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**Symbols in Lord of the Flies**

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## **Symbols in Lord of the Flies**

### **SYMBOLS**

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

#### **The Conch Shell**

The conch shell is the first important discovery Piggy and Ralph make on the island, and they use it to summon the boys together after they are separated by the crash. As a result, the conch shell becomes a powerful symbol of civilization and order. It is used to govern the boys' meetings: the boy who holds the shell is given the right to speak, making the shell more than a symbol; it is an actual vessel of political legitimacy and democratic power. As the island civilization erodes and savagery begins to dominate the boys, the conch shell loses its power and influence among them. Ralph clutches it desperately when he talks about his role in murdering Simon. Later, he is taunted and pelted with stones when he attempts to blow it in Jack's camp at Castle Rock. When Roger kills Piggy with the boulder, the conch shell is crushed, signifying the complete demise of the civilized instinct among almost all the boys on the island.

#### **Piggy's Glasses**

Piggy is the most intelligent, rational boy in the group, and his glasses represent the power of science and intellectual endeavor in society. This is most clearly demonstrated when Piggy's glasses are used to make fire by intensifying sunlight with their lenses. Thus, when Jack's hunters raid Ralph's camp and steal the glasses,

the savages have taken the power to make fire, and Ralph's civilization is left helpless.

### **The Signal Fire**

The signal fire burns on the mountain, and later on the beach, to attract the notice of passing ships that might be able to rescue the boys. As a result, the signal fire becomes a symbol for the boys' connection to civilization. As long as the fire is well maintained, the boys exhibit a desire to return to society, but when the fire burns low or goes out, the boys lose sight of their desire to be rescued, having accepted their savage lives on the island. The signal fire thus functions as a kind of measuring stick by which the strength of the civilized instinct on the island can be judged.

Ironically, at the end of the novel, it is a fire that finally summons a ship to the island, but not the signal fire: it is the fire of savagery—the forest fire Jack starts as part of his quest to hunt and kill Ralph.

### **The Beast**

One of the most important symbols of the novel, the imaginary beast, which frightens all the boys, stands for the primal instinct of savagery that exists within all human beings. The boys are afraid of the beast, but only Simon realizes that they fear the beast because it exists within each of them. As the boys grow more and more savage, their belief in the beast grows stronger and more pronounced. By the end of the novel, they are leaving it sacrifices and treating it as a totemic god. Because the boys' behavior is what brings the beast into existence, the more savagely they act, the more real the beast seems to become.

## **The Lord of the Flies**

The Lord of the Flies is the bloody sow's head that Jack impales on a stake in the forest glade as an offering to the beast. This complicated symbol becomes the most important image in the novel when Simon confronts it in the glade and it seems to speak to him, telling him that evil lies within every human heart and promising to have some "fun" with him. (This "fun" foreshadows Simon's death in the following chapter.) In this way, the Lord of the Flies becomes both a physical manifestation of the beast, a symbol of the power of evil, and a kind of Satanic figure who evokes the beast within each human being. In a reading of the novel's religious iconography, the Lord of the Flies represents the devil, just as Simon represents Christ. In fact, the name "Lord of the Flies" is a translation of the name of the biblical Beelzebub, a powerful demon in hell sometimes thought to be the devil himself.

## **Ralph, Piggy, Jack, Simon, Roger**

Because the novel is an allegory, each character signifies an important idea or theme. Ralph represents order, leadership, and civilization; Piggy represents the scientific and intellectual aspects of civilization; Jack represents savagery and the desire for power; Simon represents natural human goodness; and Roger represents brutality and bloodlust at their most extreme. In the sense that the boys' society functions as a political state, the littluns can be said to represent the common people, while the older boys represent the ruling classes and political leaders. The developing relationships of the older boys to the younger ones further symbolize their connection to either the civilized or the savage instinct: civilized boys such as Ralph and Simon use their power to protect the littler boys and advance the good of the group; savage boys such as Jack and Roger use their power to gratify their own desires, treating the littler boys as objects for their own amusement.