



Lord of the flies

By William Golding

First published 1954

Genre & subject

Classical Fiction

Synopsis

A plane crashes on a desert island and the only survivors, a group of schoolboys, assemble on the beach and wait to be rescued. By day they inhabit a land of bright fantastic birds and dark blue seas, but at night their dreams are haunted by the image of a terrifying beast. As the boys' delicate sense of order fades, so their childish dreams are transformed into something more primitive, and their behaviour starts to take on a murderous, savage significance. *Lord of the Flies* is one of the most celebrated and widely read of modern classics.

Author biography

British novelist William Golding wrote the critically acclaimed classic *Lord of the Flies*, and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1983.

William Golding was born on September 19, 1911, in Saint Columb Minor, Cornwall, England. He was raised in a 14th-century house next door to a graveyard. His mother, Mildred, was an active suffragette who fought for women's right to vote. His father, Alex, worked as a schoolmaster.

William received his early education at the school his father ran, Marlborough Grammar School. When William was just 12 years old, he attempted, unsuccessfully, to write a novel. A frustrated child, he found an outlet in bullying his peers. Later in life, William would describe his childhood self as a brat, even going so far as to say, "I enjoyed hurting people."

After primary school, William went on to attend Brasenose College at Oxford University. His father hoped he would become a scientist, but William opted to study English literature instead. In 1934, a year before he graduated, William published his first work, a book of poetry aptly entitled *Poems*. The collection was largely overlooked by critics. After college, Golding worked in settlement houses and the theatre for a time. Eventually, he decided to follow in his father's footsteps. In 1935 Golding took a position teaching English and philosophy at Bishop Wordsworth's School in Salisbury. Golding's experience teaching unruly young boys would later serve as inspiration for his novel *Lord of the Flies*.

Although passionate about teaching from day one, in 1940 Golding temporarily abandoned the profession to join the Royal Navy and fight in World War II. In 1945, after World War II had ended, Golding went back to teaching and writing.

Discussion starters

- Why do you think Golding named his novel *Lord of the Flies*? In the novel, what is the Lord of the Flies? What does it mean? What does it symbolise?
- In his 1982 essay *A Moving Target*, Golding stated that the theme of *Lord of the Flies* is "grief, sheer grief, grief, grief." What might he have meant by this? How is grief

present in the novel? What are some examples of it? Do you agree or disagree with Golding's statement? What *is* the major theme of the novel?

- Golding's *Lord of the Flies* is most often read as an allegory, meaning that characters and events represent complex ideas and concepts. *Lord of the Flies* is especially noteworthy for its allegorical commentary on different aspects of human nature — for example, an allegory of evil inherent in each individual rather than in society as a whole. What are some other allegories that are found in the novel?
- When choosing a leader, the boys initially vote for Ralph not because he has demonstrated leadership skills but because of his charisma and arbitrary possession of the conch. Later they desert him to join Jack's tribe because of Jack's way of life, with the war paint and ritualised dance. What is the difference between Ralph's and Jack's leadership? How does the way Ralph lead contrast to the way Jack leads? How would you characterise each form of leadership?
- The conch plays a significant role in the novel. What does the conch symbolise?
- Piggy, Ralph, Jack, and Simon are perhaps the four most important characters in the novel. But they're so different from each other. What does each of them represent? How do their actions on the island and their outlook on life differ from each other? What type of human nature does each of them represent?
- In Chapter 3, Piggy asks the boys "How can you expect to be rescued if you don't put first things first and act proper?" What does Piggy mean by "act proper?" Why does he feel acting properly will bring them success in being rescued? Contrast this sentiment to the actual reason a rescue ship spots their smoke signal.
- In Chapter 4, who or what is being described with this phrase: "There was the brilliant world of hunting, tactics, fierce exhilaration, skill, and there was the world of longing and baffled common-sense"? What does this mean? How do the two worlds represent facets of humanity?
- Why does Simon's role as a visionary make him an outcast in the group? What other visionaries have been outcasts in their societies?
- How does Golding use colour to link Jack with the Lord of the Flies? Are there other instances of Golding using colour to link characters or provide symbolism?
- Ralph says in Chapter 12, "there was that indefinable connection between himself and Jack; who therefore would never let him alone; never." What is that connection? How does it develop and what does it signify?

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