenting on

this, in relation to the question, will help you gain higher marks in the examination.

The plane crash is a deliberate ploy by Golding: the boys have no means of reconstructing England from the wreckage. They are alone with whatever tools and other aids to survival they can fashion for themselves.

### Pause for thought

...the creature was a party of boys... (p. 15)

The choir and Jack are compared to a creature, which makes them seem less human. Why is this appropriate?

Piggy tells Ralph that he heard the pilot saying that an atom bomb had gone off and no one was left to look for them. He finds a conch shell and, when Ralph blows the conch, boys begin to appear from the jungle. The younger boys wait patiently to be told what to do.

As soon as Jack arrives, leading his choir, he begins to assert himself, and he is the only boy who speaks to Ralph on equal terms.

### Text focus

Read the passage from 'The children who came along the beach' to 'eccentric clothing' (pp. 14–15).

Notice that Golding uses an interesting **foreshadowing** technique here. Twice he presents an animal image to describe what the boys seem to see, before revealing to us what is really there:

Here, the eye was first attracted to a black, bat-like creature that danced on the sand, and only later perceived the body above it. The bat was the child's shadow...

Within the diamond haze of the beach something dark was fumbling along. Ralph saw it first, and watched till the intentness of his gaze drew all eyes that way. Then the creature stepped from mirage on to clear sand, and they saw that the darkness was not all shadow but mostly clothing. The creature was a party of boys...

Both metaphors suggest that the heat of the island plays tricks on the boys and makes

them imagine things that are not really there. Golding makes us see things from the boys' point of view. We too are tricked at first, before discovering the reality. It is significant that both 'creatures' are dark and vaguely threatening, despite the brilliant sunshine.

How successful do you think this foreshadowing technique is?

Ralph lifts the conch and says that there should be a chief to decide things. Jack immediately says that he should be the chief. The boys, however, attracted by Ralph's quiet authority and the fact that he has blown the conch, quickly elect him as chief.



**The conch: a symbol of power**

### *Key quotation*

**But there was a stillness about Ralph as he sat that marked him out...**

(p. 19)

Ralph, Jack and Simon explore the area and find a piglet trapped in the undergrowth: Jack draws his knife, but hesitates, which allows the animal to escape. This is the reader's first



glimpse of Jack's willingness to kill. Though he hesitates here, this incident is a clear indication that he is capable of being savage.

### *Key quotation*

**...he hadn't: because of the enormity of the knife descending and cutting into living flesh; because of the unbearable blood.**

(p. 29)

## Chapter 2 Fire on the mountain

- The small boys begin to worry about a beast.
- A signal fire is lit, with the choir responsible for keeping it going.
- The forest catches fire and at least one boy is killed.

Jack interrupts the second meeting to announce that they will need hunters to catch pigs. He gets excited by the idea of inventing rules, especially so that those who break them can be punished.

Ralph decides that the conch will be passed to anyone who asks to speak and that the person with the conch will not be interrupted. The use of the conch is a child's version of order.

### *Grade booster*

Exploring the symbolism of fire can help you achieve a higher grade. The fire is a symbol of the power of the forces of nature. The boys think they can control the situation, but stopping the fire is soon beyond their power.

One of the smaller boys says that he has seen a giant snake that he calls the 'beastie', which came at night and tried to eat him.

### *Key quotation*

**‘We ought to have more rules. Where the conch is, that’s a meeting.’**

(p. 42)

Ralph tells the boys that they need to light a fire on the mountain top to attract the attention of passing ships. Jack realises that Piggy’s glasses can be used to light the fire.

*Key quotation*

**‘That little ’un–’ gasped Piggy – ‘him with the mark on his face, I don’t see him. Where is he now?’**

(p. 46)

Jack begins to change the rules even at this early stage, mostly to suit himself, foreshadowing the way he behaves later in the novel.

**Pause for thought**

Many of the most important symbols of the novel are introduced in this chapter: the fire, the conch, Piggy’s glasses and the beast. What do we learn about each of these symbols in this chapter?

Ralph announces that the conch counts no matter where it is used.

Piggy notices that the fire has set the surrounding forest ablaze and at least one of the younger boys might have been caught in the forest fire.

## Chapter 3 Huts on the beach

- Jack becomes more interested in hunting.
- Ralph tries to get the boys to build shelters.

**Pause for thought**

The boys begin to feel an impact, and even a threat, from the natural world that

surrounds them. They are unsure how to react. The small boys are scared and even Jack feels he is being hunted. How would you explain their fears at this point? Are they simply 'imagining things', or is there something real to be afraid of?

Jack is in the forest on his own, tracking pigs. He has now made himself a spear and still carries a large knife.

Ralph realises that Jack is intent on killing but asks for his help with the shelters. Jack insists that he needs to catch meat for the group. Ralph and Jack both come close to losing their tempers but refuse to compromise their own point of view.

#### *Key quotation*

**They walked along, two continents of experience and feeling, unable to communicate.**

(p. 56)

The 'littluns' are becoming frightened at night because they think that there is something in the forest that will come to get them. Jack feels that he is not alone when he is in the forest but that he is being hunted even though he is supposedly the one hunting.

## Chapter 4 Painted faces and long hair

- Smoke from a ship is seen on the horizon.
- The fire has gone out.
- Jack nearly stands up to Ralph.
- Piggy's glasses are partly broken by Jack.
- The boys have a feast of roast pig.

The boys play on the beach and we are introduced to some of the other characters, such as Henry, Percival, Roger and Maurice. Jack is experimenting with camouflaging his face so that the pigs cannot see him so easily. However, as we will gradually see, this face painting is also a means of escaping from the constraints of civilised society.



## CHAPTER THREE

*Huts on the Beach*

Jack was bent double. He was down like a sprinter, his nose only a few inches from the humid earth. The tree trunks and the creepers that festooned them lost themselves in a green dusk thirty feet above him; and all about was the undergrowth. There was only the faintest indication of a trail here; a cracked twig and what might be the impression of one side of a hoof. He lowered his chin and stared at the traces as though he would force them to speak to him. Then dog-like, uncomfortably on all fours yet unheeding his discomfort, he stole forward five yards and stopped. Here was loop of creeper with a tendril pendant from a node. The tendril was polished on the underside; pigs, passing through the loop, brushed it with their bristly hide.

Jack crouched with his face a few inches away from this clue, then stared forward into the semi-darkness of the undergrowth. His sandy hair, considerably longer than it had been when they dropped in, was lighter now; and his bare back was a mass of dark freckles and peeling sunburn. A sharpened stick about five feet long trailed from his right hand; and except for a pair of tattered shorts held up by his knife-belt he was naked. He closed his eyes, raised his head and breathed in gently with flared nostrils, assessing the current of warm air for information. The forest and he were very still.

At length he let out his breath in a long sigh and opened his eyes. They were bright blue, eyes that in this frustration seemed bolting and nearly mad. He passed his tongue across dry lips and scanned the uncommunicative forest. Then again he stole forward and cast this way and that over the ground.

The silence of the forest was more oppressive than the heat, and at this hour of the day there was not even the whine of insects. Only when Jack himself roused a gaudy bird from a primitive nest of sticks was the silence shattered and echoes set ringing by a harsh cry that seemed to come out of the abyss of ages. Jack himself shrank at this cry with a hiss of indrawn breath; and for a minute became less a hunter than a furtive thing, ape-like among the tangle of trees. Then the trail, the frustration, claimed him again and he searched the ground avidly. By the bole of a vast tree that grew pale flowers on a grey trunk he checked, closed his eyes, and once more drew in the warm air; and this time his breath came short, there was even a passing pallor in his face, and then the surge of blood again. He passed like a shadow under the darkness of the tree and crouched, looking down at the trodden ground at his feet.

The droppings were warm. They lay piled among turned earth. They were olive green, smooth, and they steamed a little. Jack lifted his head and stared at the inscrutable masses of creeper that lay across the trail. Then he raised his spear and sneaked forward. Beyond the creeper, the trail joined a pig-run that was wide enough and trodden enough to be a path. The ground was hardened by an accustomed tread and as Jack rose to his full height he heard something moving on it. He swung back his right arm and hurled the spear with all his strength. From the pig-run came the quick, hard patter of hoofs, a castanet sound, seductive, maddening—the promise of meat. He rushed out of the undergrowth and snatched up his spear. The pattering of pig's trotters died away in the distance.

Jack stood there, streaming with sweat, streaked with brown earth, stained by all the vicissitudes of a day's hunting. Swearing, he turned off the trail and pushed his way through until the forest opened a little and instead of bald trunks supporting a dark roof there were light grey trunks and crowns of feathery palm. Beyond these was the glitter of the sea and he could hear voices. Ralph was standing by a contraption of palm trunks and leaves, a rude shelter that faced the lagoon, and seemed very near to falling down. He did not notice when Jack spoke.

“Got any water?”

Ralph looked up, frowning, from the complication of leaves. He did not notice

Jack even when he saw him.

“I said have you got any water? I’m thirsty.”

Ralph withdrew his attention from the shelter and realized Jack with a start.

“Oh, hullo. Water? There by the tree. Ought to be some left.”

Jack took up a coco-nut shell that brimmed with fresh water from among a group that were arranged in the shade, and drank. The water splashed over his chin and neck and chest. He breathed noisily when he had finished.

“Needed that.”

Simon spoke from inside the shelter.

“Up a bit.”

Ralph turned to the shelter and lifted a branch with a whole tiling of leaves.

The leaves came apart and fluttered down. Simon’s contrite face appeared in the hole.

“Sorry.”

Ralph surveyed the wreck with distaste.

“Never get it done.”

He flung himself down at Jack’s feet. Simon remained, looking out of the hole in the shelter. Once down, Ralph explained.

“Been working for days now. And look!”

Two shelters were in position, but shaky. This one was a ruin.

“And they keep running off. You remember the meeting? How everyone was going to work hard until the shelters were finished?”

“Except me and my hunters——”

“Except the hunters. Well, the littluns are——”

He gesticulated, sought for a word.

“They’re hopeless. The older ones aren’t much better. D’you see? All day I’ve been working with Simon. No one else. They’re off bathing, or eating, or playing.”

Simon poked his head out carefully.

“You’re chief. You tell ’em off.”

Ralph lay flat and looked up at the palm trees and the sky.

“Meetings. Don’t we love meetings? Every day. Twice a day. We talk.” He got on



one elbow. "I bet if I blew the conch this minute, they'd come running. Then we'd be, you know, very solemn, and someone would say we ought to build a jet, or a submarine, or a TV set. When the meeting was over they'd work for five minutes then wander off or go hunting."

Jack flushed.

"We want meat."

"Well, we haven't got any yet. And we want shelters. Besides, the rest of your hunters came back hours ago. They've been swimming."

"I went on," said Jack. "I let them go. I had to go on. I——"

He tried to convey the compulsion to track down and kill that was swallowing him up.

"I went on. I thought, by myself——"

The madness came into his eyes again.

"I thought I might kill."

"But you didn't."

"I thought I might."

Some hidden passion vibrated in Ralph's voice.

"But you haven't yet."

His invitation might have passed as casual, were it not for the undertone.

"You wouldn't care to help with the shelters, I suppose?"

"We want meat——"

"And we don't get it"

Now the antagonism was audible.

"But I shall! Next time! I've got to get a barb on this spear! We wounded a pig and the spear fell out. If we could only make barbs——"

"We need shelters."

Suddenly Jack shouted in rage.

"Are you accusing——"

"All I'm saying is we've worked dashed hard. That's all." They were both red in the face and found looking at each other difficult. Ralph rolled on his stomach and began to play with the grass.

“If it rains like when we dropped in we’ll need shelters all right. And then another thing. We need shelters because of the——”

He paused for a moment and they both pushed their anger away. Then he went on with the safe, changed subject.

“You’ve noticed, haven’t you?”

Jack put down his spear and squatted.

“Noticed what?”

“Well. They’re frightened.”

He rolled over and peered into Jack’s fierce, dirty face.

“I mean the way things are. They dream. You can hear ’em. Have you been awake at night?”

Jack shook his head.

“They talk and scream. The littluns. Even some of the others. As if——”

“As if it wasn’t a good island.”

Astonished at the interruption, they looked up at Simon’s serious face.

“As if”, said Simon, “the beastie, the beastie or the snake-thing, was real. Remember?”

The two older boys flinched when they heard the shameful syllable. Snakes were not mentioned now, were not mentionable.

“As if this wasn’t a good island,” said Ralph slowly. “Yes, that’s right.”

Jack sat up and stretched out his legs.

“They’re batty.”

“Crackers. Remember when we went exploring?”

They grinned at each other, remembering the glamour of the first day. Ralph went on.

“So we need shelters as a sort of——”

“Home.”

“That’s right.”

Jack drew up his legs, clasped his knees, and frowned in an effort to attain clarity.

“All the same—in the forest. I mean when you’re hunting—not when you’re



getting fruit, of course, but when you're on your own——"

He paused for a moment, not sure if Ralph would take him seriously.

"Go on."

"If you're hunting sometimes you catch yourself feeling as if——" He flushed suddenly.

"There's nothing in it of course. Just a feeling. But you can feel as if you're not hunting, but—being hunted; as if something's behind you all the time in the jungle."

They were silent again: Simon intent, Ralph incredulous and faintly indignant. He sat up, rubbing one shoulder with a dirty hand.

"Well, I don't know."

Jack leapt to his feet and spoke very quickly.

"That's how you can feel in the forest. Of course there's nothing in it. Only—only——"

He took a few rapid steps towards the beach, then came back.

"Only I know how they feel. See? That's all."

"The best thing we can do is get ourselves rescued."

Jack had to think for a moment before he could remember what rescue was.

"Rescue? Yes, of course! All the same, I'd like to catch a pig first——" He snatched up his spear and dashed it into the ground. The opaque, mad look came into his eyes again. Ralph looked at him critically through his tangle of fair hair.

"So long as your hunters remember the fire——"

"You and your fire!"

The two boys trotted down the beach and, turning at the water's edge looked back at the pink mountain. The trickle of smoke sketched a chalky line up the solid blue of the sky, wavered high up and faded. Ralph frowned.

"I wonder how far off you could see that."

"Miles."

"We don't make enough smoke."

The bottom part of the trickle, as though conscious of their gaze, thickened to a creamy blur which crept up the feeble column.

“They’ve put on green branches,” muttered Ralph. “I wonder!” He screwed up his eyes and swung round to search the horizon.

“Got it!”

Jack shouted so loudly that Ralph jumped.

“What? Where? Is it a ship?”

But Jack was pointing to the high declivities that led down from the mountain to the flatter part of the island.

“Of course! They’ll lie up there—they must do, when the sun’s too hot——”

Ralph gazed bewildered at his rapt face.

“—they get up high. High up and in the shade, resting during the heat, like cows at home——”

“I thought you saw a ship!”

“We could steal up on one—paint our faces so they wouldn’t see—perhaps surround them and then——”

Indignation took away Ralph’s control.

“I was talking about smoke! Don’t you want to be rescued? All you can talk about is pig, pig, pig!”

“But we want meat!”

“And I work all day with nothing but Simon and you come back and don’t even notice the huts!”

“I was working too——”

“But you like it!” shouted Ralph. “You want to hunt! While I——”

They faced each other on the bright beach, astonished at the rub of feeling. Ralph looked away first, pretending interest in a group of littluns on the sand. From beyond the platform came the shouting of the hunters in the swimming pool. On the end of the platform Piggy was lying flat, looking down into the brilliant water.

“People don’t help much.”

He wanted to explain how people were never quite what you thought they were.

“Simon. He helps.” He pointed at the shelters.

“All the rest rushed off. He’s done as much as I have. Only——”

“Simon’s always about.”

Ralph started back to the shelters with Jack by his side.

“Do a bit for you,” muttered Jack, “before I have a bathe.”

“Don’t bother.”

But when they reached the shelters Simon was not to be seen. Ralph put his head in the hole, withdrew it, and turned to Jack.

“He’s buzzed off.”

“Got fed up,” said Jack, “and gone for a bathe.”

Ralph frowned.

“He’s queer. He’s funny.”

Jack nodded, as much for the sake of agreeing as anything, and by tacit consent they left the shelter and went towards the bathing-pool.

“And then,” said Jack, “when I’ve had a bathe and something to eat, I’ll just trek over to the other side of the mountain and see if I can see any traces. Coming?”

“But the sun’s nearly set!”

“I might have time——”

They walked along, two continents of experience and feeling, unable to communicate.

“If I could only get a pig!”

“I’ll come back and go on with the shelter.”

They looked at each other, baffled, in love and hate. All the warm salt water of the bathing-pool and the shouting and splashing and laughing were only just sufficient to bring them together again.

\*

Simon, whom they expected to find there, was not in the bathing-pool.

When the other two had trotted down the beach to look back at the mountain he had followed them for a few yards and then stopped. He had stood frowning down at a pile of sand on the beach where somebody had been trying to build a little house or hut. Then he turned his back on this and walked into the forest with an air of purpose. He was a small, skinny boy, his chin pointed, and his eyes so bright



they had deceived Ralph into thinking him delightfully gay and wicked. The coarse mop of black hair was long and swung down, almost concealing a low, broad forehead. He wore the remains of shorts and his feet were bare like Jack's. Always darkish in colour, Simon was burned by the sun to a deep tan that glistened with sweat.

He picked his way up the scar, passed the great rock where Ralph had climbed on the first morning, then turned off to his right among the trees. He walked with an accustomed tread through the acres of fruit trees, where the least energetic could find an easy if unsatisfying meal. Flower and fruit grew together on the same tree and everywhere was the scent of ripeness and the booming of a million bees at pasture. Here the littluns who had run after him caught up with him. They talked, cried out unintelligibly, lugged him towards the trees. Then, amid the roar of bees in the afternoon sunlight, Simon found for them the fruit they could not reach, pulled off the choicest from up in the foliage, passed them back down to the endless, outstretched hands. When he had satisfied them he paused and looked round. The littluns watched him inscrutably over double handfuls of ripe fruit.

Simon turned away from them and went where the just perceptible path led him. Soon high jungle closed in. Tall trunks bore unexpected pale flowers all the way up to the dark canopy where life went on clamorously. The air here was dark too, and the creepers dropped their ropes like the rigging of foundered ships. His feet left prints in the soft soil and the creepers shivered throughout their lengths when he bumped them.

He came at last to a place where more sunshine fell. Since they had not so far to go for light the creepers had woven a great mat that hung at the side of an open space in the jungle; for here a patch of rock came close to the surface and would not allow more than little plants and ferns to grow. The whole space was walled with dark aromatic bushes, and was a bowl of heat and light. A great tree, fallen across one corner, leaned against the trees that still stood and a rapid climber flaunted red and yellow sprays right to the top.

Simon paused. He looked over his shoulder as Jack had done at the close ways behind him and glanced swiftly round to confirm that he was utterly alone. For a

moment his movements were almost furtive. Then he bent down and wormed his way into the centre of the mat. The creepers and the bushes were so close that he left his sweat on them and they pulled together behind him. When he was secure in the middle he was in a little cabin screened off from the open space by a few leaves. He squatted down, parted the leaves and looked out into the clearing. Nothing moved but a pair of gaudy butterflies that danced round each other in the hot air. Holding his breath he cocked a critical ear at the sounds of the island. Evening was advancing towards the island; the sounds of the bright fantastic birds, the bee-sounds, even the crying of the gulls that were returning to their roosts among the square rocks, were fainter. The deep sea breaking miles away on the reef made an undertone less perceptible than the susurrations of the blood.

Simon dropped the screen of leaves back into place. The slope of the bars of honey-coloured sunlight decreased; they slid up the bushes, passed over the green candle-like buds, moved up towards the canopy, and darkness thickened under the trees. With the fading of the light the riotous colours died and the heat and urgency cooled away. The candle-buds stirred. Their green sepals drew back a little and the white tips of the flowers rose delicately to meet the open air.

Now the sunlight had lifted clear of the open space and withdrawn from the sky. Darkness poured out, submerging the ways between the trees till they were dim and strange as the bottom of the sea. The candle-buds opened their wide white flowers glimmering under the light that pricked down from the first stars. Their scent spilled out into the air and took possession of the island.