

Short story's elements: "the lottery" by shirley jackson essay

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



Short stories are a common form of fiction in American Literature. The prose writing that is usually employed in short stories depends on how the author organizes and presents his/her work of literature. The length of short stories is not relevant to their quality. The American literature portfolio features some renowned masters of this craft. Some of the greatest short-story writers include Edgar Poe, Jack London, Mark Twain, and Stephen Crane.

A good short story has to have a combination of five elements. These elements include plot, setting, character, plot, conflict, and theme. The quality of any short story depends on how well these elements have been employed. An example of a short story that successfully employs these elements is "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson. "The Lottery" is a story about human atrocities that happen within a village. Although when the story was first published, it received massive criticism around the world, today it is regarded as one of the greatest stories in the history of literature (Hattenhauer 43). This paper explores how the elements of a short story are used in Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery".

The setting of "The Lottery" is in a small town that resembles most American small towns. The village is consisted of about three hundred residents who are both excited and terrified by the idea of an annual 'lottery' ritual. The ritual takes place in a beautiful summer day in June (Jackson 234). All the villagers including children are obligated to participate in this ritual. The setting of "The Lottery" is synonymous with the setting in most small towns of the 1930s. When the book was published, most of the protest against it came from such towns (Oppenheimer 32). The author was

able to capture the readers' attention by presenting them with a familiar setting.

The plot of "The Lottery" revolves around a ritual known as the lottery that is performed in villages everywhere. The ritual is meant to ensure that the sins of the village are forgiven so that the annual harvest is not compromised. When the villagers are preparing for the ritual, one of them quotes a local proverb that says that "Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon" (Jackson 234). The lottery ritual involved each family drawing lots from a box. The family that draws the lot with a black spot has to sacrifice one of its family members.

The man running "The Lottery" is Mr. Summers, a man who carries out several duties on behalf of the village. The ritual ends with the chosen person being stoned to death by the village mob. The plot in the story is well formulated to include an introduction, a climax, and an ending. Jackson's story provides the reader with a sensational climax where one of the villagers is being picked for elimination. The ending of the story also leaves the readers in awe because most of them had thought that somehow the sacrificial human being would be spared.

The element of conflict is used reservedly in the story. In the beginning of the story, it seems like there is no conflict as the villagers gather in unison for the annual lottery. The only hint of conflict at this time is the rumor going around that some villagers are considering abandoning the lottery ritual. One of the villagers Mrs. Adams even claims that the lottery is no longer

practiced in some villages but she is opposed by the Old Man Warner (Jackson 235). There seems to be an internal psychological conflict because most of the villagers do not seem supportive of the lottery even if they engage in the ritual. However, the conflict becomes physical and external when Tessie Hutchinson begins protesting her execution.

The element of character is well implemented in the story with the main antagonist being the lottery itself. The protagonist in "The Lottery" is the human will. The villagers represent the will of human beings to continue with a tradition they dislike. Most of the characters in story conform to this battle of the human will and finally the ritual goes on as planned.

There are several themes in "The Lottery" but the most prominent theme is the danger of blind tradition. The villagers do not question the relevance of this tradition and their only reason for not doing so is that it is a tradition. The author shows the absurdity of this concept by presenting people from all lifestyles in a single united front. The other main theme in this story is family unity.

In the lottery, it is every family for itself. However, as the lottery proceeds family members are forced to turn against each other. The fact that a family has to lose one member for its own benefit complicates matters even more. In the 1950s, the issue of family unity was a popular topic in America and that is probably why Jackson chose this theme (Oppenheimer 223).

The author of "The Lottery" has successfully used all the elements of a short story. The result of this usage is a story with strong themes, great

characters, an exquisite setting, and an easily understandable plot. The ensemble of these elements makes this story interesting and relevant to its readers.

Hattenhauer, Darryl. Shirley Jackson's American Gothic, New York, NY: SUNY Press, 2003. Print.

Jackson, Shirley. The Lottery and Other Stories, London, United Kingdom: Penguin, 2009. Print.

Oppenheimer, Judy. Private Demons: The Life of Shirley Jackson, New York, NY: Putnam, 1988. Print.