



Lord of the Flies

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The Work

Lord of the Flies is a kind of parody of Robert Michael Ballantyne's *The Coral Island* (1858), a Robinson Crusoe-type story that was once popular with English boys. Nobel Prize-winning author William Golding's modern characters are schoolboys marooned on an island while fleeing the horrors of an unspecified nuclear war. In the absence of adult rules and institutions, their behavior grows increasingly uncivilized, until the dominant band actually begins killing boys. The novel concludes at the moment that the band is about to capture Ralph, the last civilized boy. The bloodthirsty chase is interrupted by the sudden appearance on the beach of a British naval officer, who thinks the boys are merely playing. An unspoken irony is the fact that the warship of the ostensibly civilized officer is itself in the midst of a deadly manhunt.

First published in 1954, *The Lord of the Flies* became an American campus favorite during the 1960's. Since that time it has been challenged in many school districts because of its graphic violence and occasionally profane language—but particularly because of its pessimistic view of human nature.

The novel has been adapted to film twice. In 1963 a black and white film version was made in Britain. A color version filmed in 1990 updated the story's setting and replaced the British public-school boys with young American military cadets.

Bibliography:

Baker, James, ed. *Critical Essays on William Golding*. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1988. Twelve wide-ranging essays by critics and part of Baker's interview with Golding. Includes Golding's Nobel Prize address.

Dick, Bernard F. *William Golding*. Rev. ed. Boston: Twayne, 1987. Contains a chronology of Golding's literary career.

Friedman, Lawrence S. *William Golding*. New York: Continuum, 1993. Sets *Lord of the Flies* in the context of Golding's entire body of work. The philosophical first chapter is especially useful in focusing on significant themes and concerns.

Gindin, James. *William Golding*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988. A biography and survey of Golding's literary career. Includes an enlightening comparison of *Lord of the Flies* with R. M. Ballantyne's nineteenth century novel, *The Coral Island*.

Reilly, Patrick. *"Lord of the Flies": Fathers and Sons*. Boston: Twayne, 1992. Defends the novel from charges of unrelieved despair.

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