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Civilization vs. Savagery in Lord of the Flies

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## Civilization vs. Savagery in Lord of the Flies

### Introduction

One of the central themes in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* is the conflict between civilization and savagery. The novel dramatizes the fragile balance between social order and primal instinct, showing how quickly the structures of law and morality collapse when external authority is removed. The stranded boys begin with attempts at democracy and cooperation, but gradually descend into violence and chaos. In this lecture, we will explore how Golding presents this theme through symbols, characters, and key events in the novel.

### 1. Civilization: Order, Rules, and Authority

#### The Conch Shell

At the beginning, Ralph and Piggy find the conch shell, which becomes a powerful symbol of order and democracy. It grants the right to speak during assemblies, and its authority is respected by the boys. The conch embodies the principles of cooperation and rule of law.

#### Ralph's Leadership

Ralph is elected leader because he represents fairness and responsibility. His priorities — building shelters and maintaining the signal fire — reflect a commitment to civilization and rescue. Ralph insists: "The rules are the only thing we've got!" His authority, however, depends on the boys' willingness to obey, which erodes over time.

#### Piggy as the Voice of Reason

Piggy represents rationalism and scientific thought. His glasses, used to start the fire, symbolize the practical power of knowledge. Yet his intellectual authority is mocked, showing how fragile rational leadership is when emotions and instincts dominate.

## 2. Savagery: Instinct, Violence, and Chaos

### Jack's Transformation

Jack begins as the head of the choirboys, disciplined and organized. But as the island life continues, he rejects rules and embraces hunting and violence. The act of painting his face frees him from shame and identity: "The mask was a thing on its own, behind which Jack hid, liberated from shame and self-consciousness." This is the turning point toward savagery.

### The Hunters and Bloodlust

Jack's tribe becomes obsessed with hunting pigs, chanting "Kill the pig! Cut her throat! Spill her blood!" The chant shows how collective ritual erases individuality and awakens primal instincts.

### Breakdown of Order

The destruction of the conch during Piggy's death symbolizes the complete collapse of civilization. What began as children's play and rules ends in murder and tribal warfare.

## 3. The Shifting Balance Between Civilization and Savagery

### The Signal Fire

The fire is both a practical tool for rescue and a symbol of hope and civilization. When the boys let it go out, preferring to hunt, it marks the triumph of savagery over rational responsibility. Ironically, it is a fire of destruction, set by Jack's tribe to hunt Ralph, that eventually leads to their rescue.

### The Beast as Inner Darkness

The boys' fear of an external beast gradually transforms into recognition that the real beast is within themselves. Simon articulates this: "Maybe there is a beast... maybe it's only us." Civilization suppresses the beast; savagery releases it.

## Rescue and Irony

The boys are finally rescued by a naval officer. Yet the officer himself represents the adult world locked in global war, suggesting that the conflict between civilization and savagery is universal, not just limited to children on an island.

## Conclusion

Golding presents civilization and savagery as two opposing forces in human nature. Civilization, represented by Ralph, Piggy, and the conch, relies on fragile social agreements. Savagery, embodied in Jack and Roger, appeals to primal instincts of power and violence. The novel warns that civilization is only a thin veneer, easily destroyed by fear, desire, and aggression. In the end, the collapse on the island mirrors the collapse of order in the world beyond — war, genocide, and destruction.