

## **Lord of the Flies Study Questions**

*As you read the novel, keep in mind that the behavior of the characters is meant to be indicative of human nature in a general sense, not simply a reflection of the behavior of boys. What insights into (or opinions about) human nature do the characters' actions reveal?*

**Note:** *The highlighted questions are the ones I think are the most important and/or interesting questions to reflect on and discuss.*

### **Chapter 1: "The Sound of the Shell"**

- 1.** Describe the major characters: Ralph, Piggy, and Jack.
- 2.** What instances of foreshadowing occur in this chapter? What predictions can you make about what sorts of things might happen later in the novel?
- 3.** What do the boys' attitudes and actions (e.g. Ralph's joy at being free of "grownups," the vote for leader, Ralph's telling the other boys about Piggy's nickname) reveal about human nature?
- 4.** What is the significance (the meaning and importance) of the boys' encounter with the wild piglet?
- 5.** What do you think the "sound of the shell" and the conch itself might symbolize?

### **Chapter 2: "Fire on the Mountain"**

- 1.** What do you think is the significance of the "snake-thing" or "beastie"? Consider the little boy's description of the creature, the discussion of nightmares, Ralph's feeling that he is "facing something ungraspable" when confronted with this problem, and his need to repeat loudly that "there isn't a beast."
- 2.** What does Jack's behavior in this chapter suggest about him (e.g. his attitude toward killing pigs and hunting the beast, his excitement about the rules and the consequences of violating them, his treatment of Piggy etc.)? In what way(s) might the behavior of the boys during the meeting foreshadow later events?
- 3.** What do you think Piggy's glasses might represent? Consider their normal function, the use they are put to in this chapter, Piggy's intelligence, and Piggy's helplessness without them.
- 4.** What hypocritical irony is there in the boys' treatment of Piggy in contrast with their treatment of Ralph and Jack? What does this fact suggest about human nature?
- 5.** What is ironic about consequences of the boys' decision to light a fire? In light of these consequences, what do you think it and the "drum-roll" represent?
- 6.** What do the events of these first two chapters reveal about the major themes of the novel?

### **Chapter 3: "Huts on the Beach"**

- 1.** Discuss the change in Jack's personality that is described at the beginning of the chapter. What is Jack's highest priority, and what does this tell us about him?
- 2.** How are all of the boys except Ralph and Simon (and Jack) behaving? What is Golding telling us about human nature? What important qualities do Ralph, Simon, and Piggy have that the other boys seem to lack?

3. What is making it difficult for Ralph and Jack to communicate and get along? Where do you think their differences will lead?
4. Why do you think Jack and the littluns (and others, probably) have fears about a “beastie,” but Ralph, Simon, and Piggy don’t? What theme does this suggest?
5. What does this chapter reveal about Simon’s personality, and what importance do you think this will have later in the novel? (How do you think the other boys will react to Simon?)

#### **Chapter 4: “Painted Faces and Long Hair”**

1. Describe the behavior of the boys at the beginning of the chapter. What thematic significance does this scene have?
2. Why does Maurice walk away when Percival starts crying, and why doesn’t Roger throw the stones directly at Henry? What does their behavior suggest about human nature?
3. Why do the hunters decide to “paint” themselves with clay and charcoal? What effect does doing this have on their behavior, and why? Does this “makeup” have any symbolic meaning?
4. How do the hunters behave in response to the success of the hunt, and what is the significance of this behavior?
5. How does Ralph “assert his chieftainship” after the argument with the hunters? Why do you think this gesture is so effective?
6. What do you think will result from the open conflict between Jack and Ralph and from Jack’s success at getting meat? What is the significance of the boys’ reaction to being able to eat meat, and how does this compare to their reaction about having missed a chance to be rescued?
7. Discuss the thematic significance of the title of the chapter.

#### **Chapter 5: “Beast from Water”**

1. What change has come over Ralph as a result of the signal fire incident? How have his values changed?
2. What points does Ralph make at the meeting? What general point does he make that he wants people to discuss? Why are these points so significant?
3. What does Jack say in response to Ralph’s comments? Why do you think Ralph is shocked?
4. What does Piggy mean by his claim that “life is scientific”? What does he mean when he suggests that “there isn’t no fear, either[...]unless we get frightened of people”?
5. What does Percival say when Jack asks him where the beast lives? Why do you think he says this?
6. What does Simon say about the beast, and what do you think he means? How does everyone else react to what he says?
7. Why are the rules so important to Ralph? What are the consequences of breaking them?
8. Why does Piggy say that Ralph should blow the conch to call everyone back, and why does Ralph decide not to?

## Chapter 6: “Beast from Air”

1. What is the “beast from air”? How is it appropriate that the boys mistake it for a beast—what connection does it have with the novel’s themes, and what does it symbolize?
2. What does Sam and Eric’s description of the beast tell us about human psychology?
3. How does Ralph overcome Jack’s challenge during the discussion about what to do about the beast?
4. What significant thoughts does Simon have about the beast while the boys are walking to the “castle”?
5. Why do you think Ralph doesn’t really expect to encounter the beast?
6. How do most of the boys react to their discovery of the “castle”? What foreshadowing takes place at the end of the chapter?

## Chapter 7: “Shadows and Tall Trees”

1. What embarrassing thing does Ralph say to himself near the beginning of the chapter that he’s afraid someone might have overheard? What does he mean by it? What change in Ralph does the act of talking to himself demonstrate?
2. What does Simon say to Ralph that makes them both smile? Think carefully about Simon’s choice of words—do you think it foreshadows something that might happen later in the novel?
3. What disturbing thing do the group of hunters and Ralph do immediately after their encounter with the pig? How is Ralph’s behavior surprising? What does this behavior foreshadow?
4. Why do you think Simon is so eager to volunteer to go across the island to tell Piggy and the littluns what they’re doing?
5. Why do you think Jack insists on going up the mountain to look for the beast even though it’s already dark when they arrive? What internal conflict does Ralph feel about the decision to go up the mountain in the dark?
6. Why do you think Golding (the author) plotted the story so that the boys would go up the mountain in the dark?

## Chapter 8: “Gift for the Darkness”

1. What does Ralph say that angers Jack? How does Jack express his anger? How does Jack respond to his failure to get support from the group, and what does this response suggest about the boys’ future?
2. How does Piggy show “intellectual daring”? Why is this so significant to the boys?
3. Why do you think the biguns wait until the other boys are occupied to leave instead of supporting Jack’s challenge during the meeting?
4. What unusual thing happens to Ralph after Jack leaves and after he realizes most of the biguns have left? What is the significance of his reaction?
5. What suggestion does Simon make, and why do you think he makes it? What does he mean when he says, “What else is there to do?” What are the consequences of the group’s decision not to follow Simon’s suggestion?

6. What do Jack and the biguns first decide to “do” about the beast, and what does this say about human nature? Think back to question # 2.

7. What foolish decision does Jack make during the hunt, and why is it foolish?

8. What happens to Simon after the hunters leave his clearing? What is the “lord of the flies”? What does it represent? How does it talk to Simon—what does its speech really indicate?

#### **Chapter 9: “A View to a Death”**

1. What are the purpose and effect of Jack’s generosity with the meat he and the hunters obtained? What do you think his decision to give meat to even Ralph and Piggy is meant to show?

2. Why does Jack command the boys to dance and chant, and why is this an effective leadership tactic? What psychological effect does dancing and chanting have on the boys? Think back to the effect that putting on makeup had on them in Chapter 4.

3. What is the “beast” that the boys kill? How is this event ironic and especially tragic (not only for the “beast,” but for everyone on the island)? How is it symbolically significant?

4. Why do you think Golding decided to have the “figure” fly over the boys on the beach and into the sea? Why do you think he had Simon’s body get washed away, and what does this represent in a psychological sense?

#### **Chapter 10: “The Shell and the Glasses”**

1. How do Ralph and Piggy view Simon’s death? How does each of them react to it? Why does Ralph laugh as he says, “I got the conch,” and why does Piggy react so strongly to his laughter? What explanations do they have for their behavior, and what excuses do they come up with? What do these reactions show about them and about human nature?

2. What does the narrator mean to suggest when he says, “Memory of the dance that none of them had attended shook all four boys convulsively”?

3. How do the biguns seem to define a “proper chief”? What does this criterion suggest about human psychology?

4. What does Jack do that causes Roger to have doubts about his leadership?

5. What feelings, beliefs, and speculations do Jack’s biguns have about what happened the night before at the feast? Can you explain why they did what they did? Why are they “half-relieved, half-daunted by the implication of further terrors”? Consider the significance of the quotes below, especially the second one. What unspoken words complete the first sentence?

“But didn’t we, didn’t we—” “No!”

“How could we—kill—it?”

“Each savage flinched away from his individual memory.”

“I expect the beast disguised itself.”

6. What signs of stress and fear can we see in Ralph, Piggy, and Samneric’s behavior in this chapter?

## Chapter 11: “Castle Rock”

1. In what way are the twins “seeing Ralph for the first time” before they all set off for Castle Rock?
2. Why is the boys’ attempt to get back Piggy’s specs and get the other boys to maintain a signal fire bound to fail?
3. Why do you think Roger pushes the rock off the cliff?
4. How is the destruction of the conch symbolically significant?

## Chapter 12: “Cry of the Hunters”

1. Why does Ralph think that the boy he sees is “not Bill”?
2. Why does Ralph hit the pig’s head?
3. Why do you think Samneric decide to join Jack’s tribe? Why do they tell Jack where Ralph is hidden?
4. What do Samneric mean when they tell Ralph that Jack has “sharpened a stick at both ends”? What do you think the reason for Jack’s hatred is?
5. What foolish method do the boys use to ensure that they find Ralph? What does this decision suggest about the power of hatred and violence versus the power of reason?
6. Where does Ralph decide to hide? What does this hiding place symbolize?
7. Explain the significance of this quotation: “Percival Wemys Madison sought in his head for an incantation that had faded clean away.”
8. What is ironic about how the boys are saved? What is ironic about the fact that the boys, who have become savages, are British, and why do you think Golding chose to write about a group of British boys? Consider what the naval officer says: “I should have thought that a pack of British boys would have been able to put up a better show than that.”

## Review Questions

1. What are the major themes of the novel, and how are they developed?
2. What insights about human nature, human psychology, and human society does the novel present? How are they expressed?
3. Discuss the deterioration of the “society” on the island. What circumstances, events, and psychological forces cause this deterioration?
4. Discuss the extensive use of symbolism in the novel. Examples of important symbols are the conch, the fire, the beast, Piggy’s glasses, and the “lord of the flies,” as well as Piggy, Ralph, Simon, and Jack themselves.
5. What is your opinion of the novel—is the story convincing? Does it present a realistic vision of human nature? Have you experienced or observed things that would either support or contradict Golding’s ideas?