

Lesson 8: Defects of Human Nature

☐ Getting Started

When William Golding was asked to describe the central idea of *Lord of the Flies*, he said, "The theme is an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature." The **theme** of a text is its main idea or viewpoint. Though he stated a major theme of the book quite directly in the interview, Golding never did so in the novel. Instead, he used the characters and the story to convey his ideas.

To portray the defects of human nature, Golding wrote of boys who fail to cooperate in ways that would make their lives better. They don't help build shelters and they continually put the safety of their own food source at risk by defecating near it. They wrestle with irrational fears of an imagined enemy, but even this terror can't motivate them to keep the signal fire burning. Through their own carelessness one of them has already died, and as the story progresses the danger they pose to one another escalates. The boys display the same characteristics that often lead to failures in the real world — the real adult world.

Stuff You Need

- *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding
- dictionary* (Activity 2 - optional)

Ideas to Think About

- What makes an individual powerful?
- What are the implications for contemporary society?

Things to Know

- The **theme** of a text is its main idea or viewpoint.
- William Golding described the central idea of *Lord of the Flies* as follows: "The theme is an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature."
- A novel can have more than one theme, and some themes are more central to the text than others.
- **Minor themes** support, expand, or elaborate on a main or central theme or themes of a story.
- Know the definitions of the following vocabulary words: *incredulity*, *guano*, *dun*, *oblong*, *obtuseness*, *luxuriance*, *illusive*, *theological*, *propitiatingly*, *ululation*.

Activities

☐ Activity 1: Determine the Theme

As Golding developed the major, or central, theme, he also explored additional minor themes. Minor themes support, expand, or elaborate on a central theme. One example of a minor theme in *Lord of the Flies* is "What makes an individual powerful?"

"Jack started to protest but the clamor changed from the general wish for a chief to an election by acclaim of Ralph himself. None of the boys could have found good reason for this; what intelligence had been shown was traceable to Piggy while the most obvious leader was Jack. But there was a stillness about Ralph as he sat that marked him out: there was his size, and attractive appearance; and most obscurely, yet most powerfully, there was the conch. The being that had blown that, had sat waiting for them on the platform with the delicate thing balanced on his knees, was set apart."

Why would Ralph's attractive appearance qualify him to be chief? Golding wants us to examine the way we choose our leaders. Though how we choose leaders is not a main theme of the novel, it is related to the central topic that Golding identified. Poor judgement of character just may be one of the defects of human nature that contributes to other defects of society.

On the activity pages, "Determine the Theme," you'll read examples of common themes found in classic literature. Some may be minor or supporting themes in *Lord of the Flies*. You will identify the themes that are touched on in Golding's novel. This activity has two options. Ask which option you should complete.

Option 1

Recall that Golding identified the major theme of *Lord of the Flies*: "The theme is an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature." In this activity, you will choose the three themes that best support the major theme identified by Golding. Then you will support those choices by referring to details from the novel. Use the activity page, "Determine the Theme" (Option 1) to complete this activity.

Option 2

In this option, you will choose the three themes that best support the major theme identified by Golding. Then you will choose and explain the one you think best

supports the major theme of the novel. Use the "Determine the Theme" (Option 2) page to complete this activity.

☐ **Activity 2: Vocabulary**

Lord of the Flies contains some advanced vocabulary. This activity focuses on some of the words you may not yet be familiar with. You'll learn the meanings of the words and practice recognizing them in context. This activity has two options. Choose the option you prefer.

Option 1

This option asks you to read the sentences from *Lord of the Flies* that contain vocabulary words. A definition bank provides the meaning of the words. You'll match the meaning to the words based on the context. Follow the instructions on the "Vocabulary" (Option 1) page.

Option 2

This option defines the vocabulary words for you. You are asked to complete sentences from the novel by filling in blanks with the appropriate terms. Since the definitions are provided for you, the sentences will give you the context you need to fill in the blanks. Follow the instructions on the "Vocabulary" (Option 2) page.

Wrapping Up

Now that you are more than halfway through the book, the book's major themes are becoming clear. As you read the rest of the novel, keep the author's own words in mind:

"WWII was the turning point for me," he said. "I began to see what people were capable of doing. Anyone who moved through those years without understanding that man produces evil as a bee produces honey, must have been blind or wrong in the head."

"Look out," he said, "the evil is in us all."

Homework

For homework, you will read and answer questions for the next two chapters of the novel.

☐ **Reading and Questions**

Read Chapters 9 and 10 then answer the following questions. Add to the STEAL character pages as you read or after you have completed the reading.

1. What does Simon find when he climbs the mountain?

2. What does Jack's tribe do to Simon when he comes to tell them about the parachute man?

3. Do you think Ralph, Piggy, Sam and Eric should worry about keeping the fire going? Why or why not?

4. What did Jack and the hunters take from the other tribe?

DETERMINE THE THEME

Listed below are some examples of common themes found in literature. Some may be minor or supporting themes in *Lord of the Flies*. Circle the 3 themes that you think best support the major theme identified by Golding: "The theme is an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature:"

- the relationship between power and influence
- the corrosive effect of hatred on the one who hates
- the lasting impact of childhood trauma into adulthood
- the effect that the loss of a loved one has on survivors
- the disconnect between outer beauty and inner beauty
- the relationship between violence and control
- the relationship between civilization and survival

Copy the 3 themes you chose onto the lines below. In each box, record some details from the book that support your choices.

Now choose the minor theme that you feel most strongly supports the major theme. Write 3-4 sentences explaining how the minor theme supports the major theme of the novel. Use the back of the page if needed.

DETERMINE THE THEME

Directions: Listed below are examples of themes found in literature. Some may be minor or supporting themes in *Lord of the Flies*. Recall that Golding identified the major theme: "The theme is an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature." Choose and circle the three themes in the list below that best support the major theme identified by Golding.

The relationship between power and influence: This theme questions whether positions of power enable leaders to influence the collective actions of those who follow them. Does a powerful person who is unable to sway the thoughts and emotions of others have a lasting spot at the top? Is influence necessary to sustain a leadership position?

The disconnect between outer beauty and inner beauty: This theme points out the fact that people who are beautiful on the outside might be, on the inside, careless and mean, while people who have physical defects on the outside might be caring and intelligent on the inside. Do we put too much stock in the way people look on the outside?

The corrosive effect of hatred on the one who hates: This theme points out the fact that hating someone or something is negative and exhausting. It is often much worse for the person who hates than for the person or thing that is hated.

The relationship between violence and control: This theme questions whether people are able to control violence or if they lose control of themselves and the outcome of a situation when they try to use violence as a tool.

The lasting impact of childhood trauma into adulthood: This theme questions the extent to which people who experience traumatic events as children are able to heal from those events. Can they become the people they would have been if those traumas had not occurred?

The relationship between civilization and survival: This theme questions whether the things which make us "civilized" (wearing clothes, sleeping in homes, maintaining sanitary eating conditions, refraining from fistfights, etc.) are the same things which extend our life expectancy.

The effect that the loss of a loved one has on survivors: When someone close to us dies, how do we handle it? How is it different for a child when a parent dies versus when a sibling or a friend dies?

Now pick one theme from the three that you chose that you feel best supports the major theme. Write 3-4 sentences explaining how the minor theme supports the major theme in the novel.

Vocabulary

Directions: Read the definitions and then read the sentences. Choose the correct definition of the word in bold print in the sentences from the definition bank. Indicate your answer by writing the letter in front of the sentence.

Definition Bank

- A. richness, plentifulness
- B. ungraspable, mysterious, difficult to fully understand or see
- C. blunt, without edges
- D. a sound without words, a howl or yelp
- E. longer on one side than another, oval or rectangular, not square or circular
- F. dark, shadowy
- G. related to religious philosophy, ideas or beliefs based on a certain notion of god
- H. to appease or satisfy someone else, to calm or placate
- I. bird or bat excrement, usually dried and hardened
- J. with doubt, with skepticism, a state of disbelief or a lack of total or complete belief

1. ____ Simon, walking in front of Ralph, felt a flicker of **incredulity** — a beast with claws that scratched, that sat on a mountaintop, that left no tracks and yet was not fast enough to catch Samneric.
2. ____ Nothing but what you might expect: pink, tumbled boulders with **guano** layered on them like icing; and a steep slope up to the shattered rocks that crowned the bastion.
3. ____ If you could shut your ears to the slow suck down of the sea and boil of the return, if you could forget how **dun** and unvisited were the ferny coverts on either side, then there was a chance that you might put the beast out of mind and dream for a while.
4. ____ Piggy bumped into him and a twin grabbed him as he made for the **oblong** of paling stars.
5. ____ On the other side of the island, swathed at midday with mirage, defended by the shield of the quiet lagoon, one might dream of rescue; but here, faced by the brute **obtuseness** of the ocean, the miles of division, one was clamped down, one was helpless...
6. ____ For most of the way they were forced right down to the bare rock by the water and had to edge along between that and the dark **luxuriance** of the forest.
7. ____ Simon lowered his head, carefully keeping his eyes shut, then sheltered them with his hand. There were no shadows under the trees but everywhere a pearly stillness, so that what was real seemed **illusive** and without definition.
8. ____ A **theological** speculation presented itself. "We'd better keep on the right side of him, anyhow.
9. ____ Piggy nodded **propitiatingly**.
10. ____ Eric raised his head and achieved a faint **ululation** by beating on his open mouth.

Vocabulary

Directions: Fill in the blank in each sentence by choosing a word from the word bank.

Word Bank

dun: dark, shadowy

guano: bird or bat excrement, usually dried and hardened

illusive: ungraspable, mysterious, difficult to fully understand or see

incredulity: with doubt, with skepticism, a state of disbelief or a lack of total or complete belief

luxuriance: richness, plentifulness

obtuseness: blunt, without edges

oblong: longer on one side than another, oval or rectangular, not square or circular

propitiatingly: to appease or satisfy someone else, to calm or placate

theological: related to religious philosophy, ideas or beliefs based on a certain notion of god

ululation: a sound without words, a howl or yelp

1. For most of the way they were forced right down to the bare rock by the water and had to edge along between that and the dark _____ of the forest.
2. Simon, walking in front of Ralph, felt a flicker of _____ — a beast with claws that scratched, that sat on a mountaintop, that left no tracks and yet was not fast enough to catch Samneric.
3. A _____ speculation presented itself. "We'd better keep on the right side of him, anyhow.
4. Nothing but what you might expect: pink, tumbled boulders with _____ layered on them like icing; and a steep slope up to the shattered rocks that crowned the bastion.
5. Eric raised his head and achieved a faint _____ by beating on his open mouth.
6. If you could shut your ears to the slow suck down of the sea and boil of the return, if you could forget how _____ and unvisited were the ferny coverts on either side, then there was a chance that you might put the beast out of mind and dream for a while.
7. Piggy bumped into him and a twin grabbed him as he made for the _____ of paling stars.
8. On the other side of the island, swathed at midday with mirage, defended by the shield of the quiet lagoon, one might dream of rescue; but here, faced by the brute _____ of the ocean, the miles of division, one was clamped down, one was helpless...
9. Piggy nodded _____.
10. Simon lowered his head, carefully keeping his eyes shut, then sheltered them with his hand. There were no shadows under the trees but everywhere a pearly stillness, so that what was real seemed _____ and without definition.

Lesson 8: Defects of Human Nature

Getting Started

✿ Ideas to Think About

- What makes an individual powerful?
- What are the implications for contemporary society?



Things to Know

- The **theme** of a text is its main idea or viewpoint.
- William Golding described the central idea of *Lord of the Flies* as follows: "The theme is an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature."
- A novel can have more than one theme, and some themes are more central to the text than others.
- **Minor themes** support, expand, or elaborate on a main or central theme or themes of a story.
- Know the definitions of the following vocabulary words: *incredulity*, *guano*, *dun*, *oblong*, *obtuseness*, *luxuriance*, *illusive*, *theological*, *propitiatingly*, *ululation*.

⦿ Skills

- Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme. (LA)
- Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text. (LA)

Introducing the Lesson

In this lesson, students learn to identify major and minor or supporting themes in a book. In Golding's own words, "The theme is an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature." This is a major, or central theme of the novel.

Activities

Activity 1: Determine the Theme

This activity asks students to identify which minor themes support the major theme of the novel. Students are provided with a list of themes commonly found in classic literature and are asked to circle the three that support the major theme of *Lord of the Flies*. There are two options for this activity. The first option may be most suitable for students with a background and aptitude for analytical thinking and writing. The second option provides more information and guidance to students who benefit from a more structured approach. Option 2 also requires less writing than Option 1. Have students complete the option best suited to them.

Option 1

This option lists themes and asks the students to circle the three themes that best support the major theme of the novel. Students should have circled any three of these themes:

- the relationship between power and influence
- the disconnect between outer beauty and inner beauty
- the relationship between violence and control
- the relationship between civilization and survival

Students are asked to support their choices with examples from the novel. Answers will vary, but should essentially align with the following concepts:

- *The relationship between power and influence* -- Jack understands that displays of personal physical power can help a person gain social influence. That is one of the reasons he is so determined to catch a pig and why he is so frustrated when he fails. He is not interested in the types of tasks everyone can perform, such as building huts or watching for a passing ship. He wants to be seen as able to do something other boys cannot do.
- *The disconnect between outer beauty and inner beauty* -- The kids choose Ralph as leader partly because he is attractive. Piggy is thoughtful and intelligent but is dismissed because his appearance is not attractive.
- *The relationship between violence and control* -- Every time violence is introduced in a scene, the boys lose their capacity for self control. An example is the attack on Robert; even Ralph is involved. The fire burning out of control and killing the boy with the mulberry mark also is an example. Furthermore, every time violent acts occur, the target of the violence shifts from its initial mark and the consequences of the savagery are totally unpredictable.
- *The relationship between civilization and survival* -- The less the boys care about maintaining order and civilization, the less likely they are to survive. Ralph understands that the boys' best chance for survival is to maintain standards of living that resemble civilization. He wants the boys to stay focused on things that will make them more comfortable, such as building shelters. (As the book progresses, savage instincts prevail and more boys die. But by this chapter, students may still be unsure whether Golding will illustrate a direct link between civilization and survival, and that's acceptable at this point. As long as students understand that theme of the book relates to the relationship between civilization and survival, they are successfully grasping the theme.)

Students are then asked to write three to four additional sentences on the minor theme (of the three in the exercise) they feel has the strongest presence in the novel. Answers will vary. Any of the four choices provided — the relationship between power and influence, the disconnect between outer beauty and inner beauty, the relationship between violence and control, and the relationship between civilization and survival — are strong supporting themes in *Lord of the Flies*.

Option 2

From a list of common themes, students are asked to choose the three themes that best support the major theme of *Lord of the Flies*. In this option, students are supported with explanations of the themes. The themes below best support the major theme:

- *The relationship between power and influence*: This theme questions whether positions of power enable leaders to influence the collective actions of those who follow them. Does a powerful person who is unable to sway the thoughts and emotions of others have a lasting spot at the top, or is influence necessary to sustain a leadership position?

- *The disconnect between outer beauty and inner beauty:* This theme points out the fact that people who are beautiful on the outside might be, on the inside, careless and mean, while people who have physical defects on the outside might be caring and intelligent on the inside. Do we put too much stock in the way people look on the outside?
- *The relationship between violence and control:* This theme questions whether people are able to control violence, or if they lose control of themselves and the outcome of a situation when they try to use violence as a tool.
- *The relationship between civilization and survival:* This theme questions whether the things which make us "civilized" (wearing clothes, sleeping in homes, maintaining sanitary eating conditions, refraining from fistfights, etc.) are the same things which extend our life expectancy.

Students are then asked to write three to four additional sentences on the minor theme (of the three chosen in the exercise) they feel has the strongest presence in the novel. Answers will vary. Any of the four choices — the relationship between power and influence, the disconnect between outer beauty and inner beauty, the relationship between violence and control, and the relationship between civilization and survival — are strong supporting themes in *Lord of the Flies*.

Activity 2: Vocabulary

This activity introduces students to more vocabulary words from the book. There are two options for the activity page. Option 1 asks students to read the sentences from *Lord of the Flies* that contain vocabulary words. A definition bank provides the meaning of the words. Students will match the meaning to the words based on the context.

Option 2 defines the vocabulary words for students. They are asked to complete sentences from the novel by filling in blanks with the appropriate terms. This option is more challenging than Option 1 because students do not start with the words placed in the context of the story.

Option 1

This option asks students to read the sentences from *Lord of the Flies* which contain vocabulary words. A definition bank provides the meaning of the words. Students will match the meaning to the words based on the context.

Answer Key:

1. J
2. I
3. F
4. E
5. C
6. A
7. B
8. G
9. H
10. D

Option 2

This option defines the vocabulary words for the student. The student is asked to complete sentences from the novel by filling in each blank with the appropriate term by using the context of the sentence to determine the meaning and word which best fit.

Answer Key:

1. luxuriance
2. incredulity
3. theological
4. guano
5. ululation
6. dun
7. oblong
8. obtuseness
9. propitiatingly
10. illusive

Wrapping Up

Questions to Discuss

- What does it mean to have power? Is power the same thing as control or is it different? (Answers will vary.)
- What does it mean to have self control? Can people have power over their own lives without having power over others? (Answers will vary.)
- Is retaining personal power more important to Ralph or to Jack? (Answers will vary.)
- Do you think Ralph or Jack has more power on the island? Why? (Answers will vary.)

Things to Review

Review the book's themes with the student. The book's major theme deals with the relationship between the defects of human nature and the defects of society. Discuss the minor theme(s) that students found most prevalent (the relationship between power and influence, the disconnect between outer beauty and inner beauty, the relationship between violence and control, and the relationship between civilization and survival).

Remind students that while the precise message and specific takeaways of each scene and symbol are open to discussion and interpretation, the fundamental message is consistent with the author's world view. Moving forward, use the author's own words and description of the novel to evaluate and guide students' level of understanding and ability to conduct meaningful analysis of the text.

Homework

For homework, students will read and answer questions about the next two chapters in the novel. They will also add to their STEAL character pages.

Reading and Questions

1. What does Simon find when he climbs the mountain?

He finds the rotting body of the man in the parachute.

2. What does Jack's tribe do to Simon when he comes to tell them about the parachute man?

They kill him because they think he is the Beastie.

3. Do you think Ralph, Piggy, Sam and Eric should worry about keeping the fire going? Why or why not?

Answers will vary.

4. What did Jack and the hunters take from the other tribe?

Piggy's glasses