The Lord of the Flies by William Golding

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 theater 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.

Chapter 1

1 - What are the first intimations that Piggy is a rather lower-class person? How does he tell us by speech, movement and social action with Ralph?
2 - What are "Screwed up eyes"?

3 - How does Ralph treat Piggy? Could this be a personal reaction, or a class consciousness reaction? How would you be able to know?

4 - What is the setting that you are given in the first chapter? How would the word "Idyllic" be brought to bear?

5 - What is the forshadowing you receive that all may not be well in paradise? Give specific details.

6 - What role do adults fill in the boys' lives? What do the boys do when there are no longer any adults available to be present?

7 - Are people basically sheep or goats in your view? What makes you support this opinion?

8 - The explorers go up... way up... but they only go up to see and claim the island as their own. What other historical figures have done this same sort of thing? Thus, are the boys typical or atypical?

9 - What could indicate that some people in the tattered little band want power? Give some detail in your answer.

10 - What is the evidence of the plane wreck? What seems to be missing?

11 - If Piggy doesn't want to be Piggy anymore, why does he confess that this has been his hated name all along? What does this revelation get him?

12 - The conch shell fulfills a ritual need for many of the boys. Describe it. How do you know that Piggy has never tried to blow a musical instrument?

13 - What is the diet of fruit doing to the boys?

14 - The three boys go exploring and topple a huge rock into the jungle below a precipice. Using parallels to the society you are a part of, would you say that this is an adult or youthful thing to do?

15 - What is Piggy's reaction to Ralph's nakedness?

16 - What is a "cirque"? A "coign"?

17 - "The blade continued to flash at the end of the boys' arm..." What sort of thing seems to be going through Jack's head? What does he do or not do? What is his promise?

18 - How do you know the pig is terrified?

19 - "This toy of voting..." For the boys, voting seems to be a popularity contest, or one where the vote cast is pre-ordained. Why do the boys who vote for Jack, or for Ralph, vote the way they do? Could this be a reflection of voting in our "democratic" society? What could be the responsibility of a voter before voting?
20 - The boys show an insistent need for certainty in their lives whether on the island or not. Describe some of the evidence you find for this.

21 - Jack Merridew is the leader of what? What are his qualifications in his eyes? What might be his qualifications in the eyes of the person/people who appointed him?

22 - Piggy accepts Jack's telling him to "Shut up, fatty". Why?

23 - Jack collects power for himself. Ralph gets it by delegating responsibility. Find evidence for both their styles.

24 - There was a "Communion of shining eyes in the gloom" after pushing the huge rock down. What is the communion about?

Chapters 2 and 3

1 - At the beginning of chapter 2, Ralph glances to Piggy before saying anything at a meeting. What might he want or need from Piggy?

2 - Ralph tries to lead with information, but Jack tries to lead through a display of raw physical power. What are the dangers of each type of leadership? What are the advantages of each?

3 - The conch becomes the symbol of "right of authority and responsibility". Give examples of each of these symbols, quoting from the text.

4 - What is the purpose of rules for Jack?

5 - "At last Ralph induced him to hold the shell but by then the blow of laughter had taken away the child's voice." What has gone on here and how is it rescued?

6 - What is done with the information about the snake-thing?

7 - "...There was the dubiety that required more than rational assurances." What is going on and why?

8 - A fire becomes a great lark. What happens? Give an example of something around the school that reflects the same problem, if you can.

9 - How do Piggy's eye-glasses become communal property? At what point can something owned by an individual be laid claim to by a community? (Talk to your parents/guardian about property ownership.)

10 - What kind of fire is needed, and what is actually made?

11 - Give an example of Jack twisting the rules he'd agreed to with the conch shell so he could do what he wanted, when he wanted?

12 - "After all, we're not savages. We're English; and the English are the best at everything." What could be meant by this? Think back to what you have studied in history classes and talk to parents/guardians, and come up with three examples of this "English-ness" being an acceptable excuse for activities.
13 - If the choir takes responsibility for the fire as well as hunting, how does the power shift in the group?

14 - “You got your small fire all right.” Explain and comment upon this statement.

15 - Golding paints a vivid picture of the fire's growth. Give four examples of text which describe the minutiae of the fires advance. Make me see four pictures in my head.

16 - Jack and Ralph have a lot of tension between them. What is going on? What are the triggers for each boy? Describe, in some detail, their antagonism and its (temporary) resolution.

17 - What on earth is Jack doing, crawling about on all fours, sniffing?

18 - For Jack, hunting is power. How does he feel about the act of hunting? How does his need for power fit into these activities? (or vice-versa).

19 - When speaking about hunting we are told that “... a mad, opaque look cam into Jack's eyes” Describe this another way.

20 - Is Simon nuts near the end of Chapter 3 or is what he is doing (withdrawing into himself) normal? Comment, and include a mention of the “...Susurratation of the blood”.

21 - The kids seem to be going off in all directions whenever they feel like it... little really gets done. What do most of the kids really need? (Think about their background) What are they lacking in their present condition?

22 - There is more of a menace to the island by the end of chapter 3 than there was at the beginning of the story. How is the greater feeling of threat created by Golding?

23 - Give some evidence that the kids really don't know much geography at all.

24 - Outline jack's reaction to Ralph's comment "The best thing we can do is get ourselves rescued".

25 - Find six words of English schoolboy slang and "translate" them into something we can all understand.

Chapters 4,5,6 and 7

Choose only 12 of these questions to attack, and do a few each day.

1 - What are the rhythms that emerge in life on the island? What are the rhythms in your own life?

2 - What is evidence that the boys' lives focus "inwards" only, ignoring the outside almost exclusively?

3 - Johnny seems to be a natural jerk, especially towards Percival. Does this sort of belligerance occur in the "real world"?

4 - What is Roger's reaction to the fact that his civilisation is in ruins? What hold(s) does it still have on him, what calls does it make on him?
5 - Samneric have become one for Jack, who liberates himself from constraint with colour and a mask. What does the mask allow him to do? Talk about the "power" of the mask. Try and find some parallels in our lives (think about clothes, make-up, job-titles).

6 - Piggy is "cut" by Ralph. How? So? What does "cutting" Piggy do for Ralph?

7 - Something inside Ralph cracks and he is in agony, despair and anger all at the same time. What has he learnt? What has his leadership come to? How may he be seeing his future?

8 - Where has Jack's blood lust got him now? Referring to question 7 (above, this chapter) discuss short and long-term vision as aspects of leadership.

9 - "You let the fire out" is all Ralph can say for a while. Why?

10 - I got to have them specs. Now I only got one eye. Jus' you wait..." For what?

11 - Discuss "Passions beat about Simon on the mountaintop with awful wings".

12 - Jack raged on the mountaintop about Ralph asserting his chieftainship, without knowing why. Write what Jack's inner voices may have been saying.

13 - Outline and discuss three indications of rising tension in Ralph in these chapters.

14 - How is Jack's relationship to all the rules he wanted changing? Give evidence. Does this ever happen in YOUR reality? Talk about it!

15 - What kind of signals are REALLY needed to get a ship's attention?

16 - What brings the beast back? Do the kids have any other bogeymen or superstitions? How about you?

17 - Tell me about the corpse in the copse.

18 - Ralph "...might undertake the advanture of washing (his shirt). Tell me about Ralph's life before the crash.

19 - Talk about clothes. What is happening to clothes on the island? How is the relationship to clothes mirrored in other social changes that emerge now, stealthily, in the novel?

20 - Describe Ralph's acceptance of Simon's statement that the group would get back (home). Comment on Simon's state of mind. Is he a believer? Is he hallucinating? Is he wacko? How does his acceptance of Simon's assertion parallel Ralph's telling the littluns that there is no beast?

21 - How does Ralph save Jack's bacon? Talk about the irony in this situation. Discuss Ralph and Jack, in relation to each other in their attempts to gain approval of the others present at the time. Give some parallels in the lives of little kids.

22 - Describe the danger that Robert gets into with the hunters.

23 - Try to develop more completely the ritual being developed in Jack's head involving the death of a littlun.
24 - Answer Ralph's question, "Why do you hate me?"

25 - What caused the "Kind of plop" noise that so frightened Jack?

26 - Describe Jack's arrogance, Ralph's tension and the other's boldness in the face of the thing that goes "plop". How does Golding take you inside Ralph's head through the skillful use of words as Ralph leaves the scene?

**Chapters 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12**

1 - Jack says "He isn't a hunter, he isn't a prefect and he doesn't get us meat." In Jack's mind these seem to be the qualities of Chieftainship. What's happened recently that Jack feels he has the right and the ability to make these comments in public?

2 - What is Ralph's emerging attitude towards more discussion?

3 - Jack says "All right then. I'm not going to play any longer. Not with you." What has just gone on that he should get so mad that he just wants grab his marbles and go home?

4 - How does Golding really help you know how Jack is feeling in Chapter 8?

5 - Part way through chapter 8, Simon says perhaps with the clarity of youth, "What else is there to do?" What specifically is Simon talking about doing?

6 - After Jack leaves the group, what changes inside Piggy? Why?

7 - Jack and his hunters find a place of great beauty to actually perform their kill. Why would Golding use this technique, juxtaposing beauty and death?

8 - After the kill when they leave the head for the beast, they run away. What are they running away from? (there are several "what's" here).

9 - How does Golding evolve Ralph's character to make him more of a democrat, accepting Piggy for what he is, rather than excluding him for what he isn't?

10 - What is the "Lord of the Flies"?

11 - Describe Simon's reaction to the Lord of the Flies?

12 - Analyse Simon's activities towards, and treatment of, the dead airman which reveals Simon's compassion?

13 - Simon crawls out of the forest in the middle of a really bad thunderstorm, but instead of finding his companions he finds a single-minded hate-filled organism which kills him. What makes people in the book act like this organism? (it kills Simon).

14 - At the beginning of chapter 10, Ralph comes out of the trees and sits with Piggy. After a little bit of very serious kidding around, Ralph raises the issue of Simon's murder, and Piggy remonstrates saying "It was dark. There was that bloody dance. There was lightening. We was scared. It wasn't what you said." Ralph says "Oh Piggy" in a voice which is more a low moan than a voice. What do you think has been going through Ralph's head, especially with that low, almost-moan of "Oh Piggy"?
15 - In chapter 10, Jack talks a lot about safety and security and that sort of thing after he has beaten Wilfred, whom he has tortured by tying up and forced to wait for an uncertain fate. During the discussion he gives specific instructions to the rest of the crew, his merry little band of hunters (Jack's band is a parody of Robin Hood and his Merry men) to leave the head behind for the beast. Read this section again, trying to get a feeling for how the other boys are reacting to the memory of the beast and what it did. Why does Jack still want the others to believe that the beast still exists? What function does the beast serve now for Jack?

16 - What was the fight all about which followed the night time invasion?

17 - For most of the boys, what are the reasons they want a chief? What does a chief do for them?

18 - Describe Jack's reaction to Piggy being killed by the falling rock.

19 - How does Golding describe Piggy's death making it pig like compared to other possible deaths?

20 - What value does the conch have, even after it has been broken? (Remember to think about the value of a ritual, in religious terms and symbolism).

21 - How does Roger get away with elbowing Jack out of the way right at the end of chapter 11, when Jack is trying to intimidate Sam'n'erictalk about the differences between Jack's power and Roger's power.

22 - What does Piggy's death symbolise in terms of civility?

23 - Near the beginning of chapter 12, Golding writes "He (Ralph) knealt among the shadows and felt his isolation bitterly... they were savages, it was true, but they were human, and the ambushing fears of deep knight were coming on." Describe these fears of the deep knight which Ralph is tormented with at this juncture of the novel.

24 - How has Jack popbably made Ralph into the new (or next) beast? How does Ralph know about this? (Think about his discussions in a frenzied whisper with Sam'n'erictalk about the differences between Jack's power and Roger's power.

25 - What is the significance of Roger's sharpening a stick at both ends? What has Choir become, if your premiseis correct? Describe your feelings towards the boys, at this moment, as a reader.

26 - When things can, really, hardly get any worse for Ralph, or for anyone on the island, Golding provides a way out of this mess. What is it?

27 - The officer can't really see the seriousness in the situation which he views. The officer's point of view changes when he believes Ralph's statement that two have been killed. What convinces him to trust what he hears?

28 - While Ralph cries, the officer turns away. This is often done in our society. What does the officer expect Ralph to do? Do you think Ralph can do it? How about little Parcival Wemys Madison?

29 - At the end of the novel Ralph cries. What is he crying for?