

# The unlucky winner

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



The Unlucky Winner In Shirley Jackson's short story "The Lottery", the setting deceives the reader making them think the lottery is a typical annual social event held on a peaceful summer day. The whole town anxiously gathers together in the town square for the lottery. The names of the townspeople are called one at a time to come up and take a piece of paper from the box. When it is revealed who has drawn the only piece of paper that is not blank, a winner of the lottery is established. The story takes on a more mysterious and suspenseful tone as the reader realizes the lottery is in fact not the desirable situation one would expect. The story ends with the residents murdering an innocent person in a barbaric, sacrificial ritual. This paper will examine setting, character, theme, and conflict to explain Jackson's view of humanity in this twisted tale. The story sets up the reader to expect good things from the lottery. The lottery is set in a very mundane town, where everyone knows everyone and individuals are typical. Jackson tells the reader what time of day and what time of year the story takes place to get the reader to focus on what a typical day it is in this small town (587). The morning is described as clear and sunny. The setting creates a mood of peacefulness and tranquility. The men are smiling as they gather together to talk about planting and rain, tractors and taxes. The women of this community are exchanging bits of gossip while the children are busy playing and collecting rocks (587). The townspeople presented to the reader are static characters because they are not very developed and do not experience a change in their personalities. Jackson uses ordinary people, so the reader can relate to the townspeople and families. They readily go along with the yearly tradition, seeing it as necessary and normal. She uses these

simple characters to illustrate how a society is so willing to follow what is considered normal no matter what it is, while they hope that they are not the ones selected. This is seen when Tessie is complaining that her family is unfairly chosen, because her husband didn't have enough time to choose a different paper (591). While Tessie complains, Mrs. Delacroix is saying, " Be a good sport, Tessie," and Mrs. Graves states, " All of us took the same chance. " The only character that is dynamic in this story is Tessie Hutchinson. Mrs. Hutchinson shows a personality change from the beginning of the story. Tessie, arriving late to the lottery, shows she does not fit the town's mold of what a woman should be. She eagerly participates in the yearly ritual and urges her husband to hurry up and get his slip of paper, but when it is she who is the lottery winner, she automatically sees the tradition as unfair and wrong. Tessie is out-spoken, foreshadowing her as the lottery's choice. Tradition is a central theme in " The Lottery". The town clings to the tradition of the lottery. Mr. Summers conducts the lottery as he conducts all the civic activities. The children willfully gather the stones for the eventual homicide (587). The female children stand to the side, faded into the background indicating where their place will be as they grow up. The black box, constructed of pieces of the original box, represents the only part of the original ritual that has been preserved since the lottery began and serves as a link to the time when the purpose of the lottery was clear. This is evidenced when Old Mr. Warner recalls a vague perception of the lottery's impact on crop fertility as the only specific reasoning given for the ritual. Most of the old ritual is forgotten but they remember to use the stones (593). Even Davy Hutchinson is given pebbles to stone his mother, learning what to

do before understanding why he does it. The most important conflict in the story is between the subject matter and the way the story is told. From the first sentence of the story, "The morning of June 27th was clear and sunny, with the fresh warmth of a full-summer day; the flowers were blossoming profusely and the grass was richly green", the setting gives the reader a serene feeling about the town. The town square is the site of the annual two hour event. Jackson's use of friendly conversation among the villagers and the presentation of the lottery as an event similar to the square dances and Halloween programs to illustrate the lottery as a welcomed, festive event. Up to this point, Jackson has not pointed out anything which would reflect an ironic ending. Confusion in the setting begins when the black box is revealed. The town begins to act nervous and hesitant (587-588). The black box symbolizes death for the villagers though the reader does not know it yet. Bill Hutchinson draws the paper with the black mark on it, and people immediately begin speculating about which Hutchinson will actually "win" the drawing. Tessie selects the paper with the black mark on it, and she vigorously protests the unfairness of the drawing. The townspeople refuse to listen to her, and as the story ends they begin to pelt her with the stones they have gathered. Jackson's use of setting, character, conflict, and theme explain her view of humanity by suggesting that horrifying acts of violence can take place anywhere at anytime, and they can be committed by the most ordinary people. Through the community's sense of tradition, Jackson also addresses the psychology behind the ritualistic murder by presenting a community whose citizens refuse to stand as individuals and oppose the lottery. They instead unquestioningly take part in the killing of an innocent

and accepted member of their village with no apparent grief or remorse.

Works Cited Jackson, Shirley. "The Lottery" The Story and Its Writer, 7th edition Ed. Ann Charters. Boston: Bedford, 2007 587-593