

## The Lottery

The Lottery is a short story written in 1948 by Shirley Jackson. It is a piece of fiction that shows a small town in a rural setting. The villagers gather at the village square for an annual event known as the lottery. This, however, is not the anticipated jackpot winning event but is rather a sinister ceremony carried out by the villagers. Shirley Jackson gives the story dark, dreadful end, which shows how the human kind clings on worthless rituals.

On 27th June, Villagers meet up in the village square, at around ten o'clock, between the bank and the post office, to take part in the lottery operated by Mr. Summers. Mr. Summers is the one who manages and administrates at all public events in the village. He is running a company that deals with coal. However, in spite of his good fortune, he has a nagging wife and no children.

The children arrive at the village square early and start collecting stones Bobby Martin starts collecting smooth, round stones and the other boys follow suit. On the other hand, the girls keep to themselves and do not undertake in the stone collecting. The village in the story is small and does not have a large population. This is because; it takes just a day here to complete the lottery. On the other hand, it takes about two days in other villages with a large population. The men arrive first after the children and begin to discuss farming events. The women arrive soon after and call to the children who stop collecting the stones.

Mr. Summers calls the head of each family – a mature man – to the front where a sizeable black wooden box is standing. Mr. Graves places the box on a three-legged stool. The black box is old and shabby but represents tradition to the villagers. Every year, during the lottery, Mr. Summers talks about replacing it with another newer one. However, this is just talk as nobody ever takes the initiative to replace the box. The man then proceeds and takes a piece of paper from the box. First, all the men select their piece of paper then Mr. Summers allows them to look into the paper and retrieve the winner. From the events following the selection, we get the sense that being selected does not mean a person has won a million dollars. This is because; after Bill Hutchinson gets selected his wife starts to complain immediately.

After this Mr. Summers puts five pieces of paper into the box. This is because the Hutchinson family has a total of five members. Each member has to draw a paper from the box. Mrs. Hutchinson, Tess, select a massive black paper dotted in the middle. The villagers then begin to move forward towards Mrs. Hutchinson. Here, it becomes crystal what the reward from the lottery assuredly is – stoning. Mr. Summers tells the crowd to finish up quickly as Mrs. Delacroix picks up a stone while Mrs. Dunbar cheers her. Mrs. Hutchinson protests and pleads but this is as futile as flogging a dead horse as the villagers attack her. The rest of the villagers pick up the stones which the boys had piled up before. Tess is frantically urging the crowd to stop. Her son already has a few stones in his hand. Old man Warner cheers on the crowd as one of the stone thrown hits Tess. The story ends with Tess screaming as the stone throwing villagers attack her.

## Analysis

Shirley Jackson's is one filled with a lot of controversy as she uses comedy and irony to show hypocrisy, evilness and moral decadence of the human kind. The short story is staged in a small town where people have close relations, and tradition is dominant. In this town, there is a yearly event called the lottery and the winner gets to be stoned violently by friends and family in the village square.

The bizarre nature of this event is evident in the writer's voice. She uses extremely forthcoming language among the members of the village and then presents the lottery in the same way she would present a village dance or festival in the village. She describes the lottery as a welcome event among the villages. She further describes the arrival of the women who greeted one another as they arrived and exchanged bits of gossip. This way the reader believes that the lottery is an event where the winner takes home a price due to the anticipation of the villagers for the drawing. The writer only reveals the winner's fate at the end of the story the winner dies in the hands of family and friends.

Shirley Jackson presents a normal atmosphere and situation in her story. In this, she is trying to make a declaration in regards to the evil and hypocritical nature of the human kind. She paints a picture of an exceedingly pleasant village with flowers blooming and green grass growing. Even the villagers have decidedly ordinary names such as Warner, Anderson and even

Martin. However, all these people have lips filled with honey and hearts filled with evil intentions, which all come out in the end. Jackson is trying to show that underneath the smiles and polite pleasantries people have, underneath they may harbor evil intentions for their neighbors.

The short story does not get subtle until the reader comes to the end. However, the author does show a premonition of events to occur through Mr. Summers and Mr. Graves. Mr. Summers administrates the event also prepares the slips. The writer depicts Mr. Summers as a charming man who jokes around with the villagers but carries out this ominous lottery without a shred of conscience at all. He talks awful nonchalantly with Mr. Grave and the Martins as he leans on the black box. He is a tremendously influential man and his name “Summers” symbolizes the mood of the people in this event. Mr. Summers is in charge of the lottery, he is the face of the lottery and his name is a symbol of the mood of the lottery. Mr. Graves, on the other hand, is a symbol of the eventual happenings. He is Mr. Summers assistant and is always in attendance during the whole event even though the spotlight is not on him. This in a way foreshadows the evil lurking in this hellish ordinary community. It shows the presence of death in the midst of the crowd during the event although it is not revealed until the end. In any normal situation, this comes out as quite bizarre. Death in this village during the lottery is not an issue to write home about because; it is obvious.

This story shows how traditions may obscure an individual sense of ethics and lead one to follow the society’s norms blindly. This leads the writer into using a lot of symbolism to show

the moral decadence of the people living in this “ordinary” village. In this story, Shirley Jackson encourages the reader to see all sides of the dilemma posed in this short story. One of the leading symbols used is the color black which shows the corrupt and evil nature of the individuals in this society.

The writer depicts the entire event as black. The black box, which contains the lottery slips, gives a picture of death and inauspicious things to come; it also shows how the villagers are tied to their traditions not caring about the consequences or the eventualities of following this age old ominous tradition. The box had grown old over the years and was now looking remarkably shabby. It was no longer entirely black but rather one could see the original color of the wood used to make it. This can be discerned as having a double meaning to this story. On one hand, the villagers stone the winner of the lottery without guilt or hesitation. On the other hand, the shabby wooden box shows how rotten this event is and how it should be replaced. This is particularly ironic because; a winner in a lottery ordinarily gets exalted, however, in this village, they stone the winner.

### Summary

When the despicable shock of the murder has worn off, the reader is now able to see a new meaning to the title of the story, “The Lottery”. The writer uses this title to show how villagers blindly follow age old, meaningless traditions. Her son is a participant in this stone

throwing activity and this makes the matter worse. An unsettling fact is that nobody in the village seems to remember the logic behind this ominous ritual. Mr. Warner is the only person who seems to have a vague recollection of the events impact on bountiful harvests. Another noteworthy character in the story is Adams objects to the ritual of the lottery and the stoning of the winner. However, Adams is too scared to question the status quo.

Shirley Jackson paints a dreary picture of the human race in her story. However, the villagers had forgotten the original ritual just like they had lost the original black box. The villagers had in no way forgotten how to throw stones. The whole event was meaningless and barbaric and painted a bleak picture for civilization.