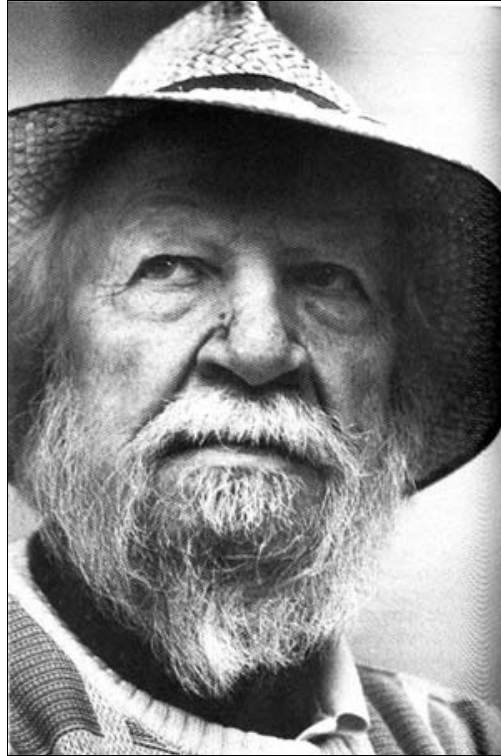


William Golding

(1911-1993)

William Golding was born on September 19, 1911, in Cornwall, England. Although he tried to write a novel as early as age twelve, his parents urged him to study the natural sciences. Golding followed his parents' wishes until his second year at Oxford, when he changed his focus to English literature. After graduating from Oxford, he worked briefly as a theatre actor and director, wrote poetry, and then became a schoolteacher. In 1940, a year after England entered World War II, Golding joined the Royal Navy, where he served in command of a rocket-launcher and participated in the invasion of Normandy.

Golding's experience in World War II had a profound effect on his view of humanity and the evils of which it was capable. After the war, Golding resumed teaching and started to write novels. His first and greatest success came with *Lord of the Flies* (1954), which ultimately became a bestseller in both Britain and the United States after more than twenty publishers rejected it. The novel's sales enabled Golding to retire from teaching and devote himself fully to writing. Golding wrote several more novels, notably *Pincher Martin* (1956), and a play, *The Brass Butterfly* (1958). Although he never matched the popular and critical success he enjoyed with *Lord of the Flies*, he remained a respected and distinguished author for the rest of his life and was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1983. Golding died in 1993, one of the most acclaimed writers of the second half of the twentieth century.



Lord of the Flies tells the story of a group of English schoolboys marooned on a tropical island after their plane is shot down during a war. Though the novel is fictional, its exploration of the idea of human evil is at least partly based on Golding's experience with the real-life violence and brutality of World War II. Free from the rules and structures of civilization and society, the boys on the island in *Lord of the Flies* descend into savagery. As the boys splinter into factions, some behave peacefully and work together to maintain order and achieve common goals, while others rebel and seek only anarchy and violence. In his portrayal of the small world of the island, Golding paints a broader portrait of the fundamental human struggle between the civilizing instinct—the impulse to obey rules, behave morally, and act lawfully—and the savage instinct—the impulse to seek brute power over others, act selfishly, scorn moral rules, and indulge in violence.

Golding employs a relatively straightforward writing style in *Lord of the Flies*, one that avoids highly poetic language, lengthy description, and philosophical interludes. Much of the novel is allegorical, meaning that the characters and objects in the novel are infused with symbolic significance that conveys the novel's central themes and ideas. In portraying the various ways in which the boys on the island adapt to their new surroundings and react to their new freedom, Golding explores the broad spectrum of ways in which humans respond to stress, change, and tension.

Readers and critics have interpreted *Lord of the Flies* in widely varying ways over the years since its publication. During the 1950s and 1960s, many readings of the novel claimed that *Lord of the Flies* dramatizes the history of civilization. Some believed that the novel explores fundamental religious issues, such as original sin and the nature of good and evil. Others approached *Lord of the Flies* through the theories of the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, who taught that the human mind was the site of a constant battle among different impulses—the id (instinctual needs and desires), the ego (the conscious, rational mind), and the superego (the sense of conscience and morality). Still others maintained that Golding wrote the novel as a criticism of the political and social institutions of the West. Ultimately, there is some validity to each of these different readings and interpretations of *Lord of the Flies*. Although Golding's story is confined to the microcosm of a group of boys, it resounds with implications far beyond the bounds of the small island and explores problems and questions universal to the human experience.

"Bullocks to the rules!"
Lord of the Flies