

## Symbolism

### *The conch* Rationality

- The conch is symbolic of common sense and discipline. It is beautiful because it is part of the island. "In colour the shell was deep cream, touched here and there with fading pink."
- Its beauty strikes us when Ralph and Piggy find it, but then is forgotten as they put it to use.
- Piggy treats the conch with great care.
- In his world of reason, the symbol of the conch is central to a civilised society.
- The conch gives authority to a speaker and through the conch the needs of the boys can be discussed in an orderly way.
- The boys cannot talk at meetings unless they are holding the conch, and, for Piggy, the conch avows the necessity of decent, controlled behaviour.
- It is Piggy who immediately recognises the shell as a conch and he instructs Ralph how to blow it, in order to call meetings.

### Its destruction

- If its destruction at the same time as Piggy's death symbolises the destruction of rationality on the island, it also points out the limitations of that rationality.
- Throughout the novel Piggy cradles the conch, desperate to cling to a world that is sensible and rational.
- However, as the situation on the island deteriorates, and Jack's brutality is entrenched, the conch becomes irrelevant and pointless.
- The conch belongs to nature and as soon as man begins to use it, with whatever decent intentions, it is doomed to inadequacy and oblivion.
- It brings into being assemblies that rapidly disintegrate into horseplay and boredom.
- Once Jack is chief, his initial disregard for the conch becomes absolute, as Jack's society is a society of tyranny and violence.
- The end of the conch, when it shatters with Piggy, comes about because of eyes that can no longer see shining thing or boy, but only empty shell and pig, which stand in the way and fuel the power urge.
- The conch shatters with the same force as Roger destroys Piggy: "the conch exploded into a thousand white fragments and ceased to exist."

### Rescue sign

After his initial exploration of the island, Ralph calls a second meeting, and discusses the necessity of making a fire so that they can be rescued. This sounds like fun to the boys, and all of them, except Piggy, rush off to build one. The fire rages out of control and "The boys broke into shrill, excited cheering" and "build a bonfire".

Piggy is frustrated and screams at them to "act proper". He is indignant and furious that the boys have gone "and set the whole island on fire". The necessity of a fire as a smoke signal is lost on the boys.

## Cooking

- For Jack, the fire is for roasting pig, despite his initial boast that he and his hunters will keep a rescue fire going. When a ship does pass on the horizon, the fire is dead, as Jack and his hunters are so intoxicated with the hunt that they have forgotten about rescue.
- Jack is angered when Ralph and Piggy attack him about the dead fire. Jack lunges at Piggy and breaks one side of his glasses. The fire is re-lit for the purpose of cooking the pig and the boys feast on meat.
- Later in the novel, when Ralph and Piggy go to Castle Rock to recover Piggy's glasses that Jack and his hunters have stolen, the fire now has one purpose only - cooking pig. Ralph screams at Jack: "Look at that! Call that a signal fire? That's a cooking fire. Now you'll eat and there'll be no smoke. Don't you understand?" Of course Jack and his hunters have no wish to understand, as the idea of rescue belongs to a world long forgotten. Thus at the end of the novel, in order to hunt and kill Ralph, Jack recklessly sets the entire island on fire.

## Safety vs destruction

- If the fire is first a rational but false symbol of safety, and then an irrational but true symbol of destruction, then it exactly parallels the symbolic use of the hunters who offer first a hope of sustenance and then a foreshadowing of disaster in their concern with killing rather than cooking. It is indeed ironic that Piggy's spectacles, emblem of a "civilised" intelligence, should be linked to the fire that comes, as much as the beast, to stand for that primitivism and savagery so rampant by the end of the novel. The more sinister associations of the fire are fostered by Jack's assertion that the conch, the would-be symbol of order, does not "count" on the mountain, the location of the fire.

## The 'beastie' *Origins*

- The term includes all the fear and terrors of the boys. It is a terrifying force that Golding believes is in all of us - a force of evil. As the rules of society lose the fragile grip on people, the concept of the beast becomes increasingly more desperate and more terrifying. This leads to the boys' hysterical "The beast comes out of the sea -" / "Out of the dark -" / "Trees -".
- The beastie is introduced by the boy with the mulberry-coloured birthmark. The small boy seems to have mistaken the large tree-creepers for snakes. The "littluns" become more and more frightened by the darkness and have nightmares about the "beastie".
- One of the most pathetic aspects of the reality of the boys as frightened and confused humankind is their insistence on seeking the beast everywhere but in the place of its origin, the human heart. Adults can comfort children after nightmares but in a situation where no adults are present and where the nightmares are made to indicate the terrible limitations of adult knowledge, no such comfort can emerge.
- For Jack, the beast is something that can be controlled. Hence he offers the head of a pig as a sacrifice, as a gift for the beast. Furthermore, Jack's frenzied hunting and the ritual chanting enable the boys to forget the beast temporarily.

## *Realisation*

- It is through Simon's confrontation with the Lord of the Flies that Golding articulates this dark, sinister force. "You knew, didn't you? I'm part of you?" Thus when the dead parachutist lands on the island, he is taken for the beast by everyone except Simon. The boys flee from the sight of "this great ape & sitting asleep with its head between its knees." But Simon recognises that "the beast was harmless and horrible". However, before he has a chance to inform the boys, he is killed. In the death of Simon, Golding reinforces his statement about the beast, the fact that the beast is "other". First, it was the pig, then Simon, next Piggy, and if it were not for the Royal Navy, Ralph. All the deaths are variations on pig slaying, as the boys externalise the evil, "the beastie", that is in every one of them.