

In what ways does
golding present the
boys decline into
savagery essay



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The main descent to savagery in the novel could be seen in the choir. They begin as boys who accept the discipline of a choir school and acknowledge Jack's position as head chorister. They become hunters, when Jack claims this role for them. Then, as Jack releases his savage instincts by creating his mask, they become savages. They used to wear identical cloaks and caps, a uniform designed to promote their group identity and hide individuality. Jack orders the choir to 'take off' their 'togs'; this symbolizes the stripping away of civilisation.

Now their identities are hidden by masks and paint, and they degenerate into a tribe of savage killers, living in fear of their cruel chief. In the third chapter: 'Huts on the Beach' Jack description of a hunter makes him seem like an animal himself. We see him crouching, 'dog-like', and sniffing the air, 'like a sprinter, his nose only a few inches from the humid earth'. He's almost naked, apart from his 'tattered shorts' and he carries a 'sharpened stick' which he uses as a spear. Every time they kill they take a step further down the road to savagery.

In the next chapter 'Painted Faces and Long Hair' Jack paints his face with clay and charcoal for camouflage when hunting, but the mask he creates has a powerful psychological effect as well. The sight of his mask fills him with awe and excitement. This is Jack's watershed, his laughter becomes 'bloodthirsty snarling' and he is 'liberated from shame and self-consciousness. The mask is symbolic; it is covering up Jack's civilised values. The mask influences the other boys making them scared however it is also gradually bringing out inner evil, 'the mask compelled them'.

With the mask to hide behind, Jack is now free to behave in a violent, savage way. Jack is not the only boy to become sadistic when killing pigs; Ralph too has an experience of killing a pig and enjoying it, in Chapter 7 'Shadows and Tall Trees'. Ralph is full of 'fright' and 'apprehension' and 'pride' when he realises that his spear hit the pig. He enjoys the respect he has won and feels that hunting is good after all. For a moment Ralph shares some of the hunters' feelings. Ralph wants more attention so he re-acts the scene by using Robert as the pig.

He feels the desire to 'squeeze and hurt'; this has been brought out by the thrill of him killing the pig. Ralph gains respect when he spears a pig, but not when he insists on the importance of living in a civilised way while looking for rescue. I think this is because boys generally enjoy adventure more than the subject of rescue that an adult would normally deal with. In chapter 7 Golding changes the language used considerably. Near the beginning of the book he describes the islands wonderful features like the beautiful lagoon, the 'palm fringed shore' and the 'warm dark green beach pool'.

However in this chapter he describes the other side of the island, he uses harsh words like 'hard', 'clipped blue' and 'the brute obtuseness of the ocean'. The friendly side of the island is expressed with words like 'defended', 'shield' and 'quiet'. There, it was possible to dream of rescue. The contrasting language helps express the difference of the different parts of the island. Chapter 8, 'Gift for the Darkness' is long and important because we see how there is a very close connection between the boy's physical appearance and their mental state. Jack's hunters are now painted, anonymous savages. Their sticks are spears.

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These hunters once sang in unison in the choir, now, at Jack's insistence, they talk in unison in a frightening ritual designed to enhance Jack's power and authority. In the next chapter, 'A View to a Death' Jack is shown even more like a primitive god, throned on a log with a garland around his neck, surrounded by offerings of food and drink. He gives orders which the boys obey, and conveys warnings which they obey. This shows how Jack dominates like an imperious monarch. Golding uses pathetic fallacy and personification to emphasise how the island has changed, 'evening was come, not with calm beauty but with the threat of violence'.

The killing of the pigs becomes more bloodthirsty, and has more to do with ritual violence than with the providing of meat. The ritual of chanting and dancing increases in ferocity until it culminates in Simon's murder. Ralph and Piggy join in with the ritual, because they feel a kind of security. The boys stamp and chant as if the rhythmic repetition will keep them safe. The whole atmosphere is built up by using pathetic fallacy; the ritual is lit by flashes of lightening in the 'dark and terrible air'.

When Simon staggers into the circle of savage, dancing boys he tries to tell them the truth about the 'body on the hill', that there is nothing to fear from it. However he is beaten to death as he speaks. Golding shows an immediate contrast at the end of this scene, the ritual is ferocious and vile, while the burial is strikingly beautiful. Golding creates a sense of rhythm and majesty of the universe with phrases like 'somewhere over the darkened curve of the world the sun and moon were pulling and while the solid core turned'. In chapter 11 'Castle Rock' Piggy and Ralph confront Jack asking for the glasses back.

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Ralph tries to belittle the savages, calling them 'painted fools' and tells them they're not 'playing the game'. He fails to realise quite how savage they have become. Golding wants the reader to know how savage the boys have become, they get the same excitement and thrill when grabbing and tying up the twins as when they are killing pigs. I think this is because they feel the same power over them. When Piggy is killed by the dislodged rock the conch is also smashed. This is very symbolic in that the conch represented the values of democracy, responsibility and order, ideas which Piggy persistently upheld.

The final hunt in the novel is the hunt for Ralph. What they intend to do with his body shows how much they have changed. The echoes and reminders of playground games of chasing and hunting make the reality of what they are doing all the more sinister. In the end there is no element of civilisation left and the descent to savagery is complete. In this final chapter it is written in such a way as to bring the reader right inside Ralph's head, so that we identify with his thoughts and feelings, and experience them in the same way he does.

Golding uses short sharp sentences to show Ralph's breathless panic and his attempts to think clearly like Piggy: 'Break the line. A tree. Hide, let them pass.' Ralph is found by the hunters, and is chased onto the beach. There he meets a navel officer on the beach, who uses an ironic comment, 'Fun and games', 'nobody killed, I hope', the officer does not understand the situation. He knows less about the real meaning of war and the real nature of humanity than Ralph does. Golding has written all four intended killings in a certain order.

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The first is of the 'pigs' they kill, which is essentially for food, however it turns into more of an exciting sport. The next murder is of Simon which is arguably an accident caused by the frenzy the boys had worked up. Piggy's death was because of one Rogers sadistic nature, but it was not a group murder. At the end the boys intended Ralph to be murdered, the whole group of savages was trying to kill him, and this was intended because of the savage nature they had taken on. I think that each chapter in the novel shows the boys decline into savagery.