William Golding

biography

SYNOPSIS

EARLY LIFE
William Golding was born on September 19, 1911, in Saint Columb Minor, Cornwall, England. He was raised in a 14th-century house next door to a graveyard. His mother, Mildred, was an active suffragette who fought for women’s right to vote. His father, Alex, worked as a schoolmaster. William received his early education at the school his father ran, Marlborough Grammar School. When William was just 12 years old, he attempted, unsuccessfully, to write a novel. A frustrated child, he found an outlet in bullying his peers. Later in life, William would describe his childhood self as a brat, even going so far as to say, “I enjoyed hurting people.” After primary school, William went on to attend Brasenose College at Oxford University. His father hoped he would become a scientist, but William opted to study English literature instead. In 1934, a year before he graduated, William published his first work, a book of poetry aptly entitled *Poems*. The collection was largely overlooked by critics.

TEACHING
After college, Golding worked in settlement houses and the theater for a time. Eventually, he decided to follow in his father’s footsteps. In 1935 Golding took a position teaching English and philosophy at Bishop Wordsworth’s School in Salisbury. Golding’s experience teaching unruly young boys would later serve as inspiration for his novel *Lord of the Flies*. Although passionate about teaching from day one, in 1940 Golding temporarily abandoned the profession to join the Royal Navy and fight in World War II.
ROYAL NAVY
Golding spent the better part of the next six years on a boat, except for a seven-month stint in
New York, where he assisted Lord Cherwell at the Naval Research Establishment. While in the
Royal Navy, Golding developed a lifelong romance with sailing and the sea. During World War
II, he fought battleships at the sinking of the Bismarck, and also fended off submarines and
planes. Lieutenant Golding was even placed in command of a rocket-launching craft. Of his
World War II experiences, Golding has said, “I began to see what people were capable of doing.
Anyone who moved through those years without understanding that man produces evil as a bee
produces honey, must have been blind or wrong in the head.” Like his teaching experience,
Golding’s participation in the war would prove to be fruitful material for his fiction. In 1945,
after World War II had ended, Golding went back to teaching and writing.

LORD OF THE FLIES
In 1954, after 21 rejections, Golding published his first and most acclaimed novel, *Lord of the
Flies*. The novel told the gripping story of a group of adolescent boys stranded on a deserted
island after a plane wreck.

DEATH AND LEGACY
Golding spent the last few years of his life quietly living with his wife, Ann Brookfield, at their
house near Falmouth, Cornwall, where he continued to toil at his writing. On June 19, 1993,
Golding died of a heart attack in Perranarworthal, Cornwall. He was survived by his wife and
their two children, David and Judith. After Golding passed away, his completed manuscript for
*The Double Tongue* was published posthumously. Among the most successful novels of
Golding’s writing career were *Rites of Passage* (winner of the 1980 Booker McConnell Prize),
*Pincher Martin, Free Fall* and *The Pyramid*. While Golding was mainly a novelist, his body of
work also includes poetry, plays, essays and short stories.