



A group of boys have been shipwrecked on a desert island. The oldest boy, Ralph, has been elected chief and has asked the others to keep a constant fire to signal their position, but the chief of the Hunters, Jack, needed all the boys to kill a pig. The fire died out and a ship came and went without seeing them. Ralph has called all the boys with a Conch, a big seashell he found on the beach the first day.

"The thing is: we need an assembly." No one said anything but the faces turned to Ralph were intent¹. He flourished the conch. He had learnt as a practical business that fundamental

statements like this had to be said at least twice, before everyone understood them. One had to sit, attracting all eyes to the conch, and drop words like heavy round stones among the little groups that crouched or squatted. He was searching his mind for simple words so that even the littluns² would understand what the assembly was about. Later perhaps, practised debaters—Jack, Maurice, Piggy—would use their whole art to twist the meeting: but now at the beginning the subject of the debate must be laid out³ clearly.

"We need an assembly. Not for fun. Not for laughing and falling off the log"—the group of littluns on the twister giggled and looked at each other—"not for making jokes, or for"—he lifted the conch in an effort to find the compelling word—"for cleverness. Not for these things. But to put things straight."

He paused for a moment.

"I've been alone. By myself I went, thinking what's what. I know what we need. An assembly to put things straight. And first of all, I'm speaking."

¹ attentive

² Little ones (the youngest boys on the island)

³ explained

He paused for a moment and automatically pushed back his hair. Piggy⁴ tiptoed to the triangle, his ineffectual protest made, and joined the others.

Ralph went on.

"We have lots of assemblies. Everybody enjoys speaking and being together. We decide things. But they don't get done. We were going to have water brought from the stream and left in those coconut shells under fresh leaves. So it was, for a few days. Now there's no water. The shells are dry. People drink from the river."

There was a murmur of assent.

"Not that there's anything wrong with drinking from the river. I mean I'd sooner⁵ have water from that place— you know, the pool where the waterfall is—than out of an old coconut shell. Only we said we'd have the water brought. And now not. There were only two full shells there this afternoon."

He licked his lips.

"Then there's huts. Shelters."

The murmur swelled⁶ again and died away.

"You mostly sleep in shelters. Tonight, except for Samneric up by the fire, you'll all sleep there. Who built the shelters?"

Clamor rose at once. Everyone had built the shelters. Ralph had to wave the conch once more.

"Wait a minute! I mean, who built all three? We all built the first one, four of us the second one, and me 'n Simon built the last one over there. That's why it's so tottery. No. Don't laugh. That shelter might fall down if the rain comes back. We'll need those shelters then."

He paused and cleared his throat.

"There's another thing. We chose those rocks right along beyond the bathing pool as a lavatory⁷. That was sensible too. The tide⁸ cleans the place up. You littluns know about that."

There were sniggers here and there and swift glances.

"Now people seem to use anywhere. Even near the shelters and the platform. You littluns, when you're getting fruit; if you're taken short—"

⁴ A fat boy with glasses

⁵ I prefer

⁶ Expanded

⁷ Toilets

⁸ The waves

The assembly roared.

"I said if you're taken short⁹ you keep away from the fruit. That's dirty

Laughter rose again.

"I said that's dirty!"

He plucked at his stiff, grey shirt.

"That's really dirty. If you're taken short you go right along the beach to the rocks. See?"

Piggy held out his hands for the conch¹⁰ but Ralph shook his head. His speech was planned, point by point.

"We've all got to use the rocks again. This place is getting dirty." He paused. The assembly, sensing a crisis, was tensely expectant. "And then: about the fire."

Ralph let out his spare breath with a little gasp that was echoed by his audience. Jack started to chip a piece of wood with his knife and whispered something to Robert, who looked away.

"The fire is the most important thing on the island. How can we ever be rescued except by luck, if we don't keep a fire going? Is a fire too much for us to make?"

He flung out an arm.

"Look at us! How many are we? And yet we can't keep a fire going to make smoke. Don't you understand? Can't you see we ought to—ought to die before we let the fire out?"

There was a self-conscious¹¹ giggling among the hunters. Ralph turned on them passionately.

"You hunters! You can laugh! But I tell you the smoke is more important than the pig, however often you kill one. Do all of you see?" He spread his arms wide and turned to the whole triangle.

"We've got to make smoke up there—or die."

He paused, feeling for his next point.

"And another thing."

Someone called out.

"Too many things."

There came a mutter of agreement. Ralph overrode them.

"And another thing. We nearly set the whole island on fire. And we waste time, rolling rocks, and making little cooking fires. Now I say this and

make it a rule, because I'm chief. We won't have a fire anywhere but on the mountain. Ever."

There was a row¹² immediately. Boys stood up and shouted and Ralph shouted back.

"Because if you want a fire to cook fish or crab, you can jolly well go up the mountain. That way we'll be certain."

Hands were reaching for the conch in the light of the setting sun. He held on and leapt on the trunk.

"All this I meant to say. Now I've said it. You voted me for chief. Now you do what I say."

They quieted, slowly, and at last were seated again. Ralph dropped down and spoke in his ordinary voice.

"So remember. The rocks for a lavatory. Keep the fire going and smoke showing as a signal. Don't take fire from the mountain. Take your food up there."

Jack stood up, scowling in the gloom, and held out his hands.

"I haven't finished yet."

"But you've talked and talked!"

"I've got the conch."

Jack sat down, grumbling.

"Then the last thing. This is what people can talk about."

He waited till the platform was very still.

"Things are breaking up. I don't understand why. We began well; we were happy. And then—"

He moved the conch gently, looking beyond them at nothing, remembering the beastie, the snake, the fire, the talk of fear.

"Then people started getting frightened."

A murmur, almost a moan, rose and passed away. Jack had stopped whittling. Ralph went on, abruptly.

"But that's littluns' talk. We'll get that straight. So the last part, the bit we can all talk about, is kind of deciding on the fear."

The hair was creeping into his eyes again.

"We've got to talk about this fear and decide there's nothing in it. I'm frightened myself, sometimes; only that's nonsense! Like bogies¹³. Then, when we've decided, we can start again and be careful about things like

⁹ If you need to go to the toilets

¹⁰ *The person who has the conch gets to speak without being interrupted*

¹¹ Awkward

¹² Protest

¹³ monsters

the fire." A picture of three boys walking along the bright beach flitted through his mind. "And be happy."

He raised the conch for a moment.

"Very well then. I suppose what's what is whether there are ghosts or not—"

He thought for a moment, formulating the question.

"Who thinks there may be ghosts?"

For a long time there was silence and no apparent movement. Then Ralph peered into the gloom¹⁴ and made out¹⁵ the hands. He spoke flatly.

"I see."

The world, that understandable and lawful world, was slipping away. Once there was this and that; and now— and the ship had gone. The conch was snatched from his hands and Piggy's voice shrilled.

"I didn't vote for no ghosts!"

He whirled¹⁶ round on the assembly.

"Remember that, all of you!"

They heard him stamp.

"What are we? Humans? Or animals? Or savages? What's grown-ups going to think? Going off—hunting pigs—letting fires out—and now!"

A shadow fronted him tempestuously.

"You shut up, you fat slug!"

There was a moment's struggle and the glimmering conch jiggled up and down. Ralph leapt to his feet.

"Jack! Jack! You haven't got the conch! Let him speak."

Jack's face swam near him.

"And you shut up! Who are you, anyway? Sitting there telling people what to do. You can't hunt, you can't sing—"

"I'm chief. I was chosen."

"Why should choosing make any difference? Just giving orders that don't make any sense—"

"Piggy's got the conch."

"That's right—favor Piggy as you always do—"

"Jack!"

Jack's voice sounded in bitter mimicry.

"Jack! Jack!"

¹⁴ Watched into the darkness

¹⁵ Counted

¹⁶ Turned

"The rules!" shouted Ralph. "You're breaking the rules!"

"Who cares?"

Ralph summoned his wits¹⁷.

"Because the rules are the only thing we've got!"

But Jack was shouting against him.

"Bollocks to the rules! We're strong—we hunt! If there's a beast, we'll hunt it down! We'll close in and beat and beat and beat—!" He gave a wild whoop and leapt down to the pale sand. At once the platform was full of noise and excitement, scramblings, screams and laughter. The assembly shredded away and became a discursive and random scatter from the palms to the water and away along the beach, beyond night-sight. Ralph found his cheek touching the conch and took it from Piggy.

"What's grown-ups going to say?" cried Piggy again. "Look at 'em!"

The sound of mock hunting, hysterical laughter and real terror came from the beach.

Extract from The Lord of the Flies by William Golding

http://gv.pl/pdf/lord_of_the_flies.pdf

Reading Guide

- ❧ What is the purpose of the Assembly?
- ❧ What problems have appeared on the island? Why?
- ❧ Describe the kid's reactions to Ralph's speech and their attitude as a whole. What do you think of them?
- ❧ How are Ralph and Jack different? Which one do you like most?

- ❧ Comment on Piggy statement. What is the author's point of view about humanity?

¹⁷ Thought very hard