

Human disconnect in "the lottery" by shirley jackson

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"The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson is a story of an anticipated yearly event where all the citizens of a small town gather together to participate in. The author gives the impression through the light-hearted dialogue among the characters that the lottery leads to an event bringing its winner good fortune. As the fortune of the one chosen by the lottery drawing is revealed, it also shows a potential problem of the human character. "The Lottery" reveals when exposed to violence routinely people can become desensitized to the outcomes of such acts.

Throughout the story the narrator through the dialogue of the characters tells the lottery is an annual event that has gone on longer than the oldest person can remember. Since the lottery has been conducted for so long the oldest to the youngest alike gather to anticipate it. As the people gather, the narrator describes how the townspeople interact routinely with young children playing together, men talking about farming and taxes, and women gossiping about things. The narrator describes what seems to be an innocent act of young boys gathering stones, "Bobby Martin had already stuffed his pocket full of stones, and the others soon followed his example, selecting the smoothest and roundest stones; Bobby and Harry Jones and Dickie Delacroix...eventually made a great pile of stones in one corner of the square..." (903), but the stones become a symbol to the tragic conclusion of the story. After everyone reaches the place where the lottery is conducted they gather into families to await Mr. Summers, who oversees the lottery as well as other civic events in the town.

Once Mr. Summers and the townspeople are gathered, the narrator goes on to describe the tradition of the black box used to conduct the lottery and the

rituals of how the lottery was to be conducted. The procedures of how the officiator of the lottery conducted the drawing had changed over the years from more formal to less formal, and more personal. The act that Mr. Summers takes to talk to each person casually that draws from the black box knowing what would happen to the person drawn is indicative of the attitude of all the townspeople. After the narrator leaves off from the history of the lottery the character that is drawn in the lottery, Tessie Hutchinson, enters the story. Ms. Hutchinson enters while a roll call of all the citizens of the town is taking place to make sure everyone has a chance to be drawn.

When Mr. Summers is ready to conduct the lottery the narrator once again reiterates how the people had grown accustomed to the proceedings, " The people had done it so many times that they only half listened to the directions, most of them were quiet, wetting their lips, not looking around" (905). In the previous quote, the author reveals part of the theme she is trying to express on how people emotionally detach themselves when they have experienced something enough. While the drawing is taking place the narrator describes the dialogue between the characters of Old Man Warner, the oldest man in town, and a fellow citizen Mr. Adams. In the dialogue between the two men the narrator relates how something that is tradition can be hard to give up: " They do say," Mr. Adams said to Old Man Warner, who stood next to him, " that over in the north village they're talking of giving up the lottery." Old Man Warner snorted, " Pack of crazy fools," he said. " Listening to the young folks, nothing's good enough for them. Next thing you know, they'll be wanting to go back to living in caves, nobody work anymore, live that way for a while. Used to be a saying about ' Lottery in <https://assignbuster.com/human-disconnect-in-the-lottery-by-shirley-jackson/>

June, corn be heavy soon.' There's always been a lottery," he added petulantly. " Bad enough to see young Joe Summers up there joking with everybody."

" Some places have already quit lotteries," Mrs. Adams said. " Nothing but trouble in that," Old Man Warner said stoutly. " Pack of young fool."(906) In the passage, the author expresses there is a disconnect between the older generation and the younger generation in that Old Man Warner thinks it would be foolish to give up the lottery although the younger generations of other villages had convinced others to quit lotteries. Once again, the story reveals the theme that the more people see something, like Old Man Warner, though it may be violent the less sensitive to it they can become. Once the initial drawing has concluded, the narrator gives the first evidence that there is something that is undesirable to the lottery.

When the initial phase of the lottery drawing concludes, it is found that Mr. Hutchinson is the person with the paper that has the mark revealing the person drawn. After it is announced that Mr. Hutchinson is the one drawn, it is then that the narrator reveals that the lottery is something no one wants to win. The narrator describes the reaction of Tessie Hutchinson, " Suddenly, Tessie Hutchinson shouted to Mr. Summers, " You didn't give him time enough to take any paper he wanted. I saw you. It wasn't fair!"(907). The reaction Tessie Hutchinson displays seems odd, until the fate of the person that draws the mark is later revealed. The reaction of Mrs. Delacroix and Mrs. Graves, who previously had been joking with Tessie but now were unsympathetically scolding her shows the loss of compassion among the

people for the fate of the person drawn. When the initial phase of the drawing concludes, the narrator explains the procedure for the second phase of the drawing that will take place only among the Hutchinson family. During the second drawing the author tries to reveal the lack of sensitivity even among family members through the reactions of those not drawn. The narrator describes the reaction of the Hutchinson family as the papers are unfolded: Mr. Graves opened the slip of paper and there was a gentle sigh through the crowd as he held it up and everyone could see that it was blank. Nancy and Bill, Jr., opened theirs at the same time, and both beamed and laughed, turning around to the crowd and holding their slips of paper above their heads. "Tessie," Mr. Summers said, and his voice was hushed. "Show us her paper, Bill." Bill Hutchinson went over to his wife and forced the slip of paper out of her hand. It had the black spot on it, the black spot Mr. Summers had made the night before with the heavy pencil in the coal-company office. Bill Hutchinson held it up, and there was a stir in the crowd. (908) The coldness and disconnect of the villagers and the family of the one whose fate is sealed by the lottery unveils what the theme the author is trying to put forth.

Once Tessie Hutchinson is the unfortunate person drawn, there is not one villager that shows compassion to her because they had obviously seen this happen before and participated in the outcome. The narrator describes everyone including the children wasted no time and didn't think twice to carry out the task at hand. The stones the children had gathered together and placed in a pile at the beginning of the story seemed to be a harmless act by children but the conclusion reveals the real intention of the stones: "

The pile of stones the boys had made earlier was ready; there were stones on the ground with the blowing scraps of paper that had come out of the box. Mrs. Delacroix selected a stone so large she had to pick it up with both hands and turned to Mrs. Dunbar. 'Come on,' she said. 'Hurry up.' Mrs. Dunbar had small stones in both hands, and she said, gasping for breath, 'I can't run at all. You'll have to go ahead and I'll catch up with you.' The children had stones already, and someone gave little Davy Hutchinson a few pebbles. Tessie Hutchinson was in the center of a cleared space by now, she held her hands out desperately as the villagers moved in on her. 'It isn't fair, she said.' A stone hit her on the side of the head." (908) The narrator describes an act that is horrific for people to think about but many argue can happen to society as a whole if exposed to such acts frequently.

The conclusion of the story reveals a theme people for generations have been concerned about when people are exposed to constant violence. From soldiers that have been involved in war to children of today that see constant images of violence through television and video games. There is a concern that such things lead people to become desensitized to and participate in such acts. "The Lottery" was published in 1948 shortly after the end of World War II when it was becoming known worldwide about the atrocities of the Jewish Holocaust. People found out the German friends and neighbors of the Jews had participated in the death of Jews. The story of "The Lottery" is perhaps a story written on how people that are friends and relatives can see such violence and become so desensitized to it they could possibly participate in it. Whether the author wrote "The Lottery" with the Holocaust in mind or just making an observation of how inhumane people can become to

each other is not known. "The Lottery" explains how people can become desensitized and lose compassion toward each other when exposed to constant violence leading them to possibly participate in such acts.

Works

Cited

Jackson, Shirley. "The Lottery." Literature for Life. Ed. X. J. Kennedy, Dana Gioia, and Nina Revoyr. New York: Pearson, 2013. 903-908. Print.