

The structure and values of society is able shape and influence people and their ...



The Structure and Values of Society is Able Shape and Influence People and Their Ideas The subject of society and its influence is one that has been lamented and explored by many an author. It is not a widely disputed concept that society drives the thought and behavior of individuals within that society. In Both Nadine Gordimer's " Once Upon a Time" and Shirley Jackson's " The Lottery" are useful examples where society is the driving force behind the actions of the characters within the stories.

This is highlighted by the existence of leaders or icons, usually only one or two in the whole society that had the mental strength and breadth to think in ways outside of the ordinary for the society. They would be perceived as controversial within their society historically, until they managed to provide a thought process so strong, and with such an accessible logic, that it overcame the ideals of that historic society by implanting those beliefs in the thoughts and behaviors of a material volume of society members.

The " Lottery" and " Once upon a time" show this throughout the fictional writing. Through these stories, those outside of the norms, and those from the society with the benefit of hindsight, can identify the imperfections and effects of that historic society, but those within it at the time are unable to act independently from its ideals. Gordimer and Jackson use this loss ability to voice personal opinions through society with their stories " Once Upon a Time" and " The Lottery. The examination of the effect of societies on individuals behaviors has been the cornerstone of the works of Nadine Gordimer, whose work has focused on the effect of apartheid on the lives of South Africans and the moral and psychological tensions of life in a racially-

divided country, which she often wrote about by focusing on oppressed non-white characters, a theme explored in her short story, "Once Upon a Time".

Froelich and Halle note in their short story criticism "Explicator" that "as she became more publicly committed to the struggle against apartheid in the 1980s, her criticism turned more overt, and, interestingly, her literary approach, always essentially realistic, became more experimental." "Once Upon a Time" epitomizes this new stage of Gordimer's writing. Gordimer conveys in this story how a well-to-do, white family strive to live the 'ideal' lifestyle in their affluent suburb. Gordimer discusses the linkage between the intruder and their worth "... that the feared intruders use to cut the supposedly burglar-proof bars and steal everything they can, including a bottle of single-malt scotch, a loss "made keener by the property owner's knowledge that the thieves wouldn't even have been able to appreciate what it was they were drinking." The townspeople already show a great disrespect and through whisperings and gossip of riots outside the cities and robberies and stabbings within it, they wrote on their security walls 'YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED. But as Gordimer tells in her story, "every week there were more reports of intrusion: in broad daylight and the dead of night, in the early hours of the morning, and even in the lovely summer twilight - a certain family was at dinner while the bedrooms were being ransacked upstairs." As Shurgot points out, 'She then describes a terrible fear of being attacked, for she has 'the same fears as people who ... take ... precautions' such as burglar bars and guns under pillows. Two neighbors have been attacked recently: a woman murdered and 'an old widower ... knifed by a casual laborer he had dismissed without pay." They apply more security

measures until in the end all their precautions backfire. “ Finally, they build the ultimate protective fence... within they will live securely in concentration camp style—until the fence grotesquely mangles not an intruder but their own son. ” (Froelich and Halle) In the end, society’s pressure to tighten security and protect themselves from the ever daunting unknown was the family’s downfall. Had they not fell victim to hearsay and rumors they would never have had the horrific outcome. Shirley Jackson used this sense of society and its power over people in her story “ The Lottery” as well.

Shirley Jackson wrote with odd and macabre tones, with an impending sense of doom, often framed by very ordinary settings and characters. This was displayed in the “ The Lottery”, which depicts the society within a small rustic American village, their traditions and the way locals follow them just because generations before them had. Both Jackson and Gordimer use society and its influence to show how one can be manipulated in their stories. Traditions which although strange and in many cases illogical to those outside the villages in the United States, are seen as normal and behavior is inherited without consideration of outside influences and normalcy by the following generations. Lori Voth, from her critical essay “ Analysis of ‘ The Lottery’, a Short Story by Shirley Jackson” describes how in “ The Lottery” Jackson uses “ irony and comedy to suggest an underlying evil, hypocrisy, and weakness of human kind. ” A small village where people are devoted to one another and traditions are upheld to the highest standard, “ The Lottery” tells of an event which happens each and every year.

In this lottery that is held, one person from within the town is chosen by a random drawing. Upon being the chosen one, this person is then stoned to death by their dear and intimate friends and family, all for the sake of a good harvest season to come. This tradition is not one to be taken lightly and even after the lottery having been in effect for more years than even the oldest man in town can remember, Mr. Warner, it is practiced every year, by every single person in the town. Along with hypocrisy, “ the Lottery” presents a weakness in human individuals.

This town, having performed such a terrible act for so many years, continues on with the lottery, with no objections or questions asked, and the main purpose being to carry on the tradition. “ There’s always been a lottery”, says Old Man Warner. “ Nothing but trouble in that,” he says of quitting the event. However, the villagers show some anxiety toward the event.

Comments such as “ Don’t be nervous Jack”, “ Get up there Bill” and Mrs. Delacroix’s holding of her breath as her husband went forward indicate that the people may not be entirely comfortable with the event. (Voth) As Jackson writes, “ Soon the men began to gather.

They stood together, away from the pile of stones in the corner, and their jokes were quiet and they smiled rather than laughed. The women, wearing faded house dresses and sweaters... went to join their husbands. Soon the women... began to call to their children, and the children came reluctantly, having to be called four or five times. ” The reluctance of the children to come and the quiet nature of the men show they are wary of the proceedings about to take place, yet no one will speak up to voice the fact that they do not want their families subjected to such cruelty. The people in <https://assignbuster.com/the-structure-and-values-of-society-is-able-shape-and-influence-people-and-their-ideas/>

the town are obviously aware of the implications the lottery has on the town, yet refuse to voice opinions. The townspeople know within themselves that this lottery is not the magnificent event it is made out to be (to only ensure the people of a good harvest) still the pressures from within the elders in the town push them to not only participate in this appalling tradition, but to do so with willingness and enthusiasm. These works are fictional, yet they are both based on real society traits through generations of oppression of non-whites in South Africa and also the insular traditions and behaviors within small villages in the United States.

The strength of society persuading the general public is enforced by the notion that these behaviors are inherited through generations in the societies within these works, without hindsight or individual thinking. Both these stories show how outside pressure can cause one to do things for the mere fact that others are partaking place in the activities. By geographic insulation, the lack of information received by a society on alternative ways of acting reduces the likelihood of individuals thinking and acting outside of the status quo of that society.

That society will then defend the interpretation of any external information into that environment. This is displayed by the rumors around the lottery being phased out in other villages in the region. The role of Old Man Warner (note the simple application of names in the piece to describe the role of the character) as the eldest in the village is to educate the members of the society on what used to happen and thus is perceived as the best placed, due to experience, to know how change would affect the environment in the society.

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Jackson writes, “‘They do say,’ Mr. Adams said to Old Man Warner... ‘ that over in the north village they’re talking of giving up the lottery. ’ ‘ Pack of crazy fools,’ he said. ‘ Listening to the young folks... 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 June, corn be heavy soon... There’s always been a lottery. ’” Both Gordimer and Jackson highlight the impact that one person is able to have over another through these stories.

They both realize that people do not gain ideas simply from themselves, but also from their surroundings, even if they are detrimental to that person. Both the husband and wife are so keen to “ take heed” of their neighbors’ advice, they lose focus on the reality of their surroundings and the fact that they were never in as much danger as was made out to be. Gordimer points this out saying: When the little boy’s pet cat tried to climb in by the fanlight to keep him company in his little bed at night, as it customarily had done, it set the alarm keening through the house.

The alarm was often answered – it seemed – by other burglar alarms, in other houses, that had been triggered by pet cats or nibbling mice. The alarms called to one another across the gardens in shrills and bleats and wails that everyone soon became accustomed to, so that the din roused the inhabitants of the suburb no more than the croak of frogs and musical grating of cicadas’ legs. These alarms were customary to hear, not though, for the reason they were put in, criminals, but yet common household pets and rodents.

Their fear had been so overstretched by the gossip and rumors that absurdity of listening to alarms all night became tolerable, and even normal. What may seem odd and strange to one person was standard to those within the community. While shown in a different way, these same themes are visible and common in Jackson's "The Lottery." Reading the story it is obvious that this is a tradition which has outrun its course; still they continue it. Tradition is more important in this small American village, as opposed to reason.

Again, this protection society displays over maintaining the tradition of core beliefs and actions, is also identified by Fritz Oehlschlaeger, in his critical essay *The Stoning of Mistress Hutchinson: Meaning and Context in 'The Lottery.'* "This submission on control Oehlschlaeger talks of is "this concept of how society's beliefs and actions can control the actions of individuals, usually from drive for self-preservation, as previously explored in *Once Upon a Time* above.

The lottery forces women to have large families, as desired by the males of the village, as larger the family, the smaller the probability of the mother being picked if the family had been picked in the first round. "Society and its influence hold such a high position in these two stories that the individual person is almost nonexistent as a character. The higher good of both the village in "The Lottery" and the suburb in "Once Upon a Time" are seen as the main focus, instead of the characters themselves.

Nothing they do is really for them per say, yet for the traditions and good of their surroundings. In reflection, we see that these two stories incorporate



society but put society above the characters well being. "The Lottery" and "Once Upon a Time" are both timeless stories about what can happen when we don't take the person themselves into account. As Voth once again states, "It is the thousands of readers who replied to 'The Lottery', in disapproval and horror that blindly proved Jackson's theories valid and unknowingly portrayed themselves as not very unlike the villagers in the short story. Society is important in life, but when it doesn't allow you to make your own decisions or you put too much value on other people's ideals, it can be harmful. "The Lottery" and "Once Upon a Time" both show us how damaging society can be to not only an individual, but many people.

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