

# *Lord of the Flies*

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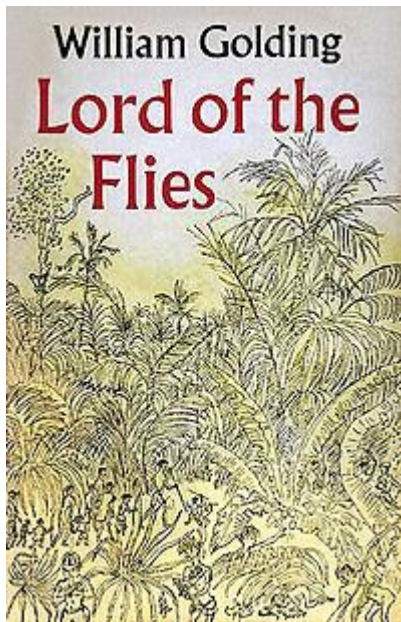


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## *Lord of the Flies*



The original UK *Lord of the Flies* book cover

<b>Author(s)</b>	<a href="#">William Golding</a>
<b>Country</b>	United Kingdom
<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Genre(s)</b>	<a href="#">Allegorical</a> novel
<b>Publisher</b>	<a href="#">Faber and Faber</a>
<b>Publication date</b>	17 September 1954
<b>Media type</b>	Print (Paperback & Hardback)
<b>Pages</b>	248 pp (first edition, paperback)
<b><a href="#">ISBN</a></b>	<a href="#">ISBN 0-571-05686-5</a> (first edition, paperback)
<b><a href="#">OCLC</a> Number</b>	<a href="#">47677622</a>

*Lord of the Flies* is a novel by [Nobel Prize](#)-winning author [William Golding](#) about a group of [British](#) boys stuck on a [deserted island](#) who try to govern themselves, with disastrous results. Its stances on the already-controversial subjects of [human nature](#) and individual welfare versus the [common good](#) earned it position 68 on the [American Library Association](#)'s list of the 100 most frequently [challenged](#) books of 1990–1999.<sup>[1]</sup> In 2005 the novel was chosen by *[TIME](#)* magazine as one of the 100 best [English-language](#) novels from 1923 to 2005.<sup>[2]</sup> It was awarded a place on both lists of [Modern Library 100 Best Novels](#), reaching #41 on the editor's list, and #25 on the reader's list.

Published in 1954, *Lord of the Flies* was Golding's first novel. Although it was not a great success at the time—selling fewer than 3,000 copies in the United States during 1955 before going out of print—it soon went on to become a best-seller, and by the early 1960s was required reading in many schools and colleges; the novel is currently renowned for being a popular choice of study for [GCSE](#) English Literature courses in the [United Kingdom](#). It was adapted to [film](#) in 1963 by [Peter Brook](#), and [again](#) in 1990 by Harry Hook.

## Contents

[\[hide\]](#)

- [1 Background](#)
- [2 Plot summary](#)
- [3 Allegorical relationships](#)
  - [3.1 Ralph](#)
  - [3.2 Piggy](#)
  - [3.3 The Conch](#)
  - [3.4 Jack Merridew](#)
  - [3.5 Roger](#)
  - [3.6 Simon](#)
  - [3.7 Naval Officer](#)
  - [3.8 The Beast](#)
  - [3.9 The Lord of the Flies](#)
- [4 Film adaptations](#)
- [5 Influence](#)
  - [5.1 Music](#)
  - [5.2 Printed works](#)
- [6 See also](#)
- [7 References](#)
- [8 External links](#)

## Background

The book indicates that it takes place in the midst of an unspecified [nuclear war](#). Some of the marooned characters are ordinary students, while others arrive as a musical choir under an established leader. Most (with the exception of the choirboys) appear never to have encountered one another before. The book portrays their descent into savagery; left to themselves in a paradisiacal country, far from modern civilisation, the well-educated children regress to a primitive state.

At an [allegorical](#) level, the central theme is the conflicting impulses toward civilization—live by rules, peacefully and in harmony—and towards the [will to power](#). Themes include the tension between [groupthink](#) and individuality, between rational and emotional reactions, and between morality and immorality. How these play out, and how different people feel the influences of these, form a major subtext of *Lord of the Flies*.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Plot summary

In the midst of a wartime evacuation, a British plane crashes onto an isolated island. The only survivors are male children below the age of 13.<sup>[4]</sup> Two boys, the fair-haired Ralph and an overweight, [bespectacled](#) boy reluctantly nicknamed "Piggy" find a [conch](#), which Ralph uses as a horn to bring all the survivors to one area. Two dominant boys emerge during the meeting: Ralph and Jack Merridew, a redhead who is the leader of a choir group that was among the survivors. Ralph is voted chief, losing only the votes of Jack's fellow choirboys. Ralph asserts two goals: have fun, and work towards a rescue by maintaining a constant [fire signal](#). They create the fire with Piggy's glasses, nearly catching the whole island on fire. For a time, the boys work together.

Jack organises his choir group into the group's hunters, who are responsible for hunting for meat. Ralph, Jack, and a black-haired boy named Simon soon become the supreme trio among the children. Piggy is quickly made an outcast by his fellow "biguns" (older boys) and becomes an unwilling source of laughs for the other children. Simon, in addition to supervising the project of constructing shelters, feels an instinctive need to protect the younger boys.

The original semblance of order imposed by Ralph quickly deteriorates as the majority of the boys turn idle. Around the same time, many of the younger boys begin to believe that the island is inhabited by a monster, referred to as "the beast". Jack gains control of the discussion by boldly promising to kill the beast. At one point, Jack summons all of his hunters to hunt down a [wild pig](#), including those who were supposed to be maintaining the fire. A ship approaches, but passes by because the signal fire has gone out. Although the hunting of the pig turns out to be the hunters' first successful catch, Ralph is infuriated that they have missed a potential rescue. Later, Ralph envisages relinquishing his position, though Piggy discourages him from doing so. Ralph, Simon, and Piggy yearn hopefully for some guidance from the adult world.

After twins Sam and Eric, who are in charge of keeping the smoke signal going, report possibly seeing the beast atop a mountain, Ralph and Jack investigate; they encounter the [corpse](#) and the open [parachute](#) of a [fighter pilot](#) who has landed on the island but mistake it as "the beast", asleep. Jack assembles the children with the conch and confirms the beast's existence to them. The meeting results in a [schism](#), splitting the children into two groups. Ralph's group focuses on preserving the signal fire. Jack becomes the chief of his own tribe, which focuses on hunting, while exploiting the iron-clad belief in the beast. As Jack and the hunters have already slain their first pig, they offer promises of meat, fun, and protection from the beast. Jack's tribe gradually becomes more animalistic, applying [face paint](#) while they hunt. The face paint becomes a [motif](#) which recurs throughout the story, with more and more intensity toward the end.

Simon, who had "cracked" and gone off by himself to think, finds the head of the hunters' dead pig on a stick, left as an offering to the beast. Simon envisions the pig head, now swarming with scavenging [flies](#), as the "[Lord of the Flies](#)" and believes that it is talking to him. Simon hears the pig identifying itself as the real "Beast" and disclosing the truth about itself—that the boys themselves "created" the beast, and that the real beast was inside them all. Simon also locates the dead parachutist who had been mistaken for the beast, and is the sole member of the group to recognise that it is a [cadaver](#) instead of a sleeping monster. Simon attempts to alert Jack's tribe that the "beast" is nothing more than a cadaver. While trying to tell Jack's tribe of this fact, Simon is caught in a ring during a primal dance. He is mistaken for the "beast" in the darkness, and Jack's tribe kills him, with Ralph, Piggy, Sam, and Eric in the ring also. Ralph, Piggy, Sam, and Eric later try to convince themselves that they did not take part in the murder.

Jack's tribe then raids Ralph's camp to steal Piggy's glasses – the glass lenses being the only source of starting a fire. Ralph's tribe journeys to Jack's tribe at Castle Rock to try to retrieve the glasses. In the ensuing confrontation, Roger drops a boulder, aiming at Piggy. Piggy is struck by the boulder, and the conch is smashed into pieces. Piggy flies through the air and falls forty feet onto the rocks below by the sea, and is killed. Sam and Eric are captured and tortured into joining Jack's tribe. Ralph is forced to flee.

The following morning, Jack leads his tribe on a manhunt for Ralph, and in the ensuing search sets the forest alight. However, the fire and smoke attract the attention of a nearby [warship](#). Then a [naval officer](#) lands on the island near where Ralph is lying, and his sudden appearance brings the children's fighting to an abrupt halt. Upon learning of the boys' activities, the officer remarks that he would have expected better from British boys, initially believing them only to be playing a game. In the final scene, although now certain he will be rescued after all, Ralph starts crying.

## Allegorical relationships

### Ralph

When he and the others arrive on the island, Ralph quickly becomes the chief of the group, not by any harsh, overt or physical action, but by being elected.<sup>[5]</sup> Ralph is described as having "the directness of genuine leadership".<sup>[6]</sup> Ralph's first big decision is that they have "got to decide if this is an island".<sup>[7]</sup> After Ralph, Jack, and Simon discover that they are truly "on an uninhabited island",<sup>[8]</sup> Ralph suggests that a fire be lit because "if a ship comes near the island they may not notice us".<sup>[9]</sup> However, towards the end of the book he forgets the initial reason for maintaining the fire. This is representative of the debilitating effects corruption has even on the brightest mind. Ralph may seem to mean well, but often his [obsession](#) with being popular overcomes him and he resorts to [bullying](#) Piggy to regain his power. Still, in the midst of all the island's [chaos](#), it should be noted that Ralph has a tendency to be polite and logical in the tensest of moments; for example, when the children are obliged to investigate Castle Rock, Ralph takes the lead despite being afraid of "the beast". Ralph is sometimes perceived as partially being a literary tool to aid the audience's realisation of inner evil throughout the duration of the novel; "Ralph wept for the end of innocence..."

Ralph embodies good intentions in the implementation of reason, but ultimately fails to execute these plans soundly. Ralph's refusal to resort to violence throughout the novel is

counterpoised by Jack's inherent love of violence. Beginning with his self nomination as hunter, Jack eventually degenerates into the beast he is consumed with slaying. Towards the end of the story, Jack abandons the tribe and forms one of his own. His darkly irresistible nature, along with the lure of meat, immediately sways the majority of the island dwellers to his tribe, which is a much more violent group. Jack's [insurrection](#) begins a chain of events that drives the island further into chaos, initially resulting in the frenzied mob murdering Simon during a primal dance, and then culminating with the murder of Piggy by Roger before the group attempts to hunt down Ralph.<sup>[10]</sup>

## Piggy

Piggy is an intellectual, with [poor eyesight](#), a [weight problem](#), and [asthma](#).<sup>[11]</sup> He is the most physically vulnerable of all the boys. By frequently quoting his aunt, he provides the only female voice.

Piggy's intellect benefits the group only through Ralph; he acts as Ralph's adviser. He cannot be the leader himself because he lacks leadership qualities and has no [rapport](#) with the other boys. Piggy relies on the power of [social convention](#). He believes that holding the [conch](#) gives him the right to be heard. He believes that upholding social conventions produces results.

As the brainy representative of civilization, Piggy asserts that "Life...is scientific".<sup>[12]</sup> Ever the [pragmatist](#), Piggy complains, "What good're you doing talking like that?"<sup>[13]</sup> when Ralph brings up the highly charged issue of Simon's death at their hands. Piggy tries to keep life scientific despite the incident, "searching for a formula"<sup>[14]</sup> to explain the death. He asserts that the assault on Simon was an accident, and justifiable because Simon asked for it by inexplicably crawling out of the forest into the ring.<sup>[14]</sup> Piggy is so intent on preserving some remnant of civilization on the island that, after Jack's tribe attacks Ralph's group, he assumes they "wanted the conch",<sup>[15]</sup> when, in fact, they have come for Piggy's glasses<sup>[15]</sup> in order to make fire. Even up to the moment of his death, Piggy's perspective does not shift in response to the reality of their situation. Because his eminently intellectual approach to life is modelled on the attitudes and rules of the [authoritative](#) adult world, he thinks everyone should share his values and attitudes as a matter of course. When Ralph and Piggy confront Jack's tribe about the stolen spectacles, Piggy asks "Which is better – to have rules and agree, or to hunt and kill? [...] law and rescue, or hunting and breaking things up?"<sup>[16]</sup> as if there is no doubt that the boys would choose his preference.

## The Conch

When first blown, it calls the children to an assembly, where Ralph is elected leader. They agree that only the boy holding the conch may speak at meetings to forestall arguments and chaos, and that it should be passed around to those who wish to voice their opinion. The conch symbolises democracy and, like Ralph, civility and order within the group. When Piggy is killed, the conch is smashed into pieces,<sup>[16]</sup> signalling the end of order and the onset of chaos.<sup>[3]</sup> Originally the conch is portrayed as being very vibrant and colourful, but as the novel progresses, its colours begin to fade, the same way society begins to fade on the island.

## Jack Merridew

Jack [epitomises](#) the worst aspects of human nature when unrepressed or untempered by society. Like Ralph, Jack is a natural leader. Unlike Ralph, Jack appeals to more primal desires in the children and relies on his status as leader of the choirboys to justify his authority. Although his way of behaving is neither disruptive nor violent at the beginning of the book, he does, at that time, express an unquenchable desire to hunt and kill a pig and spends hours in solitude traversing the island.

This first time Jack has an opportunity to kill a pig, he cannot, "because of the enormity of the knife descending and cutting into living flesh; because of the unbearable blood".<sup>[17]</sup> After this hesitation, for which he is most ashamed, Jack's blood lust grows more and more irrational, to the point where he abandons the fire (and causes the boys to miss a potential rescue) in order to hunt. During Jack's [metamorphosis](#), he begins to paint his face with clay and earth, masking his humanity from the pigs and inspiring terrible awe amongst the boys.

Jack's transition puts him on a collision course with Ralph's elected authority. As Jack leaves and takes the majority of the boys with him, lured by the promises of meat, play, and freedom, there has arisen a clear dividing line between the two. Jack represents the irrational nature of the boys, while Ralph represents rationality. Under Jack's rule, the baseness of human nature is unleashed, and he initiates a period of inter-tribal violence, punishing other children, inciting the frenzy that leads to the murder of Simon, and torturing the twins until they submit to his authority.

The tale ends with Jack leading many of the boys in a frenzied attempt to kill Ralph. At this time, the last remaining vestiges of civilization are gone, and Ralph's demise is only prevented by the abrupt and unexpected arrival of a naval officer, who is disappointed by the savage nature of the British boys.<sup>[10]</sup>

## Roger

Roger, at first, is a simple "bigun" who is having fun during his stay on the island. Along with Maurice, he destroys the sand castles made by three small children. While Maurice feels guilt for kicking sand into a child's eye, Roger begins to throw stones at one of the boys. The book states that Roger threw the stones to miss, and felt the presence of civilization and society preventing him from harming the children.<sup>[18]</sup> Later, once he feels that all aspects of conventional society are gone, he is left alone to his animal urges. During a pig hunt, Roger shoves a sharpened stick up the animal's rectum while it is still alive.<sup>[19]</sup> He kills Piggy with a boulder that was no longer aimed to miss, and becomes the executioner and torturer of Jack's tribe. He also tortured Sam and Eric into joining Jack's tribe. In the final hunt for Ralph at the end of the novel, Roger is armed with "a stick sharpened at both ends,"<sup>[20]</sup> indicating his intentions of killing Ralph and offering his head as a sacrifice to the "beast". He represents the person who enjoys hurting others, and is only restrained by the rules of society.<sup>[21]</sup>

## Simon

Simon is a character who represents peace and tranquillity and positivity. He is in tune with the island, and often experiences extraordinary sensations when listening to its sounds. He loves the nature of the island. He is positive about the future. He has an extreme [aversion](#) to the pig's head, the "Lord of the Flies", which derides and taunts Simon in a [hallucination](#). After this experience, Simon emerges from the forest to tell the others that the "beast" that fell from the sky is actually a deceased parachutist caught on the mountain. He is brutally



killed by the boys, who ironically mistake him for the beast and kill him in their "dance" in which they "ripped and tore at the beast". It is implied that Ralph, Piggy, Sam and Eric partake in the killing. The final words that the Lord of the Flies had said to Simon vaguely predicted that his death was about to occur in this manner. Earlier in the novel Simon himself also predicts his own death when he tells Ralph that he will "get back all right", <sup>[22]</sup> implying that, of the two of them, only Ralph will be saved. Simon's death represents the loss of truth, [innocence](#), and common sense. <sup>[10]</sup> Simon is most commonly interpreted as a Christ figure because of his ability to see through misconception, unlike the rest of the boys, and the events he experiences in the book that parallel those of Jesus' life.

## Naval Officer

Arriving moments before Ralph's seemingly impending death, the Royal Navy officer is surprised and disappointed to learn that the boys' society has collapsed into chaos. He states that he would have expected "a better show" <sup>[23]</sup> from British children. The sudden looming appearance of an adult authority figure instantly reduces the savagery of the hunt to a brutal children's game. Upon the officer asking who is in charge, Ralph answers loudly, "I am", <sup>[23]</sup> and Jack, who was previously characterised as a powerful leader, is reduced to "A little boy who wore the remains of an extraordinary black cap on his red hair and who carried the remains of a pair of spectacles at his waist". <sup>[23]</sup> In the last sentence, the officer, embarrassed by the distress of the children, turns to look at the cruiser from which his party has landed – a symbol of his own adult war.

## The Beast

The Beast is first mentioned by a "littlun" and the notion is immediately dismissed by Ralph. The Beast is thought to be within the water and described by the littluns as such. Soon after the rumours of the Beast begin to flourish, the corpse of a fighter pilot, ejected from his aircraft, falls to the island. His parachute becomes entangled in the jungle foliage in such a way that sporadic gusts of wind cause the chute to billow and the body to move as if still alive. Sam and Eric discover the parachutist in the dark and believe that it is the beast. Ralph, Jack, and Roger search for the Beast and encounter it on the mountain. The reality of the Beast is now firmly established in the boys' minds. Simon discovers the parachutist and realises that the beast is really only the corpse of a man. Jack's tribe feeds the Beast with the sow's head on a stick. This act symbolises Jack's willingness to succumb to the temptation of [animalism](#).

Simon is the first child on the island to realise that the Beast is created by the boys' fear. He decides that "the news must reach the others as soon as possible". <sup>[24]</sup> Meanwhile, the boys have been feasting and begin to do their tribal pig-hunting dance. When "the beast stumble[s] in to the horseshoe", <sup>[25]</sup> the frenzied, terrified boys "leapt on to the beast, screamed, struck, bit, tore". <sup>[26]</sup> It becomes clear that the boys have mistaken Simon for the beast and murdered him both when Golding describes "Simon's dead body move[ing] out towards the open sea", <sup>[27]</sup> and on the morning after when Ralph tells Piggy, "That was Simon. [...] That was murder". <sup>[28]</sup>

## The Lord of the Flies

The eponymous Lord of the Flies is a pig's head that has been cut off by Jack, put on a stick sharpened at both ends, stuck in the ground and left as an offering to the "beast". Created out

of fear, the Lord of the Flies used to be a mother sow who, though at one time clean, loving, and innocent, has now become a manically smiling, bleeding image of horror. Near the end of the book, while Ralph is being hunted down, he strikes this twice in one moment of blind anger, causing it to crack and fall on the ground with a grin "now six feet across".<sup>[29]</sup> This transformation parallels the transformation that Jack and the boys have undergone during their time in the island. The name "Lord of the Flies" is a literal translation of [Beelzebub](#), a demonic figure that is often considered synonymous with Satan.

## Film adaptations

There have been four film adaptations:

- [Lord of the Flies](#) (1963), directed by [Peter Brook](#)
- [Lord of the Flies](#) (1990), directed by [Harry Hook](#)
- [Alkitrang dugo](#) (1976), a Filipino film, with a female role
- [Island](#) (2011), a British film based on the novel, set during a nuclear disaster

## Influence

Many writers have borrowed plot elements from *Lord of the Flies*.

### Music

- [Steve Harris](#) and [Janick Gers](#) of the English heavy metal band [Iron Maiden](#) composed a **1995 song** about the novel.
- The final song on [U2's](#) 1980 [debut album](#) takes its title, "[Shadows and Tall Trees](#)", from Chapter 7 in the book. Some printings of the book's cover are similar to the album cover artwork.<sup>[30]</sup>
- The lyrics of [Taking Back Sunday's](#) song "[Liar \(It Takes One to Know One\)](#)" are influenced by the novel.
- The lyrics of [Gatsbys American Dream's](#) song "Fable" are heavily influenced by the novel.
- The title is referenced in the song "1000 More Fools" on [Bad Religion's](#) album [Suffer](#)
- The song "[You're Gonna Go Far, Kid](#)" by [The Offspring](#) is about *Lord of the Flies*.

### Printed works

The 1961 novel [The Butterfly Revolution](#), by [William Butler](#), is described on its front cover as being a "classic in the tradition of *Lord of the Flies*."<sup>[31]</sup>

[Stephen King](#) has stated that the Castle Rock in *Lord of the Flies* was the inspiration for the [town](#) that has appeared in a number of his novels.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> The book itself appears prominently in his novels [Hearts in Atlantis](#) (1999), [Misery](#) (1987), and [Cujo](#) (1981).<sup>[32]</sup> King's fictional town of Castle Rock inspired the name of [Rob Reiner's](#) production company, [Castle Rock Entertainment](#), which produced the 1990 film. King wrote an introduction for a new edition of the book to mark the centenary of William Golding's birth in 2011.<sup>[33]</sup>

The comic novel [Wilt](#) by Tom Sharpe repeatedly refers to *Lord of the Flies* and especially to its use in British education.



## See also

- [\*Heart of Darkness\*](#)
- [\*Two Years' Vacation\*](#)
- [Island mentality](#)
- [\*The Coral Island\*](#), a novel with a similar plot but with an opposite perspective

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23. <sup>^</sup> <sup>[a](#)</sup> <sup>[b](#)</sup> <sup>[c](#)</sup> Golding, p. 224
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## External links



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- [Lord of the Flies](#) student guide and teacher resources; themes, quotes, characters, study questions
- [Reading and teaching guide](#) from [Faber and Faber](#), the book's UK publisher
- [An interview with Judy Golding](#), the author's daughter, in which she discusses the inspiration for the book, and the reasons for its enduring legacy
- [William Golding official website](#) run and administered by the William Golding Estate

[\[hide\]](#)

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  - [Pincher Martin](#) (1956)
  - [The Brass Butterfly : a Play in Three Acts](#) (1958)
  - [Free Fall](#) (1959)
  - [The Spire](#) (1964)
  - [The Hot Gates, and Other Occasional Pieces](#) (1965)
  - [The Pyramid](#) (1967)
  - [The Scorpion God : Three Short Novels](#) (1971)
  - [Darkness Visible](#) (1979)
  - [Rites of Passage](#) (1980)
  - [A Moving Target](#) (1982)
  - [Nobel Lecture, 7 December 1983](#) (1984)
  - [The Paper Men](#) (1984)
  - [An Egyptian Journal](#) (1985)
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