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Characters of Lord of the Flies

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Characters of Lord of the Flies

Ralph—The novel's protagonist, a twelve-year-old English boy. Marooned on a tropical island with a group of boys when their transport plane is shot down, Ralph is elected leader of the group and attempts to coordinate efforts to build a miniature civilization on the island. Ralph represents the civilizing instinct within human beings, as opposed to the savage instinct symbolized by Jack.

Jack—The novel's antagonist, one of the older boys stranded on the jungle island. On the island, Jack is the leader of the hunters, but he longs for total power and becomes increasingly wild, barbarous, and cruel as the novel progresses. He is also adept at manipulating the other boys. Jack represents the instinct of savagery within human beings, as opposed to the civilizing instinct represented by Ralph.

Simon—Simon is in some ways the only naturally “good” character on the island. He behaves kindly toward the younger boys and is willing to work for the good of their community. Moreover, because his motivation seems rooted in his deep feeling of connectedness to nature, Simon is the only character whose sense of morality does not seem to have been imposed by society. Simon represents a kind of natural goodness, as opposed to the unbridled evil of Jack and the imposed morality of civilization represented by Ralph and Piggy.

Piggy—Ralph's lieutenant. A whiny, intellectual boy, Piggy's inventiveness frequently leads to innovation, such as the makeshift sundial, which the boys use to tell time. Piggy represents the scientific, rational side of civilization.

Roger—Jack's lieutenant. A sadistic, cruel older boy who brutalizes the littluns and eventually murders Piggy by rolling a boulder onto him.

Sam and Eric—A pair of twins closely allied with Ralph, Sam and Eric are always together and are often treated as a single entity by the other boys; they are frequently referred to as “Samneric.” They are young and easily excitable, and are subject to manipulation and coercion by Jack and his cronies.

The Lord of the Flies—The name given to the sow’s head impaled on a stake and erected in the forest as an offering to the “beast” after Jack’s most brutal hunt. It comes to symbolize the primordial instincts of power and cruelty that take control of Jack’s tribe.

Analysis of Major Characters of Lord of the Flies

RALPH

Ralph, a twelve-year-old boy marooned with a group of other boys on a deserted island, is the athletic, charismatic protagonist of Lord of the Flies. Elected the leader of the boys at the beginning of the novel, Ralph is the primary representative of order, civilization, and productive leadership in the novel. While most of the other boys are concerned with playing, having fun, and avoiding work at the beginning of the novel, Ralph sets about building huts and thinking of ways to maximize their chances of being rescued. For this reason, Ralph’s power and influence over the other boys are extremely secure at the beginning of the novel.

However, as the book progresses and the group succumbs to savage instincts, Ralph’s position declines precipitously as Jack’s station rises. Eventually, all the boys except Piggy leave Ralph’s group for Jack’s, and Ralph is left alone to be hunted by Jack’s tribe. Ralph never seriously considers joining Jack’s tribe in order to save himself.

Ralph's commitment to civilization and morality is very strong, and his main wish is to be rescued and returned to the society of adults. In a sense, this strength gives Ralph a moral victory at the end of the novel, when he casts the Lord of the Flies to the ground and takes up the stake it is impaled on to defend himself against Jack's hunters. Ralph understands, as Simon did, that savagery exists within all the boys, but he is determined not to let it overwhelm him.

For much of the novel, Ralph is simply unable to understand why the other boys would give in to base instincts of bloodlust and barbarism. The sight of the hunters chanting and dancing is baffling and distasteful to him. But when Ralph hunts a boar for the first time, he experiences the exhilaration and thrill of bloodlust and violence, and when he attends Jack's feast, he is swept away by the frenzy, dancing on the edge of the group and participating in the killing of Simon. This firsthand knowledge of the evil that exists within him, as within all human beings, is tragic for Ralph, and it plunges him into listless despair for several chapters. But this knowledge also enables him to cast down the Lord of the Flies at the end of the novel. Ralph's story ends semi-tragically; although he is rescued and returned to civilization, when he sees the naval officer, he weeps with the burden of his knowledge about humanity.

JACK

Jack, the strong-willed, egomaniacal boy who is the novel's prime representative of the instinct of savagery, violence, and power, is the antithesis of Ralph. From the beginning of the novel, Jack desires power above all other things; he is furious when he loses the election to Ralph and continually pushes the boundaries of his subordinate role in the group. Early on, Jack retains the sense of moral propriety and behavior that was instilled in him by society—he was the leader of the choirboys, after all.

The first time he encounters a pig, he is unable to kill it. But Jack soon becomes obsessed with hunting and devotes himself to the task, painting his face like a barbarian and giving himself over to bloodlust. The more savage Jack becomes, the more he is able to control the rest of the group, which, apart from Ralph, Simon, and Piggy, largely follows him in casting off moral restraint and embracing violence and savagery. By the end of the novel, Jack has learned to use the boys' fear of the beast to control their behavior, giving Golding a chance to explore how religion and superstition can be used as instruments of power. Jack's love of authority and violence are intimately connected, as each enables him to feel powerful and exalted.

SIMON

If Ralph stands at one end of a line, representing civilization, and Jack stands at the other end of the line, representing savagery, where does Simon stand? The answer is that, unlike all the other boys, Simon is not on the line at all; he stands on a different plane from every other character in the novel. Simon seems to represent a kind of innate, spiritual human goodness that is deeply connected with nature and, in its own way, as primal as Jack's evilness. The other characters in the novel abandon moral behavior as soon as civilization no longer imposes it upon them; they are not innately moral but have simply been conditioned to act morally by the adult world, by the threat of punishment for misdeeds. To an extent, even the civility of Ralph and Piggy is a product of social conditioning, as can be seen in their participation in hunt-dance.

In the psychology of the novel, the civilizing impulse is not as deeply rooted in the human psyche as the savage impulse. Alone of all the children on the island, Simon acts morally not out of some guilt or shame but because he believes in its inherent value. He behaves kindly toward the younger children, and he is the first to realize the problem posed by the beast and the Lord of the Flies—that is, that the monster on

the island is not some physical beast, but rather a savagery that lurks within each human being. This idea finds representation in the sow's head and eventually stands as the moral conclusion of the novel. The main problem of the book is the idea of inherent human evil. Against this, Simon seems to represent an idea of essential human goodness. Yet his brutal murder by the other boys indicates the scarcity of that goodness amid an overwhelming abundance of evil.