



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.

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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.





ANALYSIS OF MAJOR CHARACTERS

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 games. 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

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 reduce 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.

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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. short While that may be an oversimplification, the book does echo certain moral



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.