**LORD OF THE FLIES OVERVIEW**

**The Meaning of the Title**

The title of the novel is a translation of a Hebrew word, "baal-zevuv," which means chief or principal devil--Satan. In Greek, the word is "Beelzeboub." An English word derived from the Greek word is "Beelzebub," which can mean any of the following: Satan, chief devil, an assistant devil second only to Satan, or fallen angel. In the novel, the decapitated head of a pig is referred to in Chapter 8 ("Gift for the Darkness") as the "Lord of the Flies" after Jack and his boys impale it on a stake driven into the ground. When the head begins to decompose, it attracts many flies. However, the head is only a symbol of the devil, or evil. Simon learns while staring at it that the real evil on the island lies inside the souls of the boys. It is interesting to note that the boys call their leader "chief," which could be interpreted as a shortened version of the meaning of Beelzebub, or chief devil.

**Theme as Explained by the Author**

In a publicity release prepared for American publishers of The Lord of the Flies, William Golding explained the theme of his book as follows:

The theme is an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature. The moral is that the shape of a society must depend on the ethical nature of the individual and not on any political system however apparently logical or respectable. The whole book is symbolic in nature except the rescue in the end where adult life appears, dignified and capable, but in reality enmeshed in the same evil as the symbolic life of the children on the island. The officer, having interrupted a man-hunt, prepares to take the children off the island in a cruiser which will presently be hunting its enemy in the same implacable way. And who will rescue the adult and his cruiser? (E.L. Epstein. "Notes on Lord of the Flies." The Lord of the Flies, by William Golding. New York: Berkley Publishing Group, 1954, page 204).

**Symbols**

The Lord of the Flies contains many symbols used by the author to develop and support his theme. These symbols include the following:

Plane Crash: Failure or breakdown of society in the world outside; spread of corrupting ideas.

Forest Scar: This path of destruction through the forest, caused by the crashing plane, appears to represent the encroachment of corrupt civilization on the pristine island.

Island: Before the arrival of the boys, the Garden of Eden; after the arrival of the boys, the corrupted world of humankind.

Conch: Civilized authority, democracy.

Eyeglasses of Piggy and Piggy Himself: Insight, wisdom, knowledge.

Death of Piggy and Destruction of Conch: Failure or breakdown of society on the island.

Signal Fire: Hope.

Imagined Beast: Fear, superstition. (The boys imagine that a monster in the form of a snake, a sea monster, an ape, or other "beasties" that they dream about lurks nearby.)

Dead Parachutist: The beast. (In fact, the parachutist is a beast, for he has taken part in a war to kill fellow human beings.)

Chanting and Dancing of the Hunters: Blind emotion, loss of reason.

Logs on Which Ralph and Jack Sit: Seats of authority; thrones.

The Big Boys: The emerging generation of evil.

The Little Boys: The next generation of evil.

The Naval Officer: The present generation of evil.

The Killing of the First Pig: Original sin.

The Killing of the Second Pig, the Sow: Release of perverted, Oedipal urges.

Jack's Knife, Sticks Sharpened Into Spears: Weapons of war in the macrocosmic world; phalluses as representations of masculine aggression.

Jack and Ralph: Perhaps Cain and Abel (although Ralph does not die, as Abel did in the Bible).

The Impaled Pig's Head (Lord of the Flies): The evil in every person's heart.

**Writing Style**

Golding relies heavily on figures of speech and symbols to undergird his story. A log becomes a metaphor for the throne of the ruler, or chief; a conch, the emblem of democracy; a fist fight, a military battle; an island, the whole world.

Golding's language is vivid but easy to understand, and the plot moves quickly. As in Animal Farm, by Golding's fellow countryman Eric Blair (pen name, George Orwell), the characters and the action have several layers of meaning, although readers can enjoy the novel as an adventure story on its basic, literal level. One fault of the book appears to be that Golding sometimes violates a central tenet of good writing: "Show, don't tell." In other words, rather than allowing his figures of speech, symbols, and descriptions to work their magic by suggesting subtle meanings, interpretations, feelings, character traits, and so on, he intrudes upon the narrative to tell the reader what such and such means or represents. This approach patronizes the reader and destroys the sense of awe and mystery that Golding is attempting to create. Notable examples of this heavy-handed approach occur in two crucial scenes--the first when the impaled pig's head speaks to Simon, the second when Ralph stumbles and falls at the feet of the navy man at the end of the novel.

In the first example, the impaled head (the Lord of the Flies) tells Simon--and the reader--what he symbolizes (Golding 143). The head, in fact, assumes the role of a teacher instructing a slow learner. Golding writes, "The Lord of the Flies spoke in the voice of a schoolmaster. 'This has gone quite far enough. My poor, misguided child, do you think you know better than I do?'"

In the second example, Golding is there again to tell the reader what to think and, with a reference to Piggy, to add a note of melodrama bordering on bathos: "Ralph wept 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).

Climax

The climax of a novel or another narrative work, such as a short story or a play, can be defined as (1) the turning point at which the conflict begins to resolve itself for better or worse, or as (2) the final and most exciting event in a series of events. The climax of The Lord of the Flies occurs, according to the first definition, when Jack rebels and forms his own tribe, resulting in a "war" between his boys and Ralph's. According to the second definition, the climax occurs when Ralph fights Jack and Piggy dies.

**Irony**

There are several types of irony. Usually, though, irony refers to an outcome or a circumstance that is the opposite of what one might expect. It would be ironic, for example, if the shortest basketball player on a team is the highest scorer--or if the most popular, most intelligent, and most attractive student in the senior class is unable to get a date for the prom. Examples of irony in The Lord of the Flies include the following:

1.The survivors of the plane crash are boys evacuated from a battle zone in a world war. However, the society they form eventually breaks down, and the children go to war with one another.

2.Piggy's eyesight is weak, but his insight is strong.

3.The British naval officer who arrives to rescue the boys at the end of the novel appears to represent civilization and sanity. But he and the society he represents are actually a mirror image, on a large scale, of the boys and their corrupt island society.

4.When Jack sets a fire to roust Ralph from the forest, he unintentionally saves the lives of all the remaining boys. It was this fire that attracted the attention of the British ship.

**Internal and External Conflict**

There are two main types of conflict in literature: external and internal. External conflict pits a person against another human or against an animal, an object, the forces of nature, or any other thing or things outside of him. Internal conflict involves a struggle between a person and his emotions or negative attributes. Both types of conflict occur in The Lord of the Flies. Write an essay that identifies several of them and explains how they affect the course of events.