

Sam Poole

Date

Class and Period

Literary Analysis Essay

The Beast Within

Modern history has shown us the evil that exists in human beings. Assassinations and shootings are common, governments use torture to discourage dissent, and six million Jews were exterminated during World War II. In *Lord of the Flies*, William Golding describes a group of schoolboys shipwrecked on an island with no authority figures to control their behavior. One of the boys, Jack Merridew, yields to the dark forces within himself, a corruption that symbolizes the evil in all of us. First, Jack kills a living creature; then, he rebels against the group leader; and finally, he seizes power and sets up his own murderous society.

The first stage in Jack's downfall is his killing of a living creature. In Chapter 1, Jack aims at a pig but is unable to kill. His upraised arm pauses "because of the enormity of the knife descending and cutting into living flesh, because of the unbearable blood" (38), and the pig escapes. Three chapters later, however, Jack leads some boys on a successful hunt. He returns triumphantly with a freshly killed pig and reports excitedly to the others, "I cut the pig's throat" (72). Yet Jack twitches as he says this, and he wipes his bloody hands on his shorts as if eager to remove the stains. His transformation has begun, but there is still some civilization left in him.

After the initial act of killing the pig, Jack's refusal to cooperate with Ralph, the elected leader, shows that this civilized conscience within Jack is rapidly disappearing. With no adults around, Ralph has made rules for the group's safety. One rule is that a signal fire must be kept burning. But Jack tempts the boys watching the fire to go hunting, and the fire goes out. Another rule is that at meeting, only the person holding a special seashell has the right to speak. In Chapter 5, another boy is speaking when Jack rudely tells him to shut up. Ralph accuses Jack of breaking the rules. Jack shouts: "Bollocks to the rules! We're strong—we hunt! If there's a beast, we'll hunt it down! We'll close in and beat and beat and beat--!" (127). He gives a "wild whoop" and leaps off the platform, throwing the meeting, and their society, into chaos. Jack is now much more savage than civilized.

The most obvious sign of Jack's inner corruption comes in Chapter 8, when he establishes his own murderous society. Insisting that Ralph is not a "proper chief" because he does not hunt, Jack insists on a new election (183). After he again loses, Jack announces, "I'm going off by myself.

Commented [SM1]: Author and title given in introduction

Commented [SM2]: Thesis: What the author wants to show in the novel—the message about the theme of human evil.

Commented [SM3]: The first of three main points to support the writer's thesis—as listed in the introduction paragraph.

Commented [SM4]: Evidence from the text used to show the writer's point. Note the format for using a direct quote and giving the page number.

Commented [SM5]: Topic sentence giving the next main point to support the writer's thesis—the next stage in Jack's moral decline.

Commented [SM6]: The topic sentence—the second point—was discussed and evidence from the text (a direct quote) was given to support it. The last sentence in the paragraph sums up Jack's state at this point.

Commented [SM7]: This topic sentence states the final main point about Jack's moral downfall.

... Anyone who wants to hunt when I do can come too" (191). Eventually, nearly all the boys join Jack's "tribe." Following his example, they paint their faces like savages, sacrifice to "the beast," brutally murder two of their schoolmates, and nearly succeed in killing Ralph as well. Jack has now completely broken with ordered society and become completely savage and brutal—and so have the others in his tribe.

Through Jack Merridew, Golding shows how easily moral laws can be forgotten and suggests what leaders and society can become if unchecked. Freed from grown-ups and their rules, Jack learns to kill living things, defy authority, and lead a tribe of murdering savages, not unlike the events leading to World War II., which preceded Golding's novel. Jack's example is a frightening reminder of humanity's potential for evil. The "beast" the boys try to hunt and kill is actually within every human being.

Commented [SM8]: Plot details are given and documented to support the writer's point about Jack.

Commented [SM9]: The paragraph ends with the writer's comment about Jack's descent into savagery.

Commented [SM10]: In the concluding paragraph, the writer restates the thesis of the essay—what the novel shows about human nature left unchecked by law and morality.

Commented [SM11]: The essay's main points that support the thesis are restated.

Commented [SM12]: The essay ends with the writer's final, memorable comments relating the novel to our lives.

Source: *Writers Inc.* Great Source Education Group. Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Note the following in the essay:

1. A lead into the idea of the novel and the writer's understanding appears in the first sentence.
2. A very brief plot summary is in the introduction, along with the author and title of the novel.
3. The thesis statement is given in the introduction, stating the writer's central point about the novel's theme.
4. A brief list of the essay's major points end the introduction (optional to list here; supporting points can be incorporated into the thesis sentence instead or can be given in topic sentences of each supporting graf).
5. Transitions are used at the beginning of each paragraph to link the ideas, one to the next.
6. Direct quotes and paraphrases are used to support the writer's claims and are documented in the essay, in the following format: Character / Narrator says, "Quote" (183).
7. Plot points are used in the body ONLY to illustrate the ideas and claims.
8. The major supporting points of the essay are briefly summarized in the conclusion.
9. The thesis—the one central idea—of the essay is restated in the essay, and the major supporting points are briefly restated also.
10. The essay ends with a conclusive, interesting, and memorable final remark related to the theme of the novel.