

# The lottery vs. the destructors

Literature, American Literature



The purpose of fiction is to entertain and sometimes educate. Occasionally, one may read a fictional story based around actual events or ideas. The author may write this type of fiction with the purpose to educate the reader.

In *The Lottery*, the purpose of author Shirley Jackson is to place focus on tradition and raise the question of following it. Just because something is done based on tradition, does it necessarily mean it is positive, beneficial, or even safe? This is what comes to mind when reading about a small town that holds a lottery as tradition to see who will be killed. In Graham Greene's *The Destructors*, Greene writes with the purpose to educate the reader on the destructive element that exists in human nature (Sharker, 2015). Using a setting from post World War II, this story is about a teenage boy who is determined to destroy the last house standing in the previously bombed neighborhood. The protagonists in these two stories have conflict with either an idea or an object. Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery* and Graham Greene's *The Destructors* both have inhuman antagonists.

In comparison, the theme for both stories is centered around violence. *The Lottery* focuses on violence with tradition. A town comes together on June 27, and each person is given a piece of paper. The tradition is that the citizen who has the paper with a mark on it is selected to be stoned to death as a sacrifice for the crops to grow and the village to prosper (Human Sacrifice, n. d.). Tessie, the protagonist, is focused on this lottery until she is the one with the marked piece of paper. The theme in *The Destructors* is centered around violence with destruction. This is about Trevor, a teenage boy and the protagonist, who sees the aftermath of the neighborhood that has been previously bombed during WWII. There is only one house left, but Trevor

makes it his and his gang's business to destroy the house, so the area will look like the rest of the town around it. The antagonist to Jackson's Tessie is the lottery itself as it is the one thing that destroys her, and Trevor's fight or conflict is with a house as it is the thing he destroys. While the protagonist and antagonist of a story are usually people, these two stories have antagonists that are not human.

In addition, the plots of both stories are based on destruction but in a strange way. The lottery is held to randomly select people to die, resulting in destruction of human life. However, life is destroyed as a sacrifice for growth and prosperity. Trevor's goal is destruction of property, but he wants to destroy the house because, to him, this benefits the town by making the area like the other parts of the neighborhood. There is irony in both situations as destruction symbolizes something negative, but here, the results are made to appear positive. The Lottery presents even more irony as the title alone means something good under normal circumstances. The lottery is more popular and favored for its most common prizes - large amounts of money. To the contrary, winning the lottery in Jackson's story is not every person's dream. Winning this lottery means being stoned to death.

While the two stories share a few similarities, Jackson and Greene did have different ideas on a few other writing techniques. In The Lottery, as tradition, a small town gathers on a summer day and randomly selects people to die to decrease the population but prosper in crop growth. Wife and mother Tessie of the Hutchison family is selected to be stoned to death. Teen Trevor of The Destructors has one goal to completely destroy the old and only house

remaining in the town previously bombed during World War II. These two characters, while both the main characters, have separate goals and destinies. Tessie as a wife and mother undoubtedly focuses on caring for her family and has several responsibilities while Trevor as a teenage gang member appears to have not a care in the world, except to destroy that house. Tessie's destiny after winning the lottery is death, but Trevor's success leaves him alive and brings harm on another character.

Also, the setting of The Lottery differs from that of The Destructors. Jackson sets the lottery in a small populated village, between the bank and the post office, on a summer day. The exact opposite, Greene's setting is an area that has been destroyed and bombed during the war and has only one house remaining. The mood in The Lottery changes as events progress, starting out calm before the lottery, transitioning into suspenseful during the lottery, and eventually sad after the lottery winner is selected. As for The Destructors, the mood remains dark and violent, giving a negative vibe. The house represents the last of hope in dark times, and Trevor destroys it (Sharker). For the empathetic reader, the tearing down and final destruction of the house along with how the gang treated Mr. Thomas, the owner, bring mixed emotions to surface.

In conclusion, while the two stories are fiction, they both use real life events or rituals from history to educate the reader on current day situations. The conflict of one story is between a woman and a lottery, and the conflict of the other story is between a teenage boy and a house. Although the antagonist is usually a person, The Lottery and The Destructors both have

antagonists that are not human. Jackson and Greene use different settings and moods, but both manage to have the same effect on the reader's emotions in the end.