

Plot over the lottery essay



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Shirley Jackson wrote "The Lottery" in 1948 with a purpose in mind. Upon hearing the title, many readers think about a lottery in people want to win due to the fact that they could win millions of dollars. However, this is not the case in Jackson's version where the lottery is one in which the winner is stoned to death. Jackson's focus in this story is that society is flawed, imperfect, and sometimes stuck in the past. She declared that her purpose was "to shock the story's readers with a graphic demonstration of the pointless violence and general inhumanity in their own lives" (Jackson 239).

Her goal is for the reader to notice these traits of society upon evaluating the plot, point of view, and character of "The Lottery." Plot is a sequence of events that make up a story. Plot is not only one event, but a sequence of many events that include exposition, complicating incident, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement. The plot of "The Lottery" begins with the exposition, which is what the reader is first exposed to. The exposition of the story is that it is the morning of June 27th and it is a beautiful day.

The weather is clear and sunny with the warmth of a typical summer day. Flowers are blooming and the grass is green. The approximate 300 villagers gather in the square at sometime around ten ' o'clock to participate in the town's annual lottery, which takes less than two hours to complete. The complicating incident, also known as the problem, in the story is that somebody has to "win" the lottery, which has been a tradition of the village since before anybody there was born. The main problem with that is that nobody wants to win the lottery, because whoever wins the lottery is then stoned to death.

The rising action occurs as tension builds just before and during the drawing as the villagers are curious to who has the black spot on their slip of paper that they drew. The climax, where the problem is addressed but not solved, then occurs when it is discovered that Mr. Hutchinson's paper has the black spot on it and somebody from his family will "win" the lottery. A short moment of falling action, occurring after the climax, occurs as Mrs. Hutchinson begins to complain that the lottery was unfair because Mr. Hutchinson does not have time to choose the piece of paper he wanted.

Mr. Hutchinson's entire family of five then gather near the box and prepare to draw to determine the true "winner" of the lottery. It is discovered that it is Mrs. Hutchinson who has the black spot on her slip of paper, making her the person who will be stoned to death. The denouement, the resolving of the plot, then occurs as Mrs. Hutchinson screams about the lottery not being fair, but to no avail. The villager's move in on her, she is hit by the first stone in the side of the head, and then the entire town is upon her as she is helpless. NOTE: this discussion of plot is a bit vague. More details are needed in each paragraph to fully address each part of the story's plot. Please pay attention to the fact that this part of the paper is divided into separate sections, like your paper should be. You can write a paragraph for the beginning parts of plot, another paragraph for the middle parts of plot, and a final paragraph for the ending parts of plot). The definition of point of view is the perspective from which a story is told.

Before determining who the narrator of the story is, the reader must first establish the four concepts of voice, consciousness, point and presence, and reliability of the narrator. Jackson's use of voice in "The Lottery" consists of

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many third person pronouns. Many of these pronouns are plural, referring to the villagers as a group. Jackson makes the statement, " Although the villagers had forgotten the ritual and lost the original black box, they still remembered to use stones" (244). The next element to look at is whether or not the author gives the reader access to any character's consciousness.

In reading the story the reader can tell how certain characters feel by listening to what they say. An example of this is when Old Man Warner states, " It's not the way it used to be. People ain't the way they used to be" (244). The reader can tell that he is frustrated because people are not responding to the lottery as they used to. However, Jackson does not allow the reader access into any character's consciousness and let him or her know how a particular character feels outside of what that character says.

The third concept involves the narrator's position and presence, which determines whether that person is involved in the story or not. If the narrator is involved in the story, the reader must then determine if that character is a major or minor character and if his or her presence is pervasive, dominate, or obtrusive. Jackson's use of the narrator in this story is one that is an outside observer looking in at the events unfolding and not a participant in the story. The fourth and final concept of point of view is the reliability of the narrator.

The reader must determine if they find the narrator believable or not. The fact that the narrator in this story is an outside observer that offers no opinions and only states what they see and hear is proof that the narrator is reliable. By establishing how the four concepts are used in " The Lottery,"

the reader can determine that Jackson wrote the story with a dramatic point of view. Character is defined as the verbal representation of a human being. There are three dimensions of a character which include physical attributes and appearance, background, and psychology.

Certain types of characters include round, dynamic, three-dimensional, flat, static, stock, stereotype, and one-dimension characters. All of the characters she uses play roles of certain stereotypes to help elaborate on her focus. One of those characters is Mr. Summers who plays the stereotype of a town's politician or mayor. He is introduced alongside the setting of the story: " The lottery was conducted-as were the square dances, the teenage club, the Halloween program-by Mr. Summers, who had the time and energy to devote to civic activities" (240).

He is also a stock character as he performs a recurring task and is a representative of the village. Another very unfortunate, but common attribute in many people today is being two-faced. Mrs. Hutchinson plays the role of that stereotype in this story. She and her friend, Mrs. Delacroix, appear to be good friends as they laugh together but after Mrs. Hutchinson " wins" the lottery, " Mrs. Delacroix selects a stone so large it requires two hands to lift. She then turns to Mrs. Dunbar and says, " Come on. Let's go" (244).

Many people today only stand up for something whenever they are the ones in trouble, and do not worry about other people who are in trouble. Mrs. Hutchinson is a stereotype of that attribute. She knows that the lottery is wrong, yet does not worry about it or even try to get it stopped. She is even

laughing before the lottery begins. As soon as Mr. Hutchinson draws the original slip of paper with the black spot she begins saying, “ You didn’t give him enough time to take any paper he wanted. I saw you. It wasn’t fair! ” (243).

After she selects the paper with the black spot and the villagers begin moving upon her she states, “ It isn’t fair, it isn’t right” (245). Mrs. Hutchinson was not the only villager like this, as nobody in the village has put forth too much of an effort to stop the lottery for good. Jackson uses her characters in a masterful way to represent a flawed, unwitting society that is unfortunately similar to the one we live in today. Jackson’s excellent use of plot, point of view, and character provide solid support of society being imperfect.

The story was published in 1948 but still applies today as society still has many of the same faults, including the fact that many people do not consider the consequences of their actions and it comes back to hurt them or somebody else. When readers read this story she wants them to understand this, take a look at themselves, and see what they can do to make themselves a better person. Nobody is perfect and there is something that everybody can do to make themselves a better person and somebody that contributes to society in a positive way.