

William Golding  
Lord of the Flies  
World War III & the atomic age

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Lord of the Flies was first published in the early 1950s when the world was recovering from the devastation of World War II. The horror of Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini was still on everyone's mind.

At the same time, a significant event had recently happened -- the detonation of two atom bombs over Japan. The people of the world were transfixed by the devastation.

And then, in 1949, Russia revealed that it too had the atom bomb. The world suddenly had two superpowers threatening everyone with a nuclear holocaust.

William Golding started writing Lord of the Flies soon after this sequence of events.

It was taken for granted that a nuclear war would soon erupt. One prediction for this event was 1964 -- the theme of Nevil Shute's novel On the Beach.

Indeed, the fear of the atom bomb was clearly revealed in a series of movies released during the early 1950s.

In the remake of H.G. Wells' War of the Worlds, America attempts unsuccessfully to destroy the Martian invaders through the use of a nuclear weapon.

In Them, ants mutate into giants through contact with radiation and threaten all humanity.

Tarantula has a similar plot while in The Incredible Shrinking Man -- arguably the best movie of this genre -- the hero shrinks to infinity after accidentally passing through a nuclear cloud while at sea on a yacht.

These were the fears which were gripping the imagination at the time when William Golding was writing Lord of the Flies.

The story is set in the very near future, at a time when new but strange aircraft travelled the skies.

In the plot, the next world war has indeed happened and the boys have had to be evacuated because of the nuclear threat to Britain.

It is easy to conjure up yet another Hitler but in this case it's in the shape of the tyrant, Jack. Golding shows what would happen within a small and closed community if such a tyrant were to succeed.

1. Piggy shook his head, put on his flashing glasses and looked down at Ralph. "Didn't you hear what the pilot said? About the atom bomb? They're all dead."
  - Why does Piggy mention the atom bomb? (2)
  - Where was their passenger plane taking them? How do you know? (4)
  
2. "We was attacked!" The fat boy shook his head. "When we was coming down I looked through one of them windows. I saw the other part of the plane. There were flames coming out of it."
  - The novel is set in the future. The passenger plane in which the boys were riding was therefore an imaginary vehicle. What features make it different from modern jetliners? (4)
  
3. "And this is what the tube done."

"What happened to it?" Ralph asked. "Where's it got to now?"

"That storm dragged it out to sea. It wasn't half dangerous with all them tree trunks falling. There must have been some kids still in it."

  - Explain how the boys arrived on the island. What is the meaning of the "passenger tube" which scarred the island? (4)
  - If all the children were in the "passenger tube", why did they all become scattered after the crash -- and why did so few of them appear afterwards to know one another? (4)
  
4. "Where's the man with the megaphone?"
  - Who is the man with the megaphone? (2)
  - Where is he now? (2)
  
5. Technology advances so rapidly that Science Fiction movies are notorious for becoming out of date rapidly. Indeed, a Sci-Fi movie that is more than a decade old is often quite laughable.
  - To what extent is this true for <u>Lord of the Flies</u>? (4)

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