

The venturesome novel, *Lord of the Flies*, is an enchanting, audacious account that depicts the defects of society as the incorrigible nature of individuals when they are immature and without an overlooking authority. The author of the novel, William Golding, was born in Britain, which accounts for the English, cultured characters in the novel. After studying science at Oxford University for two years, he changed his emphasis as a major to English literature. When World War II broke out in 1939, Golding served in the Royal Navy for five years. The atrocities he witnessed changed his view about mankind's essential nature. He came to believe that there was a very dark and evil side to man, which accounts for the savage nature of the children in the novel. He said, "The war was unlike any other fought in Europe. It taught us not fighting, politics, or the follies of nationalism, but about the given nature of man." After the war he returned to teaching and wrote his first novel, *Lord of the Flies*, which was finally accepted for publication in 1954. In 1983, the novel received the Nobel Prize and the statement, "[His] books are very entertaining and exciting. . . . They have aroused an unusually great interest in professional literary critics (who find) deep strata of ambiguity and complication in Golding's work. . . ." (Nobel Prize committee) Some conceived the novel as bombastic and didactic. Kenneth Rexroth stated in the *Atlantic*, "Golding's novels are rigged. . . . The boys never come alive as real boys. . . ." Other critics see him as the greatest English writer of our time. In the *Critical Quarterly* in 1960, C.B. Cox deemed *Lord of the Flies* as "probably the most important novel to be published. . . in the 1950's."

The setting of the novel takes place on an island in the Pacific Ocean. The author never actually locates the island in the real world or states the exact time period. The author does state that the plane carrying the children had been shot down in a nuclear war, so the time period must be after the making and the use of nuclear weapons. Even though the location of the island is not definite, the author vividly describes the setting. Golding tells us that the island is tropical and shaped like a boat. At the low end are the jungle and the orchards, which rise up to the treeless and rocky mountain ridge. The beach, called the scar, is near the warm water lagoon. On the scar, where the boys hold their meetings, is a "natural platform of fallen trees." Far away is the fruit orchards which supply the boys with food. Inland from the lagoon is the jungle with pig trails and hanging vines. The island has a mountain that Ralph, Simon, and Jack climb, and from which

they are able to see the terrain. Finally, there is the castle at the other end of the island, which rises a hundred feet above the sea and becomes Jack's headquarters. Golding gives us a very strong sense of place, and the setting shapes the story's direction. At the outset the boys view the island as a paradise because it is lush and abundant with food. As the fear of the beast grows, however, it becomes a hell in which fire and fear prevail. Even though Golding does not clearly state the setting, a mental picture of the island is depicted throughout the novel.

The plot of the story begins when a group of British students' plane is shot down, and they crash on a tropical island. Ralph and Piggy are the first characters introduced, and they find a white conch shell. Ralph blows on the conch, and the other boys appear. Among them are Jack, Sam, Eric, Simon, and many other boys who are never given names. The group elects Ralph as their leader. When the conch calls again, they talk about a small boy's fear of a snakelike beast in the woods. Is there really such a beast? The boys can not agree. Ralph convinces everyone that they need a fire for a signal in case a ship passes the island, but the boys find it hard work keeping the fire going. Jack decides he no longer wants to be part of Ralph's group because he would rather hunt than worry about keeping the fire burning. He leaves with everyone except Ralph, Piggy, Sam, Eric, and Simon. In spite of their growing terror of the imagined beast, Jack leads his hunters into the jungle for the slaying of pigs. They place a pig's head on a stake, much like a primitive offering to the unknown beast. Then Simon wanders into the woods alone, has a seizure, and talks to the pig's head. In Simon's hallucination the head becomes the "Lord of the Flies". Then Simon, terrified and sickened, starts back to where the other boys are to tell them that the beast is a dead man who parachuted onto the island. When Simon appears, the boys kill him, mistaking him for the beast. The next night Jack and two hunters attack Ralph and Piggy and steal Piggy's glasses. Piggy and Ralph go to Jack to get back Piggy's glasses. Then the hunters hurl a giant boulder over a ledge, which demolishes the conch and kills Piggy. The next day Jack's tribe hunts Ralph. While running from the hunters, Ralph stumbles onto the beach and falls at the feet of an army officer. They are finally rescued, but Ralph can only weep "for the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart, and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy." (p.184)

The protagonist in the story is Ralph, a tall, blond twelve year old. He is

the first character Golding introduces in the novel. He blows on the conch shell to call the first assembly, and the boys elect him the leader. Ralph states, " I'm the chief then." (p.21)

Ralph is respected by all the boys until Jack becomes a separate leader of the hunters.

Ralph is physically strong and brave, and he depicts this when he leads explorations, looks for the beast, and tries to escape from Jack's tribe. Ralph becomes friendly with Piggy,

and the two of them refuse to adopt the new, less structured way of life that most the boys

on the island experience. Both of them are very firm in their belief of organization and

civilization, and they are the only ones not to succumb to Jack's savage ways.

Ralph tries

to play his leadership role the same way an adult would, but he struggles to maintain

order. He constantly urges the boys to keep the fire burning, and he always hopes to be

rescued. When Jack lets the fire go out, Ralph becomes irate and says to Jack, "You let the

fire out." (p.63) Ralph makes sure that shelters are built and maintained, people deposit

their wastes correctly, and that the coconuts are always full with water. Ralph, the

appointed leader, enforces civilization but struggles to maintain it.

The antagonist in the novel is Jack, a tall, thin, red-headed boy. He appears in the

novel as the leader of the boys' choir. During the first blowing of the conch and the first

assembly, Jack loses the election for chief. He and Ralph, the protagonist, initially are

amiable, and their relationship and attitudes remain almost the same. They both agree on

the need of fire, shelters, and meat. Jack voluntarily takes charge of the hunting. Initially,

he is not very successful, but with the help of his hunters, they are able to kill pigs. At first

Jack and his hunters do what they are asked, but as time goes on, they start to participate

in different activities and neglect those needed for the sake of the boys' salvation. They

start painting their faces when hunting and become obsessed with killing. At this point the

conflict between Ralph and Jack climaxes, and the structure of life on the island breaks

down. Jack and his hunters form a tribe of savage boys on the far side of the island.

Most of the boys follow Jack because they relish the idea of meat and fun but despise the

idea of doing work with Ralph. Over a period of time, all the boys become a member of

Jack's tribe except Piggy and Ralph. Jack becomes chief of his hunters, and they respect

him like a god. He and his tribe kill Simon because they mistake him for the beast, and

they kill Piggy by hitting him with a boulder. With no respect for human lives,

Jack and his tribe hunt Ralph. While running after Ralph, an army officer confronts them, and they are rescued. Jack, the leader of the savage hunters, is the antagonist to Ralph and civilization.

One of the many themes in the novel is that man is savage at heart, and he always ultimately reverts back to an evil and primitive nature. Contrary to the belief that man is innocent and society evil, the novels shows that laws, rules, policemen, and schools are necessary to keep the darker side of human nature in line. Golding depicts the reality of this theme when the confusion in the novel finally leads to a manhunt for Ralph. The reader realizes that despite the strong sense of British character and civility that has been instilled in the youth throughout their lives, the boys backpedal and show the underlying savage side existent in all humans. If a group of well-conditioned school boys can ultimately wind up committing various extreme travesties, one can imagine what adults, leaders of society, are capable of doing under the pressures of trying to maintain world relations. When Golding wrote the novel, he said he was "striving to move behind the conventional matter of the contemporary novel to a view of what man, or pre-man, is like when the facade of civilized behavior falls away." In a questionnaire Golding stated, "The theme is an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature.

The moral is that the shape of a society must depend on the ethical nature of the individual and not on any political system however apparently logical or respectable."

The main conflict in the novel is an internal struggle between man and his basic or inner nature. Realizing there are no adults, laws, rules, or authorities, the boys in the novel reside to their inner nature. This struggle that occurs within each boy creates a plethora of distinct conflicts. One contention derived from this conflict is an internal conflict between man and his imagination. The barbarous nature of the hunters put a pig's head on a stake as an offering to the beast. In Simon's internal, imaginary conflict, this head talks to him. This hallucination leads to his death. Man verses man, an external conflict, is another conflict derived from the contention between man and his basic nature. Because Jack and his tribe convert to their basic nature, it creates a conflict between the savage, Jack and his hunters, and the ones trying to keep order, Ralph and Piggy. This conflict becomes very intense and even results in death. This struggle brings about the stealing of the Piggy's glasses, the death of Piggy, and the manhunt for R

