

## *Lord of the Flies... for the teacher*

-by-

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Golding's novel has a story-line which will grip and involve many students. It is full of important detail, and challenges active and thoughtful readers in many ways. Some of your students will find the text difficult.

### **READING**

It is suggested that you employ a range of reading strategies with the purpose of leading students of differing ages towards both enjoyment and understanding.

- Some students may read the whole text privately, coming together to discuss chapters or events, following a time-table set by the teacher.
- Other groups may benefit from a skilled whole-group reading in which the teacher reads the text and the students follow. This may seem old-fashioned, but the result can be very powerful for the group. It certainly allows responses from the group as the story unfolds.
- Group reading in which four or five share the reading aloud in a small group. Again, this allows for immediate response and this can be linked to whole class feedback sessions.
- Prepared reading aloud by members of the group. This could be useful after the whole text has been completed, in order to focus on key passages.
- Reading aloud of the direct speech by several students. Again, this would help to focus or clarify key moments in the text that you have chosen.
- Reading with a sharp pencil – skimming through as a re-read in order to pick out elements which are needed for discussion or writing. Linked to note-taking, this is good preparation for discussion or hot-seating.

### **TOPICS and ISSUES**

#### **SURVIVAL**

A very worthwhile topic is that of survival. Groups or individuals studying the text will be able to list all the ways that the children try to ensure survival. Obvious elements: fresh water, fruit, shelters, areas for lavatories. Students will research and note the detail which Golding gives us about this. Linked to it must be Ralph's insistence on the signal fire. He and Piggy see it as the most important item. Surely the hope of being rescued is itself an important element of survival. Golding presents us with an island which has everything needed for survival: the bounty that is on the island could be listed. Students will need to think about what goes wrong: i.e. how the behaviour of the boys puts survival at risk.

#### **Speaking and Listening**

How different would things have been if Golding had used a group of girls? A mixed group? This leads to fascinating discussion: an examination of the problems, fears, faults of the boys

may be matched to the opinions of the students as to how **THEY** would have handled the situation.

A second topic for discussion would involve students in the reality of the boys' situation: they crash on a tropical island – they have nothing except what Nature has given them. In a possession- and gadget-dominated world your students could reflect in groups on what actually IS essential. What would your students MISS from their lives as they live them now? It would be very interesting to see what items are regarded as **ESSENTIAL** in different parts of the world today.

### **Writing**

Leading on from discussion: students using both imagination and knowledge of the text could write their own survival story – straightforward prose format. The piece would enable students to put themselves in a position similar to Golding's boys but with personal interests informing an updated version of the idea. This could be quite a long piece, so students should be counselled to go for the telling detail.

Alternatively, another effective way of writing about the experience of survival would be to use the diary format, in which the slightly abbreviated style would allow for more useful details to come to the fore.

### **RELATIONSHIPS**

An obvious area for students to research – perhaps in role as one of the characters.

It is a question of finding the evidence in the text for suggesting how one character feels about another.

- How does Ralph's relationship with Jack change as the novel progresses? There are clear moments of real liking – what goes wrong? How does Golding show us the change?
- Piggy's relationships with both Jack and Ralph are worth deep analysis. This could be charted diagrammatically. Draw students' attention to Piggy's understanding of how Jack is going to behave – for example, the idea that if Jack cannot get at Ralph, he **WILL** get at Piggy. Piggy's relationship with Ralph repays some research: look with students at all the support Piggy gives to Ralph. Re-read the words near the end of the novel where the writer puts in his own comment about what Ralph may have thought of Piggy.
- Simon's relationship with both Ralph and Piggy is also interesting. There is loyalty there, hard work, commitment. Look also at that strange moment at which Simon tells Ralph that he thinks Ralph will survive, will get back.
- More loyalty is evident in the relationship that Sam'n'Eric have with Ralph: this becomes especially interesting when Ralph is the outcast and Sam'n'Eric are forced to be on guard against him.

### **Speaking and Listening**

After research and note-taking, students play the part of a character and respond to the question "What do you think of...?"

### **Writing**

Many years have passed, and the survivors are elderly. Something triggers thought about the experience on the island, and the character makes an entry in a diary in which there is reflection and comment about one of the other characters.

Or: a straight piece of writing in which students track the deterioration in relationships between the main characters.

## **LEADERSHIP**

The struggle for leadership is a vital theme of the novel: what are the differences between Jack and Ralph in terms of leadership? There is a lot of detail to be sorted out here, and students should be ready to skim through the text and note down the different elements of the two boys' leadership skills. How far is the conch important in connection with leadership?

### **Writing**

Note-taking could be used to assemble details for this theme – leading to a display on wall chart or OHT of the two boys' different qualities where leadership is concerned. Students should take care to back assertion with evidence – QUOTE!

### **Speaking and Listening**

Groups could discuss the whole question of what they think Golding is suggesting through the story about "What makes a good leader?" Why does Ralph respond so strongly to the officer's question at the end of the book?

## **EVIL ... THE BEAST ... SAVAGES**

A major topic to handle. Students will need to face up to what Golding is saying about US. A lot of the evil in the story is obvious: the killings of Simon and Piggy, and the evil intentions towards Ralph. Focus will be on Roger and Jack. Simon's comment, "maybe it's us", will need much discussion.

**Brainstorm** with the students: build up a list on OHT, white board, flip chart etc.: what evil can be found in the story? Events, people, comments. What do we mean by "evil" anyway?

Each student could make a copy of the brainstorm for future thought and reflection.

## **A CIRCLE TO MAKE YOU THINK**

The children are on the island because they have been evacuated from a grown ups' war. Golding pushes us to think about the ironies of this: the physical beast is the dead airman, a casualty from that grown-up world. The adults for whom the children long are the very same as the adults who have created the war. What do your students think of the naval officer's words at the end of the story? "We saw your smoke. What have you been doing? Having a war or something?"

Many students will enjoy thinking about the irony involved in the story at this stage.

## **FROM PARADISE TO HELL?**

Another fruitful area for discussion and research. Students should consider how the writer moves us through this change. They will be able to find that Golding's language builds up a picture of an island which is friendly, has possibilities, and is exciting. This is Ralph: "He patted the palm trunk softly; and, forced at last to believe in the reality of the island, laughed delightedly again and stood on his head. He turned neatly on to his feet, jumped down to the beach, knelt and swept a double armful of sand into a pile against his chest. Then he sat back and looked at the water with bright, excited eyes."

So, Paradise is set up. Of course, the language, which Golding uses, reflects the story line, so by the end of the book Ralph is being described very differently:

"He could hear them crashing in the undergrowth and on the left was the hot, bright thunder of the fire. He forgot his wounds, his hunger and thirst, and became fear; hopeless fear on flying feet, rushing through the forest towards the open beach."

**Paired activity** – searching for and writing notes about good examples of the way Golding uses language to reflect the story line.

## HOW FAR IS THE BOOK AN ALLEGORY?

A particularly interesting question to discuss with groups. The reader may feel that a great deal of the novel is allegorical. You will need to help students define and understand the term "allegory". We can look at events and character and find clear equivalents in our lives, in our world, our society.

- **JACK**: a very individual leader; a despot or dictator; uses fear; makes decisions on his own.
- **RALPH**: a thoughtful leader; a people's leader – chosen and supported; considers and consults and is motivated by desire to improve things for everybody; prey to doubt; honest and hard-working.
- **PIGGY**: a thinker; cares about others; serious; an outsider who does not fit; frequently says the right thing; understands how things are; an object of mockery.
- **SIMON**: independent; does not fit in; marked out to be different; possesses understanding and knowledge beyond the ordinary; a prophet – rejected and killed.
- **THE CONCH**: a symbol of order; part of important ritual; gives comfort; like a democracy, it can be smashed.
- **THE ISLAND**: like the world – full of good things. There is fresh water, abundant fruit which is good to eat. There are fish, crabs. Materials to make shelter; natural beauty. So ... the first fire kills a Littlun and lays waste part of the island, destroying fruit, firewood etc. The second fire will destroy all that is good on the island.

The reader may therefore take a great deal that is allegorical from this story. Students may like to think about how Sam'n'Eric, Roger, and the Beast fit into this idea.

## FOLLOWERSHIP

Your students will have looked in detail at the theme of **LEADERSHIP**. As a complement to this it is well worth considering the idea of **FOLLOWERSHIP** in the novel. What about all the boys who rush to join Jack's tribe? The difficulty Ralph faces in getting anything done –

even in keeping the signal fire going – is given a lot of attention by Golding. What about the rush to join Jack?

- Where the Littluns are concerned: examine their need for a leader on whom they can depend to remove the fear and give some feeling of stability. This is short term: the power of the chief and the older children with spears can offer some sort of protection for the younger ones. This is not the same as Ralph's need to keep a signal going, to regulate the lavatories, to organise fresh water, and so on.
- Attraction and excitement play a part in Jack's success: it was much more fun to hunt, feast and have fun. Your students will be able to find many modern parallels. Good discussion areas will include: movements such as the Hitler Youth ... in more recent times, skinheads ... followers of particular football teams ... and so on.
- Many of the children will have been encouraged to join Jack because of the ritual of the pig dances and the chanting. The power of this should not be underestimated: ask students to re-read the dreadful dance and chanting scenes, which led to the death of Simon.
- Finally, followership needs discussion in terms of FEAR. Perhaps Golding wants us to think that a large proportion of the children wanted to be controlled by Jack's power through fear – the ordered cruelty that Roger orchestrates, for example.

### **FLIGHT OF FANCY ...**

Of course, I often think back to that time and with the passing years I am more able to come to terms with what happened – and to talk to you now.

It was so good at first: I loved the island, the lagoon, the sand, the swimming. There was plenty to eat, and we found fresh water quite quickly. I felt bad about telling everyone Piggy's nickname when he did not want them to know ... I think of him often ... I so easily remember his prompting me to say something ... when a key thing was just out of reach at the edge of my mind. Yes, I was pleased when I was elected chief. I really felt I could do it and get things sorted so that we were rescued ... oh, I learnt so much. The difficulty of getting anything done. Those little boys were so difficult to get to do anything ... they were ... little boys I suppose.

I know what you are thinking. Things started to go wrong pretty quickly, didn't they? I realise now what I was up against. I liked Jack at first. Then I realised there was something different. I wasn't against having fun, pleasure, larking around – but I wanted us to do both that and the serious things, like the fire.

You have to stand up for what is right against what you know is wrong. Piggy and I and Sam'n'Eric tried to do that ... I often cannot believe it. Piggy killed, Simon killed ... and that little boy with the birthmark: we never saw him again after the fire went out of control. Fear? I wonder if you have any idea what it really is. Running for my life ... it haunts my dreams. I'm lucky to be alive.

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