

In the novel, *The Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, a class of young boys are stranded on a deserted island and there are no adults. On reading this novel, many might assume the main conflict in the story is one of civilization versus savagery, and we can clearly see the protagonist and the antagonist, Ralph and Jack, are civilized and savage, respectively. Upon closer examination, we discover that the conflict goes much deeper than this. The real problem is that Ralph is missing humility, as he is clearly not willing to step aside even though stepping aside can potentially lead to a more unified tribe. In many of our everyday activities, we want to be the leader, be the “guy,” but sometimes it’s actually better to take a step aside and let someone else take over. This is because two dominant forces pushing for the same role can lead to a disaster and that is precisely what happens in the book: Jack and Ralph eventually disagree, and two people die because of it.

Definition

A key term for this essay is “Leadership”. In the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, leadership is defined as “capacity to lead”, and “lead” is defined as “An inspiring example for others to follow.” It is worth noting, however, a chief is not necessarily a leader. For this essay, a chief is the person with the most power, and the leader is the person who is most inspiring. This distinction is important because a chief may not be inspiring at all, and if there is a leader that is more inspiring, they might overthrow the chief. In the novel, we see that this is exactly what happens, when Jack (the leader) overthrows Ralph (the chief). Ralph wanted to be chief when he should have been the leader, as he could have manipulated Jack. In this way, he could have avoided conflict, disagreement, and most important, bloodshed.

Point 1: Disagreement

The main conflict that the boys need to deal with on the island was the dispute over leadership between Ralph and Jack. We can see that there is a dispute of leadership between Ralph and Jack from the assembly on the night when they first let the fire go out, which shows Jack pointing fingers at Ralph and saying that he favoured Piggy. This can be seen in Chapter 5, when this falling out happens:

“You shut up you fat slug!” [Jack said.]

There was a moment’s struggle and the glimmering conch jiggled up and down. Ralph leapt to his feet.

“Jack! Jack! You haven’t got the conch! Let him speak.”

Jack’s face swam near him.

“And you shut up! Who are you anyway? Sitting there - telling people what to do. You can’t hunt, you can’t sing -”

“I’m the chief. I was chosen.”

“Why should choosing make any difference? Just giving orders that don’t make any sense -”

“That’s right - favour Piggy like you always do -”(Golding 98)

Ralph is mad at Jack for letting the fire go out, and Jack is mad at Ralph for taking Piggy’s side from earlier. This culminates in a massive outburst from Jack, after Ralph yet again defends Piggy from Jack’s verbal attacks. Jack yells, “Sitting there - telling people what to do. You can’t hunt, you can’t sing -” (98). As we can see, Jack thinks that leaders should be based on talents, and that the opinion of the majority does not matter as much as the skills you bring to the table. Ralph, on the other hand, believes that democratically elected leaders and a leader that the people approve of is more important than the talent of the individual. We can see these traits when this exchange occurs:

“I’m (the) chief. I was chosen.” [Ralph said].

“Why should choosing make any difference? Just giving orders that don’t make sense -” [Jack said]. (98)

This shows the difference between Ralph’s beliefs, Jack’s beliefs, and the conflict that ensues.

Jack has more power than Ralph, and we can see this because when Jack created a new tribe on the island, most of the biguns joined Jack and Ralph was left alone.

He looked round. Then for the first time he saw how few biguns there were and understood why the work had been so hard.

“Where’s Maurice?”

Piggy wiped his glass again.

“I expect... no, he wouldn’t go into the forest by himself, would he?”

Ralph jumped up, ran swiftly round the fire, and stood by Piggy, holding up his hair.

“But we’ve got to have a list! That’s me and you and Samneric and-”

He would not look at Piggy but spoke casually.

“Where’s Bill and Roger?”

Piggy leaned forward and put a fragment of wood on the fire.

“I expect they’ve gone. I expect they won’t play either.” (144)

We can see that in this short part of the story, Ralph realized that 3 biguns left him for Jack, which shows the power that Jack has over the biguns. Later almost every bigun has gone to Jack’s tribe. Ralph says,

“Piggy? Are you the only one left?”

“There’s some littluns.”

“They don’t count. No biguns?”

“Oh - Samneric. They’re collecting wood.”

“Nobody else?”

“Not that we know of.” (171)

This proves that Ralph just simply cannot compete with Jack, as during the beginning Jack had no one, and everyone was in Ralph’s tribe. By the end, Ralph had no one.

Point #3: Ralph the leader; Jack the chief

Ralph should have let Jack be the leader at the start, as Jack is a lot more dominant than Ralph. This can be seen as Jack launched a coup on Ralph, whereas Ralph did not think anything of the sort and tried to focus on getting off the island. This may not and was not a good thing in the book, but Jack was never truly a leader until he launched a coup against Ralph. If Ralph became a voice of reason for Jack, it could have been a lot better. For example, Ralph could have offered to help with the fire, and Jack's group could have done things like hunting, as that was their preferred roles. This would have kept their mutual interests in check, as people would be happy with their roles and would not result in big disagreements if everyone stuck to their roles.

Point #4: Refutation

Now, I acknowledge that this premise is flawed, as there is no guarantee that Jack would listen to Ralph. However, at the start, they were looking for responsible people to do work, and a lot of them were resting, as they could not stand the work on the island. This could be a good opportunity for Ralph to step in, and - in a manner of speaking - "suck up" to Jack. This would allow Jack to see that Ralph can work and has potential as a second-in-command type of role. That is why I think this issue is insignificant in the grand scheme of things.

Conclusion

In Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, we see young children fall victim to tyranny because of their failure to instill a fair system of power and the conflicting egos of the so-called leaders. This novel provides an illustration that civilization is but a thin veneer of savagery, and that things can turn from everyone being somewhat ok on the first day, into a situation where things can turn "real bad, real quick".

When they were first electing chief, Ralph should have let Jack have more of a leadership role, and take a step down. Ralph, at the beginning, only took leadership reluctantly and kept it because he wanted to keep the signal fire going. However, Ralph's unwillingness to step aside resulted in conflict and two deaths. If he instead steps aside, he could have acted as Jack's voice of reason. In many of our everyday activities, we want to be the leader, be the "guy," but sometimes it's actually better to take a step aside and let someone else take over. This is because two dominant forces pushing for the same role can be disastrous.