Chapter Five:

Beast from Water

**Summary:**

1. Ralph thinks about the seriousness of the forthcoming meeting and of his role as chief.
2. At the meeting, he lays down the ground rules for behaviour on the island.
3. Discussion turns to the beast and some of the boys wonder if they are not alone on the island. Jack and Piggy dismiss the idea.
4. The opinions of Piggy and Simon are ignored.
5. Jack and Ralph have a further disagreement and the meeting ends.
6. Simon and Piggy, fearing what Jack is capable of, urge Ralph to remain as chief.
7. Simon, Piggy and Ralph discuss what grown-ups would do and wish for a signal from them.

**Why is this chapter important?**

A Golding’s description on the first page of this chapter **mirrors** Ralph’s feelings and we see his increasing unease.

B As Ralph begins to recognise the qualities needed for **leadership**, we notice he has new **respect** for Piggy.

C It is significant that Jack **dismisses** the idea of a beast here, for he will later **use the boys’ fear of it to his own advantage.**

D Piggy’s **logical** thinking and **knowledge** of science lead him to argue that the only fear worth considering is the fear of people – an important idea in the novel.

E Simon would like to speak about the **nature of evil** but he is silenced – which **foreshadows** his death later on, when he tries to bring the truth about the beast to the boys.

**Ralph as leader:**

Ralph is **forced** to grow up quickly as life takes on a new seriousness for him. He walks on the beach thinking about the boys’ initial enthusiasm for the island. He considers how their original ideas for keeping order have **broken** **down** and realises that prospects for rescue in the immediate future are not good.

Having decided to call an assembly, he is anxious that it does not turn into a pointless exercise and a wasted opportunity. He thinks beforehand, ‘**This meeting must not be fun, but business’ (p81)**

Before speaking at the assembly, Ralph considers the **weight** of his responsibility as chief. He recognises the ability to think **rationally** and **systematically** as an important requirement for **leadership**. He realises that Piggy is able to think clearly and logically and begins to have a new-found respect for him.

**The significance of the beast:**

Though the chapter is called ‘Beast from Water’, in ‘deciding the fear’ (p88) a number of explanations are put forward.

The explanations range from **real** wild creatures, like the giant squid, to **humans themselves** being the source of fear. Unreal phenomena are also considered – **fear created by the imagination**, fear of evil and fear of ghosts. Notice how each suggestion is received by the different boys.

The significance of the chapter is that it **creates doubt** in the minds of the boys that they are alone and introduces the idea of the **possibility of something ‘other’** on the island.

**Ralph realises things are going wrong:**

1. Ralph begins to realise his own **failings** and **doubt his ability** to be chief. His **dirty uniform** and long hair make him realise how **far** from **civilisation** the boys have slipped.
2. He calls a meeting to remind the boys of the rules – they’re beginning to ignore them and to **descend into savagery**.

***SYMBOLISM****: The shelters represent* ***civilisation*** *– all the boys helped build the first one, and it’s* ***sturdy****, but the one which only Ralph and Simon built is ‘****tottery’****. Without all the boys working together and agreeing, society doesn’t work!*

**The Beast divides the group:**

1. Ralph sees that fear of the beast is damaging the group and wants them to ‘decide there’s nothing in it’. Piggy thinks that the only thing to **fear is people** and Simon suggests that the **beast is actually them**. Nobody takes either of them seriously.
2. Jack calls the littluns ‘cry babies and sissies’ for being frightened of the beast. He says it doesn’t exist, but then says ‘we’ll hunt it down!’ This makes the **beast seem more real**, and makes **hunting seem necessary** for the boys’ safety. This gives Jack more power.
3. Phil **mistakes** Simon for the beast – this **foreshadows** Simon’s murder later in the novel.
4. As the boys’ fear increases they become more likely to act on their savage instincts instead of thinking things through.

**The rules of the conch are becoming less important:**

1. Jack speaks without the conch and Piggy and Simon are shouted down even when they have it.
2. Ralph tells Jack that ‘the rules are the only thing we’ve got’ – the only thing that ties them to civilisation, but Jack replies, ‘Bollocks to the rules!’ His emphasis on having fun and hunting the beast appeals to the other boys’ growing savagery.
3. Jack takes advantage of the chaos caused by the boys’ fear of the beast, and excitement about hunting it, to gain power – he breaks up the assembly to stage a mock hunt.
4. Ralph doesn’t blow the conch to call the boys back – he’s afraid they’ll ignore it and see he’s **losing his authority**. He realises that Jack’s **becoming more powerful!**

**Writing about others’ views on Ralph:**

For a top mark, you may need to view one of the boys through the eyes of other characters. Knowing a variety of viewpoints on a particular person is important so together they give a **balanced** insight into a character’s personality.

**Jack has a lack of respect for the authority of the conch as well as a lack of respect for Ralph as leader.** This leads Jack to break the rules. When confronted by Ralph, he shouts and swears. His use of bad language appears to demonstrate his **contempt** for any sort of **authority**.

Piggy, on the other hand, **fears for his own position** if Ralph were no longer leader. He is **afraid** of what Jack might do if Jack became leader.

Simon is clear and straightforward in his statement that Ralph should remain as leader: ‘Go on being chief’ (p101)

***Things to think about for an A grade:***

1. *You will need to know, understand and be able to explore how the characters shape and react to events. For example, notice how Jack and Piggy treat the younger boys, when the fear of the beast is mentioned. Who is the kinder of the two?*
2. *Why might Piggy be fearful of people?*
3. *Ralph points out that* ***‘the rules are the only thing we’ve got!’*** *(p99). How far have the rules of civilised society broken down so far? It is a useful exercise to track the breakdown of the rules as you go through each chapter.*
4. *What particularly worries Ralph about the boys’ adjustment to life on the island?*