

## ***Still a Work in Progress***

**By Jo Knowles**

Ryan and I follow Sam into our language arts class and sit at the big circular table. Mr. Marshall set up so the students can see one another during discussions. Today we're talking about the first half of *Lord of the Flies*. So far, this book is creepy and disturbing.

Emma says the book is going to steal away my innocence like it did hers, and that they should stop teaching it. She had to read it in middle school, too. She got in big trouble because she made a list of which of her classmates would go crazy and turn into savages if they got trapped on an island, the way most of the boys in the book do, and which wouldn't. Unfortunately, Ms. Cliff saw the list and felt the need to discuss it "anonymously" at Community Meeting. It didn't take long for everyone to figure out who she was talking about, and for a while, Emma was the most popular girl in school, not because

she was the prettiest and smartest but because everyone wanted to find out if she thought they'd be a savage or a Ralph. Ralph's the main character and the only one who doesn't either die or turn into a beast follower, which is what happens to all the boys who become savages. Pretty soon, it didn't matter who she labeled what, because the whole school was fighting about it and calling one another savages and it was all Emma's fault. And just like in the book, they turned on Emma, who everyone loved and adored, suddenly became the outcast. I'm pretty sure she started out convinced she was a Ralph, but in the end she came to believe she was the beast after all. The entire incident changed her in a big way. It was like she'd seen how she was capable of being a terrible person without even being stranded on an island. Even

though eventually people forgot about it and moved on and forgave her, Emma couldn't. She started trying to be more perfect and more adored than she was before, but to do that, she was secretly punishing herself. It's not a time we like to talk about.

Emma used to want to be a psychologist someday. I think she liked to study people to find out if they had a dark side. Sometimes I'd catch her watching me, like she was trying to figure out if I'd grow up to be a serial killer.

But all that stopped after the *Lord of the Flies* incident. It's really too bad, because as mean as it was to make that list, I bet she was right about a lot of people.