The Lottery Study Guide

The Lottery by Shirley Jackson

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Introduction

First published in *The New Yorker* on June 26, 1948, "The Lottery" is considered one of the most haunting and shocking short stories of modern American fiction and is one of the most frequently anthologized. The story takes place on a June morning in the town square of a small village. Amidst laughter and gossip, families draw slips of paper from a ballot box until housewife Tessie Hutchinson receives a slip *with* a black mark on it. The villagers then stone her to death as a ritual sacrifice despite her protests about the unfairness of the drawing. The impact of this unexpected ending is intensified by Shirley Jackson's detached narrative style, the civility with which the cruelty is carried out by the villagers, and the serene setting in which the story takes place. After publishing the story, *The New Yorker received* hundreds of letters and telephone calls from readers expressing disgust, consternation, and curiosity, and Jackson herself received letters concerning "The Lottery" until the time of her death. Most critics view the story as a modern-day parable or fable which addresses a variety of themes, including the dark side of human nature, the subjugation of women, the danger of ritualized behavior, and the potential for cruelty when the individual submits to the tyranny of the status quo.

Author Biography

Born December 14, 1919, into an affluent family in San Francisco, California, Jackson wanted to be a writer from an early age. She wrote poetry and kept journals throughout her childhood, and these writings have revealed her interest in the supernatural and superstition. When she was fourteen, Jackson's family moved from California to New York, and in 1935 Jackson began college at the University of Rochester but withdrew for a year to teach herself to write. She tried to write at least a thousand words a day and established a disciplined writing routine she kept for the rest of her life. Jackson completed her bachelor of arts degree at Syracuse University in 1940. As a student, Jackson regularly published fiction and nonfiction in campus magazines. Additionally, her editorials denounced prejudice at Syracuse, particularly against Jews and blacks.

Shortly after graduation, Jackson shocked her Protestant family by marrying Stanley Edgar Hyman, a left-wing Jew and fellow student from Syracuse University who later became an eminent literary critic. Living in New York City, Jackson worked briefly as a clerical worker and continued to publish short fiction regularly. In 1945 the couple moved to the village of North Bennington in Vermont, where Jackson lived for the rest of her writing career. It is in North Bennington where she wrote "The Lottery," and Jackson has admitted that the village served as a model for the setting of the story. The diversity of Jackson's popular stories in such periodicals as *The New Yorker, Good Housekeeping, The Hudson Review, Woman's Day,* and *The Yale Review* thwarted the efforts of most critics to neatly categorize her work. Jackson joined the teaching staff at the Bread Loaf Writer's Conference in 1964; she won the Edgar Allan Poe Award in 1961 and the Syracuse University Arents Pioneer Medal for Outstanding Achievement in 1965. Jackson died of heart failure on August 8, 1965.

Plot Summary

"The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson opens on a warm June day in a town of about 300 people and describes an annual event in the town, a tradition that is apparently widespread among surrounding villages as well. Children arrive in the town square first and engage in "boisterous play." Some of the boys create a "great pile of stones in one comer of the square."

When the men of the village arrive they stand away from the stones, joke quietly, and smile in stead of laugh. The women arrive next. As they join their husbands, they call to their children. One mother's voice carries no weight, and it is her husband that commands Bobby Martin's attention.

The event for which they gather is a lottery conducted by Mr. Summers, a neatly dressed, jovial businessman with a wife but no children. Although many traditional customs associated with the lottery seemed to have been lost over time, Mr. Summers still has "a great deal of fussing to be done" before he declares the lottery open. He has created lists of households, their heads, and their members. He and Mr. Graves, the postmaster, have spent the previous night making up slips of paper to be placed in a shabby black box that has been used for the lottery for as long as Mr. Summers can remember.

As Mr. Summers is about to begin the drawing, Tessie Hutchinson hurries to join the crowd. She had forgotten that today was the lottery and remembered while she was washing dishes. She speaks briefly with Mrs. Delacroix about her forgetfulness and makes her way to stand beside her husband. Mr. Summers then begins to call off the names of each family in the village. As the household name is called the male head of the family steps up to Mr. Summers and draws a slip of paper from the box. All are told not to look at the slip until after the last name has been called. During the time It takes to complete the drawing, Mr. Adams notes that some towns have started to talk about doing away with the lottery. Old Man Warner, participating in his seventy-seventh lottery, snorts at the idea and says that would only cause trouble.

After the last name has been drawn there is a long pause before Mr. Summers tells the men to look at their slips of paper. When Tessie Hutchinson realizes that her husband holds the marked slip, she cries out that the process was not fair. The reader learns at this moment that the lottery does not offer a reward or prize in the traditional sense. Tessie claims her husband had to rush to choose the slip of paper and that her daughter and son-in-law should be included in the next round. Her husband tells her to be quiet as Mr. Graves puts only five slips of paper into the box, one for each family member who lives in the Hutchinson household.

The Hutchinson children pick first followed by Bill and then Tessie. The two older children look at their slips and rejoice. Mr. Hutchinson looks at his and shows the blank paper to Mr. Summers. It is then clear that Tessie has drawn the unfortunate slip and

Mr. Summers asks the townspeople to complete the lottery quickly. They begin to gather up stones and throw them at Tessie.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

Shirley Jackson takes every care to describe a beautiful morning in a small village. It is clear and sunny. Flowers are everywhere. The lawns throughout the village are brilliant green. The town square is the site of the annual Lottery, which was a two-hour affair for this very small village of three hundred souls. It is a bright and happy scene. Of course, the children are off from school, too. They are, at first, staggered by their freedom but then warm up to their freedom and begin to play vigorously. Even so, there is some tradition to be followed in their movements.

The boys know what to do. They already gathering stones. One boy, Bobby Martin, has pro-actively stuffed his pockets with stones while others searched for them. Eventually, a few of them put the stones, the premium smooth, polished stones, in a corner of the square and guard them against the other boys.

It is June 27th. The Lottery has started rather late in this season in this particular village because it is a very short drawing, lasting only a few hours. Villagers can participate and get back to their homes for their special, noon dinner. In other villages, the events last longer, as much as several days. This is not just their tradition. It is a tradition of many villages.

The men watched their children nonchalantly, speaking of everyday affairs. Rain was one concern. Tractors another. They were farmers and they talked about the usual things that concern farmers. They were soon followed by their wives, who came somewhat together, wearing casual clothing, The women gossiped and joked together, greeting their husbands and calling out to their children. The children came to their parents when they were ready. Bobby Martin's took him to task when he dodged his mother, after she called him. He made Bobby stand beside him and his brother. There was an order of respect here and a tradition to be followed.

Mr. Summers, as always, was assigned to conduct the Lottery on this glorious day. He was a town leader, the owner of an important coal business. He led many civic events- square dances, Halloween shenanigans, teen functions and, of course, this one, the Lottery. He carried the box- the black, wooden one, into the Square. He was followed by the postmaster, Mr. Graves, who carried a three-legged stool. They put the box on the stool in the center of the square and requested some help from the audience. Mr. Martin and his son came forward to hold the box while its papers were stirred by Mr. Summers.

In some ways, this was a unique moment. Mr. Summers had successfully requested substituting paper for chips of wood. They needed to make allowance for the growing population and Mr. Summers had won the day, so tradition was broken in this Lottery. However, there were other traditions that would be respected this day. In particular,

before the Lottery was to be open, lists needed to be compiled regarding the heads and members of each family and then there must be the swearing-in of the Lottery official.

There had been some loss of tradition in the past. For instance, a ritual chant had been discarded along with a special salute. All the official had to do now was to greet each participant as they came forward. As Mr. Summers turned to face the villagers, a woman came rushing down to the square and took her place in the back. Tessie Hutchinson told her neighbor how she had forgotten the day, but rushed there immediately when she realized she was late. Mrs. Hutchinson searched for her husband and children and found them in the front. She made her way there, laughingly apologizing. Would he have wanted the dishes left in the sink? The crowd laughed at her joke.

The Lottery began. Mr. Summers called for Clyde Dunbar. He was not there. His leg was broken so his wife had to fill in for him. Her oldest boy was not yet sixteen so he couldn't. When this was over, Mr. Summers inquired as to who was drawing for the Watsons. The tall Watson boy answered. They checked on Old Man Warner's presence. Once he signaled his presence, they were ready to officially begin. After the slips of paper were chosen, the villagers were instructed not to look at them until all of them were handed out.

Mr. Adams came up and chose the first piece of paper. He called out a few more names. Mrs. Dunbar went up. Then it was Mr. Graves' turn. Even though he was assisting Mr. Summers, he greeted him formally and took his slip of paper. As the events proceeded, people turned the papers over again, multiple times, but they did not open them. Mr. Adams talked to Old Man Warner. There were some who wanted to give up the Lottery. Mr. Warner would not have any talk of that. Would the people want to return to the Stone Age, too? The Lottery was an integral part of their lives. It was a welcome herald of the corn harvest.

Other names were called. Mr. Summer called out his own name and took his slip. Then he called out for Old Man Warner. This was his seventy-ninth Lottery. After he chose his slip, the Watson boy came up. Zanini was the last name. Mr. Summers held up his slip of papers and then told them it was time. They began to open their slips of paper, the women speaking all at once. When they had finished, it was Bill Hutchinson who stood there, staring at the piece of paper silently. His wife, Tessie, spoke up. He had been forced to select too fast. It wasn't right. It wasn't fair. Her husband told her to be quiet.

Mr. Summers asked if there were any other households Bill was drawing for, any other Hutchinson households. Tessie volunteered her daughter's family. However, that didn't count. So, basically, Bill was to draw for himself, Tessie and his three children. There is Bill, Jr., Nancy and Little Dave. Mrs. Hutchinson protests as each Hutchinson family members' slip is put in the box. Now each of them must draw again. Each of the children takes one. Then Tessie takes one, but petulantly holds it behind her back. Then, it is Bill's turn.

Now, they each open their slips. However, little Dave needs help with his. Mr. Graves helps him. The rest of the children's are blank. Bill's slip is blank, too. Her husband

approaches Tessie. He holds up her paper. It has a black spot on it. It is Tessie who has been chosen.

The Villagers may have forgotten some of the old rituals, but they remember the part with the stones quite well. All her friends and neighbors now participate. Even her son, Davie, is given some stones. Mrs. Delacroix has a huge stone in her hand. Mrs. Dunbar has more moderate stones. Of course, all the children had their stones. They were ready. This is, after all, a community function.

Tessie Hutchinson was in a clearing now, as she is supposed to be. She is holding out her hands to her neighbors. She still tries to cry out about the unfairness, the injustice, as the first stone hits her on the side of the head. She is still screaming as the entire Village falls upon her, throwing stone after stone at her battered body- in the proper, traditional manner. According to the rules of the Lottery.

Analysis

Perhaps it would be best to classify "The Lottery" as a deceptive little horror story. Its initial setting is as disarming and pleasant as could be. "The Lottery" begins on a brilliant, splendid day in a bright little village, filled with the most ordinary townspeople. The people come together, men first, then women- greeting each other, chatting warmly about matters of local interest. These are just the most ordinary people, mostly farmers and their wives. Their wives wear simple, casual clothes. This could easily be a picnic or a July 4th gathering. It may be significant, however, that the only holiday mentioned- that probably fairly well nails down the setting as being purely American- is Halloween. I am focusing here on the spirit of that particular day, not the ghosts or ghouls, but rather that Halloween, in a sense, is our most sinister holiday.

Perhaps the only strange thing about the opening might be a group of boys collecting some stones and guarding them in a corner of the Village Square. And then, again, perhaps the traditions regarding the black box, from which the Lottery slips are drawn, seem a bit unusual. There are, indeed, other villages involved. One might have thought this was a typical American village or township, but this Lottery seems to predate any large governmental or state lotteries. This is, to the careful eye, perhaps a stranger environment than it seems.

This is a story about tradition. Although typical American activities and occupations are implied- the use of a lottery crossing over several generations does seem a bit odd. Shirley Jackson dwells quite a bit on the changing tradition- the use of the slips of paper instead of bits of wood, the changing of a lottery chant and salutation to just a personalized greeting from the lottery master, the compiling of lists, the rules governing who is in certain households- and who is not. A great deal of care is to formulate this tradition over several generations. It is explicitly stated that Old Man Warner has been going to the lottery for seventy-nine years.

From their demeanor, the townspeople seem to look forward to the lottery and respect its traditions. When there is some discussion of how some of the villages seem to want to do away with the lottery, Old Man Warner defends it vigorously. It would seem that some people actually love the lottery. At one point, he even quotes, "Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon." In other words, the lottery is a deeply rooted tradition with these people. Of course, one cannot help wondering what the lottery is actually for.

However, although that question rises, Shirley Jackson seems to focus again and again the procedure of the lottery and the procedure for this particular drawing. Although there are slight hints of concern in the conversation of the spectators, this seems to be a story concerning the ritual. This process of focusing on the procedure generates the ever-increasing question in the reader's mind. What is the lottery about?

If we were to follow the line of development of the story carefully, we would see that all the discussion of procedures and all the choosing of the lottery slips lead to one crucial moment. It is the moment when Tessie Hutchinson, Bill's wife, accuses Joe Summers of unfairness at the point of his selecting his lottery slip. This is the first dark note in the story.

No one has challenged anything at this point. However, when they do, there is a note of great concern. Bill Hutchinson is asked if there are any other households besides his own in the Hutchinson family group. Tessie tries to volunteer her daughter's household, but this is against the rules. Looking back on Tessie's actions, this is a particularly macabre little section; that is, in slight of what we eventually find out.

And, from the moment that Tessie questions Joe Summers' procedures, it isn't long before we find out what the lottery is about. It's about ritual mass murder and the unlucky Tessie, who, moments before, was trying to turn her daughter over to the town for their sinister ritual, gets the "black spot" on the lottery slip. The slip is held up by her husband, Bill, who almost sees happy to make the announcement. Was he offended by her anger at Joe Summers, when she accused him of not giving her husband enough time to make a proper choice? She is rewarded for her efforts at fairness by getting hit on the head with the first stone- and then all others, as the residents of the community are "all upon her." Once the lottery is drawn, there is no more time to wait. Children are the perpetrators of this mass crime as well as the women. They are all also potential victims.

So the prize of this lottery isn't quite so wonderful. It is simply to be the focus of an annual ritual murder, whose prim procedures and traditions mask an ugly secret of this little town. "The Lottery" is a masterful creation but not exactly a bedside, children's story.

Characters

Mr. Adams

Mr. Adams is one of the men of the village. While he seems to be one of the few who questions the lottery when he mentions that another village is thinking about giving up the ritual, he stands at the front of the crowd when the stoning of Tessie begins.

Mrs. Adams

Along with Tessie Hutchinson, Mrs. Adams seems to be one of the few women of the village who questions the lottery. She tells Old Man Warner that "some places have already quit lotteries."

Mrs. Delacroix

An acquaintance of Tessie Hutchinson's, Mrs. Delacroix is the first person Tessie speaks to when she arrives late at the lottery. When Tessie protests the method of drawing, it is Mrs. Delacroix who says, "Be a good sport, Tessie." Mrs. Delacroix, however, is among the most active participants when the stoning begins, grabbing a stone so heavy she cannot lift it. Some critics suggest that Mrs. Delacroix represents the duality of human nature: she is pleasant and friendly on the outside but underneath she possesses a degree of savagery.

Mrs. Janey Dunbar

Janey Dunbar is the one woman at the lottery who has to draw for her family because her husband is at home with a broken leg. When Mr. Summers asks her if she has an older son who can do it for her, she says no and then, regretfully, "Guess I gotta fill in for the old man this year." She seems to accept the patriarchal system with complacency, but when the stoning begins she picks up only small stones and then says she cannot run and will "catch up." This is one of the few hopeful and seemingly compassionate actions in the story.

Mr. Graves

Mr. Graves is the village's postmaster, the second most powerful official in the community. He helps Joe Summers administer the lottery and, like Summers, represents tradition and the status quo.

Mrs. Graves

Mrs. Graves is one of the female villagers, and she seems to accept the lottery without question. When Tessie complains about the method of the drawing, she snaps, "All of us took the same chance." She is also at the front of the crowd when the stoning begins.

Bill Hutchinson

Bill Hutchinson is Tessie Hutchinson's husband. When Tessie questions the method of drawing, he says, "Shut up, Tessie"; he also forces the slip of paper with the black spot on it out of her hand and holds it up in front of the crowd. Bill's control over Tessie highlights the patriarchal system of the village. His unquestioning acceptance of the results of the lottery, despite the victim being his wife, emphasizes the brutality the villagers are willing to carry out in the name of tradition.

Tessie Hutchinson

A middle-aged housewife and mother of four children, Tessie Hutchinson "wins" the lottery and is stoned to death by her fellow villagers. Tessie arrives late at the event, stating that she forgot what day it was. She questions Joe Summers, the administrator of the lottery, about the fairness of the drawing after her family draws the unlucky slip. She also questions the tradition of married daughters drawing with their husband's family. When she draws the paper with the black mark on it, Tessie does not show it to the crowd; instead her husband Bill forces it from her hand and holds it up. Tessie's last words as she is being stoned are, "It isn't fair, it isn't right." By challenging the results of the lottery, Tessie represents one of the few voices of rebellion in a village controlled by tradition and complacency. Her low status as a woman has also led many critics to state that Tessie's fate illustrates the authority of men over women.

Mr. Martin

Mr. Martin is a grocer who holds the lottery box while the slips of paper are drawn by the villagers.

Joe Summers

Joe Summers is a revered member of the community, the village's most powerful and wealthy man, and the administrator of the lottery. He has no children and his wife is described as "a scold." In addition to representing tradition-he continually stresses the Importance of ritual to the survival of the village-his character is said to symbolize the evils of capitalism and social stratification.

Old Man Warner

The oldest man in the village, Old Man Warner has participated in the lottery seventy-seven times. When Mr. Adams remarks to him that another village is thinking about giving up the lottery, Old Man Warner replies, "Pack of crazy fools." Resistant to change and representing the old social order, he goes on to insist how important the event is to the survival of the village. When Tessie draws the paper with the black mark on it, Old Man Warner is in the front of the crowd spurring on the others to stone her.

Themes

Violence and Cruelty

Violence is a major theme in "The Lottery." While the stoning is a cruel and brutal act, Jackson enhances its emotional impact by setting the story in a seemingly civilized and peaceful society. This suggests that horrifying acts of violence can take place anywhere at anytime, and they can be commItted by the most ordinary people. Jackson also addresses the psychology behind mass cruelty by presenting a community whose citizens refuse to stand as individuals and oppose the lottery and who instead unquestioningly take part in the killing of an innocent and accepted member of their village with no apparent grief or remorse.

Custom and Tradition

Another theme of "The Lottery" concerns the blind following of tradition and the negative consequences of such an action. The people of the village continue to take part in the lottery even though they cannot remember certain aspects of the ritual, such as the "tuneless chant" and the "ritual salute," simply because the event has been held for so long that these aspects have been lost to time. Jackson highlights the theme of tradition through symbolism. For example, the black box from which the slips of paper are drawn represents the villagers' inability to change. The box is very old and in bad shape, but when it is suggested that the people make a new box, the subject is "allowed to fade off without anything's being done." Further emphasizing the long history of both the box and the ritual, the narrator notes: "There was a story that the present box had been made with some pieces of the box that had preceded it, the one that had been constructed when the first people settled down to make a village here." Old Man Warner, the oldest man in the village, also represents the theme of tradition. When Mr. and Mrs. Adams suggest to Warner that some other villages have already given up the lottery or are thinking about doing so, he replies with, "Next thing you know, they'll be wanting to go back to living in caves. There's *always* been a lottery."

Victim and Victimization

Victimization, or the act of oppressing, harming, or killing an individual or group, is also addressed in "The Lottery." The villagers believe, based on ancient custom, that someone has to be sacrificed for the good of the village even If that person has not done anything wrong. Jackson highlights humankind's capacity to victimize others by having friends and family participate in Tessie's killing. For example, even though Mrs. Delacroix is kind and friendly to Tessie at the beginning of the story, she rushes to stone her "with a stone so large she had to pick it up with both hands" after Tessie's name is drawn. It is also considered significant that a woman is chosen as the story's victim. Some critics maintain that Jackson's depiction of a "normal" town that victimizes a

woman fits logically with the traditional patriarchal type of society in which men have power and authority over women that has been accepted as "normal" in much of the world.

Sex Roles

Some recent reviewers of "The Lottery" tend to classify the story as feminist literature. They maintain that Jackson highlights the negative aspects of patriarchal societies through her telling of the lottery ritual. In the story, men draw for their family, and women are treated as possessions or subordinates. For example, when Tessie dares to question the method of drawing, her husband tells her to shut up. Some critics have also noted that the method of the ritual itself helps guarantee the traditional role of women as mothers in the village. Fritz Oehlschlaeger states in *Essays in Literature* that "the nature of the process by which the victim is selected gives each woman a very clear incentive to produce the largest possible family."

Style

Setting

Jackson establishes the setting of "The Lottery" at the beginning of the story. It takes place on the morning of June 27th, a sunny and pleasant summer day, in the village square of a town of about three hundred people. The setting is described as tranquil and peaceful, with children playing and adults talking about everyday concerns. This seemingly normal and happy setting contrasts greatly with the brutal reality of the lottery. Few clues are given to a specific time and place in the story, a technique used to emphasize the fact that such brutality can take place in any time or in any place.

Narration

Jackson's narrative technique, the way she recounts the events in the story, is often described as detached and objective. Told from a third-person point of view, the narrator is not a participant in the story. The objective tone of the narrative, meaning the story is told without excessive emotionalism or description, helps to impart the ordinariness of the barbaric act.

Symbolism

Jackson uses symbolism, a literary technique in which an object, person, or concept represents something else, throughout "The Lottery." For example, the story takes place on June 27, near the summer solstice, one of the two days in a year when the earth is farthest from the sun. Many prehistoric rituals took place on the summer solstice, so by setting the lottery at this time, Jackson draws similarities to such ancient rituals. Another symbol in the story is the black box. Although it is old and shabby, the villagers are unwilling or unable to replace it, just as they are unwilling to stop participating in the lottery. Many critics have also argued that Jackson uses name symbology extensively in the story. For example, Mr. Summers's name is said to represent joviality while Mr. Graves's name represents tragedy. Delacroix, which in French means "of the cross," suggests sacrifice because of its reference to Jesus Christ's death on the cross.

Irony

Jackson also uses irony, the recognition of a reality different from appearance, extensively in "The Lottery." It is ironic that the story takes place in a tranquil and peaceful setting because what actually occurs is brutal and violent. It is also ironic that the events of the story are related in a matter-of-fact and objective way since the story as a whole seeks to elicit profound emotions and question morality.

Parable

"The Lottery" is often characterized as a parable, a story that presents a moral lesson through characters who represent abstract ideas. While no extensive character development takes place in the story, the shocking ending prompts readers to think about the moral implications of the lottery and how such issues relate to society as a whole. Certain characters represent certain ideas in the tale: Old Man Warner represents tradition and ritual, Mr. Summers represents joviality, Mr. Graves represents tragedy, and so forth. Jackson does not interject into the story any ethical commentary, but rather challenges readers to find their own meaning.

Gothicism

Gothic literature typically features such elements as horror, the supernatural, suspense, and violence. While "The Lottery" is not graphic in its description of Tessie's killing, it is considered an example of the Gothic genre because of the feeling of horror it generates in the reader. Because of Jackson's use of suspense, readers do not understand the full ramifications of the lottery until the end of the story. Readers could, in fact, think that it is a good thing to "win" the lottery. While some critics have faulted this technique, suggesting that Jackson deliberately misleads her readers, others have noted that it is a very effective means of highlighting the brutality of the story. Robert B. Heilman, for example, wrote in *Modern Short Stories: A Critical Anthology:* "Suddenly, in the midst of this ordinary, matter-of-fact environment, there occurs a terrifying cruel action."

Historical Context

"The Lottery" was published in 1948, shortly after the end of World War n, but Jackson set the story in an indeterminate time and place. Many critics, however, have maintained that Jackson modeled the village after North Bennington, Vermont, where she and her husband lived after their marriage in 1940. After the story was published, some of Jackson's friends and acquaintances also suggested that many of its characters were modeled after people who lived in North Bennington. Jackson herself, who throughout her life said little about the meaning behind or the circumstances surrounding the story, noted: "I hoped by setting a particularly brutal ancient rite in the present and in my own village, to shock the story's readers with a graphic dramatization of the pointless violence and general humanity in their own lives."

Some critics have suggested that "The Lottery" is representative of the social, political, and cultural climate of the time it was written. In 1948 the world was still trying to confront the brutal realities of World War II, the Holocaust, and the atomic bomb. The Holocaust, in particular, revealed that society is capable of mass genocide if they believe it to be in the name of the common good. Jackson's husband, literary critic Stanley Edgar Hyman, once wrote about the influence of world events on Jackson's fiction: "Her fierce visions of dissociations and madness, of alienation and withdrawal, of cruelty and terror, have been taken to be personal, even neurotic fantasies. Quite the reverse:

They are a sensitive and faithful anatomy of our times, fitting symbols for our distressing world of the concentration camp and the bomb."

The spread of Communism was also a major concern in 1948. Communists took over in Czechoslovakia, the Soviet occupation force In Germany set up a blockade between Berlin and West Germany, and tensions rose between the democratic Republic of South Korea and Communist-led North Korea. Additionally, the term "Cold War" was coined by President Truman's advisor Bernard Baruch to describe the increasing hostilities between East and West. In the U.S. Congress, the House Un-American Activities Committee investigated Alger Hiss, a State Department official accused of supplying the Soviet Union with classified documents. Two years later in 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy started a Communist "witch hunt" that continued for the next four years. Also in 1950, the McCarran Act (Control of Communists Act) was passed by congress to severely restrict suspected Communists. A few years earlier in 1947, many figures in the American entertainment industry were accused of having Communist Party affiliations. That year the Hollywood blacklist, which included some 300 writers, directors, and actors, was compiled. Such popular figures as Charlie Chaplin, Lee Grant, and Arthur Miller were accused of being Communists.

The United States during the late 1940s and 1950s was largely a patriarchal society, one in which women were expected to stay at home and raise the children. Recent critics have interpreted "The Lottery" from a feminist perspective, suggesting that Jackson was commenting on the role of women in American society at the time the

story was written. Peter Kosenko, for example, stated in *The New Orleans Review* in 1985 that in "The Lottery," the women "have a distinctly subordinate position in the socio-economic hierarchy of the village. "

Critical Overview

When "The Lottery" was first published in *The New Yorker* on June 26, 1948, it generated more mail than any other story published in the magazine up until that time. According to Jackson, three main themes dominated the letters: "bewilderment, speculation, and plain old-fashioned abuse." Since then, critical opinion has been both ambivalent and diverse, with critics agreeing only that the story's meaning cannot be determined with exactitude. Early reviewers such as Heilman praised the emotional impact of the story's ending but suggested that Jackson took liberties with plot by suddenly Interjecting into a seemingly ordinary environment the horrifying reality of the lottery. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren also suggested unease with the story's structure when they wrote in *Understanding Fiction* that Jackson "has preferred to give no key to her parable but to leave its meaning to our inference." Despite such comments, however, these critics applauded Jackson's focus on scapegoatism, victimization, and other themes relevant to contemporary society. Helen E. Nebeker summed up the ambivalence evident in early criticism when she wrote in *American Literature* in 1974 that "beneath the praise of these critics frequently runs a current of uneasiness, a sense of having been defrauded in some way by the development of the story as a whole."

While critics continued to concede that it was Jackson's intention to avoid specific meaning in "The Lottery," some nonetheless faulted what they considered the story's flatly drawn characters, unre vealing dialogue, and detached narrative style. They contended that because Jackson did not provide many details about the villagers, readers are unable to identify with or feel emotionally attached to the characters. Others, however, argued that "The Lottery" is a modern-day parable, a story intended to teach a lesson, and that the qualities disparaged by some critics are consistent with that type of literature.

More recent critics have commented on the relationships between men and women in the story. Fritz Oehlschlaeger, for example, stated in *Essays in Literature* that the story is a "depiction of a patriarchal society's way of controlling female sexuality." Others have read it from a Marxist perspective in which the consequences of class stratification are a primary focus. These critics have suggested that such village officials as Mr. Summers and Mr. Graves represent the upper class because of their power and money, while such characters as Bill Hutchinson and Mr. Adams represent the working class. Writing in *The New Orleans Review,* Peter Kosenko stated that "the lottery's rules of participation reflect and *codify* a rigid social hierarchy based upon an inequitable division of labor." "The Lottery" has also been read as a psychological horror story because of its focus on the willingness of people to engage collectively in abhorrent behavior. Although critical opinion continues to be mixed, "The Lottery" remains one of the most widely anthologized short stories of the modern era. The majority of commentators argue that because of its parable-like structure, Jackson is able to address a variety of timeless issues with contemporary meaning thereby stirring her readers to reflective thought and debate.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3
- Critical Essay #4

Critical Essay #1

Jennifer Hicks is a writing instructor and director of Academic Support and Writing Assessment at Massachusetts Bay Community College in Wellesley, MA. In the following essay, Hicks provides an introduction to Shirley Jackson's story, "The Lottery. " Hicks focuses on the crafting of the story, the controversy surrounding it's publication, and the possible meaning within the text.

Although Shirley Jackson wrote many books, children's stories and humorous pieces, she is most remembered for her story "The Lottery." In "The Lottery" Jackson portrays the average citizens of an average village taking part in an annual sacrifice of one of their own residents. When the story was published in the *New Yorker* magazine in 1948, reader response was tremendous. People were horrified by the story and wrote to express their disgust that a tale containing a pointless, arbitrary, violent sacrifice had been allowed to be published. Some also called to see where the town was so that they could go and watch the lottery. It is this last behavior, the need to feel a part of the gruesomeness that exists in American society, that Jackson so skillfully depicts in "The Lottery."

Take for instance the recent fascination with television talk shows. On these programs we learn more than we want to about dysfunctional families, dysfunctional individuals, murder and mayhem. Even our print media proclaims our atrocities toward one another each day on their front pages. Yet Jackson wrote "The Lottery" in 1948-before gang violence, teen suicides, the threat of nuclear war, and handgun Crimes reached epidemic proportions. Was Jackson looking into the future of the American society?

It has been noted that Jackson saw herself as a psychic even as a young girl. She had read more than her fair share of books dealing with witchcraft and the occult and wrote about the Salem witch trials. But, perhaps more than having clairvoyant powers, Jackson had an ability to see our present in our past. She understood that barbaric rituals once used to sustain the community in a harsh environment were often continued to enact a sense of unity and history within the community, even if they were no longer necessary.

Geoffrey Wolff, in an article in *The New Leader,* sees the communal bond as coming from a sort of democratic misconduct. He writes, "The story seems perfectly true. A sense of community is won at a price, and communal guilt and fear are seen as more binding than communal love." Certainly Jackson's story could be true. From the exactness of the June 27th date in the first line to the myriad details of the environment and its inhabitants, one can picture herself or himself in similar surroundings. Most of us have "stood together. . . [and] greeted one another and exchanged bits of gossip" before joining the rest of our family at a social gathering. Jackson even lets us know the habits of Mr. Summers and how he "was very good at all this, in his clean white shirt and blue jeans.'" We know the conversations of "planting and rain, tractors and taxes" of the men and the mundane housekeeping details of the women. Through these details

Jackson allows us to identify with the town's lottery day, and to feel as if we are a part of their community.

We also see the fear of the townspeople. We see it in the way the summer vacation's "liberty sat uneasily on most" of the schoolchildren, and again in the uneasy hesitation before Mr. Martin and his son Baxter volunteer to help Mr. Summers stir the papers. The fear becomes more noticeable during the drawing when people were "wetting their lips, not looking around" and holding "the small folded papers in their large hands, turning them over and over nervously.'" The fear is blatantly apparent once the Hutchinson family had been chosen and Nancy's friends "breathed heavily as she went forward." But, what we do not see is a sense of guilt in the townspeople to which Wolfe refers. Instead, we see Mr. Summers teaching Davy, the youngest of the Hutchinsons, how to participate in the ritual. We see the exuberantly grateful behavior of Nancy and Bill Jr., the other Hutchinson children, as they "both beamed and laughed, turning around to the crowd and holding their slips of paper above their heads." They are certainly old enough to know that one from their family will be chosen as the sacrificial lamb, yet they show no remorse or guilt that it is not them. We even see that someone gives "little Davy Hutchinson a few pebbles" with which he can stone his mother. Perhaps then, the sense of guilt may be felt more by the reader of the story. The narrative technique used by Jackson helps the reader Identify early on with the townspeople. When the story ends, the reader is then angered and feels that she or he has participated in the stoning through his or her identification with the characters.

It is the scapegoating of Tess Hutchinson that appalls us in the same way we are appalled by the atrocities we witness on the nightly news. Lenemaja Friedman writes in her book entitled *Shirley Jackson* that "the lottery may be symbolic of any of a number of social ills that mankind blindly perpetuates.". Perhaps it is because Jackson has managed to identify with those who do the scapegoating that so much has been written about the story. Each critic tries to see something new and tie the story to his or her views of the world.

Peter Kosenko, for instance, writes an extensive analysis in *New Orleans Review* in which he suggests that "The Lottery" serves as an analogy of an "essentially capitalist" social order and ideology. This theory can be seen as viable if one studies the economic and political structures of Marxism and capitalism. On the other hand, critics with more of a sociological bent, such as Carol Cleveland, view the story as a fable. In her essay in *And Then There Were Nine. .. More Women of Mystery,* Cleveland says Jackson depicts American society as "acting collectively and purposefully, like a slightly preoccupied lynch mob." With this interpretation, greed and corruption become collective characteristics of a society. Still others, wielding a historical perspective, tie the theme of "The Lottery" to the Bible or the Salem witch trials. In particular these critics often mention Jesus' proclamation "let those of you without sin cast the first stone," or the fact that Jackson jokingly claimed that she was the only practicing witch in New England. Others examine the story from a feminist perspective. They criticize the patriarchal nature of the village and point out that the goal of the sacrifice was "to contain the potentially disruptive force of an awakened female sexuality," as Fritz Oehlschlaeger states in *Essays in Literature.*

How then is one to really understand this powerful story? Perhaps on the most basic level, it can be viewed as a story of man's inhumanity toward man which permeates even the most outwardly looking pleasant places. Jackson, who lived for a time in Bennington, Vermont, said after the publication of "The Lottery" that she used the town and its inhabitants as models for the story. Yet Bennington was and still is a well-to-do town in southwestern Vermont. It boasts affluent families and convenient access to New York, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire. Scores of tourists travel its roads in the fall, gazing at autumn leaves against a backdrop of beautiful Green Mountains. Bennington was not evil. From where then does the pervasive evil come?

Jackson takes pains in her story to let the reader understand that the yearly stoning was a longstanding ritual. She mentions that the "original paraphernalia for the lottery had been lost long ago," and "so much of the ritual had been forgotten or discarded." Although a ritual is any activity that is followed on a regular basis, we most often think of them as ceremonial, religious activities. In fact, Jackson points us in this direction when Old Man Warner states, "There used to be a saying about Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon." This statement reminds readers of what they have learned about ancient sacrifices made in the name of various gods. It has been almost two thousand years since the Christians were sacrificed to the lions in Rome; but some cultures still believe that sacrifices made to the gods will provide them with healthy crops. Although several critics have noted the lack of religion in any of Jackson's work, one is left to wonder whether Jackson is condemning the hypocrisy of present day religions which espouse the "Golden Rule." Certainly, after reading the story, one wonders where current day religious principles are in this small pastoral community. How is it that an entire village can so complacently stone to death one of Its own each year? More importantly, how can so many towns participate in the same ritual? Although Mrs. Adams offers some hope when she says that "some places have already quit lotteries," Old Man Warner makes it clear that to do so would be the same as "wanting to go back to living in caves."

The fact that only men inhabit positions of responsibility in the town and the fact that only men are allowed to draw during the household choosing phase of the lottery overshadows Mrs. Adams's statement. The way the men of the village say "Glad to see your mother's got a man to do it," further emphasizes the patriarchal nature of the village, and the hopeful optimism of Mrs. Adams's remark is buried within the town's demand for tradition and ritual.

Source: Jennifer Hicks, for *Short Stories for Students,* Gale Research, 1997.

Critical Essay #2

In the excerpt below, Oehlschlaeger views Jackson's design of the lottery process in "The Lottery" as a key to the story's meaning: the lottery's "primary social consequence involves women's turning over the control of their fertility to men."

In a 1979 article Richard H. Williams notes what he takes to be a "flaw" in the two-stage process by which the victim is selected in Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery." Readers of the story will recall that the first round of the drawing determines a house hold from which the victim is to be drawn; the second round, the single victim from within that household. Williams points out that under such a system "individuals who are members of smaller families are more likely to be chosen as the sacrificial victim," and he then proposes a new plan that would keep the two-stage process but have the same effect as simply "selecting one individual at random from the village" ["A Critique of the Sampling Plan Used in Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery,'" *Journal of Modern Literature].* But perhaps instead of correcting the story's "flaws," we should look at the lottery as Jackson designs it for a key to its meaning. The nature of the process by which the victim is selected gives each woman a very clear incentive to produce the largest possible family. Each child she has gives her a better chance of surviving if the marked paper falls to her household in the first round. What I am suggesting, then, is that one way the story can be seen is as the depiction of a patriarchal society's way of controlling female sexuality. Helen Nebeker has argued that the story presents a ritual that has outlived the fertility function it once had in an earlier myth-oriented time. Such an argument overlooks the real and continuing function of the lottery as it is organized. That function remains the encouraging of fertility within marriage, along with the patriarchal domination that accompanies it.

A conflict between male authority and female resistance is subtly evident throughout "The Lottery." Early in the story, the boys make a "great pile of stones in one corner of the square," while the girls stand aside "talking among themselves, looking over their shoulders at the boys." Later, as the Hutchinsons file up to draw their papers from the box, it is a girl who whispers, "I hope it's not Nancy." This girl's expression of a purely personal feeling is perceived by Old Man Warner as a threat to the social order, as is indicated by his bitterly exclaiming, "It's not the way it used to be," when presumably everyone subordinated personal feelings to the social demands of the ritual. It is also a woman, Mrs. Adams, who presents the story's most significant challenge to the lottery. When at one point her husband Mr. Adams remarks that "over in the North village they're talking of giving up the lottery," Old Man Warner gives vent to a tirade on the folly of departing from what has always served its purpose. Mr. Adams makes no response, but his wife does, pointing out to the Old Man that "some places have already quit lotteries," an oblique but nevertheless real gesture of resistance. That Jackson wants us to read Mrs. Adams's statement as a gesture of resistance is reinforced by what she does with the Adamses at the end of the story. Mr. Adams is at the front of the crowd of villagers as they set upon Tessie Hutchinson. No mention, however, is made of Mrs. Adams's being involved in the stoning.

There is a strong pattern of detail in the story, then, suggesting that those who are most discomfited by, or resistant to, the lottery are women. On the other hand, men control the lottery. Mr. Summers and Mr. Graves are its official priestly administrators, and when they need help, they inquire whether any of the "fellows" might want to give a hand. The lottery is arranged by families and households, women being assigned to the households of their husbands, who draw for them in the initial round. That the society is a heavily patriarchal one is suggested in many other ways as well. As the people gather at the outset of the story, the women stand "by their husbands," and Jackson sharply distinguishes female from male authority: when Mrs. Martin calls her son Bobby, he "ducked under his mother's grasping hand and ran, laughing, back to the pile of stones," but when "his father spoke up sharply," Bobby "came quickly and took his place between his father and his oldest brother." Later when Mrs. Hutchinson complains that the draw has been unfair, her husband tersely and authoritatively commands her, "Shut up, Tessie." And when it becomes clear that Tessie has drawn the marked paper, Bill "forced the slip of paper out of her hand" and "held it up" for the crowd to see. The details Jackson chooses to describe the administrator of the lottery, Mr. Summers, and his wife further clarify the nature of male power and female submission in the lottery's community. Mr. Summers is given his position because people feel "sorry for him" as one who "had no children" and whose "wife was a scold." The woman who is without children is dismissed as a "scold," a challenge to male authority. The childless man, on the other hand, is elevated to a place of special responsibility and even sanctity. . . .

Jackson had a clear precedent in New England history of ritual, collective murder in which women responded to the pressures of male authority by betraying one another: the trial and execution of the Salem witches. Some years after she wrote "The Lottery," Jackson wrote about the witchcraft hysteria in a book for adolescents called *The Witchcraft of Salem Village.*

Some of the similarities between that book and the story are so close as to suggest that the witch trials may have been in Jackson's mind when she was writing "The Lottery." The description of people gathering for the first day's examination of the witches, for instance, closely parallels the opening of "The Lottery": "By early morning, almost the entire population of the village was assembled, the grownups talking anxiously and quietly together, the children running off down the road and back again, with wild excited shouts." As the lottery is conducted by a pair of men, so the witch examinations are presided over by a pair of magistrates, one of whom, Hathorne, is clearly, like Mr. Summers, in control. In addition, Jackson's explanation of how the delusion began could apply equally well to the reasons behind the lottery's continuing hold on its people. Discussing the role of Mr. Paris, minister in Salem village and father of one of the children believed to be afflicted by the witches, Jackson remarks: "No one dared to leave the only protection offered the people-the protection of Mr. Paris and their church. Eventually they came to believe that if they worked together wholeheartedly and without mercy they could root out the evil already growing among them." These lines reiterate the central, terrifying import of "The Lottery": that people can be brought to work together wholeheartedly and without mercy if they believe that their protection depends upon it.

A very important similarity between Massachusetts at the time of the witchcraft hysteria and the village of Jackson's story lies in the relations of power between men and women. As in Jackson's village, all power in the witchcraft trials lay with men: Mr. Paris; Magistrates Hathorne and Corwin; Deputy Governor Thomas Danforth; Judges James Russell, Isaac Addington, Major Samuel Appleton, and Captain Samuel Sewall. The "afflicted" In the trial were girls, who, like Tessie Hutchinson, responded to the pressure of male authority by betraying others of their own sex. Although Jackson does not include specific demographic information about the witches in her book on Salem, it is worth adding that Tessie Hutchinson conforms rather well to the profile of women found to be witches. Carol Karlsen has shown that the group most vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft included women between the ages of forty and sixty, or past the prime childbearing years. Accused women in this age group were also more likely to be executed than younger women suspected of witchcraft. The ages of Tessie's four children indicate that she is past the years of her peak fertility. Jackson does not give us all these ages specifically, but we do know that Tessie has a daughter old enough to be married, a son whose "overlarge" feet and order in the lottery mark him as an adolescent, a twelve-year-old daughter Nancy, and a boy so young that he must be helped to draw his piece of paper. Tessie is, then, both a woman approaching middle age and one who has had recent difficulty in conceiving children, as the age gap between Nancy and little Dave indicates. I am not arguing that there is collusion between the men who administer the lottery and Bill Hutchinson to eliminate Tessie because she has passed the peak years of childbearing. What I am suggesting, however, is this: that given the purpose of fertility within marriage that the design of the lottery unquestionably fosters, Tessie is an extremely appropriate victim.

It might be objected to my line of argument that the lottery also apparently has male victims. But such is obviously a necessary part of the process by which it retains its hold over the people who participate in it. A lottery that killed only women over forty could hardly expect to retain popular support for long, at least in part because it would lose its mystery. The lottery must appear to be fair, and it must give the villagers the sense of being narrowly spared by a mysterious power and thus justified. Still I would insist that we cannot discount Tessie's charge that the lottery is not fair. On one level, as John H. Williams has pointed out, the lottery is indeed unfair; its two-stage design means that the selection of a victim is not a purely random process. Moreover, we cannot deny Tessie's charge by saying that all the operations of the lottery appear to be fairly handled, for an obviously flawed lottery would neither mystify the villagers nor interest the reader. Neither can we argue for its fairness by saying that no one, other than Tessie, comments on any unfair ness, for obviously everyone has a very strong stake in believing it was conducted fairly. In short, if the lottery is unfair, it is reasonable to assume that its lack of fairness would be evident only to the victim.

A reading of the story in the several contexts I have supplied here dramatically underscores what is evident from the design of the lottery itself: that its primary social consequence involves women's turning over the control of their fertility to men. Jackson depicts a society in which authority is male, potential resistance female. As in the history of Anne Hutchison and *The Scarlet Letter,* women in "The Lottery" represent the personal, the conviction that, as Michael Colacurcio has said of Hester Prynne, life is

more than "the sum of its legally regulated outward works." The young girl's simple hope that the victim not be her friend Nancy is the force that would destroy the lottery, as Old Man Warner recognizes. Suppression of the personal is the function of the lottery, which it accomplishes primarily by causing women to submit control of their sexuality to men of secular and priestly authority. The design of the lottery is without flaw; It serves perfectly the patriarchal purpose of denying women consciousness by insisting that they remain part of nature, part of the fertile earth itself. . . .

Source: Fritz Oehlschlaeger, "The Stoning of Mistress Hutchinson: Meaning and Context in 'The Lottery'," in *Essays in Literature,* Vol. XV, No 2, Fall, 1988, pp. 259-65.

Critical Essay #3

The essay below is *an edited version of a lecture on "The Lottery" that was originally delivered by Jackson in 1960. The lecture was later published as "Biography of a Story," in* Come Along with Me *in* 1968. *In it, Jackson talks about how she came to write "The Lottery," and the reaction the story received when it was first published in* The New Yorker.

On the morning of June 28, 1948, I walked down to the post office in our little Vermont town to pick up the mail. I was quite casual about it as I recall-I opened the box, took out a couple of bills and a letter or two, talked to the postmaster for a few minutes, and left, never supposing that it was the last time for months that I was to pick up the mail without an active feeling of panic. By the next week I had had to change my mailbox to the largest one in the post office, and casual conversation with the postmaster was out of the question, because he wasn't speaking to me. June 28, 1948, was the day *The New Yorker* came out with a story of mine in it. It was not my first published story, nor my last, but I have been assured over and over that if it had been the only story I ever wrote or published, there would be people who would not forget my name.

I had written the story three weeks before, on a bright June morning when summer seemed to have come at last, with blue skies and warm sun and no heavenly signs to warn me that my morning's work was anything but just another story. The idea had come to me while I was pushing my daughter up the hill in her stroller-it was, as I say, a warm morning, and the hill was steep, and beside my daughter the stroller held the day's groceries-and perhaps the effort of that last fifty yards up the hill put an edge to the story; at any rate, I had the idea fairly clearly in my mind when I put my daughter in her playpen and the frozen vegetables in the refrigerator, and, writing the story, I found that it went quickly and easily, moving from beginning to end without pause. As a matter of fact, when I read it over later I decided that except for one or two minor corrections, it needed no changes, and the story I finally typed up and sent off to my agent the next day was almost word for word the original draft. This, as any writer of stories can tell you, is not a usual thing. All I know is that when I came to read the story over I felt strongly that I didn't want to fuss with it. I didn't think it was perfect, but I didn't want to fuss with it. It was, I thought, a serious, straightforward story, and I was pleased and a little surprised at the ease with which it had been written; I was reasonably proud of it, and hoped that my agent would sell it to some magazine and I would have the gratification of seeing it in print.

My agent did not care for the story, but-as she said in her note at the time-her job was to sell it, not to like it. She sent it at once to *The New Yorker,* and about a week after the story had been written I received a telephone call from the fiction editor of *The New Yorker;* it was quite clear that he did not really care for the story, either, but *The New Yorker* was going to buy it. He asked for one change-that the date mentioned in the story be changed to coincide with the date of the issue of the magazine in which the story would appear, and I said of course. He then asked, hesitantly, if I had any particular interpretation of my own for the story; Mr. Harold Ross, then the editor of *The*

New Yorker, was not altogether sure that he understood the story, and wondered if I cared to enlarge upon its meaning. I said no. Mr. Ross, he said, thought that the story might be puzzling to some people, and in case anyone telephoned the magazine, as sometimes happened, or wrote in asking about the story, was there anything in particular I wanted them to say? No, I said, nothing in particular; it was just a story I wrote.

I had no more preparation than that. I went on picking up the mail every morning, pushing my daughter up and down the hill in her stroller, anticipating pleasurably the check from *The New Yorker,* and shopping for groceries. The weather stayed nice and it looked as though it was going to be a good summer. Then, on June 28, *The New Yorker* carne out with my story.

Things began mildly enough with a note from a friend at *The New Yorker:* "Your story has kicked up quite a fuss around the office," he wrote. I was flattered; it's nice to think that your friends notice what you write. Later that day there was a call from one of the magazine's editors; they had had a couple of people phone in about my story, he said, and was there anything I particularly wanted him to say If there were any more calls? No, I said, nothing particular; anything he chose to say was perfectly all right with me; it was just a story.

I was further puzzled by a cryptic note from another friend: "Heard a man talking about a story of yours on the bus this morning," she wrote. "Very exciting. I wanted to tell him I knew the author, but after I heard what he was saying I decided I'd better not."

One of the most terrifying aspects of publishing stories and books is the realization that they are going to be read, and read by strangers. I had never fully realized this before, although I had of course in my imagination dwelt lovingly upon the thought of the millions and millions of people who were going to be uplifted and enriched and delighted by the stories I wrote. It had simply never occurred to me that these millions and millions of people might be so far from being uplifted that they would sit down and write me letters I was downright scared to open; of the three-hundred-odd letters that I received that summer I can count only thirteen that spoke kindly to me, and they were mostly from friends. Even my mother scolded me: "Dad and I did not care at all for your story in *The New Yorker,"* she wrote sternly; "it does seem, dear, that this gloomy kind of story is what all you young people think about these days. Why don't you write something to cheer people up?"

By mid-July I had begun to perceive that I was very lucky indeed to be safely in Vermont, where no one in our small town had ever heard of *The New Yorker,* much less read my story. Millions of people, and my mother, had taken a pronounced dislike to me.

The magazine kept no track of telephone calls, but all letters addressed to me care of the magazine were forwarded directly to me for answering, and all letters addressed to the magazine-some of them addressed to Harold Ross personally; these were the most vehement-were answered at the magazine and then the letters were sent me in great batches, along with carbons of the answers written at the magazine. I have all the

letters still, and if they could be considered to give any accurate cross section of the reading public, or the reading public of *The New Yorker,* or even the reading public of one issue of *The New Yorker,* I would stop writing now.

Judging from these letters, people who read stories are gullible, rude, frequently illiterate, and horribly afraid of being laughed at. Many of the writers were positive that *The New Yorker* was going to ridicule them in print, and the most cautious letters were headed, in capital letters: NOT FOR PUBLICATION or PLEASE DO NOT PRINT THIS LETTER, or, at best THIS LETTER MAY BE PUBLISHED AT YOUR USUAL RATES OF PAYMENT. Anonymous letters, of which there were a few, were destroyed. *The New Yorker* never published any comment of any kind about the story in the magazine, but did issue one publicity release saying that the story had received more mail than any piece of fiction they had ever published; this was after the newspapers had gotten into the act, in midsummer, with a front-page story in the San Francisco *Chronicle* begging to know what the story meant, and a series of columns in New York and Chicago papers pointing out that *New Yorker* subscriptions were being canceled right and left.

Curiously, there are three main themes which dominate the letters of that first summer-three themes which might be identified as bewilderment, speculation, and plain old-fashioned abuse. In the years since then, during which the story has been anthologized, dramatized, televised, and even-in one completely mystifying transformation-made into a ballet, the tenor of letters I receive has changed. I am addressed more politely, as a rule, and the letters largely confine themselves to questions like what does this story mean? The general tone of the early letters, however, was a kind of wide-eyed, shocked innocence. People at first were not so much concerned with what the story meant; what they wanted to know was where these lotteries were held, and whether they could go there and watch.

Source: Shirley Jackson, "On the Morning of June 28,1948, and 'The Lottery'," in *The Story and Its Writer. An Introduction to Short Fiction,* edited by Ann Charters, St. Martin's Press, 1983, pp 1192-95.

Critical Essay #4

In the following short essay, Lainhoff comments on the scapegoat theme in "The Lottery. "

Shirley Jackson's provocative "The Lottery" is a story in which anthropology provides the chief symbol. Frazer's *The Scapegoat (The Golden Bough,* Part VI, 3rd ed., 1913) makes it clear that the lottery is Miss Jackson's modern representation of the primitive annual scapegoat rite The story Imagines that, in some typical American community, the rite still flourishes.

The story begins on the morning of June 27. (Frazer: the rite often occurred at the time of the summer solstice.) The first to gather at the square where the lottery is to be held are the children. School recently over, they take to their new liberty uneasily, gathering together quietly at first before breaking into boisterous play, their talk "still of the classroom and the teacher, of books and reprimands." (Frazer: the rite was commonly preceded or followed by a period of general license, during which ordinary restraints were thrown aside and offenses went unpunished.)

The scapegoat rite had a double purpose: to exorcise the evils of the old year by transferring them to some inanimate or animate objects, and with that "solemn and public banishment of evil spirits" *[The Golden Bough]* to appease the forces of the New Year, to insure fertility. Primitive man, it seems, could not distinguish natural from moral phenomena: the forces of the seasons had to be placated. Similarly, the men of "The Lottery" (suburbanite and rural) cannot distinguish natural from social phenomena: anybody criticizing the social order works against the natural rightness of things. The evidence: on the public square, after the children have assembled, the men come-"Soon the men began to gather, surveying their own children, speaking of planting and rain, tractors and taxes." Old Man Warner says: "Listening to the young folks, nothing's good enough for *them.* Next thing you know, they'll be wanting to go back to living in caves, nobody work, live *that* way for a while. Used to be a saying about 'Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon.'"

The lottery is conducted by Mr. Summers, "who had time and energy to devote to civic activities. He was a round-faced jovial man and he ran the coal business, and people were sorry for him because he had no children and his wife was a scold." Summers is the appropriate leader of the rite, as his name would indicate, as his job would too, the providing of fuel, but who is more barren, more unhappy, more willing "to shift the burden of his pains and sorrows to another, who will suffer them in his stead" *[The Golden Bough]?*

The other characters are typical: Old Man Warner, the reactionary advocate of the lottery; Mr. Hutchinson, the typical citizen, disliking the lottery, but accepting it as inevitable; Mrs. Delacroix, the uneasy outsider, the most friendly to the destined victim before the lottery and the most ferocious in her attack afterwards.

The theme of the story: beneath our civilized surface, patterns of savage behavior are at work. The theme is mirrored in the gruesome unfolding of the lottery rite. However, Miss Jackson is optimistic: some villages have abandoned the lottery; and the children, unlike their elders, preserve an uncontaminated affection for one another.

Source: Seymour Lainhoff, "Jackson's 'The Lottery' ," in *Explicator,* Vol. XII, No 5, 1954, p. 34.

Adaptations

"The Lottery" was recorded by Shirley Jackson for Folkway Records in 1963.

The Lottery and Other Stories was recorded by

actress Maureen Stapleton for Caedmon in 1976.

A dramatization of *The Lottery* was videotaped by Encyclopedia Britannica Education Corporation in 1969. Also available is a videotaped discussion of the story by James Durbin. Both are available from Britannica Films.

The Lottery was filmed by the Landsburg Company/Picture Entertainment and aired on NBC in September, 1996. The movie was written by Anthony Spinner, directed by Daniel Sackheim, and starred Dan Cortese, Veronica Cartwright, and M. Emmet Walsh.

Topics for Further Study

Relate "The Lottery" to psychological explanations of scapegoatism.

Discuss the significance of Tessie Hutchinson as victim from a feminist perspective.

Research the 1692 witch trials of Salem, Massachusetts, and compare the events surrounding them to those in "The Lottery."

Compare and Contrast

1948: A Hollywood blacklist is compiled in 1947 and several figures in the entertainment industry are accused of being Communists.

Today: Although all US citizens are able to freely choose their political affiliations, few deviate from major political party lines. Ross Perot and the Labor Reform Party only garnered 8.5 percent of the vote in the 1996 presidential election according to an ABC news report.

1948: The Soviet Union occupies East Germany and blocks traffic between West Germany and Berlin.

Today: The Berlin Wall, which was built in 1961, falls in 1989; East and West Germany reunite In 1990.

1948: Birth control pioneer Margaret Sanger founds the International Planned Parenthood Federation, ushering in an era in which women are able to take more control over their own bodies.

Today: Birth control methods such as oral contraceptives and the Norplant implant are legal and widely used In the United States.

What Do I Read Next?

The short story "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" by Ursula K. Le Guin was published in her 1975 collection *The Wind's Twelve Quarters.* It focuses on the city of Omelas, whose citizens must decide how high a price they are willing to pay for happiness.

Irish writer Jonathan Swift's essay "A Modest Proposal" was first published in 1729. In it he uses satire to propose a horrifying solution, cannibalism, to the problem of hunger that existed in Ireland at that time.

Elias Canetti's nonfiction work *Crowds and Power* (1962) examines the origins, behavior, and significance of crowds as forces in society.

The Crucible (1953) by Arthur Miller is a fictionalized dramatization of the hysteria that led to the witch trials in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692, during which twenty people were killed for being witches.

James Frazer's 1890 nonfiction work *The Golden Bough* is a collection of anthropological information on folklore, myth, and ritual in which he examines the basis for human social behavior.

Further Study

Allen, Barbara. "A Folk10ristic Look at Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery,'" *Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin,* Vol XLVI, no. 4, December, 1980, pp. 119- 24.

Allen analyzes the elements of folklore and ritual in "The Lottery," contending that Jackson successfully uses them to reveal various kinds of social behavior.

Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol 60, Gale Research, 1990, pp. 209-238.

Collection of previously published criticism on Jackson's works.

Friedman, Lenemaja *Shirley Jackson,* Twayne, 1975.

Friedman takes an in-depth look at Jackson's life, stories, and novels, and concludes that Jackson is a unique Writer who belongs to no particular school of writing.

Gibson, James M. "An Old Testament Analogue for 'The Lottery,'" *Journal of Modern Literature,* Vol 11, no 1, March, 1984, pp. 193-95.

Gibson identifies the similarities between the biblical story of Joshua 7'10-26 and "The Lottery," noting that while the biblical story emphasizes the supernatural triumph of good over evil, Jackson's story reveals a "chillingly Impersonal world of gray amorality ".

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Hyman, Stanley Edgar "Shirley Jackson. 1919-1965," *Saturday Evening Post,* no. 25, December 18, 1965, p. 63.

Kosenko, Peter. "A Marxist/Feminist Reading of Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery,'" *New Orleans Review,* Vol 12, no. 1, spring, 1985, pp. 27-32.

Nebeker, Helen E "'The Lottery': Symbolic Tour de Force," *American Literature,* Vol. 46, no I, March, 1974, pp. 100-07.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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