

The lottery research papers example

[Art & Culture](#), [Symbolism](#)



Introduction

'The Lottery' published in 1948 is one of the most controversial stories of its time. Centered on the theme of tradition, this short story was written by Shirley Jackson, a notable American author. The story begins with a date mentioned as 27th June of an unspecified year with 300 residents of a small rural town gathering to take part in an annual tradition called 'the lottery'. The opening of the story also mentions about the village boys stuffing their pockets with stones but its connection with the lottery is revealed in the later part of the story. Meanwhile, each household of the village has the head of the family called individually to choose a random slip out of the ceremonious black box. Once each man is done with choosing the slip, they open it one by one only to find that Bill Hutchinson has chosen the 'winning' slip (Tew 2012). Thereupon, each member of Bill Hutchinson's family is called to take part in the second round of lottery by yet again randomly choosing a slip out of the black box. Each family member then opens the slip to find out that it is Mrs. Hutchinson, popularly called Tessie, who has got the slip with a marked 'black spot'. After Tessie's name is picked, it is then the purpose of the village boys' collection of stones in the beginning of the story comes to the forefront. Tessie is shoved to the center of a clearing with villagers getting ready with stones of various sizes and shapes to conduct the final part of the ritual. It is the theme of tradition the story is woven around with elements like mob mentality, hypocrisy of characters and symbolism being used to reinforce the plot.

Tradition and Mob Mentality

Tradition refers to a set of ideas, rituals and items handed down through generations in a society. Tradition is considered as a way of commemorating and worshipping one's heritage and ancestry. However, following antediluvian provincial rituals in the name of tradition can take one back to a medieval age tainted with superstitions and ignorance. In 'The Lottery', the villagers without understanding the significance of traditions follow the rituals blindly. The unethical practice of a horrific ritual like lottery in the name of tradition also brings out the mob mentality of the villagers who are unaware of what significance the practice holds for them today. In fact, much of the items that were used for conducting the original lottery are no longer in use today and it comes out in the statement of the narrator, " the original paraphernalia for the lottery had been lost long ago" (Jackson 1). It is only the Old Man Warner, who counts his participation in the ritual as " seventy-seventh time", sheds some light on the significance of this practice by saying that there used " to be a saying about 'Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon'(4). His statement shows that there was a time when the ritual might have held some meaning and significance but over the years the villagers have completely forgotten about the rationale of practicing this ritual. When some villagers begin to discuss how there has been news of some villages abolishing the custom of lottery, Old Man Warner protests by saying that " there's always been a lottery" (4). This argument used by Warner in defense of the continuation of lottery supported by the villagers also shows that the villagers make themselves a part of this tradition under the influence of mob

mentality and not because they believe that the ritual has any positive effect on their lives (Tew 2012).

Tradition and Hypocrisy of Characters

The theme of tradition is also emphasized by the hypocrisy of different characters. The contradiction between the cruel adherence to something so barbaric like the tradition of lottery and the apparent friendliness and civility among the villagers is startling. The villagers show such a casual attitude towards lottery that it leaves the readers shocked at the inhumaneness of the participants of this barbaric tradition. The men casually discuss about "planting and rain, tractors and taxes" while the women remain all ears for gossips all the time knowing that at the end of the day they will partake in killing a person whose name will be picked up in the lottery (Unzicker). The very beginning of the story presents the men as typical heads of the households entrusted with the responsibility of drawing the names in the lottery for the entire family. They are shown as courteous and family-oriented. At the end of the story, however, the same men don't show any scruple in stoning a hapless woman to death.

The hypocrisy of the characters also comes out the way they interact with each other and then later without hesitance turn on each other. For instance, when Mrs. Hutchinson reaches the lottery square late, she shares a short amicable moment with Mrs. Delacroix who is standing next to her. She explains to Mrs. Delacroix how she "forgot what day it was"(Jackson 2). She thought that Mr. Hutchinson was stacking wood until she looked out of the window and saw the kids gone. Then she realized that "it was the twenty-seventh and came a-running" (2). Mrs. Delacroix gives an amiable reply

saying " You're in time, though. They're still talking away up there"(2).

However, in later part of the story when Mrs. Hutchinson's family name is drawn in the lottery and she breaks into an objection by shouting at Mr. Summers as how he did not let Mr. Hutchinson " take any paper he wanted", it is Mrs. Delacroix whose tone sounds critical when she tells Tessie to be " a good sport" (5). Furthermore, when Tessie's name is drawn in the lottery as the person to be executed in the name of tradition, Mrs. Delacroix gets ready by selecting " a stone so large she had to pick it up with both hands" (7). Tessie also demonstrates her hypocrisy when she without a moment's hesitation suggests the name of her married daughter to be drawn in the lottery along with other family members so that the chances of her name getting picked up becomes slimmer(Unzicker). Furthermore, she shows willingness to stone her neighbors if their names are drawn in the lottery but when her turn comes to be stoned, she objects defiantly saying " It isn't fair, it isn't right" (Jackson7). The hypocrisy of the characters also shows when Mr. and Mrs. Adams speak of how some villages are getting away with this abominable tradition of lottery but at the end of the story it is Mr. Adams who is seen charging " in front of the crowd of villagers" (7).

Tradition and Symbolism

Shirley Jackson frequently takes the help of symbolism to betray the theme of tradition in 'The Lottery'. First of all, she makes use of symbolic names to suggest what is going to ensue after the ritual of lottery is conducted. For example, the name 'Delacroix' stands for 'Of the cross' in French (Ma 2013). The mispronunciation of the name 'Delacroix' by the villagers as 'Delacroy' suggests the Christian symbol of martyrdom. 'Summers' is the surname of

the person who conducts the tradition. Coincidentally, the tradition of lottery takes place in the summer season. Mr. Summers's assistant is 'Mr. Graves' which gives a hint that there will be a grave during summer when the lottery will be conducted (Ma 2013).

The objects used in the tradition of lottery also have symbolical meanings. In the very beginning of the story, the narrator states that " Bobby Martin had already stuffed his pockets full of stones, and the other boys soon followed his example, selecting the smoothest and roundest stones" (Jackson 1). The reason behind the children picking up smooth surfaced round stones is that most of the stones are knife like and sharp which have the potency to kill one quickly, but smooth stones would slow down the process of killing. Thus Jackson indicates that children take the action of stoning someone to death as normal just like their elders(Ma 2013). The black box which is used for drawing the papers out for lottery stands for a phase between life and death for every single person in the village participating in the tradition. The 'black' box, thus, also stands for the evil action of murder that has been carried out in the past in the name of tradition. The black box is placed on a three-legged stool during the lottery and this three-legged stool stands for the Christian Trinity with each leg representing God the father, God the son, and the Holy Spirit(Ma 2013). Though the Christian Trinity is a symbol of holiness and purity in total contrast with what the black box represents, together they suggest that stoning someone to death for religious reasons is allowed by the Almighty God. Lastly, the name of the story 'The Lottery' also stands as a symbol of social evil that is perpetrated by men blindly.

Conclusion

'The Lottery' written by Shirley Jackson deals with one of the most controversial themes, the tradition which has been emphasized through the use of elements like mob mentality, hypocrisy of characters and symbolism in the story. Tradition which refers to a set of ideas, rituals and items handed down through generations in a society can pull back people into a medieval period of ignorance and superstitions if it is observed blindly. In 'The Lottery', the villagers without understanding the significance of traditions follow the ritual of lottery blindly just because it has been in the village tradition for centuries. Though the objects used in the original ritual are no longer in use and people have forgotten about the significance of the tradition, the ritual of lottery is still carried out because of the villagers' conservative mob mentality. The theme of tradition is also emphasized by the hypocrisy of different characters like the village men, Mrs. Hutchinson, Mrs. Delacroix and Mr. and Mrs. Adams. Shirley Jackson with the use of symbolism like 'Delacroix', 'Summers' and 'Graves' weaves the theme of tradition beautifully in her story. Furthermore, the objects, used in the lottery like the black box and the three-legged stool, also bring out the theme of tradition and death. Very realistically the author has shown how tradition could be a doom for mankind if it is observed without thought.

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