

# Character analysis: ralph

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Through his literary masterpiece, *The Lord of the Flies*, William Golding attempts to dissect the human being morally, emotionally and even physically, focusing on man's weaknesses and inherent nature. By placing his characters on an abandoned island, he systematically takes them away from the civilized world at an age when they are shaping their ideas and personalities which result from external influences.

Golding mainly tries to analyze the connection between one's nature and the external influences. In a way, Golding is experimenting with the characters, deliberately putting them in a controlled environment to evaluate their responses. Ralph, the main character, is Golding's main pawn in the experiment, as he embodies both positive and negative sides of human nature and is a classic result of society's conditioning. At first the well-rounded, ideal teenager, Ralph eventually undergoes many changes, transforming and forcing himself to reevaluate himself and those around him throughout the book. His popularity among the group is evident when the boys elect him president, which is a sign that he was the all-star in their community with ideal characteristics such as being athletic, good-looking, and responsible and a moral person.

Even though Ralph tries to emulate the same actions as before on the island, he fails to realize that things have changed: a group of pre-teen and younger boys are together with no limitations or adult chaperones. His responsible behavior, such as making huts, thinking about security and going back home, are realistic approaches to a problem; something that he has been taught to do in times of crisis. However, the other boys prove that the nature of this age is different and will overcome, especially since Ralph is trying to

play part and at the time, no one wants to even think about events back home. When Ralph starts losing authority to Jack, and things start diverting from his plans, he is not sure about what to do, because he was not taught about handling failed situations. For this reason, he desperately wants to return to civilization where the line between moral and immoral is not blurred and someone is always there to tell him how to handle complicated situations.

When the other boys act savagely, Ralph immediately reminds himself that they are wrong and he must stay true to his humane side; however, even he comes under the mob mentality, and joins them in primitive rituals. He is different from the others because when they accidentally kill Simon, the others easily move on, whereas Ralph realizes the extremity of his deeds and drowns in guilt, which he shows by crying at the end of the novel. Ralph comes to two realizations through his experiences. Golding states, " He found himself understanding the wearisomeness of this life, where every path was an improvisation and a considerable part of one's waking life was spent watching one's feet" (76). Firstly, he realizes that his power only works in the traditional society, where his traits are valued.

On the island, Jack's violence and savagery represent the weaker truth about human nature, which gets out of control without any barriers enforced on it. Secondly, he realizes that human nature is capable of doing evil things which is why it must be controlled. When he realizes this, his moral awareness increases and when he tramples the Lord of the Flies, he confirms his identity of being a moral human being and places himself over the savages. His attempting to retaliate also confirms his new-founded bravery for

defending the good human nature side, even if he must die for it. The author carefully planned these changes in Ralph to make a point that even the seemingly strongest and most intelligent among men cannot escape their evil, negative human nature. It is merely a question of being placed around events that will trigger the evil and bring it in the open.

Despite this, the author argues, that man is indeed the most powerful and ethical being, along with being the weakest and most cruel. Even though Ralph gave into temptation, he struggled and suppressed it after seeing the negative effects. In contrast, Jack's character represents the vicious, immoral side of man when unleashed and given power. Through Jack, the author shows the corrupt religious institutions, politicians and average people taking advantage of others' fears. Piggy admits his fear by saying, " I'm scared of him, and that's why I know him.

If you're scared of someone you hate him but you can't stop thinking about him. You kid yourself he's all right really, an' then when you see him again; it's like asthma an' you can't breathe" (93). Golding describes Ralph's inherent goodness by physically making him innocent and beautiful with blonde hair and fair skin. He states, " You could see now that he might make a boxer, as far as width and heaviness of shoulders went, but there was a mildness about his mouth and eyes that proclaimed no devil." Ralph represents high moral integrity and also its weaknesses; however, the important factor shown by the author is that despite weaknesses, the morality overcomes. He also represents law, social order and peace and a system of fair leadership in society, one which values qualified and suited leaders over corrupt and under qualified people.

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In contrast to Jack, Ralph knows the right thing to do according to his instincts along with what he has been taught. One example of this is when he decides to lead the group to Castle Rock, ready to sacrifice himself as a true leader for their safety.