Lord of the Flies

Chapter 2

Complete the annotations on this handout.   
Define the vocabulary words in the margin.

"All right," said Ralph, "come on then."

The small boy looked round in panic.

"Speak up!"

The small boy held out his hands for the conch and the assembly shouted with

laughter; at once he snatched back his hands and started to cry.

"Let him have the conch!" shouted Piggy. "Let him have it!"

At last Ralph induced him to hold the shell but by then the blow of laughter had taken

away the child's voice. Piggy knelt by him, one hand on the great shell, listening and

interpreting to the assembly.

"He wants to know what you're going to do about the snake-thing."

Ralph laughed, and the other boys laughed with him. The small boy twisted further

into himself.

"Tell us about the snake-thing."

"Now he says it was a beastie."

"Beastie?''

"A snake-thing. Ever so big. He saw it."

"Where?"

"In the woods."

Either the wandering breezes or perhaps the decline of the sun allowed a little coolness

to lie under the trees. The boys felt it and stirred restlessly.

"You couldn't have a beastie, a snake-thing, on an island this size," Ralph explained

kindly. "You only get them in big countries, like Africa, or India."

Murmur; and the grave nodding of heads.

"He says the beastie came in the dark."

"Then he couldn't see it!"

Laughter and cheers.

"Did you hear that? Says he saw the thing in the dark--"

"He still says he saw the beastie. It came and went away again an' came back and

wanted to eat him--"

"He was dreaming."

Laughing, Ralph looked for confirmation round the ring of faces. The older boys

agreed; but here and there among the little ones was the doubt that required more than

rational assurance.

"He must have had a nightmare. Stumbling about among all those creepers."

More grave nodding; they knew about nightmares. "He says he saw the beastie, the

snake-thing, and will it come back tonight?"

"But there isn't a beastie!"

"He says in the morning it turned into them things like ropes in the trees and hung in

the branches. He says will it come back tonight?"

"But there isn't a beastie!"

There was no laughter at all now and more grave watching. Ralph pushed both hands

through his hair and looked at the little boy in mixed amusement and 1. **exasperation**.

Jack seized the conch.

"Ralph's right of course. There isn't a snake-thing. But if there was a snake we'd hunt it

and kill it. We're going to hunt pigs to get meat for everybody. And we'll look for the snake

too--"

"But there isn't a snake!"

"We'll make sure when we go hunting."

Ralph was annoyed and, for the moment, defeated. He felt himself facing something

ungraspable. The eyes that looked so intently at him were without humor.

"But there isn't a beast!"

Something he had not known was there rose in him and compelled him to make the

point, loudly and again.

"But I tell you there isn't a beast!"

The assembly was silent.

Ralph lifted the conch again and his good humor came back as he thought of what he

had to say next.

"Now we come to the most important thing. I've been thinking. I was thinking while

we were climbing the mountain." He flashed a **conspiratorial** grin at the other two. "And on

the beach just now. This is what I thought. We want to have fun. And we want to be rescued."

The passionate noise of agreement from the assembly hit him like a wave and he lost

his thread. He thought again.

"We want to be rescued; and of course we shall be rescued."

Voices babbled. The simple statement, unbacked by any proof but the weight of

Ralph's new authority, brought light and happiness. He had to wave the conch before he could

make them hear him.

"My father's in the Navy. He said there aren't any unknown islands left. He says the

Queen has a big room full of maps and all the islands in the world are drawn there. So the

Queen's got a picture of this island."

Again came the sounds of cheerfulness and better heart.

"And sooner or later a ship will put in here. It might even be Daddy's ship. So you see,

sooner or later, we shall be rescued."

He paused, with the point made. The assembly was lifted toward safety by his words.

They liked and now respected him. Spontaneously they began to clap and presently the

platform was loud with applause. Ralph flushed, looking sideways at Piggy's open admiration,

and then the other way at Jack who was smirking and showing that he too knew how to clap.

Ralph waved the conch.

"Shut up! Wait! Listen!"

He went on in the silence, borne on his triumph.

"There's another thing. We can help them to find us. If a ship comes near the island

they may not notice us. So we must make smoke on top of the mountain. We must make a

fire."

"A fire! Make a fire!"

At once half the boys were on their feet. Jack clamored among them, the conch

forgotten.

"Come on! Follow me!"

The space under the palm trees was full of noise and movement. Ralph was on his feet

too, shouting for quiet, but no one heard him. All at once the crowd swayed toward the island

and was gone--following Jack. Even the tiny children went and did their best among the leaves

and broken branches. Ralph was left, holding the conch, with no one but Piggy.

Piggy's breathing was quite restored.

"Like kids!" he said scornfully. "Acting like a crowd of kids!"

Ralph looked at him doubtfully and laid the conch on the tree trunk.

"I bet it's gone tea-time," said Piggy. "What do they think they're going to do on that

mountain?"

He caressed the shell respectfully, then stopped and looked up.

"Ralph! Hey! Where you going?"

Ralph was already 2. **clambering** over the first smashed 3. **swathes** of the scar. A long way

ahead of him was crashing and laughter.

Piggy watched him in disgust.

"Like a crowd of kids--"

He sighed, bent, and laced up his shoes. The noise of the errant assembly faded up the

mountain. Then, with the 4. **martyred** expression of a parent who has to keep up with the

senseless 5. **ebullience** of the children, he picked up the conch, turned toward the forest, and

began to pick his way over the tumbled scar.