



WITHOUT THE RULE OF LAW

The rule of law stipulates that no individual, organization, or institution in a democracy is above the law. The legitimacy of the rule of law, it is said, “stems from the support of the people for the institutions of the land, and a desire to live by the rule of law.”¹

What could happen if a society collectively withdraws their support for the rule of law? Though *Lord of the Flies* does not provide the definitive answer to this question, it certainly offers clues.

While blame for the island’s rejection of the rule of law could be assigned to many characters, Jack is the character most closely associated with the island’s breakdown of the rule of law. It was Jack who rejected the authority of the conch, who tried to arbitrarily silence many of the boys on the island, and who ultimately led the rejection of a rules-based society through the establishment of his own tribe.

Jack gained dominance through force. This was illustrated by his picking on littluns, his continual bullying of Piggy, his beating and intimidation of Wilfred and Samneric, and his rallying of the entire island population to literally smoke out and try to kill Ralph, the last openly dissenting voice on the island.

But force was not Jack’s only tool. In fact, most of the boys voluntarily joined Jack’s tribe. The first boys joined after Jack’s failed attempt to vote Ralph out as leader. Shortly after at a feast, Jack made this offer to the boys:

“I gave you food,” said Jack. “And my hunters will protect you from the beast. Who will join my tribe?” (p. 166)

This offer of food and security secured almost-complete acceptance of Jack as leader. Even though Jack used force to gain dominance, he did not need to blatantly force anybody—except Samneric—to join his tribe.

The vast majority of the boys voluntarily rejected Ralph’s society based on democratically-constructed rules. They chose Jack’s society, which embraced fear, acted through coercion and force, and rejected knowledge and diverse opinions. In the end, the island descended into a flaming wreck, its resources destroyed and boys dead.

So as Piggy pointedly asked, “Which is better? To have rules and agree, or to hunt and kill?” (p. 199). Given the outcome of *Lord of the Flies*, it would appear that having rules and agreement was the better of the two options.

CONSIDER

1. In Chapter 8, Ralph asked “What makes things break up like they do?” (p. 154). What factors do you think caused the island to break up like it did?

1

Law 30: The Law and You, Saskatchewan Education.