

Lord of the Flies... for the student

-by-

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You are an enthusiastic reader of *Lord of the Flies* and perhaps you are preparing to write about some of the issues in the book. A good place to start would be to look at Golding's characters – although remember that at whatever level you are studying a simple description of a character is not much help. You will want to show understanding of:

- how a character develops and changes
- how the writer uses a character to aid the development of the plot *and linked to this*
- how a character relates to the other key characters in the novel.

This is going to be different from other study guides. We are going to turn usual approaches on their heads – and start by looking at some of the minor characters in some detail.

ROGER

Golding has something special in mind for this character. There is a great deal to think about: what happens to Roger during the course of the story? You will notice that it was actually Roger who suggested that there should be a vote for Chief ... and he becomes the 'hangman' in the story, over whom hangs a threatening pall of death. In the chapter "Castle Rock", you will find:

"High overhead, Roger, with a sense of delirious abandonment, leaned all his weight on the lever."

We know the awful consequence of this. Roger becomes a threatening, violent presence. When the twins are captured, he shows that he enjoys or, at least, knows about violence: "That's not the way." Roger shows Jack how to prod the twins effectively. When Jack is hunting Ralph, it is Roger who puts the pressure on the twins

"If you're fooling us –."

Immediately after this, there came a gasp, and a squeal of pain.'

There are other pieces of evidence that suggest that Roger is someone different, and it is worth looking for these near the beginning of the novel. There are also clues as to how Roger develops:

- in the first description of him that we are given:
"There was a slight, furtive boy whom no one knew, who kept to himself with an inner intensity of avoidance and secrecy."

What else can you find out about Roger? What effect has the island experience had on him?

SAM'N'ERIC

Golding has given us a memorable double character. Sam'n'Eric are important:

- they seem to stand for loyalty
- they work hard
- they are keen to keep the fire going
- they are supporters of Ralph.

They are also used to help the build up of fear. In “Beast from the Air”: “Neither of the boys screamed but” And then when they have run back to the shelters, they report back what they have seen.

Sam’n’Eric are the last to change sides, to defect to Jack and the camp of fun. When they do, it is because they are forced to. The twins are a source of information for Ralph:

- Jack’s plans
- a stick to be sharpened at both ends

Look at the description of Sam’n’Eric when they first respond to the conch being blown:

“The two boys, bullet headed and with hair like tow....”

In “Fire on the Mountain”: “Now the twins, with unsuspected intelligence....”

In “Beast from the Air”, when Sam’n’Eric are re-kindling the fire and are terrified at the noise of the parachute in the wind.

Their imaginations run wild in their description of the beast – and this confirms the terror, leading to a “real hunt”.

After the killing of Simon, the twins still operate with some sort of conscience. They do not wish to admit to being involved : “Yes. We were very tired,” repeated Sam, “so we left early.”

There is more to the twins than merely being helpful, loyal or scared.

- They show understanding of Jack and his followers when they talk of his being painted.
- They show understanding of what Roger has become: “He’s a terror.”

SIMON

Golding has marked Simon out as different – he’s epileptic and is the one who dramatically faints as the choir wait for orders. He stands out in other ways: look at the description in “The Sound of the Shell”: “The boys round Simon giggled....”

- Simon has a confidence which enables him to go off on his own
- He is a reliable helper – “Simon. He helps.” Look at what Ralph says about him when talking to Jack.

Clearly Simon **LIKES** to go off on his own: look at the passage where he goes in to his secret hiding place in “Huts on the Beach”. Check also the passage where he returns to this place in “Gift for the Darkness”. Remember that he volunteers to cross the island alone with the message for Piggy.

- Simon has a level of understanding which is almost other-worldly:
“I don’t believe in the beast.” Crucially Simon says “... maybe it’s only us”.

Another important passage in which Simon is shown to have this strange knowledge is the one in which he and Ralph are talking (“Shadows and Tall Trees”), and Simon says “I just *think you’ll get back all right.*” It is worth looking closely at the conversation that Simon has with The Lord of the Flies at the end of “Gift for the Darkness”. Look at Golding’s use of language here.

- Simon discovers the simple truth about the monster/ beast; he possesses the detail of its true nature – a casualty from the grown-ups’ war from which the children have been evacuated. As Simon frees the lines of the parachute from the rock, he gains the knowledge which could free all the children from fear.
- Look again at the death of Simon and think about **IRONY**. Simon has the crucial, urgent knowledge that he runs to deliver to the others: but he is not allowed to deliver it.

Simon is a fascinating character, then. Golding shows Simon as having knowledge about the beast at two distinct levels (1) it is in us, and (2) it is merely a dead airman whose parachute is entangled.

THE LITTLUNS

It is tempting to see the Littluns as a character in this novel. Consider how far you agree with this idea.

The Littluns underline the lack of adults and the seriousness of the situation. They remind the reader that Golding is writing about CHILDREN - for example their behaviour at the assemblies on the "twister". So:

- Littluns are a backdrop for us to map the changes that take place on the island ... they get dirtier, more frightened. Piggy is to take names – this emphasises the Littluns' defencelessness. They are at risk: "Use a littlun."
- The first death is one of the Littluns, the one with the mulberry birthmark. Remember Piggy saying: "Who knows how many we got?"
- Jack turns on the Littluns for starting the fear talk and later says: "Sucks to the Littluns!"
- Percival forgets his name and address chant ... a clear comment?

THE MAIN CHARACTERS

Because we've turned normal ideas around, you will be doing your research into the main characters yourself. Remember: if you are going to write successfully about this novel, you will have to ask yourself questions about the characters and their importance to the themes and issues raised in this book.

Try to follow these character strings. See if you agree ... and then find the evidence from the text which will back up what you say.

RALPH

Strong – healthy – fit – attractive – likeable – can focus on key issues – a good leader – hard working – courageous – moral – friendly – loyal.

JACK

Strong – healthy – fit – attractive – likeable at first – becomes obsessed with hunting – likes power – resentful of criticism – ruthless – immoral – courageous.

PIGGY

Fat – unhealthy – over protected – unattractive – loyal – hard working – caring – thoughtful – has the capacity to think things through – moral.

RESPONSES

Those studying the book with a tutor will enjoy discussion and will then wish to complete written responses to questions on themes and issues. You will always wish to use quotations from Golding's text to support what you say. There are other ways of using writing to respond to the book.

Interesting responses may be created where a student combines:

- understanding of the text
- use of imagination to build on what has been read.

Here are two examples.

- 1) Imagine that Ralph reaches home safely. The local newspaper picks up on the fact that he has survived a tremendous ordeal. Write an interview with Ralph in which he responds to various questions about what has happened on the island. Try to write his answers in character – as though you ARE Ralph.

Topics covered might include: his opinion of the island immediately after the children have landed, what he thought of Jack at first, how he felt about Piggy, his reaction to the death of Simon, his feelings about rescue at the end.

- 2) Ten years pass and the boys are in their twenties, perhaps. Write an account of a chance meeting between Ralph and Sam and Eric. What would they say to each other about their experiences? What topics would be uppermost in their minds and memories?

RESPONSES

You have thought about Jack and Ralph as leaders. Now you should think about what it is like to be a follower. The boys will have felt very differently about the two leaders.

- Ralph would require of his followers commonsense and a need to realise where duty lies. If you were following Ralph, you would have a fit and attractive leader, but you would also be required to work before you played. Your failure to live up to Ralph's expectations and demands might make you feel bad.
- Jack would require very different things of you. He would want obedience and support – very strongly, almost in the adoration category. He would also frighten you with violence ... he would attract you with ritual – chanting, dancing, feasting. You would wish to follow him and to join his tribe, because there would be fellowship without guilt, safety in numbers and in weapons, and you would feast on meat.

If you consider the feelings of the followers of both leaders, you will see these marked differences. Try a CHARTING ACTIVITY:

- Divide a page in two and have half for Ralph and half for Jack. Now list or bullet-point the things that would attract the followers of both. Make sure that you search for an example for each of your reasons as you make your list.

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