

Style

- **To which features does the term ‘style’ refer?**
- **How does Golding use the setting of the island?**
- **What use does he make of description?**
- **How realistic is the dialogue?**
- **What viewpoint does the writer adopt?**
- **How does Golding use imagery and symbolism?**

In the examination, style includes looking at language, form and structure, which are key elements of Assessment Objective 2 (AO2) (see p. [71](#) for further details)

Grade booster

If you write about style in the exam, and do it well, you will show the examiner that your grasp of the novel is sophisticated.

Reading the novel and being able to retell the story is a low-level skill, and you will not gain marks in the exam for doing this. You have to give examples from the novel to illustrate your comments, but you should not simply give an account of actions.

Style is the *way* that a writer expresses the ideas in the novel. When you write about style, you are showing that you understand an important fact: the author of a novel has numerous choices.

Grade booster

Your job as a literary critic — because that is what you are when you write your exam essay — is to identify the choices Golding has made and to assess how effective they are.

Golding has made choices about the following features covered by the word ‘style’:

- how the setting adds to the story
- how dialogue (conversation) is used and how realistic it is
- what description is included: for example, adjectives describing a character’s appearance and adverbs describing how someone speaks
- the viewpoint from which the story is told: especially whether it is third person (‘Ralph turned to the sea’) or first person (told through the speech of one of the characters: ‘I turned to the sea’)
- imagery: the way in which the author uses word pictures
- symbolism

Setting and atmosphere

It is important to remember that Golding said he set out to write a realistic version of *The Coral Island*. This means that the setting has to be a deserted island. Golding has followed some of the conventions of the original novel by R. M. Ballantyne in giving the boys food and water and in making sure they cannot get off the island. However, one major difference between *Lord of the Flies* and *The Coral Island* is

that the boys in Golding's novel never try to leave the island. There is no talk of building a raft or a boat. There is simply the idea of being rescued. This gives the setting of the island an added importance, because the boys must make do with what they have.

Pause for thought

Golding uses a technique called pathetic fallacy, where the weather reflects the mood of the scene:

sun gazed down like an angry eye

(p. 60)

short chill of dawn

(p. 187)

What do these quotations suggest about the atmosphere of each scene, and how does this reflect the events at each moment in the novel?

The island seems to be a tropical one, as it is always warm and there is plenty of ripe fruit on the trees. Golding at times makes use of the weather. The main example of this is the storm that has been developing and which finally breaks at the time of Simon's death. The boys are affected by the weather and it is probably one of the reasons they get so carried away. You have only to think how uncomfortable you feel on a hot sticky day just before a thunderstorm to realise the impact the build-up to the storm has on the boys.



A tropical island setting

Parts of the island are lit by bright sunlight and seem safe. Other parts are dark and mysterious. The forest is particularly frightening at times. This reflects a normal human fear of the unknown. Even near home, walking through a dark forest can be a scary prospect. Only Simon enjoys the seclusion of the forest. Jack explores it in order to hunt but never sets up camp there.

Key quotation

The silence of the forest was more oppressive than the heat. (p. 49)

The boys inhabit two main parts of the island:

- the edge of the beach near the bathing pool: Ralph and his followers end up here
- Castle Rock: Jack instinctively retreats into a fortress even though there is nothing on the island to harm him

The island is an unusual shape: ‘It was roughly boat-shaped: humped near this end with behind them the jumbled descent to the shore’ (p. [Chapter 1, 26](#)). Jack’s castle is described as being almost detached from the rest of the island: ‘There, where the island petered out in water, was another island; a rock, almost detached, standing like a fort, facing them across the green with one bold, pink bastion’ (p. [26](#)). Creating the island in this way allows Golding to develop the storyline of Jack taking his tribe off to Castle Rock. Making the island boat-shaped is perhaps a joke reference to *The Coral Island*, in which boats play a major role. It is also possible that Golding intended the shape to be symbolic, suggesting that the island itself contains the means of rescue or salvation — in a moral sense.

The contrasts between the safety of the beach, the menace of the forest and mountain, and the security of the castle give the writer scope to move the boys around the island to suit the purposes of the story.

The boys have been presented with a perfect island — their own Garden of Eden. Parallels with the story of the fall of Adam from God’s favour in the book of Genesis in the Bible are valid here. The boys fear a mysterious beast that drives them to terrible deeds; in the book of Genesis, the beast that causes the trouble is the serpent. The paradise with which the boys have been presented turns into a nightmare landscape for Ralph as he tries to run and hide from Jack. You could make the point that this represents a view of the way in which humankind has treated the planet.

The pig’s head on the stick is clearly an important image — it gives the novel its title, *Lord of the Flies*. This title is also a reference to Beelzebub — one of Satan’s henchmen. The image of a head being eaten by flies is disturbing anyway, but becomes even stronger when linked to the devil. The voice Simon hears seems to come from this head. Golding may be asking the reader to think about the role of evil in the boys’ lives.

Dialogue

Golding has carefully given the boys the manner of speech that he would have heard in any boys' school at the time the novel was written. The voices are not upper class, though they will sound strange to many school pupils today. Examples of boys' talk are:

- 'my auntie' (Piggy, p. 3)
- 'Daddy taught me.' (Ralph, p. 8)
- 'Take off your togs.' (Jack, p. 20)
- 'waxy', meaning very angry (several boys use this word)
- 'wacco' and 'wizard' (Ralph and Jack at Simon's suggestion of a map)

The speech patterns of the boys are in keeping with Golding's idea of creating a realistic version of *The Coral Island* and come from his own experience of having taught boys like those in the novel.

Pause for thought

Look at the way Piggy speaks, e.g.

Nobody don't know we're here. Your dad don't know, nobody don't know... (p. 9)

What's grown-ups goin' to think? Young Simon was murdered. And there was that other kid what had a mark on his face. (p. 189)

His grammar is far from perfect when he is speaking. Why do you think Golding makes him speak in this manner?

Even though Jack's behaviour becomes more and more savage, his manner of speech does not really alter. This makes his actions seem even more terrible, as they are being carried out by a boy (a choirboy at that) who speaks well and sounds like

a young English gentleman.

Two of the words used throughout the novel give the reader a clear indication that the boys are not very mature. The words are ‘chief’ and ‘tribe’. The boys would probably have heard these words used in history lessons or would associate them with cowboy-and-Indian films or adventure stories. When Jack turns into a chief, he is copying a child’s idea of what a tribal chief would be like.

Text focus

Look closely at the following passage from Ralph’s speech to the assembly in p. [Chapter 5 \(87\)](#):

And another thing. We nearly set the whole island on fire. And we waste time, rolling rocks, and making little cooking fires. Now I say this and make it a rule, because I’m chief. We won’t have a fire anywhere but on the mountain. Ever.

It could be argued that this speech register sounds quite childish. Look at:

- the use of ‘and’: this is the way that young children construct speech
- the fact that Ralph has to stress that he is chief: again, this is quite a childish thing to do and shows he is insecure
- the use of the word ‘ever’ to finish off: this is typical of a young child’s way of finishing off a point

Note that you do not have to accept this interpretation of the speech. How could you argue that in fact his register shows Ralph as a strong leader?

Description

Places

Key quotation

The shore was fledged with palm trees...The ground beneath them was a bank covered with coarse grass...Behind this was the darkness of the forest proper...

(p. 4)

The island is described in some detail in [Chapter 1](#). As the boys explore their new surroundings the reader gets to see the island. Golding stresses the lush nature of the vegetation.

Note that from this simple opening observation the darkness becomes increasingly important.

The island is a fertile place, with fruit, birds and pigs, so there should be plenty of food. Other features that play a role in the story are:

- the ‘great platform of pink granite’ that forms the diving board and a natural meeting place
- the lagoon that surrounds the island: this keeps the sea from the island and makes the boys even more cut off while also giving them somewhere to swim (in the bathing pool) and play
- the mountain: this is important because it is the obvious place to light a signal fire and it is also the place where the dead airman lands
- the Castle Rock: this becomes Jack’s fortress and it is where Piggy dies

Text focus

Read the descriptions of the island in [Chapter 1](#). Golding stresses the clean, pure aspects of the landscape. The water is ‘peacock’ blue. Imagine the effect

if the water around the island were described as ‘muddy brown’.

Make a list of the descriptions from [Chapter 1](#), then do the same for descriptions of the island from the final chapter. Look at how the pleasant and lush landscape has changed by the end of the novel.

The landscape is always seen through a haze of heat and the temperature never really drops. This removes the problem of the boys having to find clothing or shelter. It also allows Golding to explore the effects of a strange new environment on the boys. The clothes they arrived in are useless on the island and are soon torn on branches or simply thrown away.

People

Key quotation

Jack is described as:

tall, thin, and bony: and his hair was red beneath the black cap. His face was crumpled and freckled, and ugly without silliness. Out of this face stared two light blue eyes, frustrated now, and turning, or ready to turn, to anger.

(p. [16](#))

There are clear descriptions of some of the main characters. This helps the reader to picture them. It is important that Jack and Ralph are the two biggest boys physically. Ralph is described as having the build that suggests he might develop into a boxer, although ‘there was a mildness about his mouth and eyes that proclaimed no devil’ (p. [5](#)). This tells the reader that although Ralph is strong he is likely to be gentle.

Pause for thought

Golding does not give clear descriptions of the younger boys. This seems to reflect the attitude of Ralph and Jack towards them: they group them together as the 'littluns' and pay them relatively little attention. Why do you think Golding does not give us a clearer idea of the younger boys as individuals?

The contrast between the descriptions of Ralph and Jack is very strong and deliberately links physical appearance with character. From the first time we see each boy we are aware that Ralph will tend to be mild in nature while Jack can become angry very quickly.

Key quotation

...mildness about his mouth and eyes that proclaimed no devil.

(p. 5)

This of course turns out to be true. Piggy is not described very clearly at all. He is simply a fat boy who is short-sighted and has asthma. The lack of description of Piggy reflects the fact that the boys might not have noticed much else about him. Golding encourages us to see Piggy as the others do. Roger is a dark-haired boy who has a dark and sinister look about him.

Viewpoint

The viewpoint of the novel is the position from which the author tells the story. For example, Golding could have chosen to tell it in the first person, perhaps through the eyes of Ralph or Jack. This would have created a very different novel, as we would have had a one-sided view of events and of the characters.

Instead, the novel is written in the third person. This means it is written using ‘he/him’ rather than ‘I/me’. It allows the author to act as narrator (storyteller). Golding does not interfere in the narrative as some narrators do. He does not deliberately mislead the reader. For example, we know that the beast is nothing other than a dead airman. This technique puts the reader ahead of the characters and creates dramatic tension.

Grade booster

Recognising the technique of writing in the third person and including it in your essay (if appropriate to the essay title) is a high-level skill.

Golding does not use the technique of telling us what the different boys are thinking. The characters’ own words reveal their thoughts and states of mind. The fact that Jack shouts ‘Choir! Stand still!’ tells us a great deal about him and the position he holds in the eyes of the choirboys.

Simon’s confusion at the time of his hallucinations in front of the pig’s head comes through from the confused conversation that he thinks he is having with the ‘Lord of the Flies’. We do not need to be told that he is confused. It is clear from the fact that the Lord of the Flies speaks to Simon that he is in a disturbed state of mind. He imagines the pig’s head speaking in the voice of a disapproving authority figure. However, note that ‘waxy’ is a schoolboy word, not one that a teacher would really use, showing that Simon’s image of authority is itself a little childish and confused.

Key quotation

‘I’m warning you. I’m going to get waxy. D’you see?’ (p. 158)

Pause for thought

The presentation of Simon's fit comes to us through his own confused eyes. We experience the strange visions and odd conversation along with Simon. How effective do you feel this is? How else could Simon's feelings have been portrayed at this point?

Text focus

For much of the time Golding is simply the invisible storyteller, describing events to us in the third person. However, a characteristic technique that he uses at times is to tell the story from the viewpoint of one character while still writing in the third person.

Read the passage in Chapter 12 from 'Most, he was beginning to dread the curtain that might waver in his brain' to 'Hide, then' (pp. 218–19). This passage takes us into Ralph's thought patterns as he flees from Jack and the hunters. The image of 'a deep grumbling noise, as though the forest itself were angry with him' suggests Ralph's sense of being under threat. In addition, we share Ralph's experience in that we are not yet told that the noise comes from the fire. The 'ululations were scribbled excruciatingly as on slate' suggest the classroom experience of chalk on a board, as well as Ralph's anguish.

In the three lines that follow this, Golding attempts to convey Ralph's desperate efforts to think fast:

Break the line.

A tree.

Hide, and let them pass.

How would this be different if Golding described the events in the normal way? For example: 'Ralph tried to think fast. He considered breaking through

the line of hunters, or climbing a tree...’.

Watch out for other occasions where Golding uses this technique. It tends to correspond to the most dramatic parts of the story.

Imagery

The term ‘imagery’ refers to the kinds of word pictures an author creates to help us imagine what is being described. There are two kinds of imagery an author can use:

- **simile:** when one thing is compared with another, using ‘like’ or ‘as’
- **metaphor:** when something is described as if it actually is something else

Golding uses this kind of imagery throughout the novel. The images the reader has of the island and of the boys come from direct description. The language does sometimes become more poetic, for example in [Chapter 1](#):

Key quotation

The coral was scribbled in the sea as though a giant had bent down to reproduce the shape of the island in a flowing, chalk line but tired before he had finished.(p. [26](#))

Even such images are linked to the way a child might see things. The act of tracing around an object but getting bored before the end is something a child might do.

The following quotation describes how Ralph’s thought process was so complicated that it was a maze of ideas.

He lost himself in a maze of thoughts... (p. [81](#))

Pause for thought

Look at these other examples of imagery. Identify whether the quotation is a simile or a metaphor and then write a few lines explaining the effect of the language used.

- 1 'the folds were stiff like cardboard' (p. 82)
- 2 'Now he saw the landman's view of the swell and it seemed like the breathing of some stupendous creature...the sleeping leviathan breathed out...' (pp. 114–15)
- 3 'these flies found Simon...They tickled under his nostrils and played leapfrog on his thighs' (p. 152)
- 4 'Simon was inside the mouth.' (p. 159)
- 5 'Nothing prospered but the flies who blackened their lord and made the spilt guts look like a heap of glistening coal.' (p. 160)
- 6 'The light was unearthly. The Lord of the Flies hung on his stick like a black ball.' (p. 160)

Golding does not write in a flowery, poetic style. He is concerned with getting across the thoughts and actions of the boys and there are no lengthy passages of writing that are not directly connected with the story.

Grade booster

If in the exam you find you are not sure whether an image is a simile or a metaphor, just call it an image. The important thing is to show how it is used rather than to identify it using the correct technical term.

The description of the dead airman at the start of [Chapter 6](#) is very matter of fact. Even though Sam and Eric find the dead man terrifying, the reader knows what the 'beast' really is. This allows us to observe how the boys respond to the news of the

beast without having to work out what it actually is. Golding's choice of technique means that the reader's attention is focused on the boys and not on whether there really is a dangerous monster on the island.

Symbolism

When an author uses an image, something is compared with something else. Symbolism is related to imagery, but it is not nearly so obvious. A symbol is something that the author uses consistently to represent or 'stand for' something else. There is also rather more room for personal interpretation here: not all critics interpret a symbol in exactly the same way.

The whole of *Lord of the Flies* is symbolic. Golding uses the closed world of the island to represent the world outside. Each boy represents a type of person. The kinds of behaviour we see reflect the behaviour of groups of people in the wider world. There are characters in the novel and groups of people in life who:

- take delight in hurting the weak
- try to lead by example
- are good thinkers but are not physically strong
- are physically strong but have few ideas

Golding uses the island as a symbol of the planet on which we all live. It was almost perfect to start with but becomes dangerous and damaged through the actions of humans.

The boys use the conch as a symbol of power. It gives the holder the right to speak without interruption — at least at the start of the novel. Piggy has an idea of how a sound is made using the shell and this ancient form of trumpet comes to symbolise law and order. It is significant that Piggy is holding the conch when Roger sends the rock down on him: the last trace of order is smashed along with

Piggy himself.



Ralph blows the conch

Pause for thought

It is interesting to chart the movement and status of Piggy's glasses throughout the novel. Does their deterioration mirror that of the boys?

Piggy's glasses are useful in a practical way because they are used to light the fire. They also symbolise wisdom. When Jack steals them he gains the ability to light the fire but none of Piggy's cleverness. The glasses also represent a link to the old world of school and the adult way of doing things.

Golding's use of light and darkness

During the day the island is bathed in light: ‘The sand, trembling beneath the heat-haze’ (p. [Chapter 1, 14](#)) and ‘They faced each other on the bright beach’ (p. [Chapter 3, 55](#)). In reality fair-skinned children would probably suffer badly from the intense sunlight. This is not the case in the novel: daytime is a time of safety, at least at the start of the novel.

The boys are happy during the day, but: ‘When the sun sank, darkness dropped on the island like an extinguisher and soon the shelters were full of restlessness’ (p. [Chapter 4, 61](#)). Fear of the dark is a natural human emotion. The boys are affected strongly by it but this is not unusual for children. How many small children like to have a light on while they fall asleep? It is significant, however, that the older children refuse to give in to their fears at first. Ralph focuses on the fire as their source of rescue, during the early chapters. Nevertheless, Jack’s tribe becomes increasingly desperate to keep its fire alight. On the other side of the island, in Chapter 10, Piggy finally admits ‘the double function of the fire...to be a hearth now and a comfort until they slept’ (p. 179).

Text focus

The fire is important throughout the novel. What do the following quotations show you about the role of fire in the novel?

This was the first time he had admitted the double function of the fire. Certainly one was to send up a beckoning column of smoke; but the other was to be a hearth now and a comfort until they slept.

(p. 179)

There was something good about a fire. Something overwhelmingly good.

(p. 180)

The flames, as though they were a kind of wild life, crept as a jaguar

creeps on its belly towards a line of birch-like saplings...

(p. 44)

...the fire racing forward like a tide.

(p. 222)

Symbolic events

The fire at the beginning not only foreshadows the larger fire at the end but is also symbolic of the chaos that descends when civilised behaviour gives way to the savage within.

The pitting of huts against hunting is symbolic of the conflicting forces of civilisation versus savagery. The irony is that both are necessary for survival as we need both food and shelter.

Simon's death (juxtaposed with the floating out to sea of the dead airman) and Piggy's death are both markers in the descent into savagery. Other markers are the destruction and theft of the glasses: initially just one lens is broken, showing that they are losing their civilised nature, then, when the glasses are taken, Piggy loses his sight completely, symbolising the end of clear-sightedness and the descent into instinct and savagery.

The events surrounding the conch are also symbolic because the conch is a symbol of order at the start of the novel, but by the end of Chapter 11 it is destroyed completely, showing the total breakdown of civilised behaviour on the island.

Review your learning

(Answers are given on p. 93.)

- 1 Why do you think Golding chose this setting for the novel?
- 2 How are night and day used symbolically in the novel?