Eduqas English Literature GCSE

Lord of the Flies: Character Profile

Jack Merridew

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Jack Merridew

Character Summary

Jack represents the instincts of violence and **savagery** alongside the consuming desire for power. He begins the novel as the controlling and arrogant leader of the choir, intimidating the other boys with his authority and confidence. When he loses the election for 'Chief', Jack quickly establishes his own **regime** and turns the choir into his ***"Hunters"***. He offers them excitement, meat and protection.



He grows fascinated by the thrill of hunting, becoming obsessed with killing. The bloodlust consumes him and he quickly abandons civilisation. After a power struggle with Ralph, Jack becomes the chief. His leadership on the island becomes increasingly **authoritarian** and he ends the text as a brutal, savage **dictator** who has surrendered completely to his **primal** instincts.

Key Chapters and Events

Chapter	Jack's Key Moments
1	• Introduction of Jack as leader of the choir boys • Jack loses the 'election' to Ralph, but is given the choir boys as ***"hunters"*** • Jack hesitates and can't kill the pig. He vows to stab it next time.
2	• Jack is excited to make rules so he can punish those who break them.
3	• Jack abandons his school uniform and embraces his new identity as a hunter • Jack and Ralph clash over what should be the priority on the island (meat and hunting vs shelters and rescue)
4	• Jack paints his face, giving him protection from previous rules and morality. • Jack lets the fire go out as he prioritises killing the pig.
5	• Jack disrespects the conch and dismisses the rules, saying he doesn't care for them. • Jack promises he will hunt down the beast and everyone follows him.

8	• Jack announces to the group that the beast does exist. He later makes an offering to the beast. • No one votes for Jack in another 'election.' He abandons the group to start his own. • Jack steals fire from the signal fire.
9	• Jack has become "***chief***", he runs a savage regime and the boys obey his commands.
10	• Jack steals Piggy's glasses so that they can keep their fires burning to cook their meat.
11	• Ralph and Jack attack each other after Ralph demands Piggy's glasses back.
12	• Jack hunts down Ralph, attempting to kill him. • Jack remains silent when the naval officer asks who was in charge.

How does Jack change throughout *Lord of the Flies?*

Beginning of the text: First Impressions (Chapter 1: The Sound of the Shell)



Jack is introduced as the formidable and strict leader of the choir boys. His striking ***"red"*** hair suggests danger and uncontrolled anger. His face is ***"crumpled and freckled and ugly without silliness"*** which emphasises his unfriendly, harsh nature. Even his eyes are ***"ready to turn to anger"*** revealing his irritable temper and fiery personality.

Jack resembles a military leader, displaying **authority** over the choir. The boys ***"march"*** in ***"columns"*** obeying his commands. The boys recognise ***"this was the voice of the one who knew his own mind."*** He is arrogant and driven by a desire for power from the beginning, declaring **"I ought to be chief"** believing his school authority should transfer automatically onto the island. When he loses the vote, he is left with ***"a blush of mortification"***, showing his damaged ego.

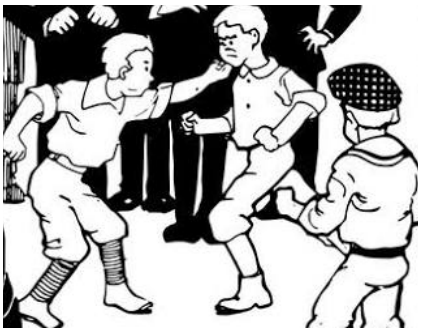
His violent tendencies appear early. He ***"snatched from behind him a sizeable sheath-knife and clouted it into a trunk."*** This unnecessary act of aggression hints at the **brutality** he will commit later. Despite this, Jack initially cannot kill the pig. Golding explains it is "***Because of the enormity of the knife descending and cutting into living flesh; because of the unbearable blood."*** Jack is still held back by the **morals** and innocence of childhood.

Jack's Transformation

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After failing to kill the pig, Jack reacts with frustration and violence. He promises "***Next time there would be no mercy"*** (Chapter 1: The Sound of the Shell.) This moment shows his regret and determination to abandon his moral restraints and embrace savagery. Gradually, Jack sheds any connection to civilisation.

He removes his clothing and becomes increasingly animalistic, described as ***"dog-like"*** (Chapter 3: Huts on the Beach.) His behaviour is driven by instinct and desire, especially the ***"promise of meat."*** Hunting becomes his obsession and Golding describes how the ***"compulsion to track down and kill"*** was ***"swallowing him up."*** (Chapter 3: Huts on the Beach) Jack abandons any reason or responsibility, becoming consumed by a desire to hunt and hurt. As the text progresses, he reinvents himself as a ruthless **dictator**, moving away from Ralph and disintegrating order on the island. He transforms into a brutal ***"chief"***, surrendering fully to savagery and ruling through violence and intimidation.



End of the text: Final Impressions

At the end of the text, Jack is described as a ***"Little boy who wore the remains of an extraordinary black cap on his red hair"*** (Chapter 12: Cry of the Hunters). The sudden shift from the brutal, violent dictator back to an ordinary, young child highlights the full extent of Jack's descent into **savagery**.

Golding reminds us that Jack is still only a "***boy",*** which makes the **atrocities** he has committed on the island even more shocking. The ***"remains"*** of his choir cap show how much of his original identity has been destroyed. When the naval officer asks who is in charge, Jack ***"started forward, and then changed his mind and stood still."*** This hesitation shows Jack, no longer protected by the mask of savagery, cannot maintain his role as the chief. When a figure of adult authority confronts him, he is exposed to shame and consequences.



Key Themes

Civilisation and savagery

At the start, ***"Jack Merridew"*** is the strict, uniformed leader of the choir. His full name represents **civilisation**. Jack initially sees himself as civilised saying "***we aren't savages***" but this belief quickly collapses as the exhilaration of hunting consumes him. Jack appears excited by the prospect of rules on the island: ***"We'll have rules!" he cried excitedly "Lots of rules!"*** (Chapter 2: Fire on the Mountain.)

However, this enthusiasm is not for fairness or order. He simply wants a system where he can violently punish others and be in charge: ***"then when anyone breaks 'em—"*** (Chapter 2: Fire on the Mountain).



By Chapter 3, Jack takes on a savage appearance. He removes any uniform that represents his former school-boy **identity**, rejecting civilisation. He suggests that the boys paint their faces, initially as a camouflage for hunting. However, the paint becomes an **enabler** for Jack, ensuring ***"He was safe from shame or self-consciouss behind the mask of his paint."*** (Chapter 8: Gift for the Darkness.) Jack feels powerful, hidden behind this new identity, accelerating his descent into savagery.

Jack's obsession with hunting grows, conflicting with Ralph's focus on rescue and survival. When Ralph insists on rules, Jack responds with ***"Who cares?"*** (Chapter 5: Beast from Water) showing his complete disregard for civilisation. His desire for violence and thrill overshadows the old world of responsibility.



Jack attempts to destroy any remains of the morality and rationality of old life. The **conch**, which represents civilisation and democracy, is **exploited** and abused. Jack ***"seized the conch"*** (Chapter 2: Fire on the Mountain) disrespecting the rules Ralph has put in place to give everyone a voice. He eventually rejects the conch completely: ***"We don't need the conch anymore"*** (Chapter 6: Beast from Air). The **signal fire**, a **symbol** of hope and rescue, is stolen by Jack along with **Piggy's glasses**. Instead of using it as a link to the civilised world, Jack uses the fire for cooking meat and for his tribe's ritual dances. He transforms the fire into something **primitive** for violence and feasting.

By the end of the text, Jack is unrecognisable. Golding describes: ***"The chief was sitting there, naked to the waist, his face blocked out in white and red"*** (Chapter 10: The Shell and the Glasses). His name has disappeared and he is only known by his role. He has fully submitted to his savage impulses and there are no ties to civilisation left.

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Power and leadership

Jack feels entitled to leadership on the island because of the power he already has over the choir: ***"I ought to be chief"*** (Chapter 1: The Sound of the Shell). He is furious and humiliated when he loses the 'election' to Ralph. From this moment, he continuously undermines Ralph's rule.

Gradually, Jack begins to entice the boys on the island, gaining influence by fulfilling their boyish desires for thrill and excitement, promising them ***"We will hunt and feast and have fun***" (Chapter 8: Gift for the Darkness). He also instills fear of the beast in order to gain **authority** (see below: Fear and the beast).

As his power grows, Jack's rule becomes cruel and aggressive. He taunts, ***"See? They do what I want"*** (Chapter 11: Castle Rock) which reveals his **totalitarian** mindset and control, becoming a **dictator** on the island. He relies on his ***"Hunters"***, particularly Roger's cruelty, to guarantee obedience and terror.

At Castle Rock, ***"Jack, painted and garlanded, sat there like an idol"*** (Chapter 9: View to a Death). He is presented as a worshipped leader whose authority cannot be questioned. Golding uses Jack's leadership to highlight the danger of **autocracy** and influence of irresponsible power.



Fear and the beast



Jack harnesses the fear of the beast as a tool in order to strengthen his power and justify the violent actions of his tribe. He makes a common enemy so he can manipulate and control the boys through terror. He speaks with authority, saying, ***"It must be here"*** (Chapter 6: Beast from Air) reinforcing the beast's existence.

He promises that ***"My hunters will protect you from the beast"*** (Chapter 9: A View to a Death) which **exploits** the Littuns' vulnerability. He recognises they are desperate for reassurance, so he heightens their fear by becoming their only defence. Ironically, as Jack hunts the beast in an effort to protect the boys, he begins to behave more and more like the beast himself.

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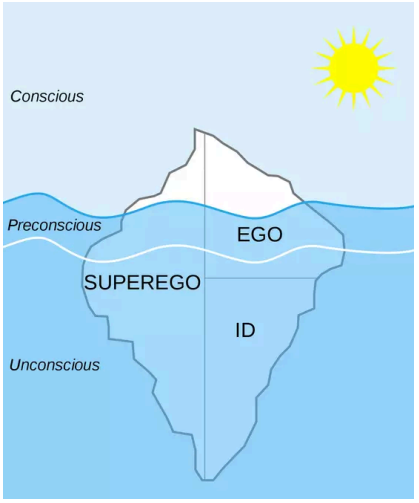
Human nature and evil

Jack initially hunts for food and survival, however he develops to take deep pleasure in violence. Golding describes how ***"His mind was crowded with memories...knowledge that they had outwitted a living thing, imposed their will upon it, taken away its life like a long satisfying drink."*** (Chapter 4: Painted Faces and Long Hair). This **simile** comparing killing to a ***"satisfying drink"*** shows the disturbing enjoyment Jack gets out of hunting and killing. Golding exposes the darker sides of human nature, where thrill and satisfaction comes from control and cruelty.

Jack eventually ends up hunting down Ralph with the intention to kill him, and his tribe is responsible for the deaths of Piggy and Simon. Golding uses Jack to show how quickly humans can become capable of murder and the most unthinkable violence when their **innate** evil is unleashed.

Context

Id, ego and superego



Some interpretations of the novel focus on how the characters reflect different parts of the personality or the **'psyche.'** Jack reflects the **'id'** - the part of the self that tries to fulfil our desires. Jack quickly surrenders to his primal need to hunt and kill.

Piggy, arguably, reflects the **superego**, which is the part of the personality concerned with rules, order and morality.

Ralph reflects the **ego**, which focuses on a balance between instinct and reason. Golding shows how primal instincts can take over completely and how fragile reason and morality is against these internal desires.

Leadership

Jack runs a **totalitarian** regime driven by fear, violence and manipulation. His leadership mirrors the violent **suppression** seen in **dictatorships** such as Adolf Hitler's Nazi regime or Stalin's rule in the 1930s, where intimidation and brutality was used to control populations.

Golding's presentation of Jack reflects the broader leadership seen across fascist and totalitarian movements. These regimes typically rely on a single charismatic leader, the creation of an enemy and the use of fear to ensure obedience. Jack's tribe mirrors these dynamics. He makes himself the source of unquestioned authority, establishes the beast as the threat and forms the "Hunters" to enforce his rule.

In his essay *Fable,* Golding was horrified at the "*vileness beyond all words that went on year after year in the totalitarian states*" and Jack reflects this concern in his rule of terror. Golding believed that "*man's capacity for greed, his innate cruelty and his selfishness was being hidden behind a kind of pair of political pants*", suggesting how easily power can become corrupt and violence can replace democracy.



Key Relationships

Relationship with Ralph: leadership and rivalry

Jack and Ralph's relationship is defined by their ongoing clash over priorities on the island and their rivalry to gain power.At first, they manage to co-exist, shown when ***"They grinned at each other, sharing this burden"*** (Chapter Two: Fire on the Mountain.)

As they are collecting logs for the fire, Golding shows a moment of mutual respect as they try to work together for survival. This early cooperation quickly fades. Ralph represents order and responsibility, wanting to prioritise survival and rescue. Whereas Jack embodies ***"the brilliant world of hunting, tactics, fierce exhilaration and skill"*** (Chapter 4: Painted Faces and Long Hair). Jack abandons Ralph's instructions to keep the signal fire going, prioritising violent thrill over survival.



This conflict becomes more intense when Jack fails to win the re-vote for chief. He is bitter and humiliated, so declares ***"I'm not going to play any longer. Not with you"*** (Chapter 8: Gift for the Darkness) breaking away to form his own tribe. He rejects Ralph's authority and any chance of friendship. Once Jack gains followers by promising meat and protection from the beast, the shift in leadership from Ralph to Jack becomes symbolic of savagery triumphing over civilisation.

By the end of the novel, Jack's hatred for Ralph is relentless as he hunts him down with the intention to kill him. Their initial childish rivalry transforms into a deadly struggle for power reflecting total breakdown of order on the island.

Relationship with Piggy: Jack's hatred for intellect and reason

Jack bullies Piggy from the beginning of the novel. He dismisses him and silences him with ***"Shut up, Fatty."*** (Chapter 1: The Sound of the Shell.) This shows his cruelty and lack of respect for Piggy's intelligent contributions. Although Jack mocks Piggy, he relies on Piggy's glasses to start the fire, taking them by force. Golding describes how Piggy's ***"voice rose to a shriek of terror as Jack snatched the glasses off his face"*** (Chapter 2: Fire on the Mountain.) This highlights Jack's willingness to steal the one thing Piggy needs to see, and therefore his rejection of reason and intellect.



Verbal abuse **escalates** into physical violence when Jack ***"stuck his fist into Piggy's stomach."*** (Chapter 4: Painted Faces and Long Hair) Jack uses aggression to assert dominance over Piggy. He targets the most vulnerable boys on the island and uses this cruelty to strengthen his own **authority**. Eventually, Piggy is a victim of Jack's **regime** of uncontrolled violence, being murdered by Roger.

Relationship with the Choir Boys or "Hunters": Identity, power and tribalism

At the start, the choir boys are a disciplined group under Jack's command. When Ralph is elected leader, he is ***"eager to offer something"*** (Chapter 1: The Sound of the Shell) to Jack, so gives him complete control of the choir. Jack chooses to turn these boys into ***"Hunters"*** giving them excitement and purpose, **reshaping** them into a tribe defined by violence.

Over time, the hunters **evolve** from choir boys into ***"savages"*** mirroring Jack's own journey into savagery. Jack becomes a figure of unquestioned power, and through the hunter's loyalty, he builds a regime based on **obedience** and **savage** ritual.



Key Quotations

"Jack drew his knife again with a flourish. He raised his arm in the air. There came a pause, a hiatus, the pig continued to scream and the creepers to jerk, and the blade continued to flash at the end of a bony arm." *(Chapter One: The Sound of the Shell)*



- This quote shows Jack's struggle between civilisation and savagery, and marks the violence he is beginning to embrace.
- The **verb** "flourish" indicates growing excitement and bloodlust, showing Jack's desire to kill.
- The use of **commas** "a pause, a hiatus" reflects his hesitation. He is still held back by the moral conditioning of his old life.
- The **repetition** of "continued" emphasises the passing of time as Jack remains internally conflicted. He is torn between the violent impulse to kill and the lingering innocence and morality that restrains him.
- The **auditory imagery** in the "scream" of the pig, makes Jack's behaviour seem even more disturbing and foreshadows his capacity to hurt others.

"Jack held out his hands for the conch and stood up, holding the delicate thing in his sooty hands. 'I agree with Ralph. We've got to have rules and obey them. After all, we're not savages. We're English and the English are the best at everything.'" (Chapter 2: Fire on the Mountain)

- Golding uses **juxtaposition** to compare Jack's ***"sooty hands"*** and the ***"delicate"*** white conch, showing how fragile civilisation is in Jack's hands. This **foreshadows** how Jack will corrupt and destroy these civilised systems with savagery and violence.
- Jack insists that the boys are ***"not savages"*** which shows he initially believes in rules and maintaining authority over the boys.
- His claim that ***"We're English"*** is **ironic.** In the adult world outside of the island, the English are engaged in a brutal war, showing the civilisation Jack proudly associates himself with is already violent.
- Jack's misplaced pride in English superiority reflects **colonial** ideas that Western nations were inherently civilised, orderly and morally advanced.
- However, Golding suggests just because civilisations see themselves as democratic and educated, it does not guarantee goodness, as under the surface lies the same capacity for evil.

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"Except for a pair of tattered shorts held up by his knife-belt, he was naked. He closed his eyes, raised his head and breathed in gently with flared nostrils." (Chapter 3: Huts on the Beach)



- The **adjective** ***"tattered"*** shows that Jack's clothing is ruined. This reflects how his previous identity as a disciplined choir boy has been destroyed.
- Jack being ***"naked"*** highlights his animalistic, savage nature. He has stripped away anything that connects him to school or society, choosing the freedom of savagery instead.
- Golding uses a **tricolon**: ***"Closed his eyes, raised his head and breathed in gently with flared nostrils"*** to emphasise how his behaviour is like a predator, relying on his senses. Hunting has transformed him into an animal, driven by primal instincts.

"He tried to convey the compulsion to track down and kill that was swallowing him up" (Chapter 3: Huts on the Beach)

- The **verb** ***"tried"*** shows how Jack cannot fully explain these feelings. They are instinctive and primal urges that civilisation cannot understand or justify.
- ***"Compulsion"*** suggests Jack is now being driven by an uncontrollable and unstoppable force. He is no longer choosing to hunt but feels forced to by something overpowering.
- The **metaphor** ***"Swallowing him up"*** shows how Jack is being consumed by his desire for violence. There is no protection or restraint from it.
- Golding suggests that humans possess a capacity for savagery and can quickly descend into barbarity when the influences of civilisation and **moral conditioning** disintegrate.

"The mask was a thing on its own, behind which Jack hid, liberated from shame or self-consciousness" (Chapter 4: Painted Faces and Long Hair)

- The mask becomes its own ***"thing"*** separate from Jack, showing that a new savage identity has taken over.
- Golding says that ***"Jack hid"*** illustrating how he uses the paint as protection, allowing him to escape the guilt and morality that normally controls human behaviour.
- Once the forces of ***"shame"*** and ***"self-consciousness"*** disintegrate, there is nothing left to restrain Jack. Golding suggests that these emotions usually keep humans responsible for their actions. Without them, there is no barrier to stop Jack from descending into violent savagery.

"Power lay in the brown swell of his forearms; authority sat on his shoulder and chattered in his ear like an ape" (Chapter 9: A View to a Death)



- Golding transforms the power-hungry Jack into a violent and brutal leader.
- The fact that ***"Power lay"*** in his ***"forearms"*** shows that Jack's authority comes from physical violence rather than democratic reason.
- Golding **personifies** ***"authority"*** as something that ***"sat on his shoulder."*** This implies that his cruel power has become an inseparable part of him, influencing him by whispering in his ear.
- The **simile** ***"like an ape"*** links Jack and his power to the previous "ape-like" description of the beast, suggesting evil savagery has taken over.