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Humanities Book Club

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*Lord of the Flies* Book Club

I. Personal Response

I hated the book. It made me sick. I, the reader, could do nothing but grieve as hate, fear, chaos, and destruction befell innocent youths. But that was William Golding's purpose, was it not? His words, the story of horror he painted, had to move our souls past mere discomfort to severe wounds and blows, things which at some point must be experienced to understand the power fear can hold over us if we yield. It is my belief that the book was meant to be a knife in the heart; it is a warning. I tasted my own blind terror, my own panic—feelings made very real to me through the twisted actions of boys turned feral and the helpless and desolate state of young children. It stabbed me personally, forcing my thoughts to my own “littlun” brothers, how they would be shouted at, beaten, lost and forgotten, or worst of all, become carnal and cruel, leaving their perfect young hearts to starve. No, I did not care for this book at all, and that's how it's supposed to be.

II. Questions

1. What does the hunter face paint symbolize and what powers do the boys draw from it?
2. Does the large number of boys on the island help or hinder their predicament? How would the outcome be different if there were only a few?
3. Is it ever the best option to lie down and die?
4. What do Piggy's glasses symbolize?
5. Can one be immune to the terror of life-threatening emergencies, or do we all break down at some point?

6. How will this experience affect the boys that survived? Will they ever be able to lead normal lives, or will they go back to savagery?

### III. Quotations

1. “‘You knew, didn’t you? I’m part of you? Close, close, close! I’m the reason why it’s no go? Why things are what they are?’” (Chapter 8, page 143)

This quote is the revealing of how things go so out of hand so quickly. The “beast” was mostly conjured from everyone’s letting their terror twist what they really saw and knew to be true, and ended up being the ultimate cause of destruction as each boy let his fears decide how he would act. When one lives in such a way, not thinking slowly and reasonably, but letting each twig snap and owl hoot scare you barmy, you’re driven mad. Through this story, Golding stresses that we must have control over our thoughts, feelings, and emotions if we are ever to survive our own personal island, lest we let fear of the beast become a permanent part of our soul and our driving factor in life.

2. “‘But really, thought Ralph, this was not Bill. This was a savage whose image refused to blend with that ancient picture of a boy in shorts and a shirt.’” (Chapter 12, page 183).

At this point near the end of the book, every character has changed for the worst. There is no concept left of friendship, love, morals, innocent pleasure, right and wrong—everything they once were. All of this has been replaced with the hunger for power and survival, ultimately driven by fear. Each of the boys lost their ability to see beyond themselves and into the hearts of others, and as a result became nothing but brutish and cowardly animals, clawing, scratching, and stopping at nothing to get what they crave. The book teaches us that when one forgets others in order to save his own life, literal or figurative, he ends up losing it anyway.

3. “‘But I know there isn’t no fear, either...Unless—...unless we get frightened of people.’”

(Chapter 5, page 84) This quote takes place near the middle of the book, with poor Piggy trying to extend his wisdom to the boys of the island. What he says sounds simple and childlike, but is

really quite profound. At that point, the boys had little to fear physically; they had food, water, and protection in numbers for the time being. What they have to fear was fear of each other, just as Piggy said; once they felt they had to fight each other to stay protected, they really lost any small amount of safety they had left. The rules and order that was originally established fell ruin and anyone, even those allied to each other, were vulnerable as the victim of the next brutal attack. You cannot afford to be run by your fear of others—there will be nothing to stop anyone from hurting you.

4. “Each of them wore the remains of a black cap and ages ago they had stood in two demure rows and their voices had been the song of angels.” (Chapter 8, page 133).

Shown here by this passage is the sorrowful truth of social and moral disintegration—it can happen to anyone; one’s previous life means almost nothing. The choir boys turned into the most savage creatures of all, and it was them in the beginning that marched and wore stately robes even on the wild island. They chose to follow Jack, and Jack himself chose to gain power, first over the pigs, then over the boys, instead of looking out for the safety and well-being of everyone. What Golding shows us through this book is that what we choose right now, be it at home or in the face of danger, is what decides who we are. We can abandon our past in the blink of an eye if we decide, leaving nothing but ruined bits of memories.

5. “For a moment he had a fleeting picture of the strange glamour that had once invested the beaches. But the island was scorched up like dead wood...Ralph wept for the end of innocence, the darkness of a man’s heart...” (Chapter 12, page 202)

This heartbreaking end to the book illustrates quite beautifully the meaning of this story of madness: darkness and fear will corrupt our hearts if we let them have any hold on us at all. In the beginning, the boys were excited at the prospect of adventure and confident in their abilities. By allowing hunger for power or fear of the ever-illusory “beast” creep in, they ended up completely possessed by their dark thoughts and feelings. The childhood purity was corrupted by hate, fear, and evil, scorching their hearts just like the island.