



**A STUDY GUIDE OF
WILLIAM GOLDING'S
*LORD OF THE FLIES***

LORD OF THE FLIES

William Golding

❖ KEY FACTS

- **GENRES:** Novel, Allegory
- **NARRATOR:** Third-person omniscient
- **CLIMAX:** Simon's death; the hunting of Ralph by Jack's tribe
- **PROTAGONIST:** Ralph
- **ANTAGONIST:** Jack
- **SETTING:** Near future in a deserted tropical island
- **POINT OF VIEW:** Primarily Ralph; also, Jack and Simon
- **FALLING ACTION:** The arrival of the naval officer to rescue the boys.
- **FORESHADOWING:**

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

- **TONES:** Lush, tragic, pessimistic, dark, unsparing
- **THEMES**

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

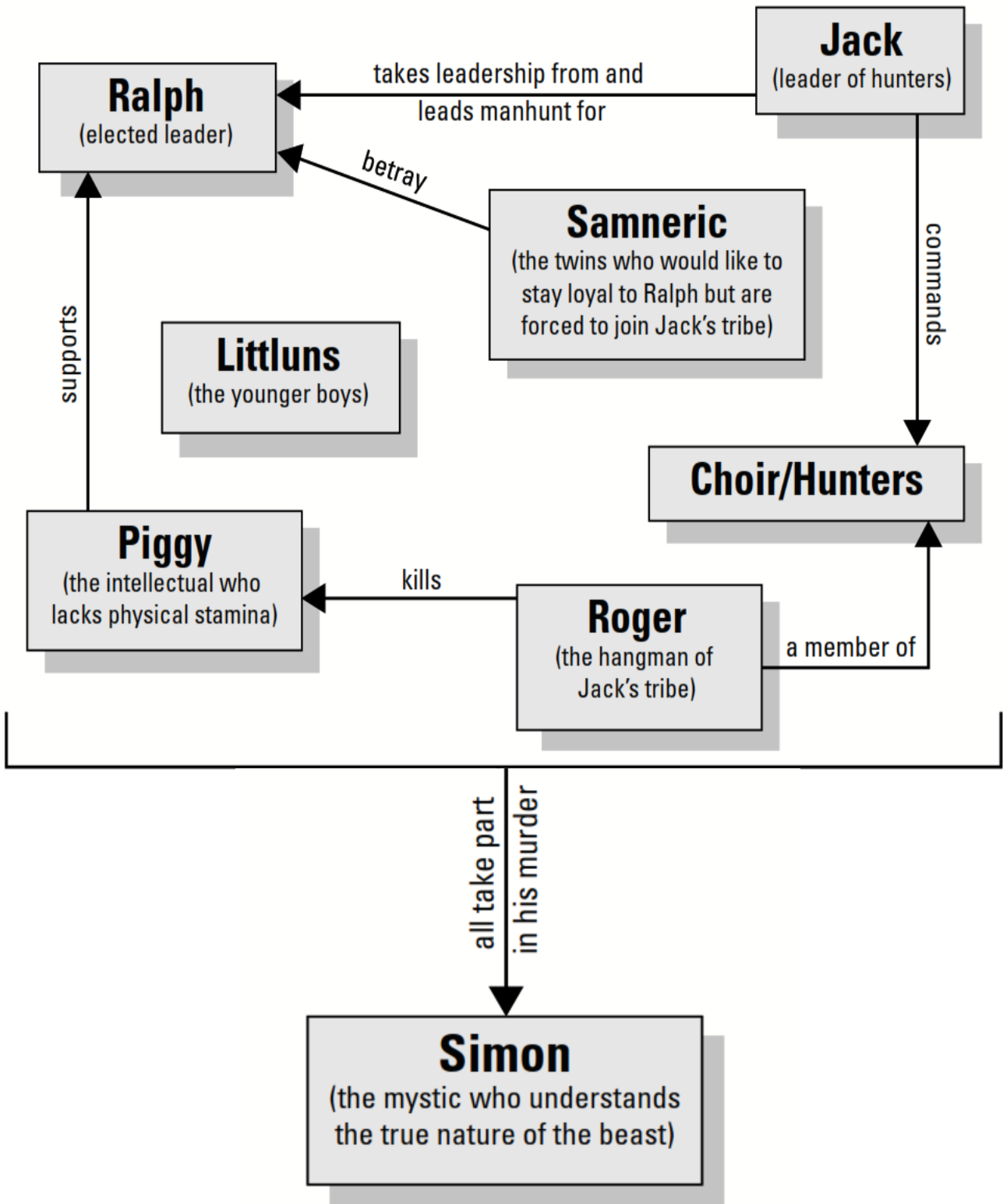
- **MOTIFS**

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

- **SYMBOLS**

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

Character Map



❖ **CHARACTER LIST**

▪ **Ralph**

Ralph is the main character and a natural leader. He is fair, responsible, and wants to establish order and civilization on the island. He represents reason and democracy.

▪ **Jack**

Jack is a strong and aggressive character who becomes the leader of a group of boys called the hunters. He is impulsive and focused on hunting and power. Jack represents savagery and the desire for control.

▪ **Simon**

Simon is a gentle and kind character who often spends time alone in the jungle. He is in touch with nature and has a spiritual side. Simon represents goodness and represents the voice of reason and morality.

▪ **Piggy**

Piggy is a wise and intelligent boy. He is overweight and wears glasses. Piggy is often ignored and bullied by the other boys. He uses his knowledge and reasoning to try and maintain order on the island.

▪ **Roger**

Roger is a follower of Jack and becomes increasingly violent and cruel as the story progresses. He enjoys causing pain and represents the dark and sadistic side of human nature.

▪ **Sam and Eric**

Sam and Eric are twins who are always together. They remain loyal to Ralph throughout the story and become part of his group. They represent the common masses who can easily be influenced by stronger personalities.

▪ **The Lord of the Flies**

The Lord of the Flies is a pig's head on a stick that becomes a grotesque symbol of evil and the boys' inner savagery. It is a manifestation of their fears and the darkness that resides within them.

❖ **THEMES & Motifs**

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work. Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help develop and inform the text's major themes. The themes and motifs in *The Lord of the Flies* depict the complexities of human nature, the fragile nature of civilization, and the inherent struggle between good and evil. This raises questions about the inherent darkness within humanity and the consequences of unchecked savagery.

❖ Themes

1. Civilization vs. Savagery:

One of the central themes in the novel is the conflict between civilization and savagery. The boys' struggle to maintain order and create a functioning society represents the forces of civilization, while their descent into violence and chaos symbolizes savagery.

2. Loss of Innocence:

The *Lord of the Flies* explores the loss of innocence experienced by the boys as they are confronted with the harsh realities of survival and the darkness within themselves. The novel captures the transition from childhood innocence to the complexities of adulthood.

3. Power and Control:

The theme of power and control is prominent in the novel. It examines the desire for power and how it can corrupt individuals and lead to the abuse of authority. The struggle for leadership between Ralph and Jack represents this theme.

4. Fear and the Unknown:

Fear and the unknown play a significant role in the story. The boys' fear of the "beast" and their inability to confront the unknown lead to irrational behavior and the breakdown of order. The novel explores how fear can manipulate and control individuals.

❖ Motifs:

1. The Beast:

The "beast" is a recurring motif in the novel. It represents the boys' primal instincts, their fear, and the darkness within them. The beast takes different forms, symbolizing the boys' growing savagery and loss of control.

2. Fire:

Fire is a symbol of hope, rescue, and civilization in the early stages of the story. However, as the novel progresses, fire becomes a destructive force, representing chaos and destruction.

3. Masks and Disguises:

The boys' use of masks and disguises represents their transformation into savage beings and their ability to hide their true identities. It symbolizes the loss of individuality and the adoption of a collective identity.

4. The Conch Shell:

The conch shell is a symbol of order, democracy, and authority. It represents

civilized behavior and the need for rules and structure. As the conch loses its power, order collapses, and chaos ensues.

A Brief Synopsis

Lord of the Flies explores the dark side of humanity, the savagery that underlies even the most civilized human beings. Golding intended this novel as a tragic parody of children's adventure tales, illustrating humankind's intrinsic evil nature. He presents the reader with a chronology of events leading a group of young boys from hope to disaster as they attempt to survive their uncivilized, unsupervised, isolated environment until rescued. In the midst of a nuclear war, a group of British boys find themselves stranded without adult supervision on a tropical island. The group is roughly divided into the "littluns," boys around the age of six, and the "biguns," who are between the ages of ten and twelve. Initially, the boys attempt to form a culture similar to the one they left behind. They elect a leader, Ralph, who, with the advice and support of Piggy (the intellectual of the group), strives to establish rules for housing and sanitation. Ralph also makes a signal fire the group's first priority, hoping that a passing ship will see the smoke signal and rescue them.

A major challenge to Ralph's leadership is Jack, who also wants to lead. Jack commands a group of choirboys-turned-hunters who sacrifice the duty of tending the fire so that they can participate in the hunts. Jack draws the other boys slowly away from Ralph's influence because of their natural attraction to and inclination toward the adventurous hunting activities symbolizing violence and evil. The conflict between Jack and Ralph—and the forces of savagery and civilization that they represent—is exacerbated by the boys' literal fear of a mythical beast roaming the island. One night, an aerial battle occurs above the island, and a casualty of the battle floats down with his opened parachute, ultimately coming to rest on the mountaintop. Breezes occasionally inflate the parachute, making the body appear to sit up and then sink forward again. This sight panics the boys as they mistake the dead body for the beast they fear. In a reaction to this panic, Jack forms a splinter group that is eventually joined by all but a few of the boys.

The boys who join Jack are enticed by the protection Jack's ferocity seems to provide, as well as by the prospect of playing the role of savages: putting on camouflaging face paint, hunting, and performing ritualistic tribal dances.

Eventually, Jack's group actually slaughters a sow and, as an offering to the beast, puts the sow's head on a stick. Of all the boys, only the mystic Simon has the courage to discover the true identity of the beast sighted on the mountain. After witnessing the death of the sow and the gift made of her head to the beast, Simon begins to hallucinate, and the staked sow's head becomes the Lord of the Flies, imparting to Simon what he has already suspected: The beast is not an animal on the loose but is hidden in each boy's psyche. Weakened by his horrific vision, Simon loses consciousness.

Recovering later that evening, he struggles to the mountaintop and finds that the beast is only a dead pilot/soldier. Attempting to bring the news to the other boys, he stumbles into the tribal frenzy of their dance. Perceiving him as the beast, the boys beat him to death. Soon only three of the older boys, including Piggy, are still in Ralph's camp. Jack's group steals Piggy's glasses to start its cooking fires, leaving Ralph unable to maintain his signal fire. When Ralph and his small group approach Jack's tribe to request the return of the glasses, one of Jack's hunters releases a huge boulder on Piggy, killing him. The tribe captures the other two biguns prisoners, leaving Ralph on his own. The tribe undertakes a manhunt to track down and kill Ralph, and they start a fire to smoke him out of one of his hiding places, creating an island-wide forest fire. A passing ship sees the smoke from the fire, and a British naval officer arrives on the beach just in time to save Ralph from certain death at the hands of the schoolboys turned savages.

CHAPTERS SUMMARIES & ANALYSIS

Chapter I:

Summary: The story begins with a group of boys, survivors of a plane crash, arriving on a deserted island. Ralph and Piggy find a conch shell and use it to gather the boys together. Ralph is chosen as the leader, and they discuss the need for rules and the hope of being rescued.

Analysis: This chapter introduces the main characters and establishes the initial sense of order and civilization. The conch shell symbolizes democracy and authority, while the boys' excitement and hope for rescue demonstrate their desire to maintain societal norms.

Chapter 2:

Summary: The boys, now organized into a society, attempt to create a signal fire to attract passing ships. However, the fire gets out of control, and a young boy with a birthmark on his face goes missing. The boys realize the importance of rules and the need for a designated firekeeper.

Analysis: This chapter highlights the struggle between order and chaos. The fire symbolizes the boys' hope for rescue, but it also foreshadows the destructive potential if not properly managed. The disappearance of the boy with the birthmark hints at the lurking danger on the island.

Chapter 3:

Summary: Ralph, Jack, and Simon build shelters on the beach while others play and neglect their responsibilities. Jack becomes obsessed with hunting pigs, and tensions rise between him and Ralph. The boys start to divide into two groups.

Analysis: This chapter explores the growing conflict between Ralph's desire for order and Jack's increasing obsession with hunting. The division between the boys foreshadows the power struggle and the eventual breakdown of unity and civilization.

Chapter 4:

Summary: The boys' appearance starts to change as they let go of their former identities. Jack and his hunters paint their faces, adopting a savage appearance. Simon finds a secluded spot in the jungle where he contemplates the nature of the "beast."

Analysis: This chapter delves into the theme of the boys' descent into savagery. The painted faces symbolize their transformation and the loss of their civilized selves. Simon's encounter with the "beast" foreshadows the inner darkness that will be explored further in the story.

Chapter 5:

Summary: The boys hold an assembly to discuss the existence of the beast and the diminishing hope of rescue. Ralph tries to maintain order, but Jack challenges his authority. They decide to climb the mountain to investigate the beast.

Analysis: This chapter focuses on the fear of the unknown and the boys' struggle to maintain rationality. The conflict between Ralph and Jack intensifies as Jack

seeks to undermine Ralph's leadership. The climb up the mountain represents the boys' confrontation with their fears and the growing tension on the island.

Chapter 6:

Summary: A dead parachutist, mistaken for the beast, lands on the island. Sam and Eric, on night watch, see the parachutist and mistake it for the beast. They rush back to tell the others, causing widespread fear and panic.

Analysis: This chapter heightens the fear and paranoia among the boys. The dead parachutist symbolizes the external threat that they perceive as the "beast." The incident further fragments the group and fuels the growing savagery and chaos.

Chapter 7:

Summary: Ralph, Jack, and Roger explore the mountain, discovering that there is no actual beast. Jack becomes more dominant and instills fear in the other boys. The group performs a mock hunt, and Jack declares himself the leader of a separate tribe.

Analysis: This chapter marks a significant turning point as the division between Ralph and Jack solidifies. The absence of a real beast reveals that the true danger lies within themselves. Jack's rise to power showcases the destructive nature of unchecked savagery.

Chapter 8:

Summary: Simon goes to his secluded spot and encounters the "Lord of the Flies," a pig's head on a stick. The "Lord of the Flies" speaks to Simon, revealing the darkness within the boys. Simon faints and later discovers the truth about the beast.

Analysis: This chapter delves into the theme of the inherent evil within humanity. The "Lord of the Flies" represents the boys' inner savagery and their descent into madness. Simon's revelation foreshadows the tragic events that will unfold.

Chapter 9:

Summary: Simon wakes up from his faint and finds the dead parachutist on the mountain. He realizes that there is no real beast. Simon rushes down to the beach

to tell the others, but they mistake him for the beast and brutally murder him.

Analysis: This chapter showcases the tragic consequences of the boys' descent into savagery. Simon, representative of goodness and reason, becomes a victim of the boys' fear and violence. It highlights the complete breakdown of order and morality on the island.

Chapter 10:

Summary: Ralph and Piggy are left as the only remaining members of the original civilized group. They confront Jack and his tribe to reclaim Piggy's stolen glasses, which the tribe is using to start fires. The confrontation turns violent, and Piggy is killed while trying to reason with the boys.

Analysis: This chapter further emphasizes the triumph of savagery over reason and civilization. Piggy's death symbolizes the destruction of intellectual and rational thinking. The loss of the glasses, representing knowledge and insight, signifies the loss of hope for a return to civilization.

Chapter 11:

Summary: Ralph is now alone and hunted by Jack and his tribe. He seeks refuge on Castle Rock but is captured and forced to participate in a savage hunt. Ralph manages to escape but realizes that he is now completely isolated.

Analysis: This chapter portrays the complete dominance of Jack's tribe and the isolation of Ralph. It highlights the total breakdown of order and the triumph of primal instincts. Ralph's struggle for survival becomes a symbol of the fight against the overwhelming forces of chaos.

Chapter 12:

Summary: Ralph is hunted down by Jack and his tribe, who set the entire island on fire to flush him out. Ralph is rescued by a passing naval officer who witnesses the chaos and destruction. The boys, now confronted by authority, break down in tears.

Analysis: This final chapter brings the story to a dramatic conclusion. The naval officer's arrival represents the return of civilization and authority, exposing the boys' descent into savagery. The boys' tears symbolize the realization of the immense damage they have caused and the loss of their innocence.

IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS EXPLAINED

"We've got to have rules and obey them. After all, we're not savages. We're English, and the English are best at everything." - Ralph

In this quote, Ralph emphasizes the importance of rules and order in maintaining civilization. He believes that their English background makes them superior and capable of upholding a civilized society.

"Maybe there is a beast... maybe it's only us." - Simon

Simon suggests that the real "beast" on the island is not a physical creature but rather the dark and savage impulses within the boys themselves. He recognizes the potential for evil within each of them.

"I'm scared of him... I'm scared of the beast." - Jack

Jack expresses his fear of the supposed beast on the island. This quote highlights how fear can manipulate individuals and drive them to irrational behavior. It foreshadows Jack's descent into savagery and his willingness to exploit the boys' fears for his own gain.

"What I mean is... maybe it's only us." - Simon

Simon suggests that the beast they fear is not an external threat but rather a manifestation of their own inner darkness. He implies that the evil they see is a reflection of their own actions and choices.

"Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy." - The narrator

This quote highlights the profound themes of the novel. Ralph's tears symbolize the loss of innocence and the recognition of the inherent darkness within humanity. It also mourns the death of Piggy, who represented reason and intellect.

STUDY QUESTIONS

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

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

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

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

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

Jack expertly uses the beast to manipulate the other boys. The frightful symbol provides his tribe with a common enemy, a common idol, a common fear, and a common system of beliefs all in one. Jack invokes different aspects of the beast depending on which effects he wants to achieve. The boys' belief in the monster also gives *Lord of the Flies* religious undertones, since the boys' various nightmares about monsters eventually take the form of a single monster that they all believe in. By leaving the sow's head in the

forest as an offering to the beast, Jack's tribe solidifies its collective belief in the reality of the nightmare; the skull becomes a kind of religious totem with extraordinary psychological power. Yet, as a religion, the beliefs the boys develop on the island are one-sided, since they are all oriented toward the savage or evil impulse that exists in all human beings. Although Simon seems to represent a kind of innately good alternative to the models of Jack and Ralph, the novel does not really explore the idea of innate human goodness, only that of innate human evil. Thus, positive moral aspects of religion are almost wholly absent from the book.