



Lord of the Flies

The Beast

Although many of the boys on the island believe in the existence of 'the beast' it is not a real creature that can be hunted and killed. Rather, it comes to represent some of the boys' darkest fears and desires.

Look at the passage below which is taken from Chapter Two when the boys first talk about the beast and then answer the questions.

'He wants to know what you're going to do about the snake-thing.'
Ralph laughed, and the other boys laughed with him. The small boy twisted further into himself.
'Tell us about the snake-thing.'
'Now he says it was a beastie.'
'Beastie?'
'A snake-thing. Ever so big. He saw it.'
'Where?'
'In the woods.'
Either the wandering breezes or perhaps the decline of the sun allowed a little coolness to lie under the trees. The boys felt it and stirred restlessly.
'You couldn't have a beastie, a snake-thing, on an island this size,' Ralph explained kindly. 'You only get them in big countries, like Africa, or India.'
Murmur; and the grave nodding of heads.
'He says the beastie came in the dark.'
'Then he couldn't see it!'
Laughter and cheers.
'Did you hear that? Says he saw the thing in the dark-'
'He still says he saw the beastie. It came and went away again an' came back and wanted to eat him-'
'He was dreaming.'
Laughing, Ralph looked for confirmation round the ring of faces. The older boys agreed; but here and there among the little ones was the dubiety that required more than rational assurance.
'He must have had a nightmare. Stumbling about among all those creepers.'
More grave nodding; they knew about nightmares.
'He says he saw the beastie, the snake-thing, and will it come back to-night?'
'But there isn't a beastie!'
There was no laughter at all now and more grave watching. Ralph pushed both hands through his hair and looked at the little boy in mixed amusement and exasperation.
Jack seized the conch.
'Ralph's right of course. There isn't a snake-thing. But if there was a snake we'd hunt it and kill it. We're going to hunt pigs and get meat for everybody. And we'll look for the snake too-'
'But there isn't a snake!'
'We'll make sure when we go hunting.'
Ralph was annoyed and, for the moment, defeated. He felt himself facing something ungraspable. The eyes that looked so intently at him were without humour.
'But there isn't a beast!'
Something he had not known was there rose in him and compelled him to make the point, loudly and again.
'But I tell you there isn't a beast!'
The assembly was silent.

1. Describe the boy who first mentions the ‘beastie’. What happens to him at the end of Chapter Two?
2. The beast is first described as a ‘snake-thing’ – what do you think is the significance of this? Where else do images of snakes appear in the novel?
3. Why does the boy think he has seen a ‘beastie’?
4. How do the following characters react to the boy’s revelation about the ‘beastie’ and what does this tell us about them?
 - Ralph
 - Jack
 - the other older boys
 - the other younger boys
5. What ideas does each character have about what the beast is during the story? What or who is mistaken for the beast at different stages in the novel?
6. Now trace how the idea of the beast develops through the whole novel by copying out and filling in a chart like the one below. You will need to re-read the following pages of your book:

Chapter 2	34-6, 47
Chapter 3	52-3
Chapter 5	88-92, 94-99
Chapter 6	106-109, 112, 115-118
Chapter 7	127, 133
Chapter 8	151-2, 158
Chapter 9	161,168-70
Chapter 12	206

(These page numbers are for the Faber edition of *Lord of the Flies* published in 1958, first published in 1954)

Page Number	Who mentions the beast?	What is said about the beast? (Include quotes)	What is the importance of the beast at this point in the novel?

7. The beast is an important symbol in the novel – it comes to represent particular themes and ideas. Can you think of any other symbols in the novel? What do they represent?
8. Write an essay about the importance of the beast in *Lord of the Flies*. You will need to consider:
 - How the different characters react to the idea of the beast
 - How ideas about what the beast might be change during the novel
 - What you think the beast represents