



Lord of the Flies: Golding's Writing Style

Transcript

Presenter: In *Lord of the Flies*, Golding's writing combines detailed description of the island, realistic dialogue and complex symbolism. Golding himself described the novel as fable, a story that teaches a moral. Although the characters in *Lord of the Flies* have archetypal significance, Golding creates realistic voice, speaking as school boys would have done in 1954.

Jack: "Shut up, you fat slug."

Presenter: Golding describes the physical experience of the main characters in *Lord of the Flies* in detail, and makes them speak in idiosyncratic ways so that he doesn't need to identify them by name in passages of dialogue. Golding has Piggy use poor grammar, identifying him as being from a working class background from the first.

Piggy: "I'm sorry I been such a time. Them fruit –"

Presenter: He has Ralph use classic 1950's preparatory school slang when he describes Simon as "batty," meaning crazy. Golding gives Piggy a weight problem, asthma, and poor sight to identify him as a potential victim. By giving Jack red hair, Golding marked him out as unusual, and references the stereotype of redheads as having fiery, impulsive temperaments. Although Golding presents characters realistically, they develop symbolic significance. For example, Ralph as the everyman figure, Jack as tyrant, Simon as visionary and Piggy as the outsider.

The setting and action are symbolic, too. Golding shows the island first as a paradise, and gradually becoming a miniature version of the warring world outside it – a microcosm through the boys' actions. Golding describes the boys destroying parts of the forest, first with rock, then with a fire. Finally, Jack is shown beginning a war that threatens to destroy the whole island, just as it was feared that nuclear war might destroy our world.

Let's explore some of the objects that have symbolic meaning. Early on, the conch shell symbolises a sense of unity among the stranded boys. It ensures orderly, civil debate where everyone has the right to speak and be heard. It leads to other democratic principles being adopted.

Narrator: "This toy of voting was almost as pleasing as the conch."

Presenter: Within the narrative, it embodies the political legitimacy in the boys' newly established society. For the reader, it symbolises the values of a civilised, western, democratic society. But as the novel progresses, and the rules about the conch are increasingly ignored, it comes to symbolise Ralph's loosening grip on leadership and the breakdown of their society. Before long, only Ralph and Piggy value it. For Piggy, it is the most important object on the island – apart from his spectacles. At the same time as Piggy, the custodian of the conch, is killed –





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Narrator: "...the conch exploded into 1000 white fragments and ceased to exist."

Presenter: – the civilised, democratic ideals it represented have also been destroyed.

Fire is another key symbol in the novel. For Ralph, the signal fire represents the hope of rescue and return to society – the light on the hill in their dark world. It also suggests they are working together toward a common cause. When the hunters let the fire go out, Ralph is distraught because they could have been rescued. He confronts Jack.

Ralph: "You let the fire go out."

Presenter: In this episode, Golding brings the differences of priorities and values between the two boys into sharp focus. Jack sees fire as a way of uniting his hunters, enabling them to cook meat and feel safe. It gives him personal power. This is why he steals Piggy's glasses. In his hands, fire later becomes destructive. More broadly, fire represents human potential and our capacity to develop new technology. But fire, like most technology, can be both a tool for creation and a weapon of destruction. The same can be said of science and logic – they can be used for good or for evil. To alleviate human suffering, or compound it. Piggy's glasses are a good example.

Jack: "His specs – use them as burning glasses!"

Presenter: And they are used to start the signal fire. But when Jack steals Piggy's glasses, he starts the fire for an evil purpose.

Piggy's glasses also symbolise his intelligence and his tragic lack of foresight. Piggy is a rational being, but he fails to realise that reason alone is not enough to persuade the boys to work together, and that there is more to life than facts and technology.

We are left in no doubt as to Jack's function in the narrative when he is presented symbolically from the first, looking like a Prince of Darkness in his long, black cloak. The choir wears a religious uniform, black cloaks and silver crosses. Ironical, in view of their later behaviour. As a group, they look like a beast, "...fumbling along the beach," which foreshadows their dark role in the story.

Golding uses descriptive vocabulary to give depth to the symbolism. A striking example is the transformative description of Jack once he has shed his uniform.

Narrator: "...except for tattered shorts held up by his knife-belt he was naked."





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- Presenter: The semi-nakedness symbolises Jack's gradual discarding of the preoccupations of his old life, though, of course, he wants to be Chief Hunter, just as he used to be Head Chorister. His essential nature does not change, just the cultural expression of it. Jack's discovery of camouflage makeup is also symbolic.
- Narrator: "The mask was a thing on its own, behind which Jack hid, liberated from shame and self-consciousness."
- Presenter: Golding's descriptive vocabulary supports the symbolism, so that when Simon is mistaken for the beast and killed, Golding describes the boys' actions as though collectively they have transformed into a violent beast.
- Narrator: "At once the crowd...screamed, struck, bit, tore. There were no words, and no movements but the tearing of teeth and claws."
- Presenter: So we see how Golding employs realistic dialogue, detailed description, and strong symbolism to convey his ideas, and to tell a compelling and thought-provoking story.

