

Lord of the Flies: A Chapter-by-Chapter Summary

William Golding's first novel, published in 1954, tells the story of a group of English schoolboys marooned on a tropical island after their plane is shot down during a war. Without adult supervision, the boys initially attempt to establish order and a plan for rescue, but their innate savage instincts gradually take over, leading to chaos and tragedy.

This allegorical tale explores the darkness within human nature, the thin veneer of civilization, and mankind's inherent capacity for evil. As the boys descend into savagery, Golding reveals his belief that human beings are fundamentally flawed and that civilization merely masks, rather than eliminates, our primitive instincts.



Introduction and Historical Context

William Golding

Raised to be a scientist but drawn to literature, Golding's experiences in World War II, including the D-Day landing at Normandy, profoundly influenced his dark view of human nature. He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1983.

Historical Context

Written in the aftermath of World War II, the novel reflects a new pessimism about humanity's inherent goodness. The references to an atom bomb and "the Reds" place the story in the early Cold War era.

Literary Significance

Golding subverts the adventure story genre by showing boys who, rather than civilizing their island paradise, descend into savagery. Unlike *Robinson Crusoe* or *Swiss Family Robinson*, *Lord of the Flies* suggests humans are inherently barbaric.



Major Characters and Their Symbolic Roles



Ralph

The largest and most physically powerful boy who becomes the elected leader.

Despite his size, Ralph shows no desire to dominate others and prioritizes rescue and following rules. He symbolizes law, government, and civil society.



Piggy

The smartest boy but physically weak due to obesity and asthma.

He believes passionately in civilization and reasoning but is often ridiculed by the others. Piggy symbolizes science and rationality.



Jack

The head of his chorus who becomes leader of the hunters. Jack loves power and dominance, becoming increasingly savage as the story progresses.

He symbolizes mankind's love of power and the savage instinct within all humans.



Simon

A dreamy, dark-haired boy prone to fainting spells. The most insightful and

spiritually aware of the boys, Simon recognizes that the beast exists within them all. He

symbolizes the mystic or prophet who confronts the darkest aspects of human nature.



Chapters 1-2: Establishing Order

The Crash

A plane carrying British schoolboys crashes on a deserted tropical island during a war evacuation.

Ralph and Piggy meet first, discovering a conch shell which they use to summon the other survivors.



The First Assembly

Ralph is elected chief over Jack. To appease Jack, Ralph puts him in charge of the hunters. Ralph, Jack, and Simon explore the island, confirming they're alone and pushing a boulder off a cliff in a display of boyish camaraderie.



Rules and Fire

Ralph establishes the conch as a symbol of authority and the right to speak. A littleun claims to have seen a "beastie," which the older boys dismiss as a nightmare. The boys decide to build a signal fire, but in their excitement, they accidentally burn part of the forest.

These early chapters establish the boys' initial attempt to create a civilized society. The conch becomes a symbol of order and democracy, while the fire represents both their hope for rescue and their destructive potential. Already, the seeds of conflict between Ralph (civilization) and Jack (savagery) are being planted.



Chapters 3-4: Growing Tensions



Building Shelters

Weeks later, Ralph and Simon work on building huts while others play. Ralph grows frustrated with the lack of help, especially from Jack, who has become obsessed with hunting pigs.



Painted Faces

Jack begins painting his face as camouflage for hunting. The mask liberates him from shame and civilization's constraints. Roger throws stones near a littleun named Henry, deliberately missing but testing boundaries.



Missed Rescue

Jack's hunters let the signal fire go out while hunting. A ship passes without seeing them. Ralph is furious, but Jack is triumphant about killing his first pig. Jack hits Piggy, breaking one lens of his glasses.

The division between Ralph's focus on rescue and Jack's obsession with hunting deepens. Jack's painted face symbolizes his growing rejection of civilization, while the missed ship represents a crucial turning point where savagery begins to triumph over the desire for rescue and return to society.



Chapters 5-6: Fear Takes Hold



The Beast Emerges

Ralph calls an assembly to address the boys' growing fears and their failure to maintain the fire and build shelters. The littleuns express increasing terror of a beast. Simon suggests the beast might be within them, but no one understands.



The Dead Parachutist

During an aerial battle, a dead parachutist lands on the mountain. Samneric, on fire duty, mistake the corpse for the beast when wind makes the parachute billow. They flee in terror to report what they've seen.



Castle Rock

The boys organize an expedition to hunt the beast. They discover Castle Rock, which Jack sees as a potential fort. Ralph insists they continue to the mountain to relight the signal fire, but darkness falls before they can reach it.

Fear becomes a powerful force driving the boys' actions. The beast, initially dismissed as childish imagination, takes physical form with the dead parachutist. Jack begins to use this fear to challenge Ralph's leadership, while Simon's insight about the beast being within them goes unheeded.

Chapters 7-8: The Beast Within

The Hunt



Ralph joins a hunt and experiences the thrill of striking a boar with his spear. The boys engage in a ritual dance, pretending to kill Robert, foreshadowing their growing bloodlust.

Confronting the Beast



Ralph, Jack, and Roger climb the mountain at night and glimpse the dead parachutist, confirming their belief in the beast's existence. They flee in terror.

Lord of the Flies



Jack forms his own tribe after failing to overthrow Ralph. His hunters kill a sow and impale its head on a stake as an offering to the beast. Simon, alone in his secret glade, hallucinates that the pig's head—the Lord of the Flies—speaks to him, revealing it is the beast within them all.

These chapters mark a crucial turning point as Jack breaks away to form his own tribe based on hunting and ritual. Even Ralph feels the pull of savage instincts during the hunt. The Lord of the Flies reveals the truth that Simon already suspected—the beast is not an external threat but the darkness within each boy.



Chapters 9-10: Descent into Savagery

Simon's Discovery

Simon discovers the truth about the "beast"—it's just a dead parachutist. He heads down the mountain to tell the others.

Denial and Division

The next day, Ralph and Piggy try to deny their participation in Simon's murder, calling it an "accident." Most boys have now joined Jack's tribe at Castle Rock, leaving only Ralph, Piggy, and Samneric.



The Feast and Dance

Jack's tribe holds a feast and performs their hunting ritual dance. Ralph and Piggy join them, drawn by hunger and a desire to maintain unity.

Simon's Death

As Simon emerges from the forest to share his discovery, the frenzied boys mistake him for the beast and kill him in their ritual dance. His body washes out to sea.

Simon's death marks the boys' complete surrender to savagery. Even Ralph and Piggy, the symbols of civilization, participate in the murder, showing how thin the veneer of civilization truly is. Afterward, they cannot face what they've done, demonstrating how civilization depends on denying the beast within.

Chapters 11-12: The Fall of Civilization

Piggy's Death

Ralph, Piggy, and Samneric confront Jack's tribe at Castle Rock to reclaim Piggy's glasses. Roger deliberately rolls a boulder that kills Piggy and shatters the conch shell.



The Hunt for Ralph

Jack declares Ralph an enemy and orders his tribe to hunt him down. Samneric are tortured into joining Jack's tribe and revealing Ralph's hiding place.



Island Ablaze

The tribe sets the island on fire to flush Ralph out. As Ralph flees for his life, the massive fire attracts a passing naval ship.



Ironic Salvation

The fire meant to kill Ralph becomes their salvation, attracting a naval officer who will return them to civilization.



Civilization Collapsed

The destruction of the conch and Piggy's death symbolize the complete collapse of civilization on the island.

Ralph, the last representative of order and democracy, becomes the hunted prey in a final descent into savagery.



The Rescue and Return to Civilization



The Naval Officer

As Ralph runs onto the beach with Jack's hunters in pursuit, he encounters a British naval officer whose ship was attracted by the smoke from the burning island. The officer is shocked to learn that British schoolboys could descend into such savagery.

When asked who's in charge, Ralph claims leadership, while Jack remains silent. The officer jokes about their "fun and games," unaware of the deaths and horror that have occurred.

The novel's ending is both a rescue and a harsh awakening. The boys are saved from killing Ralph, but they must now face what they've become. The naval officer's discomfort and his warship remind us that the adult world, despite its veneer of civilization, harbors the same capacity for violence that the boys displayed on the island.



The Return to Reality

Confronted with an adult and the return of civilization, the boys suddenly revert to children. Ralph begins to 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."

The officer, uncomfortable with this display of emotion, looks away toward his warship—ironically, another symbol of organized violence and the adult world's own savagery.

Major Themes in Lord of the Flies



Human Nature

Golding suggests that humans are inherently savage and that civilization merely suppresses rather than eliminates this savagery. When social constraints disappear, our primitive instincts emerge.



Civilization vs. Savagery

The novel portrays civilization as a fragile construct that can quickly collapse when faced with fear and the lure of power. The conch and signal fire represent order, while the painted faces and ritual dances represent savagery.



The Beast

The beast symbolizes the evil inherent in human nature. Though the boys believe it's an external threat, Simon discovers the truth—"maybe it's only us." The Lord of the Flies confirms this when it tells Simon, "I'm part of you."



Power and Authority

The novel explores different types of leadership: Ralph's democratic approach based on rules and the common good versus Jack's authoritarian style based on fear and immediate gratification.



Key Symbols and Their Meanings

These powerful symbols in *Lord of the Flies* represent the novel's central themes of civilization versus savagery.



The Conch Shell

Symbolizes order, democracy, and civilization. Whoever holds it has the right to speak. Its destruction marks the end of civilization on the island.



Piggy's Glasses

Represent science, technology, and intellectual power. They create fire, both for rescue (civilization) and for cooking meat (survival).



The Lord of the Flies

The pig's head on a stake that speaks to Simon, revealing itself as the beast within all humans. The name is a translation of Beelzebub, a devil or Satan.



These symbols work together to reinforce Golding's dark vision of human nature. The island paradise is corrupted by the boys' presence, just as the Garden of Eden was corrupted by original sin. The destruction of symbols of civilization—the conch, Piggy's glasses—parallels the boys' descent into savagery.