



Multiple Critical Perspectives™

Teaching William Golding's

Lord of the Flies

from

Multiple Critical Perspectives™

by

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General Introduction to the Work

About the Author

WILLIAM GOLDING WAS BORN on September 19, 1911 in the village of St. Columb Minor in Cornwall. His father was a schoolmaster, who had radical political convictions and a strong faith in science. Golding's mother was a supporter of the British women's suffrage movement. Although Golding started writing at the age of seven, his parents encouraged him to study natural sciences. After two years at Brasenose College, Oxford, however, he changed his focus to English literature. He received his B.A. in English and a diploma in education in 1935. For the next four years, Golding worked as a writer, actor, and producer. For a time he worked in a "settlement house," a program in which workers lived among urban poor and helped them find ways to overcome their poverty. In 1939, he moved to Salisbury to teach English and philosophy at Bishop Wordsworth's School. He married Ann Brookfield, an analytical chemist. They had two children.

During World War II, Golding served in the Royal Navy in command of the ship that helped destroy Germany's most formidable battleship, the Bismark. He also participated in the invasion of Normandy. After the war, Golding returned to writing and teaching. He had developed a pessimistic view of European civilization; remarking that "man produces evil, as a bee produces honey." While in Salisbury, Golding wrote four books, but published none of them. *Lord of the Flies* was rejected by twenty-one publishers before finally making it into print in 1954. By the late 1950s it was a bestseller in the United States. The success of the novel allowed Golding to give up teaching. He spent a year as writer-in-residence at Hollins College in Virginia and then became a full-time writer.

Golding's fiction is usually allegorical, often alluding to classical literature, mythology, and Christian symbolism. His themes tend to deal with evil, and Golding has been branded a dark optimist. *Lord of the Flies* introduces his most recurrent theme: the conflict between humankind's animal and rational natures. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1983, and knighted in 1988, becoming Sir William Gerald Golding. Sir William died of heart failure in his home on June 19, 1993. He was buried in Holy Trinity churchyard, in Bowerchalke, Wiltshire, England.

Mythological/Archetypal Theory Applied to *Lord of the Flies*



Notes on the Mythological/Archetypal Reading

MYTHOLOGICAL, ARCHETYPAL, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITICISM are all closely related. This is because Freud formulated many theories around the idea of the social archetype, and his pupil, Carl Jung, expanded and refined Freud's theories into a more cross-cultural philosophy.

Critics who examine texts from a mythological/archetypal standpoint are looking for symbols. Jung said that an archetype is "a figure... that repeats itself in the course of history wherever creative fantasy is fully manifested." He believed that human beings were born innately knowing certain archetypes. The evidence of this, Jung claimed, lies in the fact that some myths are repeated throughout history in cultures and eras that could not possibly have had any contact with one another. Many stories in Greek and Roman mythology have counterparts in Chinese and Celtic mythology, long before the Greek and Roman Empires spread to Asia and northern Europe. Most of the myths and symbols represent ideas that human beings could not otherwise explain (the origins of life, what happens after death, etc.). Every culture has a creation story, a life-after-death belief, and a reason for human failings, and these stories—when studied comparatively—are far more similar than different.

When reading a work looking for archetypes or myths, critics look for very general recurring themes, characters, and situations. In modern times, the same types of archetypes are used in film, which is why it has been so easy for filmmakers to take a work like Jane Austen's *Emma* and adapt it into the typical Hollywood film *Clueless*. By drawing on those feelings, thoughts, concerns, and issues that have been a part of the human condition in every generation, modern authors allow readers to know the characters in a work with little or no explanation. Imagine how cluttered stories would be if the author had to give every detail about every single minor character that entered the work!

Activity One**Examining the Island as Eden and the Novel as A Story of the Fall**

1. Distribute the first passage below, from the second chapter of Genesis.
2. Divide the class into two, or into an even number of smaller groups.
3. Have each group read the passage.
4. Then have one group examine the novel for references to the boys' food and answer the following questions:
 - What are Adam and Eve allowed to eat in the Garden?
 - What is significant about the fact that there is no mention of meat in the Garden narrative?
 - What begins to happen to Jack and the other hunters after their first kill?
 - Outline the steps of the boys' devolution beginning with their first kill and ending with their rescue.
5. Have the other group examine the novel for references to the boys' clothing and answer the following questions
 - What is the significance of nakedness in the Garden narrative? Why aren't Adam and Eve ashamed of their nakedness?
 - Outline the steps of the boys' gradual devolution to nakedness.
6. Allow each group to report back to the class to discuss its findings.
7. Reconvene the class distribute the second passage below, from the third chapter of Genesis.
8. Have the students, either individually or in pairs, read the passage and answer the following questions:
 - What is the significance of nakedness in the Garden narrative? Why are Adam and Eve ashamed when, in the earlier part of the narrative, they were not?
 - At what point are any of the boys described as fully naked?
 - What is Golding's version of the "flaming sword" that prevented Adam and Eve from reentering the Garden?
9. Reconvene the class and discuss the novel as an allegory for the Garden of Eden and the Fall of Humanity.

Psychoanalytic/Freudian Theory Applied to *Lord of the Flies*



Notes on the Psychoanalytic Theory

THE TERMS “PSYCHOLOGICAL,” OR “PSYCHOANALYTICAL,” or “Freudian Theory” seem to encompass essentially two almost contradictory critical theories. The first focuses on the text itself, with no regard to outside influences; the second focuses on the author of the text.

According to the first view, reading and interpretation are limited to the work itself. One will understand the work by examining conflicts, characters, dream sequences, and symbols. In this way, the psychoanalytic theory of literature is very similar to the Formalist approach to literature. One will further understand that a character's outward behavior might conflict with inner desires, or might reflect as-yet-undiscovered inner desires.

Main areas of study/points of criticism of the first view:

- There are strong Oedipal connotations in this theory: the son's desire for his mother, the father's envy of the son and rivalry for the mother's attention, the daughter's desire for her father, the mother's envy of the daughter and rivalry for the father's attention. Of course, these all operate on a subconscious level to avoid breaking a serious social more.
- There is an emphasis on the meaning of dreams. This is because psychoanalytic theory believes that dreams are where a person's subconscious desires are revealed. What a person cannot express or do because of social rules will be expressed and done in dreams, where there are no social rules. Most of the time, people are not even aware what it is they secretly desire until their subconscious goes unchecked in sleep.

Activity One

Examining Jack as the Id, Piggy as the Ego, and Ralph as the Superego

1. Review with your students Freud's definitions of the three aspects of the subconscious.
2. Divide the class into three groups or a number of groups divisible by three.
3. Assign each group one of Freud's aspects of the subconscious: the id, the ego, the superego.
4. Then have each group examine the novel for evidence of their character's representing their assigned aspect.
5. Have each group report back to the class.



Marxist Criticism Applied to *Lord of the Flies*



Notes on the Marxist Approach

THE MARXIST APPROACH TO LITERATURE is based on the philosophy of Karl Marx, a German philosopher and economist. His major argument was that whoever controlled the means of production in society controlled the society—whoever owned the factories “owned” the culture. This idea is called “dialectical materialism,” and Marx felt that the history of the world was leading toward a communist society. From his point of view, the means of production (i.e., the basis of power in society) would be placed in the hands of the masses, who actually operated the means of production, not in the hands of those few who owned it. It was a perverted version of this philosophy that was at the heart of the Soviet Union. Marxism was also the rallying cry of the poor and oppressed all over the world.

To read a work from a Marxist perspective, one must understand that Marxism asserts that literature is a reflection of culture, and that culture can be affected by literature (Marxists believed literature could instigate revolution). Marxism is linked to Freudian theory by its concentration on the subconscious—Freud dealt with the individual subconscious, while Marx dealt with the political subconscious. Marx believed that oppression exists in the political subconscious of a society—social pecking orders are inherent to any group of people.

Four main areas of study:

- economic power
- materialism versus spirituality
- class conflict
- art, literature, and ideologies

Activity One

Examining Socio-Political-Class Conflict in the Novel

1. As an entire class, discuss whether the conflict(s) in the book are social, economic, or political.
2. Identify the three socio-political groups represented in the novel: the hunters, the non-hunters, and the littluns.
3. Divide the class into groups of two or three and have them examine the book in order to answer the following questions:
 - Who is the leader of each socio-political class?
 - What is the basis of this leader's leadership?
 - What is the symbol of power/authority for each group?
 - If the groups can be so identified, which group is more like the bourgeoisie, and which is more like the proletariat?
 - What role does each class and/or each leader play in the larger society of the novel? (What does each socio-political class offer to the society at large?)
 - When does the conflict between the two dominant groups begin?
 - What is the impetus of this conflict?
 - Outline the steps (rising action) of the escalation of this conflict.
 - What is the primary motivation for the boys' eventually defecting from the one group to the other?
 - Which group ultimately emerges as victorious at the end of the novel?
4. Reconvene the class and discuss the above questions.
5. Discuss the conflict of the novel and its resolution in terms of bourgeoisie and proletariat.