



## PIGGY, THE CENSUS, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWLEDGE

Throughout *Lord of the Flies*, Piggy is the character most closely associated with the ideals of fact and reason. His assessment of the boys' situation at the closing of Chapter Two illustrates this well. After suggesting their first priority should be building shelter, Piggy specifically voices his concern about counting the number of little 'uns:

*"And that's not all. Them kids. The little 'uns. Who took any notice of 'em? Who knows how many we got?"*

*Ralph took a sudden step forward.*

*"I told you to. I told you to get a list of names!"*

*"How could I," cried Piggy indignantly, "all by myself? They waited for two minutes, then they fell in the sea; they went into the forest; they just scattered everywhere. How was I to know which was which?"*

*"Then you don't know how many of us there ought to be?" (p. 50)*

What Piggy was responsible for, but was left unable to complete, was the island's first basic census.

### WHAT IS A CENSUS?

A census is a survey of a population. In addition to counting the number of inhabitants, a census can inventory various characteristics about the population as a whole. For example, Canada's census studies topics as varied as people's income levels and their walking habits. With better understandings of citizens as a whole, the government is better able to determine policies and laws that meet the needs of communities as a whole.

It is important that governments rely upon information and research to develop policy. Munir Sheikh, the former head of Statistics Canada, said that "No country can be among the league of civilized societies without intelligent policy development. And, intelligent policy development is not possible without good data."<sup>1</sup> A thorough census is one source of "good data." Studies from experts and academics are also important sources.

However, statistics and research are not the only source of information for governments. In a democracy, citizens are empowered to speak out about laws and policies. In fact, it is essential that all people's experiences with the government's laws and policies are heard.

Occasionally, though, people's impulses and opinions may stand in the way of "intelligent policy." Piggy touched on this when he chastized the boys for their irrational excitement for building a fire:

*"The first thing we ought to have made was shelters down there by the beach. It wasn't half cold down there in the night. But the first time Ralph says 'fire' you goes howling and screaming up this here mountain. Like a pack of kids!" (p. 50)*

In this case, it appears that intelligent policy for the island—that is, building shelters—was pushed aside by the more immediate desire to build a fire.

<sup>1</sup> Munir A. Sheikh, "Good Data and Intelligent Government." *New Directions for Intelligent Government in Canada*.

This is one of the challenges of creating policies and laws in a democracy. People have the right to be heard. Their experiences, opinions, and worldviews are valid and should never be discounted. However, the “good data” that comes from statistics and research also have a vital role to play.

This is why good laws and policies can only be created when citizens’ views are considered alongside statistics and research.

### **CONSIDER**

1. Do you agree with Piggy? Is the fire an example of the mob acting without fully considering a situation?
2. Consider the following:
  - a) How important are the opinions of individual citizens in a democracy?
  - b) How important is “good data” from experts and academics in a democracy?
  - c) When the opinions of individuals contradict “good data”, what should leaders do?
3. Are all voices equal in a democracy?

### **FOR FUTURE READING**

As the story progresses consider when the boys act on Piggy’s suggestions. Consider when the boys act on their own instincts. Which is more successful?