

The Character of Jack - Transcript

Narrator: 'His sinewy body held up a mask that drew their eyes and appalled them.

He began to dance and his laughter became a bloodthirsty snarling.'

'...the mask was a thing on its own, behind which Jack hid, liberated from shame and self-consciousness.'

Presenter: This striking passage describes Jack in Lord of the Flies when he first covers his face in warpaint, symbolic of power.

With his 'bloodthirsty snarling' showing how, for Jack, the mask gives him the freedom to tap into his raw animal instincts foreshadowing or hinting at the violence to come as he leads the boys into barbaric acts of cruelty, free from the laws of civilization in everyday life.

Now, Jack is shown as a bully from the very start of the novel.

Like when he tells Piggy to 'shut up' before mocking his nickname, causing a storm of laughter.

Jack isn't interested in his duties building shelter or fire, preferring to hunt and when he returns with a fresh kill but one of the boys hesitates in eating the pork, anger takes hold of him.

The author, William Golding, uses hyperbolic language to describe his fury, 'rage elemental and awe-inspiring'.

It's a key moment for the character.

Jack realises the power of his anger upon the group when he looks around 'for understanding' but finds 'only respect'.

In other words, Jack discovers that he can earn power through his violent rage, like a dictator.

Lord of the Flies was written in the aftermath of the Second World War, when Europe was emerging from an era of violent dictatorships, some of which still remained.

Like those dictators, Jack uses threats and fear to exert control, pressuring the boys into joining what he calls his 'tribe'.

Under his leadership, violence escalates, resulting in the death of two of the boys.

After a hunt, Jack sticks the head of a dead pig on a spiked spear as an offering to the mysterious beast that the boys believe to be on the island.

Jack: 'This head is for the beast. It's a gift',

Presenter: It's a visual symbol of Jack's power and his role in destroying their society, bringing with it a surge of violence and death as the book nears its end.

At least, until order miraculously arrives in the form of their rescuer.

Was that fear and violence always there, simmering underneath the surface of the group from the start?

The author describes how Jack's mask sees him 'liberated from shame and self-consciousness'.

What do you think the author might be suggesting about how easily violent impulses can emerge, when the structures of civilisation break down?