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Sample MonkeyNotes

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Lord of the Flies

by

William Golding

1954



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by TheBestNotes Staff

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The action of the novel has been set sometime in the future. A planeload of boys has been evacuated from England, where a world war is being fought against 'the reds' (essentially World War III or an un-named future conflict). Please remember that this is fiction. After their departure, an atom bomb is thought to have fallen on England and destroyed their civilization. The plane carrying the boys is.....

CHARACTER LIST

Major Characters

Ralph - a handsome fair-haired boy of about 12 years of age. He is the son of a naval officer and a born leader. As the initial elected leader of the group of boys, he tries to remain..... "

Jack Merridew - a self-centered twelve-year old boy who is a contrast to Ralph. Both impulsive and aggressive, he is a tall, thin boy with red hair. At the beginning of the book, he is

Piggy - a friend of Ralph who supports the leader until the end. He is short, fat, clumsy, physically unfit, and suffering from asthma. He is also an orphan. He wears thick spectacles and is.....

Simon - a small, timid, skinny boy with straight, coarse hair. He keeps to himself, thinks deeply about things, wanders alone in the jungle, and has trouble communicating. He discovers the

Minor Characters

Sam and Eric - identical twins who are always found together. They side with.....

Roger - a sadistic older boy who becomes Jack's right hand when he is.....

Maurice, Stanley, Robert - Jack's hunters.

The Choirboys - Singers who are led by and are loyal to Jack.

Littluns - the little boys of the group between the ages of four and six. They have no.....

The Naval Officer - A British seaman that appears at the end of

CONFLICT

Two conflicts exist in the book, one on the literal level and one on the symbolic level. Both are outlined below.

LITERAL CONFLICT

Protagonist - The protagonist is Ralph, a rational boy who is elected the leader by the others. He tries to keep the boys civilized and plans ways to get them rescued.

Antagonist - The antagonist is Jack, who is Ralph's rival. Since he wants to be.....

Climax - When Jack forms his own tribe, his followers turn savage. They forget their civilized ways and behave like animals. To show their savagery, they raid Ralph's group and steal Piggy's

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Outcome - The story ends in tragedy. Ralph is defeated by Jack, who succeeds in taking most of the boys away from Ralph and into his own savage tribe. As a result of Jack's.....

SYMBOLIC CONFLICT

Protagonist - The protagonist is the group of boys who, in their diversity of.....

Antagonist - The antagonist is man's base state of savagery and evil, as

Climax - The climax occurs when evil and savagery overcome the rationality of the boys, and.....

Outcome - The symbolic outcome of the story is tragic. The boys revert to a base state of evil and savagery. They ignore the rational advice of.....

SHORT PLOT/CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

The novel begins with Ralph and Piggy meeting on the beach. They are part of a group of boys who were being evacuated from England due to the war and whose plane has crashed on a deserted island. Soon the whole group meets together, and Ralph is elected as their leader. They find a conch shell on the beach, and Ralph uses it as a symbol of his authority. Jack, the head of the choirboys who wants to be the leader, is made chief of the hunters, who arm themselves with wooden spears and utter war cries as they chase pigs.

Ralph, in his rationality, decides to light a fire on the mountaintop to serve as a signal to passing ships. Piggy's glasses are used to start the fire, and Jack's hunters are put in charge of keeping it burning. But the strong wind sets the whole forest on the mountaintop on fire. One of the small boys is lost in the blaze; it is the first foreshadowing that civilized life, like the fire, may grow out of control.

For the most part, life is aimless on the island. The smallest boys, called "littluns", stay together, play, eat too much, and give way to their fear in the nighttime, often crying loudly. Most of the older boys spend their time bathing in the lagoon, sleeping in the shade, or eating the plentiful fruit available in the jungle. Ralph spends much of his time building shelters to protect the boys, while Jack and his tribe are constantly off on a hunt. They are so involved in their pursuit of savagery that they even let the fire go out and miss being rescued by a passing ship. As time passes, all the boys become dirty and unkempt, an outward symbol of their interior disintegration.

After Jack kills the first pig, they all have a feast. A mock hunt is enacted round the fire with wild dancing and chanting. They even offer the pig's head as an offering to the Beast, which the boys are certain exists on the island. The Pig's head is soon covered with flies, and it becomes the "Lord of the Flies", a symbol of the boys' evil savagery.

One night there is a plane fight over the island while the boys are asleep. A dead parachutist lands on the island and gets entangled in the trees. When the wind blows, the parachute flaps and balloons, and the dead airman's head bobs up and down. Sam and Eric see this terrifying figure, and they.....

THEMES

Major Theme

Lord of the Flies is governed by the idea that man is a fallen creature. Golding insists that **evil is inherent in man**; it is a terrifying force which mankind must recognize and control. 'Civilized' British boys land on a deserted island but soon degenerate into savages. The children enjoy the freedom away from the restrictions of

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adults, but the freedom soon turns into a nightmare and results in the killing of several boys. Individualism replaces comradeship and leads to complete destruction. That children are.....

MOOD

In the beginning the mood is one of joy and freedom as the boys discover an island paradise without adults. The mood, however, slowly turns to one of darkness and.....

BACKGROUND INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY

William Golding was born on September 19, 1911, in Cornwall, England. His mother worked with the suffragettes, and his father was a schoolteacher. Golding was educated at Marlborough Grammar School and Brasemore College, Oxford. During college, Golding gave up his studies in science to pursue English Literature. After completing school, he dabbled in poetry and theater and was a grammar school teacher at Bishop Wordsworth School, Salisbury, when World War II broke out. *Lord of the Flies*, his first novel published in 1954 (and later filmed in 1963), met with popular and critical success. In the book it was apparent that the evil perpetrated during the war years influenced the author. He was a prolific writer, and his books include *The Inheritors*, 1955, *Pincher Martin*, 1956; *Free Fall*, 1959; *The Spire*, 1964; *The Pyramid*, 1967; *Darkness Visible*, 1979, *Rites of Passage*, 1980 (Booker Prize); *The Paper Men*, 1984; *Close Quarters*, 1987; *Fire Down Below*, 1989. His essays include "The Hot Gates", 1965, and "A Moving Target", 1987. He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1983 and was knighted in 1988.

Out of all his books, Golding's first novel, *Lord of the Flies*, is probably the best known and most often read. E.M. Forster recognized the book's significance and called it.....

LITERARY/HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Lord of the Flies was published in 1954, shortly after the end of World War II. As a British citizen during the war, Golding knew about the cruelties of combat. England was hard hit during the fighting, and its citizens worried about total destruction. By the time the novel was written, the first atomic.....

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES

CHAPTER 1 - The Sound of the Conch

Summary

The story begins with two boys, Ralph and Piggy, coming out onto the beach from the dense jungle where they have met. The reader realizes from their conversation that they are on an island although they are yet to confirm it. They belong to a group of boys who were being flown to some unknown destination, but their plane has crashed. The pilot of the plane is missing, and there seems to be no grown-ups on the island.

Ralph and Piggy wonder where the other boys could be. They find a conch shell and blow on it, sending out a loud and blaring sound. All of the other children soon start to appear. First to enter is a party of boys marching in step in two parallel lines. They are all dressed in strange, but similar, clothing. They are choirboys, and their leader is Jack Merridew. He is authoritative and very rude to Piggy; after a few short questions, he seems to size up the situation. Jack wishes to be the chief, especially since he is already head of the choirboys. The boys, however, decide to have a vote; everyone except the choir votes for Ralph as their leader. Realizing Jack's anger at being defeated, Ralph offers him the position of Head of the Hunters.

Ralph, Jack and Simon decide to explore the island while the others are asked to wait on the beach. Jack rudely puts down piggy when he wishes to join them. All three boys start off briskly, happy to be in each other's company. They reach the end of the island, which has jagged rocks stretching towards the mountains. They

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have to move in and out of the jungle to reach the rocky paths leading upward. They move towards the summit, pushing a huge rock over the edge of the cliff on the way, an event that clearly foreshadows the boulder that pushes Piggy over the cliff to his death on the rocks below.

The view from the square mountaintop is breathtaking. It confirms that they are on an uninhabited island. Ralph proudly keeps proclaiming their ownership of the land. On their way back down, they come across a piglet caught in the creepers. Jack draws his knife, ready to kill the pig, but he stops. He is obviously a civilized boy with no stomach for the blood letting. The pig takes advantage of the moment and runs away. Jack excuses himself by saying that he was choosing the right place to stab it and that the next time he would definitely kill. The boys come out of the jungle and move towards the boys waiting on the beach.

Notes

In the first chapter, the scene is set for the action of the novel. A plane carrying schoolboys has crashed on the island. Ironically, the boys were escaping a nuclear war and being flown to freedom. The boys, aged roughly between five and twelve, are now marooned on the island. In this opening chapter, they feel they have reached paradise, for the island is uninhabited and free of adult rules and supervision. Ralph, a handsome, trim, and athletic boy of twelve, is particularly overjoyed to note that there are no adults around and to see the beauty of the island. He sheds his clothes and enters the lagoon to bathe. This shedding of clothes is symbolic of the shedding of civilization.

The boys are introduced, one by one, as they gather on the beach. The first person Ralph meets is Piggy. Appropriately nicknamed and in contrast to Ralph, Piggy is fat, clumsy, and not very physically fit. He also wears thick glasses, being almost blind, and has asthma. In spite of his physical limitation, Piggy is very good-natured and extremely rational. He immediately senses the gravity of the situation and is eager to locate other survivors. Piggy is also the one that spies the conch shell on the beach and suggests that Ralph blow it in an effort to call the other stranded boys. Ralph, a rational boy himself, does not take an immediate liking to his first island acquaintance.

Jack and his troop of choirboys are next introduced. Wearing black capes and caps, they march on to the beach in military style. Aggressive and demanding, Jack immediately asserts his authority and takes his place beside Ralph. The protagonist and antagonist are, thus, brought together in the opening pages of the book and depicted as opposites in nature. Jack represents the world of hunting, tactics, and skill; Ralph represents common sense and sensitivity to the natural world. The reader senses an immediate rivalry between them.

When all of the boys discuss their situation, they quickly realize that they need a leader. Ralph is elected, probably because he has blown the conch and called the boys together. The new leader, sensitive to the needs of others, recognizes Jack's disappointment over not being selected and appoints him as Head of the Hunters. This appointment, along with his bullying of Piggy, makes Jack feel better. As Jack torments Piggy, Ralph realizes that he has been inconsiderate of the boy as well; he tries to apologize to Piggy and be more friendly to him.

Ralph tells the others to wait on the beach while he, Jack, and Simon (another choirboy who is quiet and shy) go off to explore the island and search for inhabitants. It is obvious that the three boys, at this point in the book, enjoy one another's company and the freedom they have found. As they play games in the jungle and climb the mountain, they seem to bond with the beauty of the island and one another.

It is significant to note that the trio's first encounter with a pig will significantly contrast to later scenes of the hunters living for "the kill". When Jack spies the piglet caught in the undergrowth, he brings out his knife in

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readiness, but something stops him from killing the pig. He is obviously still held back by the laws of the civilized world he has left behind and, as a youth, has no natural instinct for the hunt and its brutality and bloodiness. It is also important to note that in the first chapter the conch shell becomes a symbol of authority and order. Ralph uses it to call the boys together and displays it to show his leadership. Towards the end of the novel, when Piggy is crushed and killed, the conch shell is also crushed. Its destruction symbolizes the end of order and the breaking up of civilization on the island.

CHAPTER 2 - Fire on the Mountain

Summary

Ralph calls another meeting by blowing the conch. When all the children are assembled, he tells them that they are definitely on an uninhabited island, but there is an abundance of fruit and other things to eat. He explains that since there are no grown-ups, they will have to look after themselves. He assures them that if they remain calm, they can survive until they are rescued. Jack joins in by mentioning the pig, and Ralph adds that they need hunters to get meat. Ralph declares that they need to have some rules, and Jack agrees excitedly. The first rule relates to the conch. It is identified as the sign of authority, and only the one holding it is allowed to speak.

Piggy tries to make everyone realize the gravity of their situation, but no one seems prepared to be serious about being stranded on the beautiful island paradise. Their attention is diverted by a shy young boy who mentions a snake-thing, a "beastie" he has seen in the woods. Ralph and the older boys try to reassure him and explain he has probably had a nightmare. Many of the boys, however, start feeling uneasy.

The topic of their being rescued comes up again. The boys decide to build a fire signal on the top of the mountain to attract the attention of some passing ship or airplane. In sudden excitement at the idea, all the boys run up the hill leaving only Ralph and Piggy on the beach. Piggy is quite disgusted with their childish behavior. While Ralph rushes after the others, Piggy follows slowly.

On the mountaintop, the children enthusiastically collect dry and rotten wood. Once the pile is ready, they realize they have no matches to light the fire. Jack suggests using Piggy's glasses and rudely snatches them off his face. By focusing the sunlight through the thick lenses, he lights the fire. The rotten wood turns into a temporary inferno that is fanned by the wind; soon the whole mountaintop is ablaze. Piggy once again bemoans the senseless haste of the boys; they refuse to listen and mock him. After the fire has died down, the boys hold a meeting on the mountaintop, and it is decided that Jack's hunters will be responsible for keeping the fire burning. Piggy points out that the little boy with the mulberry mark on his face, the one who previously mentioned the "beastie", is missing. The boys are filled with fear and shame that he may perhaps have died in the fire.

Notes

At the start of the second chapter, an atmosphere of freedom and merriment continues, but the rational Ralph sees the need of establishing a sense of order amongst the boys. He states that there needs to be some rules, a fact that excites authoritarian Jack. He has visions of a police state where he can punish those who break the rules. The other boys are much more interested in adventure than rules.

It is also the rational Ralph who sees the need to build a fire signal at the top of the mountain. In childish excitement over the adventure of building a fire, all the boys rush off leaving the two sensible characters, Piggy and Ralph, on the beach. Piggy bemoans the reckless nature of the other boys to his friend and leader. On the mountaintop, the dictatorial Jack takes charge. He rudely grabs the glasses (which are a symbol of intelligence and civilization) from Piggy's face and ironically uses them to start the fire (which is a primitive element). When the rational Piggy tries to warn the children about being frivolous with the fire, they refuse to listen to his

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wisdom and openly mock him. The result of their irresponsibility is a fire raging out of control and a dead child burned by the blaze.

In this chapter, the author introduces two emotions that interrupt the children's fun and games. A shy little boy states he has seen a beast in the woods, a foreshadowing of things to come. (Ironically, it is this little boy that is burned to death in the fire on the mountaintop.) Even though the older boys tell the child it was only a nightmare, FEAR is introduced to the group, and their adventure seems to fade a bit. As the story develops, the fear grows and the boys begin to see the beast everywhere -- except in the place of its origin, the human heart. The second emotion is SHAME. When they learn the boy with the mulberry mark has died due to their irresponsibility in building and managing the fire, the boys feel terrible but refuse to openly accept responsibility.

By the end of the chapter, the savage element has been introduced in the boy's behavior. The creeping plants have turned into writhing snakes in the fire, and Eden (or unspoiled paradise) is destroyed.....

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Ralph - Ralph is the protagonist of the novel who at first is overjoyed to be on a tropical island free from adult restraints. To express his excitement, he stands on his head, foreshadowing the topsy-turvy nature of things to come. By nature, he is an innocent, mild-tempered boy who accepts leadership when it is thrust on him. He serves as a democratic leader who tries to keep the boys together on the island and uses a conch shell to mildly show his authority. He thinks of building shelters to protect them and a signal fire for their rescue. He befriends Piggy, the fat boy that receives taunts and teases from the other boy, and learns to rely on Piggy's intellectual reasoning.

Ralph has courage when the occasion demands it, but he really longs for the secure world of grown-ups, especially when order starts breaking down on the island. He dreams about a.....

Jack - Jack Merridew is Ralph's antagonist in the novel. When he is first seen on the island, he is leading a group of choirboys, who are dressed in strange uniform and march military style. It is a foreshadowing of Ralph's authoritarian and dictatorial leadership at the end of the.....

Simon - Simon is the quiet, shy boy in the group. Being a visionary, he often goes into the forest by himself to contemplate nature and life. As a result of his different behavior, he is isolated from the others. But because he is a loner, he finds the truth. He realizes that the.....

Piggy - Piggy is the fat boy who is the brunt of all the jokes and teasing in the novel. He is physically weak and constantly complains about his asthma. He is also myopic and almost.....

Roger - Roger is a sadistic boy and Jack's close companion. He is the boy who pushes the boulder that kills Piggy. Earlier in the novel he throws stones at the littluns, but doesn't.....

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

From beginning to end, Golding has structured *Lord of the Flies* around the ideas of man's fallen nature and his basic inhumanity to his fellow man. The novel begins with a group of boys who have tried to escape the ravages and savagery of a nuclear war. They crash on an island, a beautiful, tropical paradise. The boys are delighted to be there, away from adults and rules. But they.....

THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

Lord of the Flies is a modern novel that can be read and interpreted at various levels.

Lord of the Flies as a fable - Golding has stated in his book *The Hot Gates*, that he used the fable form to present the truth as he saw it. A fable is defined as a story that uses symbolic characters to teach a lesson. In this novel, Golding certainly accomplishes this purpose. Through the boys, he clearly teaches man's inhumanity to man and man's inherent evil. In fact, Golding states that "man produces evil as a bee produces honey". Golding shows how civilization on the island breaks down and leads to.....
Additional themes are analyzed in the complete study guide.

SYMBOLISM / IMAGERY / MOTIFS / SYMBOLS

The novel is full of colorful symbolism. Some of the symbols are interpreted below:

The Island - It represents a Garden of Eden, then after the boys arrive, it represents the corrupt nature of mankind.

The Naval Officer - represents the present generation of evil.

The Big Boys - represents the next emerging generation of evil.....

MEANING OF THE TITLE OF THE NOVEL

Lord of the Flies refers to Beelzebub, another name for the devil. He is also called the Lord of Filth and Dung. Throughout the novel, the children grow dirtier and dirtier, an outward reflection of their

ENDING OF THE NOVEL

The novel ends with naval officers arriving on the island. The one that spies Ralph and the savages who chase him, at first sees the boys as dirty children involved in fun and games. When he learns from Ralph what has happened on the island, he is amazed that civilized

AUTHOR'S STYLE

The style of the novel is deceptively simple. It reads quickly, like a children's adventure story. The narration is simple, the events flow smoothly, and the moods change rapidly without much effort. The boys are not given last names, the titles of the chapters clearly foreshadow the action.....

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the title of the novel '*Lord of the Flies*'.

Compare and contrast the characters of Ralph and Jack, and trace their development as leaders.....

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