



***READING AND WRITING SKILLS FOR STUDENTS OF
LITERATURE IN ENGLISH: POSTWAR; POSTMODERN;
POSTCOLONIAL***

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5.1. William Golding, *Lord of the Flies* (1954)

Reading Skills

I

Chapter 1

1. Describe the setting of the novel.
2. When does the action take place?
3. Briefly describe the similarities/differences between Ralph and Piggy.
4. Why have the boys landed on the island?
5. What event has taken place in the outside world, as Piggy reminds Ralph?
6. What does Piggy look like? What effect does his physical appearance have on the other boys?
7. At the very opening of the novel, Piggy says: "I expect we'll want to know all their names ... and make a list. We ought to have a meeting". What do these words tell us about his personality? What does Piggy represent?
8. What does Ralph's father do?
9. What information do we have about Piggy's parents?
10. Describe the conch the boys find in the water. What use do they agree to give to it? Who makes the suggestion?
11. What is the conch a symbol of?
12. Which of the boys is the one suggesting the necessity of organising themselves collectively?
13. Describe Jack Merridew and the first appearance of his choir of boys. What might it represent, in your opinion, bearing in mind the context in which the novel was written?
14. What do Ralph and Jack look like? What are they like in terms of character? In your answer, you should bear in mind the role each one of them is going to play in the novel.
15. Who are Roger and Simon?
16. Who is elected chief?
17. Which of the boys go on a first expedition on the island? What do they discover and how do they feel about it?
18. How are they going to survive, according to Jack?
19. On discovering that they are on a desert island, Ralph says that "This belongs to us". Later, we are told that "Eyes shining, mouths open, triumphant, they savoured the right of domination". What is the implication of these words?
20. When Jack is about to kill the first pig and is holding a knife in his hand, a pause occurs, a pause that is "only long enough for them to understand what an enormity the downward stroke would be". What is the significance of these words?

Chapter 2

1. Give examples of the emergent social organisation of the boys on the island. What use do they give to the conch?
2. What is the boy with a mulberry-coloured birthmark worried about? Is there any evidence of his fears?
3. "My father's in the navy. He said there aren't any unknown islands left. He says the Queen has a big room full of maps and all the islands in the world are drawn there. So the Queen's got a picture of this island". Analyse the implications found in Ralph's words, bearing in mind the context in which the novel was written.
4. What does Ralph suggest they should do in order to get rescued?
5. How do they manage to light the fire? Who comes up with the idea? Who actually does it?
6. What are the particular consequences of the fire and why is that the case?

Chapter 3

1. How is the building of shelters going? How many have they built and in what condition are they in?
2. Who is doing the work? What seems to be the problem?
3. Which of the boys is experiencing a strong "compulsion to track down and kill"?
4. What reasons are given for the necessity of having shelters?
5. Jack talks about the boys "being hunted". How would you explain these words?
6. How is Simon regarded by the other boys?
7. "They walked along, two continents of experience and feeling, unable to communicate". Analyse the similarities/differences between Ralph and Jack.
8. What does Simon look like? What can be learned about him at this point in the novel?

Chapter 4

1. "Roger stooped, picked up a stone, aimed, and threw it at Henry—threw it to miss. The stone, that token of preposterous time, bounced five yards to Henry's right and fell in the water. Roger gathered a handful of stones and began to throw them. Yet there was a space round Henry, perhaps six yards in diameter, into which he dare not throw. Here, invisible yet strong, was the taboo of the old life. Round the squatting child was the protection of parents and school and policemen and the law. Roger's arm was conditioned by a civilization that new nothing of him and was in ruins". What is Roger like? What does the text tell us about the society he comes from?
2. What effect does the painting of the boys' faces have on them?
3. Why is Piggy considered an outsider by the rest of the boys?
4. Why are the children not rescued by the ship they see in the distance?
5. Why is the fire dead?

6. What effect does the hunting have on the boys?
7. "The two boys faced each other. There was the brilliant world of hunting, tactics, fierce exhilaration, skill; and there was the world of longing and baffled common-sense". Identify the two boys and discuss the differences between them.
8. What consequences does this episode have for Piggy? In what way/s does his relationship with Ralph as well as the one between Ralph and Jack change?

Chapter 5

1. What does Ralph try to make the boys understand? What elements does he mention? Does he succeed in his attempt?
2. Why does he decide to tackle the issue of fear?
3. Who denies the existence of a beast in the forest? What does this fact tell us about his personality?
4. Talking about the beast, Simon ventures that "maybe it's only us", to which the narrator adds that "Simon became inarticulate in his effort to express mankind's essential illness". How do you interpret Simon's words?
5. Why is there a movement towards chaos, irrationality and savagery?
6. Why does Ralph emphasise the following of rules?
7. What approaches to life are put forward in the assembly?
8. Which of the boys are left together at the end of the chapter and what significance does this fact have?

Chapter 6

1. What is the signal sent from the adult world that reaches the island? Why is Golding being ironic at this point in the text? What does the signal tell us about the adult world?
2. What is one of the immediate consequences of the arrival of the beast?
3. Who goes looking for the beast? Who is left in care of the children?
4. Where do the boys go in search of the beast? What effect does the place have on Jack?

Chapter 7

1. What does Ralph discover about hunting?
2. Jack mentions the necessity of using "a littlun" as a pig. What is the implication of these words at this point in the text?
3. Where does Simon decide to go and why? Which route does he take?
4. Why do the boys go to the top of the mountain?

Chapter 8

1. What does this chapter show about the confrontation between the boys? What changes take place and to what effect?
2. What does Simon suggest they should do about the fire?
3. What does Piggy suggest they should do about the fire?

4. Who is left on the beach?
5. What do the hunters decide to do about the beast?
6. What is significant about the killing of the sow that takes place in this chapter?
7. What do the boys do after killing the pig?
8. What problem do they have after killing the pig?
9. What do they decide to do in order to solve the problem?
10. Why do the boys leave a gift for the beast? What are the implications behind such an action?
11. "The half-shut eyes were dim with the infinite cynicism of adult life". Whose eyes are these? What's the meaning of this line?
12. "Simon lowered his head, carefully keeping his eyes shut, then sheltered them with his hand. There were no shadows under the trees but everywhere a pearly stillness, so that what was real seemed illusive and without definition. The pile of guts was a black blob of flies that buzzed like a saw. After a while these flies found Simon. Gorged, they alighted by his runnels of sweat and drank. They tickled under his nostrils and played leap-frog on his thighs. They were black and iridescent green and without number; and in front of Simon, the Lord of the Flies hung on his stick and grinned. At last Simon gave up and looked back; saw the white teeth and dim eyes, the blood—and his gaze was held by that ancient, inescapable recognition". What is the Lord of the Flies? Why is Simon the one who encounters it? What is meant by "that ancient, inescapable recognition"?
13. "Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill!" said the head. For a moment or two the forest and all the other dimly appreciated places echoed with the parody of laughter. "You knew, didn't you? I'm part of you? Close, close, close! I'm the reason why it's no go? Why things are what they are?" These words are key to understanding the meaning of Golding's text. Comment on their significance in the light of the whole novel.

Chapter 9

1. What does Simon find on top of the mountain? What does he do?
2. What is the state of the two factions which the boys have created?
3. What happens to Simon when he tries to tell the other boys about the real identity of the beast?
4. What are the boys doing when Simon tries to tell them?
5. What happens after Simon's disappearance? What significance might these facts have?

Chapter 10

1. How do Ralph and Piggy feel about Simon's fate?
2. What is the situation in Jack's camp?
3. What is the situation in Ralph camp?
4. What do the hunters steal from Ralph's camp?

Chapter 11

1. What do Ralph and Piggy decide to do?
2. What does Piggy decide to carry?
3. What happens at Castle Rock?
4. A second significant death takes place in this chapter. Whose death? Read the passage in your text and discuss the significance this fact has, bearing the whole novel in mind.

Chapter 12

1. What does Ralph do after the death that takes place in the previous chapter?
2. Ralph thinks about an “indefinable connection” between Jack and himself. Explain this in your own words.
3. What are Jack and Roger’s intentions toward Ralph? What do they do to make him leave the forest?
4. Describe the end of the book. What is the scene the naval officer encounters?
5. “I should have thought,” said the officer as he visualized the search before him, “I should have thought that a pack of British boys—you’re all British aren’t you?—would have been able to put up a better show than that—I mean—”. Discuss the implications of the officer’s words.
6. “Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of man’s heart, and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy”. What are the implications of the above lines?

II

1. How is the novel structured?
2. Find examples of other literary/film texts that also take place on a desert island.
3. *Lord of the Flies* can be seen as a dystopian (anti-Utopian) novel. Can you relate it to any other texts produced in the twentieth century.
4. Discuss the views of evil offered by the novel.
5. Explore the relation between Golding’s text and R.M. Ballantyne’s *The Coral Island* (1858). What are their similarities/differences both formally/factually and ideologically?
6. Golding’s text has been criticised for its “over-explicitness” (J. Peter). Would you agree with such a view?

Writing Skills

1. “I agree with Ralph. We’ve got to have rules and obey them. After all, we’re not savages. We’re English; and the English are best at everything. So we’ve got to do the right things”. Bearing in mind the above words, in what ways can *Lord of the Flies* be seen as a critique of Victorian Imperialism?

2. "The novel is usually read as Golding's commentary upon human evil, and almost certainly it would not have been written had Belsen and Auschwitz never existed, or indeed had Dresden never been bombed by the Allies". (Kevin McCarron, *William Golding*. Plymouth: Northcote House, 1994. p. 4). Comment on the above quote in relation to *Lord of the Flies*.
3. "The novel is an examination ... of the essential nature of humanity itself, the heart of darkness". (Kevin McCarron, *William Golding*. Plymouth: Northcote House, 1994. p. 5). Discuss.
4. *Lord of the Flies* can be read as "an attack on the naïveté of Victorian confidence in English boys and in public schools, as well as on the whole Enlightenment doctrine about the progress and perfectibility of the human species". (James Gindin, *William Golding*. London: Macmillan, 1988. p. 21)

Golding's text shows us "a progressive stripping away of the faint echoes of civilisation as the narrative moves toward its conclusion in the centre of human darkness". (James Gindin, *William Golding*. London: Macmillan, 1988, 27)

Analyse the above quotes in the light of Golding's text.

5. "Like any orthodox moralist Golding insists that Man is a fallen creature, but he refuses to hypostatise Evil or to locate it in a dimension of its own. On the contrary Beëlzebub, Lord of the Flies, is Roger and Jack and you and I, ready to declare himself as soon as we permit him to". (J. Peter, in Ed. Norman Page, *William Golding: Novels, 1954-67*. London: Macmillan, 1985. p. 37). Comment on the implications of the above quote in the light of the whole text.
6. "On one level the story shows how intelligence (Piggy) and common sense (Ralph) will always be overthrown in society by sadism (Roger) and the lure of totalitarianism (Jack)". (C.B. Cox, in Ed. Norman Page, *William Golding: Novels, 1954-67*. London: Macmillan, 1985. p. 37). Would you agree with the above view of *Lord of the Flies*? Illustrate your answer by close reference to the text.
7. "The boys set fire to their island paradise while their elders and betters have all but destroyed the planet". (Ian McEwan, Ed. John Carey, *William Golding, The Man and his Books: A Tribute on his 75th Birthday*. London: Faber and Faber, 1986. p. 159). What are the implications behind McEwan's comment on Golding's text?