AQA English Literature GCSE

Lord of the Flies: Themes

Fear and the Beast

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Fear and the Beast

Theme Summary

Golding presents fear and the Beast as closely connected throughout Lord of the Flies. The boys' fear begins with the mysterious "beastie", but as the novel progresses, this fear becomes increasingly powerful and **destructive**. Although the Beast does not exist as a physical monster, the boys believe in it so strongly that it begins to control their behaviour.

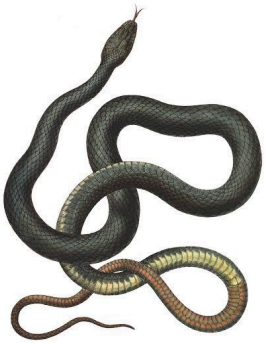


The Beast therefore becomes a **symbol** of both fear and humanity's capacity for evil. Simon is the first to recognise this when he suggests, "***Maybe there is a beast... maybe it's only us.***" While the other boys believe the Beast is an external threat, Simon understands that the real danger comes from within themselves.

Golding shows how fear can **distort** reality, destroy reason and allow individuals who seek total power, such as Jack, to exploit the fears of others and establish an increasingly **authoritarian** society. Ultimately, the boys' fear of the Beast causes them to become the very thing they fear, **culminating** in Simon's murder and the complete collapse of civilisation.

Presentation of the Theme

Fear Creates the Beast



At the beginning of the novel, the Beast exists primarily through the boys' **imagination**. The littluns are frightened by what they do not understand, particularly the unfamiliar island and the darkness of the forest. One of the younger boys describes seeing a **"snake-thing"**, which introduces the idea of the Beast. However, Ralph, Jack and Piggy initially dismiss the idea as childish and irrational, demonstrating their dependence on the logic and **authority** associated with the adult world they have left behind.

Their dismissal of the Beast suggests that, at this early stage, the older boys are still able to **suppress** their own fears and maintain the appearance of reason and order. This is significant because their confidence in **rationality** reflects their belief that civilisation can protect them from danger. Golding therefore creates a **contrast** between the littluns, who openly express their fear, and the older boys, who initially attempt to control or deny theirs. As the novel progresses, however, this reliance on reason gradually breaks down, revealing that fear is far more powerful than they initially believe.



Golding uses the **setting** to reinforce this fear. The island contains images of **darkness** and **decay**, including ***"decaying coconuts"*** and the ***"darkness of the forest proper."*** Although the island initially appears to be a paradise, these descriptions create an unsettling atmosphere and suggest that something darker exists beneath its surface.

The important point is that the boys' fear creates something that does not physically exist. Their uncertainty allows their imagination to **transform** the unknown into the Beast; it also acts as a projection; showing that humans do not wish to admit their internal darkness so always place it onto external creatures/monsters in order to escape their own evil.

This means that the Beast becomes increasingly powerful without ever needing to physically appear. Golding suggests that fear does not always require a real threat: people can create threats through their own imagination and then behave as though those threats are real.

The Beast Becomes a Symbol of Fear

As the novel develops, the Beast becomes more than an imaginary animal. It becomes a **symbol** of the boys' growing fear and anxiety. Simon understands this before the others when he says, ***"Maybe there is a beast... maybe it's only us."*** The phrase ***"only us"*** is crucial because it changes the meaning of the Beast, suggesting that the real source of fear and violence lies within the boys themselves.

The other boys struggle to accept this idea because an external Beast is easier to understand. If the Beast is an animal, they can hunt and kill it; if it exists within themselves, however, there is no simple enemy to destroy. This is reinforced when Simon encounters the Lord of the Flies, which tells him, ***"Fancy thinking the Beast was something you could hunt and kill!"*** The **rhetorical question** exposes the boys' misunderstanding and suggests that violence cannot destroy the Beast because it comes from within them. The Lord of the Flies then tells Simon, ***"I'm part of you."***, confirming his understanding that the Beast **represents** the darkness within human nature.

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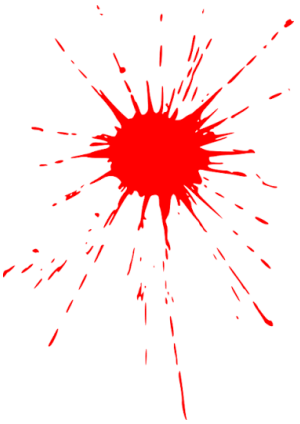
Using Fear of the Beast to Gain Power



Fear and the Beast are closely connected to Jack's rise to power. Jack realises that the boys are frightened and uses this fear to make himself appear necessary. When he declares, ***"If there's a beast, we'll hunt it down!"***, he presents himself as a protector. The **imperative language** makes him sound confident and powerful, while the promise to ***"hunt"*** the Beast suggests that fear can be controlled through violence.

Because there is no physical Beast to destroy, Jack continues to encourage the boys' fear in order to strengthen his authority. Fear therefore becomes a **political tool**, contrasting Jack's violent approach with Ralph's reliance on reason and civilisation.

As Jack's power grows, he also creates fear of himself, Roger and his hunters, using punishment and violence to **enforce** obedience. Golding suggests that fear can be **manipulated** by leaders to weaken established rules and make people surrender their freedom. Jack's tribe therefore begins to resemble an **authoritarian dictatorship**, where power is maintained through fear, intimidation and violence rather than **democratic agreement**.



Fear Turns into Violence

As the boys' belief in the Beast grows, their fear becomes increasingly violent. The hunting chant, ***"Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood!"*** directly shows how fear has become connected to **savagery**. The **repetition** and **violent imagery** create a sense of collective **hysteria**, encouraging the boys to see violence as a necessary response to the threat they believe surrounds them.

Golding suggests that fear can therefore justify brutality: when the boys believe they are acting to protect themselves, violence becomes easier to accept and their usual **moral boundaries** begin to disappear.

This idea extends beyond the boys' fear of the Beast. Many of the novel's major acts of violence are driven by fear or justified as necessary for survival and protection. During the conflict between Ralph's group and Jack's tribe, even Ralph, who represents **civilisation**, is affected by fear and the instinct for **self-preservation**.

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Golding describes how Ralph ***"began to pound the mouth below him, using his clenched fist as a hammer; he hit with more and more passionate hysteria."*** The **violent simile** of his fist as a "***hammer***" and the phrase ***"passionate hysteria"*** demonstrate how fear can overwhelm rational thought, even in characters who attempt to maintain civilisation. Golding therefore suggests that fear is a powerful instinct capable of influencing everyone, not just Jack and his hunters.



This loss of **rationality** becomes most extreme during Simon's death, when the boys are completely consumed by collective fear. Golding describes how ***"The crowd surged after it, poured down the rock, leapt onto the beast, screamed, struck, bit, tore."*** The sequence of **violent verbs** creates a rapid, chaotic **rhythm**, reflecting the boys' complete loss of individual thought and control. The **collective noun** ***"crowd"*** is significant because the boys are no longer presented as individuals capable of rational decisions; instead, they become a single violent mass.



Golding intensifies this idea through the description of ***"teeth and claws"***, giving the boys **animalistic imagery**. This is deeply **ironic** because they are attacking what they believe to be the Beast while simultaneously becoming beast like themselves. The very characteristics they fear in the Beast, violence, aggression and brutality, are now visible in their own behaviour.

The boys' fear therefore creates a powerful **irony**: their attempts to protect themselves from the Beast actually bring out the evil within themselves. Simon discovers that the supposed Beast is actually the dead parachutist and attempts to return to the group with this knowledge, but the boys are already consumed by fear and violence. They mistake Simon for the Beast and murder him. This is the ultimate proof of Simon's argument that ***"maybe it's only us."***

Golding suggests that fear can push humans to commit acts of violence that they might otherwise consider unthinkable. The Beast does not need to physically exist because the fear of it is enough to make the boys create the very brutality they were afraid of in the first place.

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The Beast and the Collapse of Civilisation



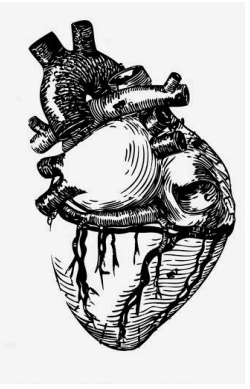
The connection between fear and the Beast also helps Golding show the **collapse** of **civilisation**. At the beginning of the novel, Ralph tries to establish rules and order. The '***conch***' gives the boys the right to speak, while the signal fire **represents** their hope of rescue. However, as their fear of the Beast increases, these **symbols** of civilisation become less important.

Jack offers the boys something different: protection from the Beast. Fear therefore helps Jack replace civilisation with savagery. The boys begin to value hunting and violence more than shelters, rules and rescue.

Piggy and Ralph continue to believe that reason can protect them, but they become increasingly powerless. Eventually, Piggy is killed and the conch is destroyed. This shows that the Beast and the collapse of **civilisation** are directly connected. As fear grows, **civilisation** becomes weaker.

Ralph Finally Understands the Beast

By the end of the novel, Ralph finally understands what Simon had recognised much earlier. He tells Piggy, ***"I'm afraid. Of us."*** This is significant because Ralph is no longer primarily afraid of the island or the Beast – he is afraid of the boys themselves.



This moment reveals the true meaning of the Beast. Ralph recognises that the threat is not something living in the forest, but the capacity for violence within human beings. This connects directly to the final image of Ralph crying for ***"the darkness of man's heart."*** The **metaphor** of darkness suggests that evil exists within humanity and can emerge when civilisation and **social restrictions** disappear.

The relationship between fear and the Beast therefore connects closely to the theme of **human nature**. Fear allows Jack to gain power, encourages the boys to abandon reason and ultimately contributes to Simon's murder.

The tragedy is that the boys spend the novel trying to find and destroy the Beast without recognising that it comes from within themselves. Golding suggests that fear does not simply respond to evil – it can also create the conditions in which evil flourishes.

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