

Worksheet 2. Major Character Study in *Lord of the Flies*

Notes to the Teacher:

Since Ralph figures prominently in every chapter, there are many diverse incidents students may select. Encourage a choice of events that span the novel—e.g., the first meeting in chapter 1; Ralph's discovery that the hunters left the fire unattended in chapter 4; revelations of his thoughts and feelings at the beginning of chapter 7; the conversation with Piggy the morning after Simon's death (at the beginning of chapter 10).

Here is a series of suggested insights on each of the three major characters under consideration. Encourage students to focus on what is stated as well as what is left out of the text as they analyze Golding's use of direct and indirect characterization

Ralph

At the beginning, Ralph sees the experience as a welcome adventure away from adult supervision. He is good-looking, fair-haired, and athletic-looking. When he is elected leader, he gives Jack a position of responsibility as head of the hunters, while he himself attempts hut-building. He is exasperated at the others' irresponsibility and becomes gradually but increasingly aware of his inadequacy as their leader; he tires of this island adventure. He participates in and later is appalled by the killing of Simon, then finds himself left only with Piggy, Sam, and Eric. After Piggy is killed by the boulder, he is forced to flee for his life and is saved only by the appearance of the navy. As the novel closes, he cries tears of relief, exhaustion, and grief—very different from the happy-go-lucky boy in the opening chapter.

Along the way we see that Ralph is a more-than-decent person who learns to think and to doubt his own abilities. He also learns to see below the surface of people and to be compassionate. Circumstances force him to understand the brutality of which even the very young are capable.

Jack

Jack, too, figures prominently throughout the novel, but Golding presents little access to the inner workings of his mind. Again, students should select incidents that span the text. Among many possibilities are the following: Jack's first appearance with the choir in chapter 1; hunting at the beginning of chapter 3; his behavior after the hunters kill the sow in chapter 8; his responses to Piggy and Ralph in chapter 11.

He was the choir leader at school—a position of considerable respect. From the beginning, the text asserts that he is not an attractive person (the only boy for whom Golding uses the word "ugly"), and his irritability, competitiveness, and desire for control are evident. He successfully learns to hunt and strives to wrest control from Ralph, whom he grows to despise. He is cruel to Piggy just because the boy is so vulnerable. Jack is a bully who feels bigger by demeaning others. As he draws the others away to his gang, he becomes increasingly tyrannical. The killing of the sow is a vivid portrait of what he becomes. By the end, his actions are mindless and totally destructive. The arrival of the navy at the end abruptly shifts readers' perspectives, as the savages, including Jack, appear as the little boys they are.

We can only guess what might become of Jack after the events in the novel. Would he experience remorse, engage in denial, or only laugh about what happened on the island? Is his nature genuinely evil, or did the castaway experience come at a particularly dark time in his early adolescence? Readers

William Golding's "Lord of the Flies" for the Common Core

know that he craves a position of power and is a doer rather than a thinker. He is a powerful leader, capable of manipulating the others, easily angered, and ruthless.

Piggy

For Piggy, too, many moments in the novel offer rich insights. Some of the most telling include his conversations with Ralph and his efforts to participate in the boys' meetings, as well as his brave determination to demand his rights in chapter 11.

Piggy is overweight and asthmatic—and he has weak eyes. He seems to have been raised by his aunt, and he loathes the nickname given him by previous schoolmates and restored by Ralph at the very beginning. He expresses a lot of confidence in adults' ability to enforce order and to solve problems. He believes in the authority represented by the conch. He is interested in ideas and intensely loyal to Ralph, partly because he recognizes his own vulnerability to Jack. He is outraged by the theft of his glasses, on which he is very dependent.

Readers can deduce his intelligence and interest in science and technology, and he shows a surprising bravery and idealism in his approach to demand the return of his glasses. He is loyal to Ralph, and senses the dangers posed by Jack's leadership. Piggy is a thinker rather than a doer. At the end Ralph, who at first made fun of Piggy, mourns the loss of a boy he grew to value deeply; many readers also mourn this loss.