

The theme of leadership in the 'lord of the flies'

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Throughout the novel, 'Lord of the Flies', William Golding is able to link the many aspects of our own world through the various characters he creates. One of these aspects is leadership, which plays a vital role in the novel's microcosmic society, as it does in our own society. Golding uses leadership to convey his ideologies about human nature. Golding believes that all humans are fundamentally flawed, that all humans are evil and are capable of inflicting evil upon others. Only the law and order of our society hold back the flaws that all humans inherently possess.

Golding uses the mixed feelings that he has about leadership to reveal his philosophy about human nature and other flawed aspects of our society. The Second World War, which Golding was a part of, brought about his pessimism of human nature. He was horrified at what himself and others did during the war.

He gradually learned to see all human nature as savage and unforgiving, the darkness of man's heart; it is in all of us. The qualities of a good leader are universally accepted. The leader has to have control over his followers. He has to demand respect.

The leader also has to be able to persuade his followers to follow him without taking away from his beliefs and views. A good leader also has to be able to be strong, mentally more than physically. He needs to be able to stand his ground and strongly believe in what he feels is right.

A good leader also has to believe in himself. If a leader does not believe in himself, then who will? A leader has to be assertive and does not need to

back down from anything. The two main characters in this novel express some of these characteristics, one character more than the other.

There are always people, when in a group, who show and possess superior leadership attributes than others. The strongest, mentally and physically, tend to have the greatest influence over others. Sometimes the strongest person is not necessarily the best choice. Authors, including Golding, often show how humans select the strongest person, to give us an understanding of the influence people can possess over others. Golding has two stand out characters in the beginning of the novel who each show their own, but very different leadership skills.

However Golding believes that there is no such thing as a perfect leader, and that every type of leadership is flawed in some way. Golding intends to use these two characters to highlight the two types of leadership that he tries to present in the novel. The first character introduced to us is Ralph, who in my opinion is presented as the better leader. His capacity for leadership is evident from the beginning, " Shut up," said Ralph absently.

He lifted the conch. " Seems to me we ought to have a chief to decide things. He then proceeds to be voted as the group leader, over Jack, mainly due to the fact that he was the one that initially blew the conch, " They obeyed the summons of the conch, partly because Ralph blew it, and he was big enough to be a link with the adult world of authority.... " It is obvious from the offset that Golding has made Ralph the symbol of democracy in the novel. Golding shows his feeling about democracy as describing democratic voting as a ' toy'. The other little'uns follow Ralph as he is the only link they have left to the civilised world.

At the beginning and throughout the novel, Ralph is the primary representative of order, society and leadership among the group. Ralph starts off well at attempting to make a new society; he firmly believes that the most important thing in this situation is being rescued. He creates a fire beacon, for cooking, heat and rescue. The signal fire can be viewed as a sign of hope - the hope the boys have to return to society. When the flames dance brightly, it shows the enthusiasm they hold for the idea of being rescued. However, as the fire grows dim, it reflects the attitude of the boys and their loss of morale.

The signal fire can also be viewed as the boys' link to the civilized world. As long as the fire continues burning, it suggests not only that the boys want to return to society, but also that they are still using their common sense. He understands the essentials that a society must have to keep afloat and he knows what must be done in order for the survival of the boys. He works vigilantly to keep the group's focus on the hope of rescue. It is at the second assembly that we see Ralph firmly asserting his authority, "except by me". It is also the first time that Jack struggles with Ralph's authority.

As the tension between Ralph and Jack continues to increase, we see more obvious signs of a potential struggle for power. Although Jack has been deeply envious of Ralph's power from the moment Ralph was elected, the two do not come into open conflict until the fourth chapter, when Jack's irresponsibility leads to the failure of the signal fire. When the fire—a symbol of the boys' connection to civilization—goes out, the boys' first chance of being rescued is thwarted. Ralph flies into a rage, indicating that he is still governed by desire to achieve the good of the whole group.

But Jack, having just killed a pig, is too excited by his success to care very much about the missed chance to escape the island. Indeed, Jack's bloodlust and thirst for power have overwhelmed his interest in civilization. Whereas he previously justified his commitment to hunting by claiming that it was for the good of the group, now he no longer feels the need to justify his behaviour at all. Instead, he indicates his new orientation toward savagery by painting his face like a barbarian, leading wild chants among the hunters, and apologizing for his failure to maintain the signal fire only when Ralph seems ready to fight him over it.

However, Ralph still has his shortcomings as a leader and isn't always perfect as Golding is trying to show. One of his first mistakes was giving more control to Jack by making him leader of his hunters. This allows Jack and the choir boys to make their own rules and encourage the choir boys to stray away from Ralph's lead. When the beast is first introduced, Ralph doesn't do a very good job of convincing the younger boys that there isn't a beast on the island. He just says " but there isn't a beast. " Whereas Jack assures the younger boys that if there is a beast, he'd find it and kill it.

The weight of leadership becomes oppressive for Ralph as the story continues; he is dutiful and dedicated, but his attempts to instil order and calm among the boys are decreasingly successful. Golding develops Ralph's particular concerns and insecurities. By showing him worrying over his perceived failures, Golding highlights Ralph's responsible, adult nature. Ralph's concern about his appearance, and particularly his grown-out hair, indicate his natural inclination toward the normality of civilization.

Although Ralph demonstrates a more than sufficient intelligence, he also worries that he lacks Piggy's genius, " if only I could step inside that fat head of his". Ralph eventually understands the importance of thought and how it can help him as a leader, " thought was a valuable thing, that got results... ". The second type of leadership that Golding conveys through a character is the Dictator, Jack. Ralph treats all the boys with dignity and tries to work with them for the betterment of the society. On the opposite side of the scale, Jack does not treat any of the boys with the dignity that Ralph does.

In chapter three Golding writes, in comparing Jack's and Ralph, " They walked along, two continents of experience and feeling, unable to communicate. " This shows how Golding is trying to tell us how Ralph and Jack's motives are completely different; one is focused on hunting and the other on the society. Jack immediately shows qualities of a good leader, but are different qualities than Ralph shows. Jack has a very commanding presence from the beginning; he arrives on the island having some success in exerting control over others by dominating the choir with his militaristic attitude.

At the first assembly he believes that he should be chief, " I ought to be chief", but is humiliated when he loses the vote to Ralph. Jack is chauvinistic, stating that, " I agree with Ralph. We've got to have rules and obey them. After all, we're not savages. We're English, and the English are best at everything. So we've got to do the right things. " Golding believes that Nationalism and chauvinism are the causes of wars on our society and is putting this across in the microcosm. This is a hint that there would be eventually conflict on the island.

Golding also uses the theory of Darwinism to relate to Jack, as Jack puts down the weaker in society, Piggy and Simon, like most dictators do. Jack represents evil and violence, the dark side of human nature. He is the character that regresses the most throughout the novel. It starts with him hunting in the Jungle, when Golding uses animal imagery to show his regression, 'ape-like' and 'half naked...walking on all fours'. Jack attempts to dominate the group, rather than working with Ralph to benefit it.

The conch does not mean anything to Jack, for him, the conch represents the rules and boundaries that have kept him from dominating others. Their entire lives in the other world, the boys had been moderated by rules set by society. The dictator in Jack becomes dominant in his personality during the panic over the beast sighting on the mountain. In trying to put Ralph down, he uses his rhetorical skills to twist Ralph's words. In defence, he offers to the group an excuse that "He'd never have got us meat," asserting that hunting skills make for an effective leader.

Jack assigns a high value only to those who he finds useful or agreeable to his views and looks to silence those who do not please him. Denouncing the rules of order, Jack declares, "We don't need the conch any more. We know who ought to say things." As Jack strives to establish his leadership, he takes on the title of "chief" and reinforces the illusion of station and power by using the other boys ceremoniously as standard bearers who raise their spears together and announce "The Chief has spoken. Jack works closely with Roger, as Ralph does with Piggy and Simon, to help him form his new dictatorship at Castle Rock.

Though Roger does not possess any sort of leadership skills, he does have a forced authority over others. This role is no game for him, though; by the night of Simon's death, Jack has clearly gone power-mad, sitting at the pig roast on a large log "painted and garlanded . . . like an idol" while "power . . . chattered in his ear like an ape." His tribe addresses him as "Chief," indicating a form of more primitive tribal leadership.

Jack's leadership in the macrocosm would not work, it would just lead to war. Whereas on the island Jack promises food and fun, so everybody follows him. Jack's savage, primitive society murders the two outcasts, Piggy and Simon. The next on their list is Ralph, who is finding himself running away from a line of Jack's group across the island. In the midst of the chaos, the forest is set on fire. As Ralph is running away, he unselfishly thinks, 'The fools! The fire must be almost at the fruit trees- what would they eat tomorrow.'

Even though Jack's tribe is hunting him down, all he cares about are the others. At the end of the novel, a naval officer comes onto the island. When he asks who is in charge, Jack steps forward and then steps back. He finally realizes that what he was doing was wrong and cowers away from the naval officer, thinking that Ralph would take all of the blame. Ralph loudly proclaims that he is the leader. They had all finally come to realize what they had done.

They soon discovered that if they had followed Ralph, none of this would have happened. When the naval officer appears on the island, all the boys who were moments ago behaving savagely, come to a halt and suddenly return to their senses. This suggests that the appearance of the naval officer symbolizes the return of both adult supervision and civilization.

Ralph was the best leader in the novel, he puts the society over himself at all times. Jack has better leadership skills, but chooses to use them for the wrong reasons. The fact that he came to be the leader was because of humanity's sinful tendency towards savagery.