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## THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN GOOD AND EVIL IN THE NOVEL “LORD OF THE FLIES” BY WILLIAM GOLDING

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### Abstract

This article examines the central thematic conflict between good and evil in William Golding’s novel “Lord of the Flies”, emphasizing the author’s exploration of human nature when removed from the constraints of civilization. The study analyzes how moral values deteriorate as the boys on the island confront fear, power struggles, and survival instincts. Golding portrays good and evil not as external forces but as inherent dualities existing within each individual. By focusing on key characters such as Ralph, Piggy, Jack, and Simon, the article investigates the psychological and symbolic dimensions of their actions, revealing how societal order gradually collapses and innate savagery emerges. Special attention is given to the symbolic functions of major elements, including the conch, the “beast”, and the Lord of the Flies, as representations of morality, irrational fear, and primal violence. Through a close reading of the text and relevant critical perspectives, the research demonstrates that Golding challenges the notion of innocence in childhood by illustrating the fragile boundary separating civilization from barbarism. Ultimately, this article argues that “Lord of the Flies” offers a profound commentary on the perpetual struggle between good and evil that resides at the core of human existence.

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**Keywords:** William Golding, Lord of the Flies, good and evil, human nature, morality, savagery, civilization, symbolism, fear, power dynamics, violence, character psychology, ethical conflict, social order, literary analysis.



## Introduction

William Golding’s “Lord of the Flies” is famous for looking deeply into what people are truly like and how quickly society can fall apart. Written after World War II, Golding didn’t believe that humans are naturally good; instead, he thought that good and evil exist inside everyone, and that acting morally mostly depends on having rules and a proper society around us. When those systems disappear, the darker, wilder parts of human nature can take over very quickly. The story follows a group of boys stranded on an island who first try to create order, but as fear and primal instincts grow, their sense of right and wrong disappears. Characters like Ralph and Piggy represent smart, responsible civilization, while Jack and his followers show the dangerous shift toward cruelty and savagery. Through powerful symbolism and a raw look at violence, Golding shows us that evil isn’t an external enemy, but a potential within the human soul. By depicting children turning savage, the book challenges the idea of innocence and exposes the universal capacity for cruelty, making it a strong critique of human society that asks if we can truly stay moral once civilization is removed.

## Literature Review

Experts mostly focus on how the book describes human nature and the constant struggle between being civilized and being savage. One of the most long-standing ideas, shared by critic James R. Baker, is that Golding had a very negative view of people, suggesting that evil is a fundamental part of who we are he even called the book a story about “innate depravity”<sup>1</sup>. This view connects to Golding’s own experiences during World War II, which made him believe that civilization is just a thin mask hiding our darker sides. Other researchers, like Claire Rosenfield,

<sup>1</sup> Baker, James R. William Golding: A Critical Study. St. Martin’s Press, 1965.

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focus on the book's strong symbols, noting that Golding uses religious and mythical ideas to show the moral battle<sup>2</sup>.

Characters like Simon and Piggy are depicted as the forces of good sense and intellect, but critics agree these forces are too weak to stop the complete social problems caused by Jack's violence.

The novel is also often looked at through a psychological lens, where the shift from order to chaos matches the idea that when rules disappear, aggression quickly becomes the main way to control others, suggesting that we need outside rules to stay moral. More recent studies, such as those by Karen Galloway, look at the cultural impact, arguing that the book is a criticism of the West's belief that humanity is always making progress, by showing that violence is a recurring part of history, not just a one-time thing<sup>3</sup>. All these scholarly views together confirm that "Lord of the Flies" is still a very important book for studying morality, violence, and human nature, and its ongoing popularity shows how relevant it remains for examining how thin the line between good and evil truly is when civilization breaks down.



## Methodology

This research analyses William Golding's "Lord of the Flies" to see how the conflict between good and evil is written and described in the work. We use a "close reading", which means we pay attention on specific parts of the text like certain scenes, what the characters say to figure out how moral conflict changes throughout the book. To back up our ideas about good and evil, we also review what other experts have written about the novel, including scholarly articles and historical studies that discussed the book about human behavior and the negative feelings after World War II.

We also specifically analyse key symbols in the book, like the conch (for order), the Beast (for fear), and the Lord of the Flies (for violence), and we examine the

<sup>2</sup> Rosenfield, Claire. "Men of a Smaller Growth: A Psychological Analysis of William Golding's Lord of the Flies." College English, vol. 26, no. 5, 1965, pp. 398–403.

<sup>3</sup> Galloway, Karen. "Children and Social Order in Lord of the Flies." The Midwest Quarterly, vol. 38, no. 2, 1997, pp. 145–160.

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main characters Ralph, Jack, Piggy, and Simon as figures who are described as different moral forces. By putting together extracts from the text and ideas from other experts, this study is aimed to offer a clear, detailed understanding of how Golding shows the conflict between good and evil as both a personal mental struggle and a universal truth about being human.

### Analysis and Discussion

The struggle between good and evil in “Lord of the Flies” unfolds as the boys confront the loss of societal structure. Golding uses character behavior, symbols, and moments of moral choice to reveal how fragile goodness can be when confronted with fear and power.

One of the earliest signs of moral conflict appears when Ralph insists on rules and order: *“We’ve got to have rules and obey them”*<sup>4</sup>. This line shows Ralph’s commitment to civilization. He embodies reason, cooperation, and responsibility. His leadership symbolizes the moral order that society attempts to uphold.

Jack, by contrast, expresses the pull of evil through the thrill of violence: *“I cut the pig’s throat!”*<sup>5</sup> Here, Jack’s excitement reveals the emergence of savagery. Killing becomes a source of pride, suggesting that violence is not simply a consequence of necessity but a growing personal desire.

The boys’ moral deterioration intensifies with the fear of the unknown. Their belief in the “beast” symbolizes the internal evil Golding argues is universal: *“Maybe there is a beast... maybe it’s only us”*<sup>6</sup>. Spoken by Simon, this statement directly connects evil to human nature, not external monsters. Simon becomes a moral truth-teller whose clarity makes him a threat to fear-driven power.



This theme reaches a tragedy when Simon is killed during a chaotic ritual: *“The sticks fell and the mouth of the new circle crunched and screamed”*<sup>7</sup>. The violence is described from a distance, reflecting the moral blindness of the

<sup>4</sup> Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies: A Novel*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2011. -P.52.

<sup>5</sup> Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies: A Novel*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2011. -P.82.

<sup>6</sup> Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies: A Novel*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2011. -P.106.

<sup>7</sup> Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies: A Novel*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2011. -P.186.

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participants. Their inability to recognize Simon underscores the complete collapse of conscience.

The conch shell serves as one of the strongest representations of social morality. When it is destroyed: “*The conch exploded into a thousand white fragments*”<sup>8</sup>. The destruction of the conch signifies the end of structured society. With it, the symbolic presence of law and fairness is lost.

Piggy’s final plea for decency also goes unheard: “*Which is better to have rules and agree, or to hunt and kill?*”<sup>9</sup>. This moment encapsulates the novel’s central question. Piggy voices the importance of rational morality, yet his immediate death shows that ethical principles alone cannot survive against unleashed brutality.

Through these scenes, Golding demonstrates that good requires constant reinforcement, while evil emerges readily when fear and desire override responsibility. The novel warns that morality is not inherent but must be continually protected by social bonds, empathy, and awareness of our darker capacities. Without these safeguards, the struggle between good and evil can tip swiftly into chaos.

Golding frames morality as a delicate structure that depends on shared rules and mutual respect. Ralph’s vision of cooperation is rooted in rescue and responsibility: “*We want to be rescued; and of course we shall be rescued*”. His optimism reflects belief in civilization as a guiding force for good. Yet the island gradually reveals how quickly such structures collapse without external enforcement.



Jack’s quest for power introduces a competing value system grounded in dominance rather than ethics: “*Bollocks to the rules!*” With this declaration, Jack openly rejects morality. The breakdown of order begins with a conscious decision to ignore shared principles, proving that evil is often chosen, not stumbled into.

Fear amplifies this descent. The “beast” becomes a projection of the boys’ internal turmoil: “*The beast was harmless and horrible*”.

<sup>8</sup> Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies: A Novel*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2011. -P.224.

<sup>9</sup> Golding, William. *Lord of the Flies: A Novel*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2011. -P.223.



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The paradox underscores Golding’s message that evil originates within humans but grows monstrous when misunderstood or denied.

Piggy represents intellect and rationality, yet he struggles to influence the group: “*Life... is scientific.*” Despite his logic, he remains powerless against emotional manipulation. His eventual death demonstrates that knowledge alone cannot suppress destructive instinct when the majority embraces violence.

Simon’s role as a Christ-like moral compass is extinguished when the group surrenders completely to savagery: “*Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood!*”.

This chant exposes collective evil. By framing the killing as a ritual, the boys strip away accountability, revealing how easily morality erodes when brutality is normalized by group conformity.

Roger, whose cruelty grows unchecked, illustrates pure, deliberate malice: “*Roger sharpened a stick at both ends*”. The chilling simplicity illustrates violence without justification. Unlike Jack, Roger does not hide behind fear or leadership. He harms for the sake of harming, becoming the novel’s clearest embodiment of inherent evil.

Ultimately, Ralph confronts the irreversible change within themselves: “*The darkness of man’s heart*”. His reflection marks the full recognition that civilization did not create goodness, it only restrained darkness.

Thus, Golding portrays good and evil not as equal forces, but as a precarious struggle in which evil has the evolutionary advantage. Civilization is temporary and fragile, while savagery is instinctual, lurking beneath behavior shaped by societal expectation. The final rescue by a naval officer reinforces this theme. Though appearing as a return to order, the warship behind him suggests the same violence playing out on a global scale: civilization merely professionalizes savagery, it does not eliminate it.





Character / Symbol	Represents	Contribution to Good vs Evil Theme
Ralph	Civilization, leadership	Shows how easily order can crumble
Jack	Power, cruelty	Demonstrates attraction of savagery
Simon	Innate goodness	His death reveals rejection of truth
Piggy	Rationality	Intellect cannot defeat violence alone
Conch	Law and democracy	Destroyed with the end of morality
The Beast	Human fear	Evil comes from within, not outside
Lord of the Flies	Pure internal evil	Corrupts and manipulates human instinct

In the conclusion, Ralph reflects on everything they have become: “Ralph wept for the end of innocence.” This emotional acknowledgment indicates that the boys have permanently crossed a moral boundary. Evil has won not because civilization never existed, but because it proved too weak to control human instinct.

## Conclusion

William Golding’s “Lord of the Flies” shows us that the fight between good and bad is not an outside battle, but a deep conflict inside all of us. As the structure on the island slowly falls apart, Golding proves how easily morality breaks down when the rules of society are taken away. Characters like Ralph and Piggy try hard to keep things cooperative, smart, and responsible, but their efforts are defeated by the strong pull of fear, violence, and power, which Jack and his followers represent.

The book’s symbols constantly highlight this message. The conch shell, which once stood for unity and law, is shattered right along with the last bit of proper behavior. The imaginary “beast” turns out to be a physical sign of the boys’ own inner darkness, and the Lord of the Flies makes it very clear that the evil comes from inside the human heart. Even Simon, the purest character, is killed when the group chooses chaos over truth. Golding’s message is tough to accept: civilization doesn’t remove our potential for evil it only holds it back. When social rules break down, our aggressive instincts come back up, showing that savagery is always closer than we think. By showing children, who are usually symbols of innocence, becoming brutal, Golding questions the comfortable belief that being moral is

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something we are born with. Ralph crying “for the end of innocence” at the end captures the deep change the boys have gone through. In the end, “Lord of the Flies” is a strong warning about the two sides of human nature. Good must be actively protected and always reinforced, but evil only needs the lack of rules to take over. Golding reminds us that the line between civilization and chaos is very thin, and the true “beast” we should be afraid of lives inside every single person.

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