

TEACHER COPY—LORD OF THE FLIES AS MICROCOSM

What is a microcosm?

A microcosm is a smaller version of society or a community. It is a scaled-down representation that has all the elements of the larger version and is able to represent the larger version.

Take, for instance, a club or sports team at your school. It has a hierarchy—some people are in charge, and others in the group follow the leaders. Everyone may get to vote on some things, but, ultimately, decisions are made by the person or people in charge. This is much the same as most larger societies. And, like in our larger society, sometimes there may be disagreements, or changes in who is in charge. Take the soccer team, for example. Your team has a coach, who ultimately makes decisions for the team. You have equipment that your team must use to be successful. Your team also needs a field to play on with goals and lines for boundaries.

Microcosm as Symbol

A microcosm also includes symbols that represent groups, people, or events from our society. Symbols are objects that represent the idea of something other than what they are literally. For example, the leader in the microcosm may represent an overbearing authority or evil dictatorship. On the other hand, the leader may represent a kind and caring head of the family. The microcosm itself may represent a type of community or society, as well. The microcosm could typify a utopia, or perfect society, through its representations of its leaders, community structure, economics, and government.

Lord of the Flies as Microcosm

William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* is often described as a microcosm. Golding himself claimed to have written the book for the purpose of creating a microcosm of his own society. Golding was often asked why, if his book was a microcosm, he only included boys as characters. Below is his response:

Girls say to me, very reasonably, 'why isn't it a bunch of girls? Why did you write this about a bunch of boys?' Well, my reply is I was once a little boy — I have been a brother, a father, I am going to be a grandfather. I have never been a sister, or a mother, or a grandmother. That's one answer. Another answer is of course to say that if you, as it were, scaled down human beings, scaled down society, if you land with a group of little boys, they are more like a scaled-down version of society than a group of little girls would be. Don't ask me why, and this is a terrible thing to say... — this is nothing to do with equality at all. I think women are foolish to pretend they are equal to men, they are far superior and always have been. But one thing you can't do with them is take a bunch of them and boil them down, so to speak, into a set of little girls who would then become a kind of image of civilisation, of society. The other thing is — why aren't they little boys AND little girls? Well, if they'd been little boys and little girls, we being who we are, sex would have raised its lovely head, and I didn't want this to be about sex. Sex is too trivial a thing to get in with a story like this, which was about the problem of evil and the problem of how people are to live together in a society, not just as lovers or man and wife.

Understanding of microcosm

Understanding of symbolism

Connection between microcosm and symbolism