

# Irony and symbolism in "the lottery" assignment

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"The Lottery", she uses many literary devices. However the most prevalent are Irony and symbolism. Jackson uses Irony and symbolism to illustrate the underlying darker theme not evident in the beginning of the short story. The use of irony is in almost every paragraph. Even the title of the story is ironic because it represents something positive but in the end the reader finds the true meaning of the title to be negative. "Part of the horrific effect of Jackson's writing stems from the author's technique of unfolding plot as if it were conventional, even though it is not. (Wagner-Martin). Thus, through Irony and symbolism Jackson paints a grim portrait of life and death in this small town. First she sets the story in a very quaint, quiet and small town. The story takes place in early summer on a beautiful day. "The morning of June 27th was clear and sunny, with fresh warmth of a full-summer day; the flowers were blossoming profusely and the grass was richly green" (499). This description of the setting gives the reader the idea of a normal peaceful town. Jackson describes the middle of town as having a "post office and a bank... (499).

She never mentions a church or courthouse which are normally focal points in any small town. This irony represents that the townspeople have no respect for morals or authority. The setting for the lottery also takes place in the same area "as were the square dances, the teenage club, the Halloween program..." (500). This is ironic because the reader learns that the actual purpose of the lottery is to choose someone who becomes a sacrifice for the town. This does not stay on the conscience of the townspeople because they soon go back to living as they were before the lottery.

As the people gather in town for the lottery, their behavior is ironic. The men gather together telling jokes and talking "... Of planting and rain, tractors and taxes..." (500). The women "... Greeted one another and exchanged bits of gossip..." (500). The children were also ironically calm as they talked of "... The classroom and the teacher, of books and reprimands" (500). The townspeople act as though this gathering is a happy event, yet as the story evolves, the reader learns that the death of one of their own is approaching. Jackson's brilliance is to convince the reader that the residents of the community are normal, ordinary people; and that the rule that they accept so unquestioningly is no more extreme than other orders that comprise patriarchal law" (Wagner-Martin). The introduction of the black box is a key turning point in the setting. At first it symbolizes mystery to the reader, but by the end the box symbolizes doom, darkness, and fear. "The villagers kept their distance" (500). The box holds the tickets for the one who is selected as the "winner".

The box holds the fate of one of the townspeople. Ironically, the names of the residents themselves foreshadow the event that is to occur. The lottery is conducted by Mr. Summers and Mr. Graves. Mr. Summers' name brings to mind the season where there is life and beauty. However Mr. Graves' name brings to mind death and doom. Both are symbolic. In the midst of enjoying the abundance of summer, a new grave will be entered in the community. Ironically, the townspeople accept this as a "fact of life" in their town.

Through Jackson's descriptive passages, she leads the reader to believe that this is a story of good fortune. At the end of the story the use of irony and  
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symbolism reveal this dark and deadly town. The everyday normalcy becomes horrific as the reader learns that the lottery does not choose a winner. The marked ballot instead chooses one who must surrender everything by giving his or her life. This is Jackson's final and ultimate irony and once the reader discovers this fact, the evil throughout the story becomes evident.