

## **The Power Gamble: A Dangerous Rite of Passage**

A notion to inspire awe, heroism, wonder. But too often danger, irresponsibility, and chaos as well — and many times the duplicitous mind of the adult. Too often, this concept of “power” is associated with evil and misdeed, opposite of the innocent domain of the light hearted child. However, Golding meddles with these opposing connotations in *Lord of the Flies*.

The boys separate themselves into two groups: the “biguns” and the “littluns.” This is a distinction typically ignored in society: they are often classified simply as “children.” The boys, however, are more serious with this segregation, and Golding uses it to portray two groups analogous to adults and children. The contrast between the littluns and biguns shows that the ability to fill a gap in power is the defining factor in determining adulthood.

A central theme of the littluns is their fright towards the “Beast.” The first to mention the monster is the boy with the mulberry-colored-birthmark, introduced as weak and pitiful, a “shrimp of a boy” (35). The littluns hang onto this childish nightmare of the monster “snake-thing ... in the woods” (35). Although their imagination is a source of unnecessary terror to themselves, even with the older boys agreeing with the leaders about the unlikeliness of a Beast, “here and there among the little ones [is] the doubt that require[s] more than rational assurance” (36). In contrast to the littluns, the biguns are stubborn in their argument that such a Beast could not exist on their island with their repeating cries of “but there isn’t a Beast!” (35) — until Ralph and Jack venture out and actually encounter a glimpse of a “Beast.” The creativity tied so closely with children’s minds leads to a useless panic that contrasts with the more rational mind of the biguns, whose assumption of the parental role is used to comfort.

Responsibility is another weak suit of the littluns — they have a strong inability to care for themselves or be responsible for their actions. On the other hand, the biguns prove to be fully self-sustainable and even have the time and resources to take care of the rowdy “kids” in addition to themselves. Simon demonstrates this parental care when he “pull[s] off the choicest [fruit] from up in the foliage, pass[ing] them back down to the endless outstretched hands [of the littluns]” (56) as a spontaneous action when he walks by. Similarly, Piggy is charged with the role of babysitter as the boys voyage off in the spirit of hunt, showing very strongly his internal caretaker. This is not an easy task, as the littluns “wait for two minutes, then [fall] into the sea; they [go] into the forest; they just scatter everywhere” (46). Unfortunately, the law and order that

are set into place by the biguns do not apply to the littluns. They are the ones that are free of the bonds of civility and the struggles of adulthood, and yet they subconsciously demand nurturing and protection. They are the ones that disappear into the forest fires. They are the ones to wail in the night. They are the ones that simply cannot survive for themselves. As a result, the biguns are the ones they need as support until they can understand power and become biguns for themselves. This lack of independence of the littluns further separates them from the biguns, as their primary concern is not power and leadership, but rather simply survival and growth.

The conflict that fuels the majority of the book is caused by the power struggles of the biguns. Besides their role as parents for the littluns, they also have to establish a makeshift “government,” a hierarchy of control. Leadership, an attribute restricted to adults, quickly distinguishes a few biguns as the most mature, adult-like members of society.

Ralph first exemplifies the role of an adult when he assumes power. Immediately, in sharp contrast to the littluns who are off playing games and picking fruit for themselves, he initiates and wins an election for leadership, or “chief,” after they notice the presence of “no grownups!” (8) — in other words, a lack of power. In an orderly manner, a democracy in miniature begins. With the power of the conch, he approves the boys’ exclamation of, “We’ll have rules!” (33). Equality is set as the rule of the-one-with-the-conch-speaks is firmly established, allowing for a fairer distribution of power. In addition, he leads the boys in their endeavors for rescue and survival by setting up a signal fire and building shelters, and he raises the spirit of the boys by exploring the island and reporting their wonderfully independent, albeit abandoned, situation. He also appeases Jack after his loss of the election by bestowing upon him power over the his loyal choir group, and the right to hunt. Ralph demonstrates the maturity associated with leadership and adulthood as he responsibly steps up to organize power in society.

The biguns in the community are not limited to positive roles, however. The older boys that join Jack’s tribe vie for power simply out of the desire for dominance and independence.

Jack is the first revolutionary to rise, the first to question authority and step up where Ralph was weakest. He speaks out for the boys when a conflict of interests arises between them and Ralph: “‘You wouldn’t care to help with the shelters, I suppose?’ ‘We want meat—’ ‘And we don’t get it’” (51). Jack continues with his obsession for the hunt — a priority that the boys favor — through a similar argument later in the story as Ralph promotes the priority of rescue.

The differences in opinions are so fierce and lead to the schism between Ralph's original group and Jack's tribe. Armed with his newlyfound authority, Jack allows for the boys in the tribes to become more independent and free, the ideal of a grownup. Interestingly, they openly identify themselves as a "tribe of painted savages" (177), notwithstanding the negative, primitive connotations of the terms "tribe" and "savages." To do this, the savages conceal themselves behind masks, which are "thing[s] on their own, behind which [they] hid[e], liberated from shame and self-consciousness" (64) — much like the deceitful adult, they mask their personal identities and lose blame by creating a single group identity. Unlike Ralph and Piggy, Jack's group seeks not civility, but being an adult by creating a sovereign group; this quality of "freedom-fighting" and fulfilling the wants of the people demonstrates Jack's maturity.

A new level of detachment from the littluns is achieved when the savages become homicidal. So entrenched in their level of power, the savages are thrown from the lovely realm of innocence into the corrupt domain of the adult. As they hide from blame and shame behind their masks, like true savages they kill Piggy as he attempts to convince them that "[they are] acting like a crowd of kids" (180) and that they are "be[ing] a pack of painted Indians, ... hunt[ing] and kill[ing], ... [and] hunt[ing] and break[ing] things up" (180). It is a struggle for power, for dominance, for humanity and rules or savagery and freedom, ending in a violent struggle that causes Piggy to end up "like a pig after it has been killed" (181) — murdered as if he was an animal — and Simon as well. Like adults who sometimes are so passionate in their argument and ruthless in their fight, their struggle for power leads towards destruction as they clash over ideals.

The introduction of a true adult — in the ordinary sense of the term — when the sailor arrives on the island has a similar effect on the boys as the biguns on the littluns. With a higher power returned over them, they are the vulnerable ones again, simply "little boys ... streaked with colored clay" (200). In the position of the littluns, they are the ones that are all "fun and games" (200) in the adult's perspective. And yet, the sailors unconditionally take care of the savage children simply because they are innocent children. This further emphasizes the role of adults to fill in the lack of power and parenthood.

The members of society who can "step up to the plate" when faced with opportunity or crisis — or both, in the case of *Lord of the Flies* — are the politicians, the leaders, the parents in society. For better or worse, a rise to power is the true rite of passage to adulthood.