

*What is the purpose of the conch in Chapter 2 of LOTF? (mini-analysis)*

## **False Hope in a Conchshell**

Near the beginning of *Lord of the Flies*, Piggy rambles on about how valuable the conch shell was — and it turns out, it was indeed valuable to their survival, allowing Ralph to call out to the other boys and establish himself as chief. **Originally a powerful symbol, the force that chose Ralph over Jack, the conch loses its significance after its initial use and is a virtually meaningless item when it is used to allow speaking in Chapter Two of *Lord of the Flies*.**

After gaining control over the conch, Piggy still has no voice nor power towards the group. According to the rules originally set by the leaders: “[Ralph will] give the conch to the next person to speak ... and he won’t be interrupted” (33), *only* the one with the conch — in this case, Piggy — has the right to speak. But despite his cries of “I got the conch ... I got the right to speak” (44) throughout the chapter, no one listens to him; he is powerless. Despite the extent to which Piggy is despised and marginalized, the same could probably be said to the other boys. This is because of the very act of opening up the shell to the public, of allowing access for even the least influential of the group, of sharing its power openly; by doing this, it loses its initial awesome presence. No longer is it the force that chooses Ralph as the most powerful, the one to bring the kids together when they are lost and scattered on the island, and the one to earn Ralph Jack’s respect; now, it is a commonplace object. Although it allows a person to speak out and be heard, it does not add any additional respect to them.

The supreme position given to Ralph and Jack also undermine the conch’s importance. In their hands, the conch had given them power, as it was unique; but they would stop at no end to prevent the others from gaining that power. Whether they knew it or not, they became power-hungry leaders from the moment they had used the conch. This was evidence in Piggy’s repelling by Ralph: although Ralph knew of Piggy’s intelligence and future importance, he shut him out because he was generally disliked and looked down on because he was chubby, but mostly because he was a threat to his power. After Piggy tried to speak too many times with the conch, Ralph and Jack didn’t allow him to speak any more, changing their rules (without objection from the children) to prevent Piggy from speaking and to prove their authority once more. “‘The conch doesn’t count on top of the mountain,’ said Jack, ‘so you shut up’” (42) said Jack contemptuously to Piggy. Because of the power that Piggy’s sagacity could have, Ralph and Jack limited the power of the shell.

The conch was an important item valuable in the first chapter, but of much lesser importance in the second. It gave Piggy and the other boys a false hope of having a say, but it didn’t achieve anything for him.