Symbolism in Lord of the Flies

Understanding symbolism in Lord of the Flies by William Golding deepens one's appreciation of the novel.

**The Conch** - Ralph and Piggy find the conch shortly after landing on the island. It soon becomes the symbol of authority and law and order. The conch is used to call assemblies and only the person holding the conch could speak at the meetings.

Ralph and especially Piggy respected the symbol of the conch until it is smashed to bits by Jack. Jack's inclination to disregard the rules governing the conch is symbolic of his disdain for law, order, and civilization. The destruction of the conch symbolizes the destruction of what little civilization the boys possessed.

**Piggy's Glasses** - The glasses symbolized the ability to see and understand things clearly. Piggy is the only boy, besides Jack, who really sees how things should be done. The cracking of the first lens symbolizes the boys losing sight of what they need to do. The glasses are also important in so much as they are needed to start the fire.

**The Signal Fire** - The signal fire symbolizes the boys connection to civilization. The fire, initially, is important in the novel. As the boys grow more savage, the fire becomes less important to them. Jack and the hunters let the fire go out in order to hunt. Ralph's effort to keep the fire going are consistent but unsuccessful, in the same way his efforts to restore order are unsuccessful.

Golding uses the signal fire to also symbolize hope, something which Jack destroys as the novel progresses. At times the signal fire rages out of control, symbolic of the boys themselves.

**The Beast** - The beast represents the inner savagery of the boys and all mankind. The boys personify it by calling it a giant snake and mistaking a dead parachutist for it. Simon is the only boy who understands that they are the beast.

**The Lord of the Flies** - Jack impales a pig's head on a wooden stake in sacrifice to the beast. The Lord of the Flies symbolizes the devil and is a literal translation from Hebrew meaning Beelzebub.

**The Dead Parachutist** - Piggy looks for a sign from the adult world. He gets it the very same night. Miles above the island, a plane is shot down. A dead man floats onto the island and becomes lodged in rocks and trees. The dead parachutist symbolizes the adult world and its inability to maintain peace. Piggy's desire to learn civilized behavior from adults goes unfulfilled. The dead man also becomes the beast.

**The Plane Crash** - The plane crash symbolizes the breakdown of modern society. The boys leave England to get away from the war and are shot down by the enemy.
**The Scar** - The scar left by the plane crash, symbolizes the damaging encroachment of humans in paradise. The vivid imagery that Golding uses to describe how the scar smashes into the jungle illustrates the affect humans have on the earth and how devastating man can be.

**The Island** - The island symbolizes the Garden of Eden before the arrival of the boys. After the boys arrive it becomes corrupted and destroyed.

**The Boys** - The boys also stand as symbols: Simon represents goodness; Ralph and Piggy symbolize law and order; Jack and Roger stand for evil; The big kids represent the ruling classes; and the littluns symbolize common folk.

---

**Allusions in Lord of the Flies**

William Golding's Lord of the Flies is more than an adventure story. It is a look into human nature. These allusions will deepen your understanding of the novel.

**Understanding Allusions**

An allusion is a reference to an famous person, historical or religious figure, an historical event, or another literary work. Allusions allow an author to inject deep meaning with few words. Allusions at times are used ironically by creating a contrast between the allusion and the situation.

The first example of an allusion is the title of the novel itself.

**Lord of the Flies** - The title is a literal translation from Hebrew for Beelzebub, the devil's right hand demon in hell. This allusion emphasizes the evil that reigns over the island and within humankind.

**The Beast**

Understanding the following *Lord of the Flies* allusions to the beast is eye opening. The beast is spoken of in *Revelations* chapter 13 of the *New Testament*:

- And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea (Revelations 13:1) coincides with the title of chapter 5, *Beast from Water*
- And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast (Revelations 13:3); the beast in chapter 6 is actually a dead parachutist who the boys bring back to life figuratively through fear. The entire island (the boys' world) is awed and fearful of the mysterious creature.
- And they worshiped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him? (Revelations 13: 4); after Jack and the hunters conclude they cannot defeat the beast, they worship it by offering a sacrifice, the Lord of the Flies.
- And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies (Revelations 13:5); Simon, while hallucinating, converses with the Lord of
the Flies, the beast's emissary; the Lord of the Flies declares his intention to destroy all that is good on the island. (end of Chapter 8 - pg. 143)

- **Literary and Additional Biblical Allusions**

  1. In addition to those referencing the beast, Biblical allusions in *Lord of the Flies* focus on Simon. Simon is seen by many as a Christ figure. Simon demonstrates the following:
      - Prophesies his own death in chapter 7, as Jesus does throughout the New Testament
      - Feeds his followers fruit in chapter 3 much like Jesus feeds the multitudes in the New Testament.
      - Withdraws to his secret place in the forest as Jesus withdraws to the wilderness to pray.
      - Understands the truth about fear, evil, and human nature, but is slain as he attempts to share it.

Other Biblical allusions in *Lord of the Flies* center around the Garden of Eden. The island itself represents an Edenic paradise until the boys arrive and destroy it.