

What Makes a Nobel Prize Winner?

Part A.

Directions: What do we mean when we say a book is good? Think of yourself as a literary critic. Circle any of the following qualities that you think necessary to a good book. Then list additional qualities.

exciting plot

snappy dialogue

believable characters

literary style

originality

unified storyline

happy ending

understandable language

deep themes

believable narrator

Part B.

Directions: Consider the fact that a writer receives the Nobel Prize for Literature not for one novel or play, but for the whole body of his or her work. Answer the following questions.

1. What do you think should be some characteristics of a Nobel Prize winner's works?

2. Do you think a person who wrote only one book should be eligible for the Nobel Prize? Why or why not?

3. What are some good reasons for awarding the prize to William Golding?

Critical Commentary on William Golding

Directions: Read the following critical commentary about William Golding. Then answer the questions.

The idea of a Golding novel invariably is superior to the performance itself. Ironically, the idea, often so engaging in the abstract, is self-defeating, for it forces an artificial method. Golding is an allegorist whose allegory pre-empts the realistic level; often, only the allegory is of interest and when that begins to wear thin, there is insufficient substance to grapple with.

Golding's novels, then, seem more attractive in their parts than as wholes. His inability, or lack of desire, to give intellectual substance to his themes, and his didactic intrusion in nearly all of the narratives, lessen the power of what still remains, however, an original talent. His eccentric themes, unfortunately, rarely convey the sense of balance and ripeness that indicate literary maturity: . . . stranded boys are compelling only if their behavior indicates something significant about them and not merely their similarity to adults. . . .¹

To end a discussion of Golding's work on this note is, however, to lose sight of his importance to the contemporary novel. Even if his didacticism makes him resolve what should be unresolvable, he nevertheless indicates in nearly every line that he is an artist seriously interested in his craft. . . .¹

1. Overall, is this commentary positive or negative?
2. What does the writer dislike about Golding's work?
3. What does the writer admire?
4. Do you agree with the commentary? Why, or why not?

¹Frederick R. Karl, "The Novel as Moral Allegory: The Fiction of William Golding, Iris Murdoch, Rex Warner, and P. H. Newby," in *A Reader's Guide to the Contemporary English Novel* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc., 1972), 259-60.

Critical Commentary: Another View

Directions: Shortly after William Golding's death in 1993, the following commentary was printed. Read it, and answer the questions.

. . . [William] Golding had one big subject: the fall. That is, our loss of paradise, and inheritance of self-knowledge, pain, and confusion. A born writer, lucid, penetrating in style, Golding did his subject better than anybody since Milton. . . .

The defining moment of his life was World War II. He served as an officer in the British Navy. He once said that during the war, "one had one's nose rubbed in human condition." When he began to write, he rubbed his readers' noses in the same. . . .

Not many people expected Golding to win the Nobel. . . . He was too much of an anomaly, an outsider who identified more with the world of ancient Greek literature than modern writing.

The Academy, however, understood what it was doing.

The Nobel Prize citation compared Golding to Herman Melville. And, of course, they're identical cousins all the way. Golding, like the author of *Moby Dick*, wrote simple-seeming tales, veneered with conflict and adventure.

But the adventure in these books never really takes off. The characters seem trapped in a curious, tortured stasis. You get the impression that the real action is taking place somewhere else. High in the heavens, amid the clash of angels. Or in some deeper realm, where good and evil churn like continental plates.¹

1. With what other writers does the article compare Golding?

2. Is this article positive or negative?

3. What are the author's main points?

¹Steve Szilagyi, "A Timeless Master," *The Plain Dealer*, 8 August 1993, I11.