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Struggles for Power: The Plague of Humanity

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Centerburg High School

Centerburg, OH

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Struggles for Power: The Plague of Humanity
Melissa Layton

Lord of the Flies Compare and Contrast Essay
Advanced Junior English
Miss Stewart
January 4, 2013

While people study history to learn from the mistakes of the past, the idea that history repeats itself counteracts this practice. In an effort to combat this cycle, authors address the recurring flaws in mankind, leaders, and societies by writing novels that possess hidden meanings and illustrate these issues. William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* provides an example of such a novel, which demonstrates the dangers of power. Many parallels can be drawn between real-world events and this novel about young boys marooned on an island. The struggle for the position of chief between Ralph and Jack strongly resembles the fight for power over the Soviet Union between Leon Trotsky and Joseph Stalin. Ralph and Trotsky face nearly identical challenges while Jack and Stalin both crave sovereign positions. Even though Ralph's goals and Jack's goals differ from those of Trotsky and Stalin, the characters and historical figures experience similar circumstances as they compete for authority, which reinforces Golding's warning that power can be dangerous.

Ralph and Jack battle for power over a group of boys stranded after a plane crash. In the beginning of *Lord of the Flies*, the boys on the island elect Ralph as their chief (Golding 23). For a while, the boys obey Ralph, but later Jack steps up as a competing leader (Golding 140). Soon Ralph becomes one of the outcasts on the island as more and more boys join Jack's tribe (Golding 148). Jack effectively uses propaganda to draw the others away from Ralph and make the chief seem incapable of leading them properly. At one point, Jack criticizes Ralph and says, "He's not a hunter. He'd never have got us meat. He isn't a prefect, and we don't know anything about him" (Golding 126). Jack appeals to the people when he says this, reminding them that he, not Ralph, provides them with meat. Towards the end of the novel, Jack firmly establishes himself as chief and turns the boys against Ralph. They hunt Ralph, intent on killing him as Jack orders (Golding 192). The transfer of power in the novel follows a steady pattern.

First, Ralph is chosen to lead, but then Jack begins to undermine his authority by appealing to the boys' desire for meat. After that, Jack's leadership role expands, and the others join his tribe. Ralph becomes one of the outcasts of the group, exiled from Jack's tribe. Eventually, Jack sees his opponent as too much of a threat and orders a hunt to kill Ralph. It becomes obvious that while Jack's power gradually rises, Ralph's authority crumbles.

A similar pattern emerged in the struggle for power between Trotsky and Stalin. After Lenin died in 1924, the Bolsheviks, the party that controlled the Soviet Union, needed someone to fill the position of leader (Lawrence 266). Trotsky appeared to be the most obvious choice since he was the party's second-ranking figure next to Lenin (Gottfried 120). However, Stalin began to increase his power. He secured an influential position as the party's General Secretary and formed alliances with the other members (MacKenzie and Curran 496). When Trotsky realized that Stalin had the power to take over the Bolshevik party, he tried to convince the other members that Stalin should be removed from his position (Gottfried 120). Trotsky spoke up too late, however, and Stalin appealed to the members' beliefs, turning them against Trotsky. He accused Trotsky of supporting anti-Leninist theories, eventually leading to Trotsky's exile (MacKenzie and Curran 496). Stalin soon gained control of the nation, and wanting to destroy all competition to his rule, he sent agents to Mexico in 1940 to kill Trotsky (Walsh). Stalin's rise to power was complete, and Trotsky lost not only his power but also his life.

The fights for power in *Lord of the Flies* and 20th-century Russia appear most alike in the way that Jack and Stalin usurp power from Ralph and Trotsky. Ralph is the first chief on the island, and Trotsky is originally the first choice for leader of the Bolsheviks. However, using propaganda, Jack and Stalin undermine their opponents. Trotsky is exiled and murdered, which correlates to Ralph who becomes an outcast and is hunted by the other boys. The pattern that

ensues in these struggles for power is nearly identical, with only a few differences. The main contrast is that Ralph and Jack fight for control of a small group of boys while Trotsky and Stalin battle for an entire nation. Also, the boys view Jack as a potential chief in the beginning of the novel, but the Bolsheviks never consider Stalin a leader until he asserts his power over Trotsky. Stalin was described as “a grey blur, looming up now and then dimly and not leaving any trace” (MacKenzie and Curran 495). This worked to his benefit since Trotsky was not even aware of the threat Stalin posed until it was too late. While the events that cause these battles differ, both the characters and the historical figures seize the opportunity to lead during times of uncertainty.

Adding to the similarities in the comparison of Ralph and Jack’s struggle to Trotsky and Stalin’s fight are the connections between the corresponding opponents. For example, Ralph and Trotsky differ in several of their characteristics, but overall they act in a similar manner. Ralph believes that the boys only need to survive until the British Navy arrives to rescue them (Golding 37). He stresses the importance of keeping a signal fire burning at all times, saying, “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?” (Golding 80). Trotsky also held strong beliefs about the future of the Soviet Union. As commander of the Red Army, he supported Communist ideals. Lenin wrote in his testament before he died that he thought Trotsky was a good choice for his successor, saying, “Trotsky...is distinguished not only by his exceptional abilities-personally, he is, to be sure, the most able man in the present central committee...” (Lawrence 267). Ralph and Trotsky’s downfalls result from a common mistake. They both underestimate their opponent, Ralph believing that Jack is still his friend and Trotsky unconvinced of Stalin’s ability. The way in which they face the challenge of their authority distinguishes the young boy and the strong commander from one another. Ralph behaves conscientiously, sometimes questioning if he is

the best person for the position of chief (Golding 93). He is more of a passive figure and thinks before he acts (Golding 76). Trotsky, on the other hand, remains sure of his ability to lead. As a military officer, he acts aggressively and fights back (Gottfried 116). Their actions are similar, but their conflicting personality traits show two different styles of leadership.

Jack and Stalin display an eerie resemblance, differing on few points. The main variation between the two is that Jack demonstrates his leadership in the beginning of the novel, commanding the choir (Golding 20), while Stalin lurks in the background until he is certain of his authority (MacKenzie and Curran 495). Also, Stalin is calculating, thoroughly planning his rise to power, but Jack has impulsive tendencies. For example, after the other boys refuse to vote Ralph out of power, Jack storms away from the group (Golding 127). However, many striking connections exist between these antagonists. Both are power-hungry, obsessive, and manipulative. Jack appeals to the boys' desires when he tells them, "We hunt and feast and have fun. If you want to join my tribe, come and see us" (Golding 140). Similarly, Stalin flatters the other Bolsheviks and claims to carry out Lenin's will in order to gain their support (MacKenzie and Curran 496). The pair also shares a paranoia of their enemies. When Jack establishes his tribe's camp at the rocks on the other side of the beach, he warns his followers to guard their cave. "They'll try to spoil things we do. So the watchers at the gate must be careful," Jack says in reference to Ralph's tribe (Golding 160). In comparison, some considered Stalin a paranoid murderer who saw "treachery and conspiracy where others saw inefficiency and muddle" (Gottfried 117). These common traits and tactics show that Jack and Stalin knew how to manipulate others, easily ousting their competition.

Despite the differences between the characters of *Lord of the Flies* and the historical figures of the Soviet Union, the two struggles for supremacy exhibit startling similarities. Ralph

and Trotsky fall from their leadership positions after being exiled and hunted down. Jack and Stalin steadily increase their power, undermining Ralph and Trotsky with propaganda and manipulation. The struggles for power between Ralph and Jack and Stalin and Trotsky follow an almost identical pattern, with Jack and Stalin utilizing similar techniques to damage their adversaries' reputations. The actions and personalities of the corresponding characters and historical figures also reinforce the similarity of these struggles for power. With unnerving connections between the novel and the real-world struggle, it is obvious that Golding wrote *Lord of the Flies* to serve as a warning to his readers. The main point that the author wanted to stress was that power comes with a cost. Power has been fought over and abused by society's leaders for centuries, and Golding chose to remind people of the dangers this can have on humanity. He speaks through Ralph as the young boy begins to feel the pressure of being chief. One statement effectively sums up the effect that battles for power have on society and mankind. After arguing with Jack, Ralph miserably declares, "We're all drifting, and things are going rotten" (Golding 94).

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