"Men?"
Jack shook his head.
"Animals."

Lord of the Flies is not a children’s story; it is a story about the nature of man. The purpose of the novel is, in the words of the author, “an attempt to trace the defects of society back to the defects of human nature.”

**The first step you should take in attempting to understand this work is, of course, to read Lord of the Flies cover to cover. After you finish reading the novel, read this study guide and answer the questions provided at the end.**

Simply reading the novel does not guarantee you a passing grade on the summer reading test which greets you early in the fall semester. The key to receiving a high grade is TO STUDY the summer reading. Please do the following:

1. Use this study guide to note-take in the novel; re-read important sections of the novel and underline them.
2. Keep a character list with descriptions and page numbers of significant events.
3. Record brief chapter summaries. Summarize key events which occur in each chapter.
4. **After reading the novel**, answer all of the questions at the end of the study guide.
5. Prior to the test, review the study guide and all of your notes.

**THE LITERARY BACKGROUND OF LORD OF THE FLIES**

William Golding’s Lord of the Flies (1954) parodies an earlier story by Ballantyne called The Coral Island (1857). Yet Golding’s parody does not make fun of the earlier work; rather, according to Golding, Lord of the Flies “is subtly rooted in admiration” (18) for his favorite childhood story. However, Golding sees Ballantyne’s The Coral Island as an idealized account of human behavior in the wild. In The Coral Island three young Victorian boys find themselves marooned on an unidentified Pacific island—“Ralph Rover, the fifteen year old narrator”; Jack Martin “a tall strapping broad shouldered youth of eighteen, with a handsome, good-humored, firm face”; and Peterkin Gay, “little quick, funny, decidedly mischievous, and about fourteen years old” (19). Well-versed in the manners of Victorian society, these three boys live life on this island “in uninterrupted harmony and happiness” (19).

The boys in The Coral Island never resort to the baseness of fleshy desire; they kill for only useful purposes such as “Peterkin’s butchery of a sow to get leaather for ‘future shoes’” (20). In the end, the boys are saved by a teacher who proclaims “through the great goodness of God you are free!” (20). Rewarded for their ability to remain civilized in the wild, the boys find redemption both in this world and in heaven.

Golding’s Lord of the Flies presents a much darker look at human nature. Using the structure of The Coral Island and even borrowing from its character names (Peterkin is split into Piggy and Simon), Golding responds cynically to Ballantyne’s vision of humanity. In 1954, after witnessing WWII and the horrors of the atomic bomb, Golding doubts man’s innate goodness and comments, “… people are not like that; they would not behave like that if they were Godfearing Englishmen, and they went to an island like that” (20). Appropriately, Golding opens his book with a glimpse of the world which has turned his vision from man’s higher spirit to man’s baser nature—the boys’ plane has crashed after evacuating them from an atomic holocaust. Mentioned only now and then throughout the story, the adult world of destruction from which the boys have emerged returns in pieces to undercut the adult world of order and civilization on which Piggy insists. The tension between the two forces—the irrational and the rational—inspires the action in Golding’s story of lost innocence, Lord of the Flies.

A BRIEF AND INCOMPLETE OVERVIEW OF FREUDIAN PSYCHOLOGY
Sigmund Freud was born in 1856 in Freiberg, Moravia. Until his death in London in 1939, he achieved many accolades for his groundbreaking work in psychology. Freud believed that all behavior is caused, and therefore that all behavior can be explained. To facilitate his explanations, Freud divided the human personality into three parts: the id (primal urge), the ego (intellect), and the superego (conscience). In Lord of the Flies, Jack is the strongest voice of the id. Ralph represents the ego, and Piggy is the embodiment of the superego.

THE ID
In Lord of the Flies the boys often act like animals. According to Freud, the id is governing their actions at these times. The id is the source of instinctive energy, and it seeks satisfaction through pleasure. Throughout the novel, Jack’s behavior is id driven; however, from the moment Ralph mimics a fighter plane and shoots Piggy in chapter one, we realize that ALL the boys (with the exception of Simon) associate violence with pleasure. They often make pleasure noises: “She-aa-ow!” (11) which are coupled with sadistic acts. Freud believed the id was the most primitive part of the human personality. Find and underline different sections of the novel where the boys enjoy violent or destructive acts. Remember, the id does not know right from wrong; it simply operates according to the pleasure principle. The major shortcoming of the id is that it does not direct a person to make any provisions for the future. People who seek nothing more than pleasure do not live long. As the boys discuss their priorities on the island, Jack says, “Rescue? Yes, Of course! All the same, I'd like to catch a pig first” (53). To the id driven Jack, rescue is not important because rescue necessitates the maintenance of a signal fire, which necessitates hard work.

The missing boy at the close of chapter two is the first indication of the problems associated with id gratifying behavior. Note what happens to the island itself at the end of the story. Be sure to mark appropriate sections of your text.

THE EGO
Because people cannot live by the id alone, Freud believed that we developed another part of the personality which intelligently releases and restrains the id. The ego is the “control center” of the personality; it holds the id back until an appropriate means of release can be found. Please note that the ego can serve the id; it intelligently releases and restrains the id. In the novel, Ralph represents the ego, and he often joins with Jack. However, the ego’s functioning is affected not only by the demands of the id (Jack), but also by the prompting of the superego (Piggy). Please note how Ralph attempts to balance the opposing desires of Piggy and Jack in the novel.

Think of the ego as the intellect; note Ralph’s many attempts to make rational decisions.

It is important for all intelligent readers of Lord of the Flies to recognize the purpose of the human intellect. The intellect organizes and interprets information brought to a person by his senses. Without this capacity, human beings would be similar to the boys at the end of the novel. Without reason, men are as animals: “What are we? Humans? Or animals?” (91). Free will is attendant upon the free and proper functioning of the intellect. An animal has a will, but it is not free; an animal’s will is governed by its appetites. It is precisely the restraint of carnal pleasures which separates civilized human beings from animals. Ralph knows that certain behaviors must be governed in order to preserve human life.

THE SUPEREGO
Parents are representatives of society. They teach us how to value and distinguish between right and wrong. The superego is the part of the human personality, which tells the person what he should or should not do. In short, the superego is the voice of your parents. In the novel, the superego is Piggy. The superego follows rules and traditions.
As Piggy is introduced, we note he is not as physically capable as the other boys. He must wear glasses, he cannot swim, and he has asthma. Piggy must depend upon the tools of civilization to survive.
Because he is physically challenged, Piggy can be successful only when the other boys obey the conventional rules of civilized society. Note how Piggy loves the conch and the order it represents. Underline sections of the novel where Piggy comes into conflict with Jack, remember that this is the conflict between the id (primal, violent urges) and the superego (conscience, morality).

The death of Piggy marks a critical turning point in the novel. It is significant that at the moment of his death, his brain is destroyed: “(h)is head opened and stuff came out and turned red” (181). His splattered cranium represents the triumph of the id on the island. After Piggy is killed, the boys are akin to animals; they are no longer governed by rational thought or moral standards. They burn the island in an attempt to kill Ralph, failing to realize that without rescue they themselves would die of starvation on barren, ashen ground.

OTHER INTERPRETATIONS
Lord of the Flies can be read as an anti-utopian novel. It is a rejection of the once popular concept that humans, and particularly children, are inherently pure or good. William Golding satirizes the once popular and influential beliefs of the philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau whose works set forth the idea that children are born with “pure instincts” which are corrupted by the greed and materialism of civilization as they become adults.

In addition, Lord of the Flies also weakens the teachings of humanistic philosophers, writers, and artists who celebrate the ultimate perfectibility of humans and their society. Readers should be aware that Lord of the Flies is not an isolated creation, but part of a distinguished tradition in utopian and antiutopian literature. Selected examples from this tradition are Plato, The Republic; Sir Thomas Moore, Utopia; Voltaire, Candide; S. Butler, Erwhon; Rousseau, Emile, Le Contract Sociale; T.S. Eliot, The Wasteland; G. Orwell, 1984, Animal Farm; A. Huxley, Brave New World; B.F. Skinner, Walden II; and J. Redfield, Celestine Prophesy.

Lord of the Flies can also be read as a conflict between rival political systems: one system based upon the consent of its members versus one based upon an autocratic control by violence. Simply put, the novel can be seen as a struggle between the strong and the weak. In this manner, the novel may be regarded as an artistic representation of Charles Darwin’s and Herbert Spenser’s analysis of human nature and its future.

Finally, the novel can be interpreted as an allegorical struggle between good and evil. This conflict is perceived by Simon, who understands that even the “young and innocent” can be driven by their ignorance and fear to function as animals.

DIONYSUS
In Greek mythology, Dionysus (his Roman name was Bacchus) was the son of Zeus and the Theban princess Semele. He was the only god whose parents were not both divine; therefore, he is the god most closely connected with the human race. His worshippers were called Maenads, women frenzied with wine, who ran screaming through woods and over mountains, tearing to pieces the animals they met. Similar to the boys in Lord of the Flies, they devoured the bloody shreds of flesh from their kills. However, the Maenads were not purely violent. They slept on soft meadow grass; they awoke to a sense of peace and heavenly freshness in nature. There was much that was lovely, good, and freeing in their worship, and yet always present was the horrible, bloody feast.

Greek mythology, like all literature, is interesting only to the extent that it can teach readers something about themselves. The worship of Dionysus and the actions of the boys on the island are centered in two widely different ideas—freedom and ecstatic joy and savage brutality. Perhaps this dichotomy defines the natural condition of humanity. Perhaps we are equally capable of performing horrible deeds as we are of performing good.
The author, William Golding, spoke about human nature and Lord of the Flies. He said, "(the boys) don't understand what beasts there are in the human psyche which have to be curbed." Golding wrote his novel to promote the idea that human beings are violent, but that our violent impulses, our "beasts," must be restrained if we are to survive. According to the Freudian interpretation, the ego and superego must control the id if we are to act rationally and provide a bright future for ourselves. In the novel, notice what results from the boys' indulgences in id-gratifying behavior.

**SIMON AND THE BEAST**

We are introduced to Simon as the boy who is "...always throwing a faint" (20). He is markedly different from the other boys, and was intended by the author to be a saint-like or Christ-like figure in the novel. He is misunderstood by his peers, he is thin, his face often "glows," and he is the only boy to abstain from eating meat. Meat eating is associated with violent blood-lust in the novel. Simon also emerges as a sacrificial victim in chapter nine; he is killed by his peers as he attempts to bring them news that the beast on the mountain is only a man. Simon also travels through the darkness of the forest to find his special place of light. The candle-buds present in this place help establish the religious imagery. Simon is also the only character who truly understands that the "beast" is within the boys themselves. The beast is the id, or the violent urges which sometimes govern our actions. Simon discovers this during his hallucinatory dialogue with the Lord of the Flies, which is a severed pig's head on a stick: "I'm part of you..." (143) the beast tells him.

At the very least, Simon is a morally good, mystical character who, like Piggy and Ralph, understands the necessity of sacrificing some of the present to provide for the future. Note that he is the only one to work with Ralph in chapter three. In recognizing the importance of sacrificing the present to provide for the future, Simon acknowledges that it is inappropriate to allow one's feelings to govern one's actions. If people did whatever felt good whenever they wanted to feel good, they would not live long lives. The "beast" can be interpreted as that pleasure-seeking impulse within us that must be restrained if we are to live in civilization. Remember, men are more capable and successful than animals precisely because of our ability to act rationally and constrain the baser passions.

**THE END**

As Ralph weeps for "the end of innocence, the darkness of man's heart" (202), he sees a battleship on the horizon. This final vision suggests there is no true escape from the violence. The "rescuers" are engaged in a manhunt of even greater proportions than the boys on the island; they are at war. Golding has his protagonist cry for all of humanity at the end of the novel. The author believes there are no external enemies who can be blamed for the ills of the world. The purpose of the novel is to suggest that we are all equally capable of acting as beasts.

"Lord of the Flies" is a translation of the Hebrew word "Ba'alzevuv" (Beelzebub in Greek) which means literally "lord of insects." The word is used as a name for the devil, and it suggests destruction, demoralization, hysteria, and panic.

**Questions to ponder as you read:**

1. Look at the opening descriptions and statements of Ralph and Piggy. What do the descriptions and statements tell you about each character's nature and values?
2. What is the "scar" in the woods? What does it mean that the boys emerge from the scar and "tangled undergrowth"?
3. Examine the description of nature in each chapter. How does nature react to the boys' attempts at civilization?
4. What is the difference between the way Ralph and Piggy each view the conch?
5. Write down details of the opening description of Jack. What does his description say about his character/morality?
6. Find descriptions of "the beastie" as you read. What is "the beastie"? Is it real? Which character denies the existence of the beastie the most? Why is this character's denying important?
7. What does Simon mean when he tells Ralph, “You’ll get back to where you came from”?
8. Why does the fire go out? What do the differing reactions of the boys tell you about the ways in which the value systems of the boys are conflicting?
9. Name three ways the boys attempt to remain civilized. At what points do each of these ways fall apart?
10. Name three ways the boys play that foreshadow their moral degradation.
11. How are the “little’uns” significant to the story?
12. Why does Jack hate Ralph? What happens when Jack tries to overthrow Ralph? Why does Jack react the way he does? How is his reaction foreboding? How does his reaction affect the characters? The plot?
13. Find three examples of foreshadowing in the story (besides the games the boys play).
14. What does Simon know about human nature? Why does he die when he does?
15. Why do the boys first hunt the pigs? How does their hunger change? When can you tell that they want to hunt for reasons other than finding food?
16. Why is the book titled “The Lord of the Flies”? 
17. Throughout the book, how does what happens to Piggy’s “specs” symbolize the progressive degradation of civilization on the island?
18. What role do Ralph’s dream scenes play in the narrative?
19. What is the meaning of Simon’s visionary experience? What news does he attempt to bring to the others?
20. After the pig-feast, what have the boys become? Why do they kill Simon? How do they react to the killing of Simon? What are the boys, the setting, and the time of day like when they kill Simon, and what is different about the boys, the setting, and the time of day when they realize they have killed Simon?
21. You may have noticed that no girls are on the island and that though the boys talk of their fathers, they do not mention their mothers. What is the significance of the killing of the sow? What drives them to kill her? What is she doing while she’s being killed? Why would the sight of her drive them wild?
22. In the sow scene, what do we learn about Roger? How is his passion for killing different from the other boys’ desire? How can you tell?
23. What do the hunters steal from Ralph, Piggy, and Samneric? Why do they steal during the night? What is the symbolic significance of what they steal? What do you think they will steal next?
24. Symbolically, why must Piggy die? How does the description of his death reveal the humanity lost on the island?
25. As Jack prepares to punish Samneric, Roger steps in. How does Roger’s behavior toward Samneric reveal his nature? How is Roger’s behavior towards Jack a foreboding of the boys’ destiny if they are not found?
26. What does Roger plan to do with Ralph?
27. How does the shift in point of view at the end of the story change the image of the boys’ war?
28. What is ironic about the author’s sending a soldier to save the boys from themselves