

# The lottery



Mostly everyone has their superstitions or traditions that they keep with them for most of their lives. In the short story "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson, the small town of about three hundred people or so all take their chances in the lottery every year at the beginning of summer, and have been doing so for over seventy five years. This lottery is very different than most, instead of gambling with money, everyone in this small town gambles with their own lives. What is the prize? One person in the town gets the prize of being sacrificed for good harvest in the summer by getting stoned to death. The head of each family (usually the father or oldest son), goes up to the town square and reaches into a black box, inside the box are a cluster of folded pieces of paper, one in which has a black dot which indicates the winner.

After the family is chosen, this year is the Hutchinsons, all the members of the family go up and draw another slip of paper, this time the one with the black dot gets to be brutally stoned, no matter if it's a eight year old child, or a seventy year old man. There is much to discuss about the way Jackson uses symbolism and metaphors to hint at what the lottery is really all about. Jackson's use of friendly language among the town's people and the presentation of the lottery as an event similar to the square dances, the teenage club, and Halloween programs illustrate the lottery as a welcomed, festive event. I think the black box was used to symbolize the way the villagers fail to stand up for their beliefs. " Mr. Summers began talking again about a new box, but every year the subject was allowed to fade off without anything being done. The black box grew shabbier each year, and in some places faded or stained" (Jackson 3). Here

is where I believe Jackson is connecting the black box to the people's beliefs, and the fact that the black box is growing shabbier each year with a lot of faded or stained places, makes me think that the town's view of reality has become tainted and weak. Even though everyone goes through with the lottery in the end, comments such as "Don't be nervous Jack" (Jackson 7), "Get up there Bill" (Jackson 6) and Mrs. Delacroix's holding of her breath as her husband went forward show that the town may not be totally comfortable with this yearly event.

Not one person openly disagrees or expresses dislike towards the lottery, but instead acts as if they are enjoying themselves at a social gathering. With that said, Jackson may be trying to say that many individuals are not strong enough to stand up for themselves, for fear of being rejected by society.

Unlike many characters in the story we find out a lot about Mr. Summers.

He's married to "a scold" and has no children, so the villagers feel sorry for him even though he runs a coal business and has time, and energy to devote to civic activities like the lottery and square dances. The villagers appear to place more importance on a traditional family life than on the kind of profitable success that Mr. Summers has achieved. Shirley Jackson chose to make one of the main characters' name in the story Mr.

Summers because the lottery takes place at the beginning of every summer in hope of a good harvest, so it would also make sense that Mr. Summers was the one in charge of the lottery because the main purpose of the lottery, is the sacrifice for harvest in the summer. Unlike Mr. Summers, Mr. Graves is never really described other than that he is the postmaster, and does not say

much of anything in the story. It may seem like Mr. Graves is not a big part of the story, but being postmaster gives him enormous power, making him in charge of communication through the outside world. He brings the three-legged stool to prop up the lottery's black box, and it is Mr.

Graves who is the one swearing-in Mr. Summers to carry on with the lottery. There is a reason why he is the official of the lottery, his name is where the winners of this event end up. The story is very big on tradition, it makes sense that Jackson includes Old Man Warner in the mix. Jackson is once again creating a figure who's not so much a real person as he is a symbol for something else, in this case, the days gone by for which it's so easy to feel regretful. The Delacroix family is one of the first families mentioned in the story, and from class discussion I have noticed that "Delacroix" means "of-the-cross" in French. Mrs. Delacroix is the only person to talk to the rather silent Mrs.

Graves, wife of the even more silent and mysterious Mr. Graves. Because of the meaning of Delacroix, it's strange how Mrs. Delacroix is the first person to attempt to start the stoning of her friend Tessie Hutchinson. She does not see how cruel and betraying she is being, which is also how outrageous the end of the story is, is that none of the villagers know what evil they are doing. The Lottery to me is very relevant to our society today. The ritual of the lottery appears to be so naturalized that the villagers can't think rationally or critically about what they are doing.

I think this relates to our society because it shows how a lot of people have unthinkingly followed traditions, for example the use of nuclear weapons,

capital punishment, religion, abortion, anti-Semitism, racial profiling, and denial of health benefits to the poor.? Jackson tells the readers the message of the potential darkness that lies within the society. In “ The Lottery”, any person regardless of age or sex had the chance of getting killed. Since this short story is packed with so much symbolism, there are many readers who have completely different outlooks on what the real message of this story is about.