

The lottery: violence nad human nature

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Violence and Human Nature in Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" Shirley Jackson shows us in her short story "The Lottery" that violence is a part of human nature, and that it can be disguised in many ways. She conveys this using many different elements. Some of the ways she demonstrates the violence in human nature are particular events in the plot, ironic twists, foreshadowing, character development (or lack of it), and symbolism. Many events in the plot of the short story convey the theme of violence, and the ways that humans turn a blind eye towards it. For example, one child in the story was depicted this way: "Bobby Martin had already stuffed his pockets full of stones, and the other boys soon followed his example..."(Jackson 194). This quote shows us how people can use the "everybody else is doing it" mob mentality logic to rationalize violence. The people of the town disguise the evil tradition of the lottery by following orders without asking any questions. This happens several times throughout the story. The characters in the story never question the morality, or the reason for sacrificing a human life. Tessie's own family does not even question it when they take part in stoning her to death. Shirley Jackson, the author of the story, uses tradition as a way for humans to excuse killing in many events in the plot. In the story, the villagers' only reason for having the lottery is tradition for the sake of tradition. This is illustrated best by Old Man Warner, when he says "There's always been a lottery"(Jackson 197). This is also demonstrated by the fact that although they have done away with some of the more ritualistic parts of the lottery, like the salute and recital, they continue the lottery every year simply because it is a tradition in the town. Also these statements in "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson "the original paraphernalia for the

lottery had been lost long ago..." (194), and when Old Man Warner says "Used to be a saying about ' Lottery in June, Corn be heavy soon.'"(197) shows that it was originally a barbaric sacrifice to ensure good harvest, but the villagers have lost almost all the reasoning for the lottery besides tradition and a fear of change. There are a few hints that the villagers do not like the lottery, but they are too afraid to change and break tradition. One example that Jackson uses in " The Lottery" is when the villagers first gather, " They stood together, away from the pile of stones in the corner, and their jokes were quiet and they smiled rather than laughed. "(194). This shows that they did not enjoy the lottery. The townspeople also mention that they just want to get it over with quickly on more than one occasion in the story. An example of the townspeople fearing change is how Mr. Summers in Jackson's " The Lottery" brings up the topic of building a new box every year, but the villagers shoot it down because " no one liked to upset even as much tradition as was represented by the black box. "(194). There are many ironic twists in this short story. One ironic twist is that the town does not think there is anything wrong with ritualistic killing. Shirley Jackson describes the day as " clear and sunny, with the fresh warmth of a full-summer day; the flowers were blossoming profusely and the grass was richly green. "(193). This is very ironic for a few reasons. Her choice of words puts readers in a comfort zone, and they do not expect the day to end with murder. Also, flowers blossoming and green grass are symbols of life. Another ironic note is that the " winner" of the lottery will die. The violent ending of the story was foreshadowed in a few different ways. The first example is when the children are gathering stones and setting them aside. Another good example

is when Tessie, the winner in "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson "tapped Mrs. Delacroix on the arm as a farewell..."(195). These hints make the shocking and violent end more believable to the reader. Tessie Hutchinson seems to be the only round character in the short story. She had no problem with the lottery until her family was selected. Even after her family was selected, she did not realize that the lottery was wrong. She felt only that it was conducted unfairly. Then, only after she was selected to be stoned to death did she say "It isn't fair, it isn't right."(Jackson 199). This shows us how people can get caught up in a violent group mentality or tradition, and don't realize that it is wrong until they become the victim. The rest of the characters are flat, and do not change their opinion or view on the lottery throughout the entire story. The interesting part is that no one in Tessie Hutchinson's family sees anything wrong with killing her. Someone in the town even gave her youngest son pebbles to throw at his mother. Shirley Jackson packed this short story full of symbolism and allegory for the violent nature of people. When the townspeople first gather in the square, they just have idle conversation about mundane topics, showing that they think there is nothing wrong with their tradition of murder. This could be allegory for events like the Holocaust, where many people turned a blind eye to what was happening in their country. It could also be symbolism for how we can turn our heads away from the violence right in front of us. The black wooden box is a symbol for violent tradition. This is because the author chose black as the color of the box, symbolizing death. The black box is also linked to tradition because it was made from pieces of the box that the original settlers used for the lottery. The surname Graves is symbolism for death, and it is fitting since Mr.

Graves helps set up the lottery, and Mrs. Graves was at the front of the crowd when they were killing Tessie Hutchinson. The black spot on the piece of paper that the “ winner” receives is another symbol for death. Readers of Shirley Jackson’s short story, “ The Lottery” receive a chilling insight into the dark areas of human nature.