

Piggy: brains, wisdom, and the human spirit

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In the introduction to William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies*, E. M. Forster describes Piggy as not only "the brains of the party" but also "the wisdom of the heart" and "the human spirit." This description of Piggy becomes more accurate as the novel increases and the distinction between savagery and civilization becomes clearer. At the beginning of the novel, Piggy may seem to the boys on the island a brainy nuisance; yet as Jack and his tribe rapidly dominate the island with their brute force Piggy's insight, experience as an outcast, and staunch belief in ethical ideals keep him from falling into the lure of savagery. When Ralph weeps at the end of the novel, he clearly sees how wisdom, soul, and sacrifice have made Piggy a true friend. Piggy, most commonly acknowledged as Ralph's subordinate, brims with intelligence that is both beneficial and harmful to himself; while his specs, symbolizing brains, clarity, and his physical limitations, prove to be a supportive pillar of survival on the island. His responsibility and need for structure can be seen when he says to Ralph, "How can you expect to be rescued if you don't put first things first and act proper?" (45). Chastising Ralph and Jack for running up the mountain "howling and screaming...like a pack of kids" at Ralph's suggestion of a signal fire, Piggy says that the first thing the boys should have done was build shelters by the beach. (45). Already at the beginning of the novel, Piggy is separated from the group in the sense that he is the only one to act maturely and think of a logical plan of action, while Ralph and the others run impulsively at the idea of fun. This costs him acceptance from the other boys, but is a lesson Golding wants his readers to abide by. It is an emphasis on the importance of nonconformity even at the price of sacrificing acceptance; it is human nature to want

others' approval, but conforming to a mad society like Jack's can lead to fatal consequences. According to one interpretation of the novel's allegory, Piggy is symbolic of technology. This is seen when Piggy, always thinking of scientific possibilities, exclaims, "If only we could make a radio—or a boat!"(162). Although the thought of scientific advancement on a deserted island is clever, perhaps Piggy subconsciously wants to recreate a small piece of his old world on this island because of his longing for home. When Jack and his tribe come to steal Piggy's specs for their own fire on Castle Rock, Jack steals Piggy's intelligence and uses it against him, leaving Piggy bereft of his clarity and intellect. Without his glasses, Piggy becomes blind—his physical and mental capabilities are stolen from him forever by the savage Jack. Piggy's intelligence and experience as an outcast both contribute to the wisdom that helps him retain his civility while understanding the cruelty possessed by Jack from an objective standpoint. Through the idea of a name list, Piggy implicitly states that without individual identity, the boys will become nameless faces and civility on the island will deteriorate into savagery. Again, Golding's message about nonconformity is clear. One must value the individual in order to retain a diverse and functioning society. While Piggy is unable to gather all of the boy's names into a list, a little 'un dies in the fire and all Ralph and Piggy can remember was "that little 'un—him with the mark on his face" because without a name, he is unidentifiable. (46). Piggy's specs, symbolizing clarity, allow him to foresee the island's ultimate fate. When he says, "Won't we look funny if the whole island burns up?", Piggy subconsciously predicts that if responsibility fails to supersede fun, then the island will go up in smoke as it

does when Jack sets the island on fire to force Ralph out of his hiding position. Even from the beginning, the boys dislike Piggy for his “ fat, and ass-mar, and specs, and a certain disinclination for manual labor” (65). They label him an outsider, allowing their contempt for Piggy to turn into full fledged hatred as the boys rapidly turn savage. Piggy’s foresight is a symbol of his wisdom because he can sense danger. On the night of Simon’s death, Ralph and Piggy follow Jack’s tribe to Castle Rock for meat. When Jack and his tribe begin dancing wildly, Piggy warns Ralph, “ Come away. There’s going to be trouble” (151). Here, Piggy tries to caution Ralph not to get involved with Jack’s chanting and barbaric behavior. Even Ralph, who is labeled an outsider by the end of the novel, cannot see that the beast is something intangible. Yet Piggy sees this when Ralph asks him, “ What makes things break up like they do?”(140). Piggy, thinking deeply, responds, “ Jack”(140). Piggy notices that “ a taboo was evolving round that word” and Jack was slowly becoming a symbol of the beast.(140). Piggy attributes the destruction of morality and order on the island to the insidious way Jack lures the boys into his tribe with hunting so that Ralph’s civilized government will be abandoned in favor of Jack’s totalitarianism. Deeper and more inherent than intelligence, wisdom is what keeps Piggy cautious of the future so that his actions will not be as easily influenced by Jack’s savage behavior. The human spirit can be described as Piggy’s inner voice, urging him to fight for his beliefs no matter how many times he is belittled by Jack and his tribe. When Jack steals Piggy’s specs for his fire on Castle Rock, Piggy implores him, “ I don’t ask for my glasses back, not as a favor. I don’t ask you to be a sport, I’ll say— not because you’re strong, but because what’s right’s

right”(171). Although Jack deprives him of reason, Piggy retains a strong sense of morality from the structured lifestyle he was raised in. Piggy cannot comprehend why anyone would breach the tacit laws of ethical behavior; because he has always led a sheltered and wholesome life, he is naturally drawn to do what is right. Piggy also fights for his ideals, passionately unleashing his anger and confusion only to be ignored by the deaf ears of Jack’s tribe. Gaining confidence from the conch in his hands, Piggy bravely reproaches the boys by saying, “ which is better—to be a pack of painted Indians like you are, or to be sensible like Ralph is? ...Which is better—to have rules and agree, or to hunt and kill?”(180). Piggy believes in these principles like a zealot, and eventually dies because of them. Rather than conform to Jack’s tribe, Piggy remains true to Ralph; and although he suffers a ruthless death, Piggy dies with the knowledge that he had stayed true to his morality while fighting for the ideals he believed in fervently. Piggy’s brains, wisdom, and spirit endear him to Ralph by the end of the novel. As a wash of realization overcomes Ralph, he weeps for “ the end of innocence, the darkness of man’s heart, and the fall through the air of the true, wise friend called Piggy”(202). Golding’s portrayal of Piggy as an unloved outcast emphasizes the lesson of resisting the temptation of a mad society, even if it involves sacrificing acceptance and love. Although Piggy is never heard by Jack and the other boys, he surpassed them by refusing to conform. Piggy deserved the description, “ brains of the party, wisdom of the heart, and the human spirit” because he alone remained true to himself and the civility in which he was brought up.