



*Journal of Advances and  
Scholarly Researches in  
Allied Education*

*Vol. V, Issue No. IX,  
January-2013, ISSN 2230-  
7540*

## **A STUDY ON THE NOVEL 'LORD OF THE FLIES'**

AN  
INTERNATIONALLY  
INDEXED PEER  
REVIEWED &  
REFEREED JOURNAL

# A Study on the Novel 'Lord of the Flies'

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**Abstract –** *Lord of the Flies* is a 1954 dystopian novel by Nobel Prize-winning English author William Golding about a group of British boys stuck on an uninhabited island who try to govern themselves with disastrous results. Its stances on the already controversial subjects of human nature and individual welfare versus the common good earned it position 68 on the American Library Association's list of the 100 most frequently challenged books of 1990–1999.<sup>[2]</sup> The novel is a reaction to the youth novel *The Coral Island* by R. M. Ballantyne.

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## INTRODUCTION

Published in 1954, *Lord of the Flies* was Golding's first novel. Although it was not a great success at the time—selling fewer than 3,000 copies in the United States during 1955 before going out of print—it soon went on to become a best-seller, and by the early 1960s was required reading in many schools and colleges. It has been adapted to film twice in English, in 1963 by Peter Brook and 1990 by Harry Hook, and once in Filipino (1976).

In 2005 the novel was chosen by *TIME* magazine as one of the 100 best English-language novels from 1923 to 2005.<sup>[3]</sup> It was awarded a place on both lists of Modern Library 100 Best Novels, reaching number 41 on the editor's list, and 25 on the reader's list. In 2003, the novel was listed at number 70 on the BBC's survey *The Big Read*.<sup>[4]</sup>

The book indicates that it takes place in the midst of an unspecified nuclear war. Some of the marooned characters are ordinary students, while others arrive as a musical choir under an established leader. Most (with the exception of the choirboys) appear never to have encountered one another before. The book portrays their descent into savagery; left to themselves in a paradisiacal country, far from modern civilisation, the well-educated children regress to a primitive state.

At an allegorical level, the central theme is the conflicting human impulses toward civilization—living by rules, peacefully and in harmony—and toward the will to power. Themes include the tension between groupthink and individuality, between rational and emotional reactions, and between morality and immorality. How these play out, and how different people feel the influences of these, form a major subtext of *Lord of the Flies*.

## PLOT

In the midst of a wartime evacuation, a British plane crashes on or near an isolated island in a remote region of the Pacific Ocean. The only survivors are boys in their middle childhood or preadolescence. Two boys—the fair-haired Ralph and an overweight, bespectacled boy reluctantly nicknamed "Piggy"—find a conch, which Ralph uses as a horn to call all the survivors to one area. Due largely to the fact that Ralph appears responsible for bringing all the survivors together, he is quickly elected their "chief", though he does not receive the votes of the members of a boys' choir, led by the red-headed Jack Merridew. Ralph asserts two primary goals: to have fun and to maintain a smoke signal that could alert passing ships to their presence on the island. The boys declare that whoever holds the conch shall also be able to speak at their formal gatherings and receive the attentive silence of the larger group.

Jack organises his choir group into a hunting party responsible for discovering a food source; Ralph, Jack, and a quiet, dreamy boy named Simon soon form a loose troika of leaders. Though he is Ralph's only confidant, Piggy is quickly made an outcast by his fellow "biguns" (older boys) and becomes an unwilling source of laughs for the other children. Simon, in addition to supervising the project of constructing shelters, feels an instinctive need to protect the "littluns" (younger boys).

The semblance of order quickly deteriorates as the majority of the boys turn idle, giving little aid in building shelters, and begin to develop paranoid ideas about the island, referring to a supposed monster, the "beast", which they believe to exist on the island. Ralph insists that no such beast exists, but Jack, who has started a power struggle with Ralph, gains control of the discussion by boldly promising to kill the beast. At one point, Jack summons all of his hunters to hunt down a wild pig, drawing away those assigned to maintain the signal fire. A ship travels by the island, but without the boys' smoke signal to alert the ship's crew, the ship continues by without stopping.

Angered by the failure of the boys to attract potential rescuers, Ralph considers relinquishing his position, but is convinced not to do so by Piggy.

While Jack schemes against Ralph, twins Sam and Eric, now assigned to the maintenance of the signal fire, see the corpse of a fighter pilot and his parachute in the dark. Mistaking the corpse for the beast, they run to the cluster of shelters that Ralph and Simon have erected and warn the others. This unexpected meeting again raises tensions between Jack and Ralph. Shortly thereafter, Jack decides to lead a party to the other side of the island, where a mountain of stones, later called Castle Rock, forms a place where he claims the beast resides. Only Ralph and Jack's sadistic supporter Roger agree to go; Ralph turns back shortly before the other two boys. When they arrive at the shelters, Jack calls an assembly and tries to turn the others against Ralph, asking for them to remove him from his position. Receiving little support, Jack, Roger, and another boy leave the shelters to form their own tribe. This tribe lures in recruits from the main group by providing a feast of cooked pig and its members begin to paint their faces and enact bizarre rituals including sacrifices to the beast.

Simon, likely an epileptic,<sup>[5][6]</sup> wanders off on his own to think and finds a severed pig head, left by Jack as an offering to the beast. Simon envisions the pig head, now swarming with scavenging flies, as the "Lord of the Flies" and believes that it is talking to him. The pig's head tells Simon that the boys themselves "created" the beast and claims that the real beast is inside them all. Simon also locates the dead parachutist who had been mistaken for the beast, and is the sole member of the group to recognise that the "monster" is merely a human corpse. Simon, hoping to tell others of the discovery, finds Jack's tribe in the island's interior during a ritual dance and, mistaken for the beast, is killed by the frenzied boys. Ralph, Piggy, Sam, and Eric feel guilty that they, too, participated in this murderous "dance."

Jack and his band of "savages" decide that they should possess Piggy's glasses, the only means of starting a fire on the island, so they raid Ralph's camp, confiscate the glasses, and return to their abode on Castle Rock. Ralph, now deserted by most of his supporters, journeys to Castle Rock to confront Jack and secure the glasses. Taking the conch and accompanied only by Piggy, Sam, and Eric, Ralph finds the tribe and demands that they return the valuable object. Turning against Ralph, the tribe takes Sam and Eric captive while Roger drops a boulder from his vantage point above, killing Piggy and shattering the conch. Ralph manages to escape, but Sam and Eric are tortured until they agree to join Jack's tribe.

The following morning, Jack orders his tribe to begin a manhunt for Ralph. Jack's savages set fire to the forest while Ralph desperately weighs his options for survival. Following a long chase, most of the island is

consumed in flames, drawing the attention of a passing naval vessel. Ralph suddenly runs into an officer from the warship and bursts into tears over the death of Piggy and the "end of innocence". The other children arrive and, now realizing what they have done, also spontaneously erupt into sobs. The officer awkwardly turns away to give them a moment to pull themselves together.

Roger, at first, is a simple "bigun" who is having fun during his stay on the island. Along with Maurice, he destroys the sand castles made by three small children. While Maurice feels guilt for kicking sand into a child's eye, Roger begins to throw stones at one of the boys. The book states that Roger threw the stones to miss, and felt the presence of civilization and society preventing him from harming the children.<sup>[22]</sup> Later, once he feels that all aspects of conventional society are gone, he is left alone to his animal urges. During a pig hunt, Roger shoves a sharpened stick up the animal's rectum while it is still alive.<sup>[23]</sup> He kills Piggy with a boulder that was no longer aimed to miss, and becomes the executioner and torturer of Jack's tribe. He also tortured Sam and Eric into joining Jack's tribe. In the final hunt for Ralph at the end of the novel, Roger is armed with "a stick sharpened at both ends,"<sup>[24]</sup> indicating his intentions of killing Ralph and offering his head as a sacrifice to the "beast". He represents the person who enjoys hurting others, and is only restrained by the rules of society.

Simon is a character who represents peace and tranquillity and positivity. He is often seen wandering off by himself in a dreamy state and is prone to fits of fainting and hallucination, likely epileptic in nature. He is in tune with the island, and often experiences extraordinary sensations when listening to its sounds. He loves the nature of the island. He is positive about the future. He has an extreme aversion to the pig's head, the "Lord of the Flies", which derides and taunts Simon in a hallucination. After this experience, Simon emerges from the forest to tell the others that the "beast" that fell from the sky is actually a deceased parachutist caught on the mountain. He is brutally killed by the boys, who ironically mistake him for the beast and kill him in their "dance" in which they "ripped and tore at the beast". It is implied that Ralph, Piggy, Sam and Eric partake in the killing. The final words that the Lord of the Flies had said to Simon vaguely predicted that his death was about to occur in this manner. Earlier in the novel Simon himself also predicts his own death when he tells Ralph that he will "get back all right",<sup>[26]</sup> implying that, of the two of them, only Ralph will be saved. Simon's death represents the loss of truth, innocence, and common sense. Simon is most commonly interpreted as a Christ figure because of his ability to see through misconception, unlike the rest of the boys, and the events he experiences in the book that parallel those of Jesus' life.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

The eponymous Lord of the Flies is a pig's head that has been cut off by Jack, put on a stick sharpened at both ends, stuck in the ground and left as an offering to the "beast". Created out of fear, the Lord of the Flies is the remnant of a mother sow who, though at one time loving, and innocent, has now become a manically smiling, bleeding image of horror. Near the end of the book, while Ralph is being hunted down, he strikes this twice in one moment of blind anger, causing it to crack and fall on the ground with a grin "now six feet across".<sup>[32]</sup> The name "Lord of the Flies" is a literal translation of Beelzebub.

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