

## LORD OF THE FLIES

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**OVERALL OBJECTIVE:** To provide teachers with instructional materials that **will enhance** their students' understanding of the novel through development of skills in the areas of **vocabulary, reading comprehension, literary analysis, writing, and appreciation** of William Golding's novel, *Lord of the Flies*, via a **multi-level instructional approach**.

### **SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THIS PACKET:**

To help students

1. build vocabularies based on the language used in the novel.
2. develop the reading comprehension skills of recognizing sequence of events and determining cause-effect relationships.
3. develop the literary analysis skills of recognizing theme and understanding characterization.
4. practice writing skills or writing to create a mood.

### **WHY TEACH LORD OF THE FLIES?**

Few books have had an immediate and as widespread appeal among young people as did *Lord of the Flies*. Those who began to teach it in the first years after its publication did so, as they had *Catcher in the Rye* and later would *The Lord of the Rings*, out of the most practical of motives: self-defense. Since students were reading it on their own, in preference to whatever traditional works had been assigned, the wisest course was to accept the inevitable, and join forces with them. Although *Lord of the Flies* may no longer be the underground student favorite it was twenty years ago, it still fulfills the basic requirement of a good high school novel, the ability to hold a student's attention and interest.

First of all, *Lord of the Flies* tells a gripping story: fast-moving, suspenseful, and capable of exciting a response on many levels, from the sheer excitement of the action, to concern for the welfare of a favorite character, to intense involvement in the moral issues raised by the events. Further, the fact that it treats a society composed solely of children makes it even more accessible to high school students than the typical exciting novel of war or other hazards set in the adult world.

Yet *Lord of the Flies* is far more than an adventure tale in a far-off place, a *Swiss Family Robinson* without the parents. Rather it uses our familiarity with idealized stories about children who behave nobly under trial, and then questions the validity of all our "childhood innocence" stereotypes. Further, the novel explores the presence of evil in everyone, and the pernicious effects of anger, ambition, and fear upon our efforts to live with one another. The issues Golding raises challenge our facile optimism, and present a sobering, though not comfortless, picture of the human condition. They encourage us to stand up for our beliefs, and at the same time to avoid self-deception about why we act as we do, and how we would behave in adversity. Thematically, then, *Lord of the Flies* can open the doors to an intense discussion of ethical problems, and of the "mingled yarn of good and ill" that most great writers tell us weaves the pattern of human life.

Golding depicts this conflict not as a battle between cardboard figures, but as a struggle among believable, realistic schoolboys. Ralph, Piggy, Simon, and Jack in particular, stand out as individuals, deftly characterized by such physical touches as stature, hair color, and mannerisms, and differentiated from each other even when they fight on the same side. Ralph's virtues, for example, which come closest to those of the stock schoolboy hero, are unlike those embodied in Piggy, the loyal and sensible counselor, or Simon, the sensitive moral visionary.

Just as those good characters have flaws that weaken their power to confront the rising tide of barbarism on the island, Jack's climb to power, and growing influence over the other boys, is made plausible by the strength of his ambition, the force of his personality, and his familiarity with command. Although his followers are of necessity more of a uniform mob than their opponents, Roger's temperament differs from Jack's and the motives of a follower are shown as essentially different from those of a leader. Even the most minor characters, such as Percival Wemys Madison, are captured with the unerring eye for the substance and the quirks of personality that typify Golding as both an experienced schoolteacher and a gifted writer. In its treatment of character, therefore, *Lord of the Flies* offers opportunities to discuss both literary technique and the complex blend of factors that go to make up any individual.

*Lord of the Flies* is also a valuable teaching tool for its vivid depiction of scene and event. The descriptions of the island, its vegetation, and its surrounding waters, use precise images from nature to create a mood and set a tone for the events that follow. Action, whether small and prosaic, like the lighting of a fire, or abrupt and violent, like the death of Piggy, is equally sharp and rich in detail.

Golding is especially successful at combining the inner and outer event, or the real and the symbolic moment, in such scenes as Simon's encounter with the Lord of the Flies or the almost magical taking of his corpse by the tide. (For other comparably effective descriptions by Golding, the teacher may wish to examine the opening pages of *Darkness Visible* or *The Scorpion God*, or the confinement of Sammy Mountjoy in Chapter 9 of *Free Fall*.)

Even the novel's dialogue, which may be troublesome to some students because of its British idiom, displays the rhythms and the peculiarities of spoken language, and the varying voices of older and younger boys, and of the coarse or the refined, the articulate or the tongue-tied, with great precision. Golding's style offers opportunities for close reading that will challenge the most able student, along with guidance in the art of descriptive and narrative writing beneficial to the whole class.

In short, *Lord of the Flies* is a rewarding classroom text for esthetic, philosophic, and psychological purposes. The skill with which the story is told, the issues it explores, and the opportunity it offers students to examine their own feelings about right and wrong, and about youth and maturity, make this an exceptionally approachable and valuable novel.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS—ACTIVITY SHEETS**

ACTIVITY SHEET	TOPIC	TIME OF USE
1	PREREADING ACTIVITY	<b>Before Reading</b>
2-3	READING GUIDE	
4	VOCABULARY: Word Meaning	
5	READING COMPREHENSION: Main Idea (Inferential)	
6	VOCABULARY: Words in Context	
7	READING COMPREHENSION: Cause-Effect Relationships (Literal)	
8	LITERARY ANALYSIS: Figures of Speech	
9	LITERARY ANALYSIS: Tone	
10	READING COMPREHENSION: Main Idea (Inferential)	
11	READING COMPREHENSION: Main Idea (Literal/Inferential)	
12	VOCABULARY: Structural Analysis	
13	READING COMPREHENSION: Cause-Effect Relationships (Literal and Inferential)	
14	WRITTEN LANGUAGE: Point of View	
15	LITERARY ANALYSIS: Characterization	<b>After Reading</b>
16	VOCABULARY: Synonyms	
17	LITERARY ANALYSIS: Theme	
18	LITERARY ANALYSIS: Tone	
19	LITERARY ANALYSIS: Characterization (Literal and Inferential)	
20	LITERARY ANALYSIS: Characterization	
21	LITERARY ANALYSIS: Characterization	
22	READING COMPREHENSION: Critical Reading	
23-25	TESTS	

**SKILLS DEVELOPMENT CHART**

**Key**  
**Level 1-Relatively easy exercises**  
**Level 2-Tasks for all students**  
**Level 3-More challenging exercises**

SKILL AREA	ACTIVITY SHEET NUMBER	TIME OF USE	LEVEL	SKILL
VOCABULARY	4	Before	1	Word Meaning
	6	During	2	Words in Context
	12	During	2	Structural Analysis
	16	During	2	Synonyms
READING COMPREHENSION	5	During	2	Main Idea (Inferential)
	7	During	1	Cause-Effect Relationships (Literal)
	10	During	1	Main Idea (Inferential)
	11	During	2	Main Idea (Literal/Inferential)
	13	During	2	Cause-Effect Relationships (Literal and Inferential)
22	After	3	Critical Reading	
LITERARY ANALYSIS	8	During	1	Figures of Speech
	9	During	2	Tone
	15	During	2	Characterization
	17	After	2	Theme
	18	After	3	Tone
	19	After	2	Characterization (Literal and Inferential)
	20	After	3	Characterization
	21	After	2	Characterization
WRITTEN LANGUAGE	11	During	2	Main Idea (Literal/Inferential)

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