

Symbolism in shirley jackson's the lottery



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Your Full Your s 21 March Symbolism in Shirley Jackson's The Lottery In her short story, The Lottery, Shirley Jackson writes about an idyllic New England town where the yearly lottery is about to take place. It is seemingly a happy event, however, what starts out for the reader as an anticipation of excitement turns into horror and then disgust when it is discovered that the lottery is actually taking place to make the yearly decision of which townspeople is to be stoned to death by the rest of the townspeople. The story is a stark reminder of how hazardous and, sometimes, downright lethal ritualistic following can be. Throughout the story, Jackson has used symbolic references, with most that refer to death in one form or another, all the while pointing at the futility of holding on to mindless ritual. Just starting out with the title of the story, The Lottery, the reader comes to believe that something pleasant is about to take place as most readers think of the lottery as something most people look forward to winning. However, the term here is not used in the normal sense of the word, but is rather symbolic of the twisted logic of most people whereby they think that giving a pleasant name to something would cause it to be looked upon favorably. What is more, Jackson has also used names of people in the story as symbols. The lottery was carried by Mr. Summers, whose name is symbolic of the irony that the story is replete with. Summers are associated with idyllic and happy times, with children frolicking around and everyone having a good time out in the sun. However, as someone who is drawing the lots to decide who gets to be stoned to death, Mr. Summers is not at all as pleasant and joyful as summers ought to be. Then, there is the postmaster, Mr. Graves, whose name is symbolic of the death that is to come as a result of the lottery. Shirley Jackson has also used objects as symbols in this story. The black box

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that the lots are drawn from is, of course, a symbol of death. Due to its color, which symbolizes death in Western culture, the black box, as it turns out in the end, actually does represent death. What is more, the box is also symbolic of the often baseless and blind following of ritual. The townspeople are not willing to get a new box despite the fact that the black box is now faded, splintered and stained. It also contained some pieces of wood from the original box that was built for the lottery. This unwillingness of people to let go of the wooden box is symbolic of the aversion of people to let go of ritual no matter how gruesome and illogical the ritual is, just like their unwillingness to stop the lottery is. All in all, Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery*, despite being a short story is replete with symbols that not only point towards the unexpected ending of the story (the stoning to death of a Tessie Hutchinson), but also bring to mind the human ability to hold on to ritualistic practices no matter what the cost.