

Lord of the Flies – Fire on the Mountain

1. Characters

Ralph

Ralph hesitates before he starts speaking at the second meeting in the afternoon: “He was uncertain whether to stand up or remain sitting” (42) but then speaks fluently. Reasonably, he calls attention to the fact that “There aren’t any grown-ups. We shall have to look after ourselves.” (43) His inclination is towards **order** and democratic assemblies: “We can’t have everybody talking at once. We’ll have to have ‘Hands up’ like at school.” (43)

He is very much excited about the fact there is **no grown-up authority** on the island: “It’s a good island. Until the grown-ups come to fetch us we’ll have fun.” (45)

To do something about their rescue, Ralph suggests making a fire: “we must make smoke on the top of the mountain.” (49) This may seem reasonable at first, but Ralph forgets there is nothing to light a fire.

As a leader Jack is more appealing than Ralph: “Ralph was left, holding the conch, with no one but Piggy.” (49) Here Ralph’s **weakness as a leader** becomes strikingly apparent. His authority is repeatedly questioned: “Ralph was annoyed and, for the moment, defeated.” (48)

Ralph organises the watch of the fire: “We’ve got to have special people for looking after the fire” (55) and tries to re-establish the authority of the conch questioned by Jack: “Where the conch is, that’s a meeting. The same up here as down there.” (55)

Questions:

How does Ralph respond to Piggy’s accusations of carelessness?

How does Jack react to accurate, reasonable criticism?

Piggy

Piggy repeatedly cleans his glasses: “Piggy took off his glasses and blinked at the assembly while he wiped them on his shirt.” (44) Again he is the one to say that “Nobody knows where we are” (44) When the boys start talking in chaos he reminds them of the conch and the right to speak reserved to the one who holds it: “[he] pointed to the conch in Ralph’s hands, and Jack and Simon fell silent.” (45)

Piggy proves to be the most **adult-type and reasonable** character. He disapproves of the children’s behaviour when they follow Jack: “Like kids!” he said scornfully. ‘Acting like a crowd of kids!’” (50) “with the martyred expression of a parent who has to keep up with the senseless ebullience of the children, he picked up the conch” (50)

Ironically Piggy is very **short-sighted**: “Jus’ blurs, that’s all. Hardly see my hand” (53) He is completely dependent upon his glasses, and therefore on the goodwill of those who borrow them.

Piggy reminds the boys to be more careful about the fire. He represents the power of **conscience**: “We ought to be more careful. I’m scared–” (58) Then he

goes on to explain that shelters for the night are more important than a fire: “The first thing we ought to have made was shelters” (58)

Piggy is the only one who notices that there is one boy missing when the fire breaks out on the mountain: “That little ‘un-’ gasped Piggy- ‘him with the mark on his face, I don’t see him. Where is he now?’” (60)

Questions:

Why do you think he criticises the boys for behaving “like kids”, when that is exactly what they are?

What do you think of Piggy from the first two chapters?

Jack Merridew

Jack interrupts Ralph’s speech: “Jack broke in: ‘All the same you need an army- for hunting. Hunting pigs-’” (43) Ralph establishes rules to guarantee order, Jack takes **pleasure in the aspect of violence and punishing** those who break the rules: “We’ll have rules!’ he cried excitedly. ‘Lots of rules! Then when anyone breaks ‘em-’” (44)

Jack’s focus is on **food and hunting**: “‘There’s pigs,’ he said. ‘There’s food.’” (45) After Ralph’s suggestion of a fire on the mountain, Jack makes the boys follow him and as a result takes over the role of the leader. Similarly, Jack comes up with the idea to use Piggy’s specs as burning glasses (52), after Ralph has to admit his “incompetence” (52), because he doesn’t think about how to light the fire. Jack wants his group, the hunter, to take responsibility “for keeping the fire going.” (55)

2. Themes, Motifs and Symbols

Paradise

The boys compare the island to those they know from books (45):

The romantic adventure story *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson (1850 – 1894) is about Jim Hawkins finding a treasure map and setting sail to go after it. As soon as they arrive on Treasure Island, the good-guys find that they are sailing with a bunch of pirates who mutiny against them.

Swallows and Amazons by Arthur Ransome (1884 – 1967), a prolific writer of children's book, describes a fantastical place where six young children can play safely and roam freely, without an adult in sight.

Coral Island by Robert M. Ballantyne (1825 - 1894) recounts the story of the three sailors Ralph, Jack and Peterkin (!) who are cast ashore after a storm. They try to find out whether the island is inhabited and how to survive when suddenly their island paradise is disturbed by the arrival of pirates and warring natives.

Ralph reassures the worried boys: “There aren't any unknown islands left. [...] the Queen's got a picture of this island.” (49)

The Snake-Thing, the Beast

The creepers create an optical illusion that frightens some of the boys: “[One of the little boys] wants to know what you're going to do about the snake-thing.” (46) “He still says he saw the beastie. It came and went away again an' came back and wanted to eat him-” (47) “He must have had a nightmare.” (49) The beast could simply be a nightmare, but it also has got deeper meanings ranging to the loss of innocence in the Garden of Eden (the snake) to the devil. Snake images are used throughout the novel; the burning creepers look like snakes.

Golding's language hints at future events: “The creepers that festooned the dead and dying trees” (56/7), “Piggy glanced nervously into hell” (58) and later “The crowd was as silent as death.” (60)

The Fire

Traditionally fire symbolises power and hope as well as fear and destruction. Fire brings warmth, comfort, and a sense of safety, but equally can destroy everything in its path: “The fire thrust out a savage arm of heat” (54)

At first the flame of the fire is “a bright squirrel” (57), then it “began to gnaw” (57) and finally, as though they were a kind of wild life, “crept as a jaguar.” (57) The image becomes a fiercer animal, eventually a predator.

The Conch Shell

Again Ralph uses the conch shell to call a meeting. It is used as the visible symbol of authority. The conch shell gives the right to speak: "I'll give the conch to the next person to speak. He can hold it when he's speaking." (43) The conch is a symbol for order and helps fighting chaos. However, when too excited the boys quickly forget about the new rule: "Jack clamoured among them, the conch forgotten. [...] Ralph was on his feet too, shouting for quiet, but no one heard him." (49) Later, on the mountain, Jack entirely refuses the authority of the conch: "The conch doesn't count on top of the mountain." (54) Ralph restores the authority of the conch, however, when Piggy holds it nobody respects his right to speak: "I got the conch! Just you listen!" (58)

Being a Group

"The choir, noticeably less of a group" (42)
"Once more, amid the breeze, the shouting, the slanting on the high mountain, was shed that glamour, that strange invisible light of friendship, adventure, and content." (51)

Civilisation vs. Savagery

Jack remembers the boys' origin and its meaning for them on the island: "We've got to have more rules and obey them. After all, we're not savages. We're English; and the English are best at everything. So we've got to do the right things." (55)

3. Vocabulary: The Boys

crowded (42)	having a lot of people or too many people	gedrängt
to hold a meeting (42)	an occasion when people come together to discuss or decide sth	ein Treffen halten
choir (42)	a group of people who sing together, especially in church services or public performances	Chor
to clear one's throat (42)	to cough so that you can speak clearly	sich räuspern
to remain (42)	to be still in the same state or condition	bleiben
to talk fluently (42)	to be able to speak, read or write a language, especially a foreign language, easily and well	fließend sprechen
uninhabited (43)	with no people living there	unbewohnt
inhabitant	a person or an animal that lives in a particular place	Bewohner
to hunt (43)	to chase wild animals or birds in order to catch or kill them for food, sport or to make money	jagen
grown-ups (43)	(of a person) mentally and physically an adult	Erwachsene
to interrupt (44)	to say or do sth that makes sb stop what they are saying or doing	unterbrechen
pale (44)	(of a person, their face, etc.) having skin that is almost white; having skin that is whiter than usual because of illness, a strong emotion, etc	bleich
to gape (44)	to stare at sb/sth with your mouth open because you are shocked or surprised	anstarren
to gaze (44)	to look steadily at sb/sth for a long time, either because you are very interested or surprised, or because you are thinking of sth else	angaffen
to fetch (45)	to go to where sb/sth is and bring them/it back	holen
to recover (45)	to get well again after being ill/sick, hurt, etc	sich erholen
treasure (45)	a collection of valuable things such as gold, silver and jewellery	Schatz
birthmark (46)	a red or brown mark on a person's skin that has been there since they were born	Muttermal
assembly (46)	a group of people who have been elected to meet together regularly and make decisions or laws for a particular region or country	Versammlung
beast (46)	an animal, especially one that is large or dangerous, or one that is unusual: <i>wild, savage, ferocious beasts; mythical beasts such as unicorns and dragons</i>	Tier, Bestie
nightmare (47)	a dream that is very frightening or unpleasant	Albtraum
to make a point (49)	to convey the main or most important idea in sth; a thing that sb says or writes giving their opinion or stating a fact	etwas darlegen, ein Argument vorbringen
to admire; admiration (49)	a feeling of respect and liking for sb/sth	bewunder; Bewunderung
crowd (49)	a large number of people gathered together	Menge
to restore (50)	to bring back a situation or feeling that existed before	wiederherstellen

scornful (50)	showing or feeling scorn	verächtlich
doubtful (50)	(of a person) not sure; uncertain and feeling doubt	zweifelhaft
in disgust (50)	a strong feeling of dislike or disapproval for sb/sth that you feel is unacceptable, or for sth that looks, smells, etc. unpleasant	angewidert
pile (51)	a number of things that have been placed on top of each other	Haufen
burden (51)	a duty, responsibility, etc. that causes worry, difficulty or hard work	Bürde, Last
to blush (52)	to become red in the face because you are embarrassed or ashamed	erröten
to confess; confession (52)	a statement admitting sth that you are ashamed or embarrassed about	gestehen; Geständnis
invisible (53)	that cannot be seen	unsichtbar
to yield (53)	to stop resisting sth/sb	er-, nachgeben
to claim (53)	to say that sth is true although it has not been proved and other people may not believe it	behaupten
	to get or take sb's attention	beanspruchen
exhausted (54)	very tired completely used or finished	erschöpft
savage (55)	an offensive word for a person who belongs to a tribe that is simple and not developed	Wilder
savagery	behaviour that is very cruel and violent	Wildheit, Unzivilisiertheit, Rohheit
trace (56)	a mark, an object or a sign that shows that sb/sth existed or was present	Spur
indignant (56)	feeling or showing anger and surprise because you think that you have been treated unfairly	entrüstet
to crawl (57)	to move forward on your hands and knees, with your body close to the ground	kriechen
to gnaw (57)	keep biting sth or chewing it hard, so that it gradually disappears	nagen
to creep (57)	(of people or animals) to move slowly, quietly and carefully, because you do not want to be seen or heard	schleichen
startled (57)	surprised and slightly shocked or frightened	erschrocken
bleak (58)	not hopeful or encouraging bare, empty or with no pleasant features	düster
shelter (58)	the fact of having a place to live or stay, considered as a basic human need, that provides protection from rain, danger or attack	Obdach, Unterschlupf, Zufluchtsort
to mutter (60)	to speak or say sth in a quiet voice that is difficult to hear, especially because you are annoyed about sth	murren