



Lord of the Flies

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The boys quickly divide into factions. Ralph, handsome and easygoing, is elected chief, but Jack Merridew, leader of a group of choirboys, repeatedly challenges Ralph's authority. Piggy, a fat asthmatic boy and the most intelligent of all, must necessarily support Ralph; his unprepossessing appearance prevents his own election to a position of importance.

At first, the rules of the civilized world prevail, reflecting the boys' unqualified acceptance of adult forms. The boys call assemblies with a beautiful conch shell. They decide to build shelters and maintain a signal fire. Jack and the choirboys become hunters, and the division of labor seems complete.

Conflicts soon arise, however, just as they had in the adult world now presumably in great part destroyed. Jack smarts from Ralph's decisive election and is jealous of Piggy's intelligence. The "little'uns" have nightmares and believe they have seen a "beastie." Ralph's helpers spend their days swimming rather than constructing shelters. The hunters, on the trail of wild pig, let the signal fire go out just as there is hope of rescue. In anger, Jack strikes Piggy and breaks one of the lenses in Piggy's glasses, which were necessary to light the signal fire.

Tribalism soon prevails, and Jack emerges as chief by default rather than election. He offers the boys day hunts, night revels, and wild dances around blazing bonfires. Ralph and Piggy find themselves isolated from the rest. Both become victims of Jack's tyranny.

The novel, written in the wake of Hiroshima's destruction and at the height of the Cold War, reveals that the Leviathan, the beastie, exists in humanity. Given the opportunity, such evil shows itself.

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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