

Marred by ignorance innocence and intolerance essay examples

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Outline

a society plunges into the depths of depravity

THESIS: In her short story “ The Lottery” Shirley Jackson uses symbolic references to innocence, tolerance and ignorance to show how blindly following tradition leads to disaster.

I: Introduction.

II: The people’s minds are brainwashed to such an extent that they hide behind their imposed, innocent vision of life in the country, where blood sacrifices are a necessity.

A. Readers, the townspeople and the children presented the same – innocent.

B. The black box as a play thing for the townspeople, just like stones are for the children.

III: The people of Jackson’s “ The Lottery” are safely lulled in their ignorance and keep falsely believing that the only thing keeping their society functioning is exactly the lottery and the tradition behind it.

A. Old Man Warner as the epitome of ignorance.

B. The superstition of Old Man Warner.

C. Fear of change.

IV. The townspeople fear change and thus, they tolerate this murderous practice, even at the cost of their own flesh and blood.

A. Tessie Hutchinson does not tolerate the results, but she tolerates the lottery itself.

B. Other villages did not want to tolerate it anymore.

C. People fear for their children, but allow it to continue.

V. Conclusion.

Marred by ignorance, innocence and (in)tolerance

a society plunges into the depths of depravity

Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" portrays a world devoid of any individuals, where the will of one is the will of all, whilst the people's lives are shaped by a bizarre ritual taking place each year to appease the fertility gods. Their faith is the faith of a child: innocent and ignorant, and it does not allow any questioning of the almighty tradition. In their endless need to believe in something which would give their life meaning and purpose, these people choose to believe in ritual murder as an undeniable part of their town fabric, not even realizing that their innocence and ignorance, in combination with their tolerance, has turned them into cold-blooded murderers. Thus, in her short story "The Lottery" Shirley Jackson uses symbolic references to innocence, tolerance and ignorance to show how blindly following tradition leads to disaster.

At the beginning of this dark story, the innocence of the reader is adequate to the innocence of the townspeople. Their preparations for the yearly lottery initially do not foreshadow any malevolence or bloody intentions that it bears in essence. The beginning is almost blissful, allowing the reader a false sense of peace and calm in this initially pleasant community. The children are

gathering stones, which in the reader's mind does not evoke any murderous intent, but on the contrary, it evokes images of children playing. Just like these children and their little stones, the townspeople are equally preoccupied with the black box. In their naïve and utterly misguided innocence, they do not see the black box for what it is. For them, it is a means of allowing the tradition to continue and they do not see a single thing wrong with what the tradition actually represents: the collective murder of an individual. Just like the children, they are throwing stones without the slightest feeling of guilt, remorse or wrongdoing. Their minds are brainwashed to such an extent that they hide behind their imposed, innocent vision of life in the country, where blood sacrifices are a necessity.

The notion of ignorance is potently exemplified in the character of Old Man Warner, who has participated in seventy-seven lotteries and is a fervent supporter of keeping the old order of things. He states an illogical conclusion that if the tradition stops being adhered to, the world as they know it, will crumble down before their eyes and they will all be reduced to living in caves like animals. His incessant belief in the degeneration of society in case of renouncing tradition seems based on superstition and utter lack of reason. He fears change and is characterized by utter ignorance of anything else other than the world as he knows it. He believes other towns which have stopped holding lotteries consist of fools, a fact which only emphasizes his fear of change. The people of Jackson's "The Lottery" are safely lulled in their ignorance and keep falsely believing that the only thing keeping their society functioning is exactly the lottery and the tradition behind it.

It appears that the townspeople not only tolerate the lottery, but outright

approve of it. The only instance of intolerance is Tessie Hutchinson's outrage at the results, which leads the reader to wonder: if she hadn't picked the piece of paper with the black dot, would she have said anything about the results being unfair? Some of the other villages have already chosen not to continue with the lottery, expressing their utter intolerance of such a process and their final rejection of it, while this particular place seems to thrive on it. Naturally, parents fear for their children's lives, but they still respect the tradition and keep silent, thus reinforcing the tolerance of the whole village. The townspeople fear change and consequently, they tolerate this murderous practice, even at the cost of their own flesh and blood. Jackson's simplistic language and minute images of the development of the lottery only appear to emphasize the shocking practice these people undergo. Their tragic mixture of innocence, tolerance and ignorance sharpen the violence, making the ending incredulously surprising and devastating.

References:

Jackson, Shirley. *The Lottery and Other Stories*. London: Penguin Group Ltd, 2009. Print.