

'LORD OF THE FLIES'

by William Golding

“Revision notes can never replace knowing the books thoroughly”
J.W.Evans

These notes should be used as pointers to the directions that your thoughts might take. They are not meant to replace your reading of the novel, you must still do that yourself..

CHARACTERISATION

Never forget that we are talking about a group of boys whose maximum age is twelve.

RALPH Does he represent all that is good in people? Tall, fair-skinned, blond hair, very athletic, natural leader although not that good a leader as many of his decisions are questionable, which ones?. He is middle-class, father a naval officer. Elected leader but not forceful enough to maintain position. Eventually he loses support and is reduced to the status of an outcast who must flee for his life.

Ralph is an idealist and a dreamer. He needs Piggy to think for him. He finds the Conch but Piggy tells him how to use it. At the end of the book, he is a disillusioned realist who now sees his world and its inhabitants for what they are.

JACK MERRIDEW Does he represent the worst in people? He is thin, tall, with red hair, light blue eyes and freckles. Leader of the choir, he becomes the leader of the hunters. Increasingly in conflict with Ralph and more particularly, Piggy, he breaks away, forms his own tribe and splits the group. He manages to get the support to do this by offering the boys the attraction of the hunting life and then by terrorising them. In the end he is the tyrannical leader of the community.

Jack is a spontaneous, unthinking person who wants instant gratification of his desires. He doesn't hypothesise (think through the possible results of his actions) and doesn't care 'what if?'. He is a 'me first' person, *as most of us are*. He is amoral in that he recognises no morality except what he can enforce. He has no worries about ignoring such things such as 'rights' and 'justice'.

PIGGY He is overweight, a 'Fatty', asthmatic, cannot see without his glasses as he is short-sighted. He is an orphan who lived with his Auntie, a sweet shop owner, and is, from his language and manner, of a lower class than the rest. He is physically unattractive and wears a greasy windcheater.

However he is intelligent and thoughtful and is able to reason and hypothesise. He defends and looks after the little'uns. A wise counsellor, he supports Ralph's attempts at democratic, parliamentary rule. After increasingly finding himself at odds with Jack, a person he both instinctively loathes and fears, he is murdered by Roger, who drops a boulder onto him.



Piggy's role in the novel seems to be heavily symbolic. As the only boy wearing glasses he has the means to light a fire. He also seems to represent the quality of reason among the boys and his gradual loss of sight, cracked lens and glasses finally stolen, and loss of influence which culminates in his death, shows the gradual degeneration of the boys. He refuses to accept the existence of a beast, as it is unscientific. For this same reason he finds Simon very strange.

SIMON He is a dark, mystical boy who the others find 'odd'. He is small, thin, with a pointed chin and very bright eyes. He has long coarse black hair over a low, broad forehead. He goes barefoot. An original member of the choir (hunters), he will be killed by boys led by the choir (hunters). He is very helpful and co-operative and the only boy to help Ralph build the shelters.

He is one of the three boys, with Jack and Ralph, who first explore the island. He suffers from hallucinatory fainting fits (epilepsy?) and goes off alone when they happen. He appears to be capable of prophecy, and is the only boy who is totally **unafraid** of the beast. He will ultimately be a 'scapegoat' who, at the point of telling the boys that the beast that they have seen is in fact, a dead parachutist, is killed by his 'school friends' during a dancing frenzy.

Simon has a high level of intuitive intelligence and this allows him to be exceptionally brave, as shown by his willingness to confront the beast. He is a fearless seeker after truth. From all this are we meant to see him as a Jesus figure?

ROGER Mysterious, slight and furtive with black hair and a low forehead, he is very secretive. Jack's lieutenant, he thinks like Jack and never considers the consequences of his actions. His name literally means 'famous with a spear'. He is a sadist who delights in inflicting pain. In the sow killing he is unnecessarily cruel. He is Jack's torturer and is the logical extension of Jack's character. He prepares the stick, sharpened at both ends, to be used to mount Ralph's head.

SAMN'
ERIC The twins. They are always talked about as one person and when they talk, they alternate sentences. Their role is to serve whoever is the leader. They stay with Ralph until he loses the position to Jack. They are likeable, irresponsible and fickle. They let the fire go out and they first bring news of the dead parachutist.

Since the twins serve as muscle, as strength to be harnessed, they represent the unthinking masses of the people. These masses are peaceable, likeable and good-natured. They elect leaders like Ralph, but they lack morals and understanding of the meaning of events, and so they are easily swayed and persuaded to serve a new leader that comes along.

There are other characters, but these are the main ones and in any question of character one of these should be discussed.



PLOT and STRUCTURE

It might be easier to separate plot and structure in the following way.

The **plot** of a novel is **what happens in the story**. The actions of the plot will be explained therefore by

- a. the characters;
- b. the setting that the characters are in;
- c. the motivations of the characters which makes them act as they do;
- d. what they do;
- e. what happens when they do what they do.

Discussion and criticism of plot must be whether you feel that a. plus b. plus c. would lead to d. and e. **in a way that is believable to you.**

The **structure** of the novel is the way that the author has got his characters to do what he wants them to do **to make his point**. An example of this would be the way Piggy's specs are broken by Jack..

In terms of PLOT you could say that Jack attacks Piggy because he doesn't yet dare attack Ralph. In terms of STRUCTURE Golding wants the glasses to be broken to show the way that reason, symbolised by Piggy, is being slowly blinded by the 'evil' that is Jack. You will find lots of places where plot is manipulated by structure.

A good example is Piggy's glasses. The PLOT needs these glasses to create the fire. However, Piggy is short-sighted because Golding's STRUCTURE demands Piggy to be helpless without his glasses. But glasses that correct short-sightedness do not magnify and therefore could not possibly be used to light a fire! In this the needs of the structure take first place over the logic of the plot.

SETTING and ATMOSPHERE

The following chart tells you where the action takes place.

It is worth thinking about the setting in terms of the structure. It has to be a tropical paradise in that it must be like Eden. It must be unspoilt by man, so that the passenger tube makes the first scar across the paradise. There must be plentiful supplies of food (fruit) and water. The lagoon of water near the boys' beach must be safe and warm for swimming. There must be a high mountain for the rescue fire. There must be pigs to hunt (how did they get to the island?).

The settings could be seen in terms of contrasts.

The lagoon, warm and safe	VERSUS	The open sea which is cold and unprotected.
The mountain, high place where truth can be seen, the place for the rescue fire and the hope that it symbolises.	VERSUS	The Castle rock, a jumbled mix-up with a cave in the centre. The fire used for torture.
The beach, a safe place, familiar, open tame	VERSUS	The jungle, wild and unknown.



WEATHER Notice the importance of the weather in the major scenes. The death of Simon takes place in a tumultuous thunderstorm that builds up over the preceding chapters. Golding uses day and night in the same way so that feelings of fear and unease are emphasised. Night is fear and day is safety. Are there other parts of the novel where the weather seems to reflect what is going on amongst the boys?

STYLE - How Golding communicates his story

I think that the best way to show the style of the writing, which in this novel is very complex, is to choose a particular scene which is very powerful. Examples could be the death of Simon, the meeting of Simon and the Lord of the Flies, the chase after Ralph at the end of the novel, in particular when he hides in the bushes or even the opening when Piggy meets Ralph. Using a couple of paragraphs, talk about the style as you might a poem. Talk about the:

VOCABULARY - the words, the use of colour

SYNTAX - the length and structure of sentences. Does he use the sentence length to speed up the action?

IMAGERY - metaphor, simile, onomatopoeia - what feelings do they create?

Comments about the overall style of the novel should emphasise that it is deceptively simple. The story has a good pace and the action flows smoothly. However there is always a feeling that there is more to this story than the adventures of schoolboys in paradise.

That we are meant to think more deeply about it and that there may be a hidden message is suggested by the following thoughts:

- Why are the boys not given second names apart from Jack and Percival?
- Why are there no girls or adults who survive the crash?
- How come the passenger tube lands, ejects the boys and then is dragged out to sea so that it cannot provide any source of shelter or supplies?
- Why is the island so isolated in that so few ships pass by?
- If it is isolated how can two fighter planes be fighting over it so that the parachutist suddenly lands on the mountain?
- Where do the pigs come from?
- Why is Piggy the only one with glasses and the only one that does not go to public school?



VIEWPOINT – or, What is it *really* all about?

There is no easy understanding of this book which has many levels. Begin by considering the following:

ALLEGORY - Some ideas are very complex and a writer will decide that instead of explaining the thought he will demonstrate it in the form of a story, a story that is told in SYMBOLS. These might be animals who act out his ideas such as in 'Aesop's Fables' or 'Animal Farm'. He might use people and tell it in the form of a parable such as 'The Prodigal Son'.

We know that Golding wrote his story when the activities of the Nazis and their death camps were being revealed in all their horror. Is this story an attempt to understand how humans can be capable of such appalling cruelty?

SYMBOLISM - Using things or people to represent **ideas**.

This novel is full of symbols, some more important and more obvious than others. Often the symbols are also found in the Bible and in Greek Mythology. The more you delve into the symbolic references in this book, the more you uncover. In Greek Mythology FIRE is a symbol of KNOWLEDGE. And Eve tempted Adam with an apple from the Tree of Knowledge. Both FIRE and KNOWLEDGE can HELP and HARM.

The beast A major symbol is the beast which evolves into the 'Lord of the Flies', physically the head of the slaughtered sow, a head placed on a stick, 'sharpened at both ends'. Remember that 'Lord of the Flies' literally translated into Hebrew is **Beelzebub** which is one of the names given to Satan, the devil. Symbolically the 'Lord of the Flies' has won when the boys have become savages.

The beast symbol therefore **evolves** gradually:

Chapter 1: The **choir** is likened to an animal as it comes across the sand.

Chapter 2: The fire is likened to **Snakes** and it kills one of the little'uns, the boy with the mulberry coloured birthmark. The snake is the devil in the Garden of Eden. However fire is a symbol in Greek mythology for knowledge, in Greek the word is the same. Is Golding saying that knowledge is 'two-edged', it can be very useful and also very dangerous, like fire itself? Interestingly the **Snake/Devil** in Eden tempts Adam with a fruit from the **tree of knowledge**. Remember that knowledge has brought us healing medicine and also the nuclear bomb!

Chapter 5: Beast from the Water: The boys complain about the beast thing in the sea and Jack uses this fear to offer 'protection' with his hunters.

Chapter 6: Beast from the Air: A **dead parachutist** lands on the mountain, taking over the place where the rescue fire is, the symbol of their aspirations. When they hear of this the older boys set off to investigate, all except Piggy who is left behind to look after the Little'uns. They begin by investigating Castle Rock, the only unexplored part of the island. Here Jack will ultimately set up his alternative tribal camp.



Chapter 7: They now set off for the mountain to investigate the beast. Anticipating a fainting attack, Simon volunteers to carry a message to Piggy that they will be late. He is unafraid of the beast in the jungle. For the final climb to the summit, Jack and Ralph are joined by Roger. When they see the dead parachutist they run off terrified. Had he been there, Simon would have been unafraid, and therefore they would have discovered the truth. Significantly he isn't.

Chapter 8: Jack makes his leadership bid, fails and decides to split away. The hunters join him and they hunt a sow. In the killing of the sow, symbolically they are killing a pregnant animal and thus destroying the future. The hunters dress as savages and mount the pig's head on a stick as a gift to the 'beast'. The killing ground is where Simon has hidden to have his 'fit'. When he awakes, Simon, in an hallucinatory fit, talks to it and it 'talks' back, saying:

**"You knew, didn't you I'm part of you? Close, close, close!
I'm the reason why it's no go? Why things are what they
are?"**

Chapter 9: Simon now passes out and when he recovers he goes to the mountain top and discovers the truth. Meanwhile the boys have a feast on the beach. They fear the beast, it is night and there is a storm brewing and the boys, to get rid of their fear of the storm, begin a dance. Simon bursts into the dance, is mistaken for the beast and is killed. His body is washed away by the sea. He becomes a 'scapegoat', a beast sacrificed to the beast.

Chapter 10: The **savage tribe** is now the beast and it steals Piggy's glasses.
Chapter 11: Piggy is killed by the tribe (the beast) when he and Ralph ask for his glasses back. Piggy is killed and Ralph is driven into hiding.
Chapter 12: The tribe hunt Ralph so that they can stick his head on the stick 'sharpened at both ends'. Ironically he is now the beast being hunted by the beast that is the tribe.

Other symbols Other important symbols are:

- the conch - symbol of democratic freedom,
- fire - symbol of hope and rescue,
- the huts - symbol of civilisation, etc. etc.



Having said all this the question remains, what does Golding **mean** by the 'Lord of the Flies'?

As he doesn't provide us with the answer, it is up to you to decide.

My own view is that maybe he is saying that there is a beast, a 'Lord of the Flies' in all of us which is **our potential for evil**. This is controlled by our intellect and our sense of responsibility towards each other, what Jesus meant by 'loving your neighbour'. Such a 'beast' causes football supporters to change into violent hooligans and it makes civilised countries commit appalling atrocities upon each other's people; one only has to think of Bosnia or Burundi. It might also make two young boys kill a little toddler, as in the Bulger case. In all cases the action is self-destructive, and seems to take no thought to the outcome. People who act without thought for others or for the consequences of their actions are called **SOCIOPATHS**, and this is what the boys become. In their bloodlust for Ralph, the tribe destroy their home and their society.

The island is therefore a **microcosm, a small version of a bigger world**.

Other critics suggest that it might also be a **macrocosm, a bigger version of the human character**.

'The symbolic encounter between Simon and the Lord of the Flies represents the conflict between good and evil as it occurs in every man. Analyse any individual and you find in him Ralph's tendency to adventure and common sense, Piggy's intellectualism, Simon's religious and poetic feelings, Roger's willingness to torture, Jack's appetite for destruction, Sam'n'Eric's desire to please other people. How these different elements are oriented in the individual decides his moral outlook. But they are present as impulses in the human personality. Thus at the same time that this is a novel exploring the disintegration of a society, it is also a study of the identity of man.'

F.Jackson.



Lord of the Flies - Character Chart

	Ralph	Jack	Piggy	Simon	Roger	Sam'n'Eric
"Type"	model boy	has to be in charge	thinker	mystic	sadist	amiable followers
What he wants	to be rescued	to hunt	to be rescued	to know the truth?	to hurt	to follow
Main Actions	forms democracy; blows the conch; lights signal fire	hunts; splits group; hunts down Ralph	feeds ideas to Ralph	talks to 'Lord of the Flies'; solves mystery of beast	kills Piggy	first to see the beast
Main emotions	very responsible; dreamer; easy-going	hatred; natural leader control freak?	serious; thoughtful; loyal	visionary brave	quiet; a 'loner'	no separate identities
At beginning	happy, excited by adventure	in charge of choir	worried and frightened	fainting	small, dark boy	carefree
At end	being hunted as animal	chief of savages	murdered	murdered	a savage torturer	savages

PLOT and SETTING CHART

1. Platform, Mountain Ralph assembles boys by blowing conch, is elected leader. He, Jack and Simon climb mountain.	2. Platform, Mountain Boys discuss plans, fears, climb mountain and light fire. Fire out of control and littl'un killed.	3. Jungle, Beach, Jungle. Jack hunts, Ralph builds shelter. Simon goes off to (butterflies) hiding place.	4. Beach, Mountain Jack kills pig but lets fire go out. Piggy's glasses' lens broken
5. Platform Ralph lectures the boys. 'Things are breaking up' Jack breaks up meeting	6. Mountain, Platform, Castle Rock Dead parachutist lands on mountain. Sam'n'Eric mistake him for beast. Ralph leads search to castle Rock.	7. Jungle, Mountain Boar charges into boys and escapes. Ralph, Roger and Jack climb mountain. See beast and flee in terror.	8. Beach, Jungle, Beach Jack splits with Ralph and takes hunters. They kill sow. Simon talks to Lord of the Flies. Ralph lights fire on beach.
9. Mountain Beach. STORM Simon solves identity of beast. Jack gives feast. Boys dance and kill Simon.	10. Beach, Castle Rock, Beach Ralph, Piggy and twins try to keep fire going. Jack's tribe in Castle Rock. They steal Piggy's glasses.	11. Beach, Castle Rock Ralph and co. go to Castle Rock for Piggy's glasses. Piggy murdered, twins captured. Ralph driven away.	12. Jungle, Castle Rock, Jungle, Beach Ralph hunted down by tribe. Tribe sets fire to island. Ship sees smoke and rescues the boys.