

## “The Lottery”

Shirley Jackson



Before Reading

## Shirley Jackson



- Jackson's writing career flourished with publications in *The New Yorker*, *Mademoiselle*, *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, *Charm*, *The Yale Review*, *The New Republic*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and *Reader's Digest*.
- She also published several collections of stories. The tone of most of her works is odd, with an impending sense of doom, often framed by very ordinary settings and characters.

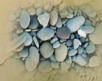
## Outcast and Social Victim

- Shirley Jackson's own life has serious effects on her writings, especially on “The Lottery.”
- Her early life was not a peaceful one. She preferred to stay in her room and write poetry rather than go outside and play with other children.



## Outcast and Social Victim

- Her college life was not great either. She dropped out and was put in a mental institute.
- Jackson married in 1940 to Stanley Edgar Hyman, a Jewish intellectual who encouraged her rebellion. He also encouraged her to become a severe critic who smoked too much, ate too much, and used drugs.



## Elements Review



- **Irony** – occurs when what actually happens is different than what was expected.
- **Diction** – is an author’s specific word choice
- **Tone** – is the adjective that describes the author’s attitude toward his/her subject matter.
- **Symbolism** – when an object, person, or situation has another meaning other than its literal meaning.
- **Allusion** – when an author references a person, place, thing, or idea of historical, cultural, literary, or political significance.

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After Reading

## Scapegoat

- **Scapegoat**- This is a person, group, or thing assigned responsibility for the perceived faults of a given society. The term has many roots in the ancient world. In modern times the holocaust is often pointed to as an example of scapegoating by which 6 millions Jews were killed under direction of Adolf Hitler. Hitler played on popular sentiment in his country at the time by blaming Jews for the loss of the first world war and the economic woes of Germany.



“Let he who is without sin,  
cast the first stone”

- “The Lottery” certainly alludes to the Gospel of St. John, 8:7, in which Jesus frees an adulterous woman, directing anyone who is without sin to cast the first stone. No one throws stones at her.
- Unfortunately, no one in “The Lottery” rebukes the powers so forthrightly as Jesus does in *John* 8:7. Tessie becomes their scapegoat; she pays for their sins.



## Ancient Ritual Sacrifice

- In ancient Athens, Greece, Athenians believed that human sacrifice promised fertile crops.
- Each year in ancient Athens, during the annual festival called *Thargelia*, citizens would stone to death a man and a woman selected for this purpose.
- Death is thought to bring prosperity to the community
- By transferring one's sins to persons or animals and then sacrificing them, people believed that their sins would be eliminated, a process that has been termed the "scapegoat" archetype
- A similar ritual sacrifice occurs with Tessie Hutchinson.
- This explains the village member's remark, "Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon."

## Ritual Without Meaning

- Because there has "always been a lottery", the villagers feel compelled to continue this horrifying tradition.
- They focus, however, on its gruesome rather than its symbolic nature, for they "still remembered to use stones" even after they have "forgotten the ritual and lost the original black box".
- The story may be saying that humanity's inclination toward violence overshadows society's need for civilized traditions.



## Irony

- It's important that you know what the "prize" of the lottery is before starting this activity.
- Draw a vertical line down the middle of a sheet of paper, making two columns. The left column will contain examples of irony, and the right column will contain an explanation of what makes that example ironic.
- EXAMPLE: One of the first items in the left column might be from the setting: the flowers are "blossoming profusely and the grass [is] richly green." This is ironic because no one would expect something awful to happen on a day like this: the imagery sets the reader up to expect happy events.
- Work individually, in pairs, or in small groups to identify examples of irony throughout the story.
- We will go over it in 10 minutes

## Symbolism

- **THE LOTTERY ITSELF:**
- Symbolizes any number of social problems that we blindly continue even though they are outdated
- **THE SETTING:**
- no specific name/place indicates this is **anytown, USA**; the contrast of the town with the ritual **helps build suspense**

Write down some symbols you see in this story...and look at the names...

### Objects

- The black box
- The color black
- The black dot
- Stones

### Names

- Mr. Summers
- Mr. Graves
- Tessie Hutchinson
- Mr. Warner
- Mr. Adams

## Symbolism

- **Black box:**
- Coffin? Evil secret hidden away?
- **Black spot** on paper:
- Sin? A “black mark” on one’s record is negative; black mark: unclean?

## Symbolism

- **Black Box—**
- The box is old; the paint is peeling, and the wood is splintered. This condition reflects the fading of the tradition in other villages as well as the villager's questioning of the lottery in this village.
- However, they will not replace the box, just like they will not stop the lottery.

## Symbolism

- Stones are a universal symbol for punishment, burial, and martyrdom: they indicate a morbid ceremony.
- Chips of wood: now discarded for slips of paper, suggest a preliterate/ancient origin, like the ancient sacrificial rituals for crops.
- Square: (village square) may represent the four corners of the earth—earthly opposed to heavenly; human-created as opposed to natural; boxed in; concealed.

### Symbolism: Names



- **Tessie Hutchinson:** Most likely an allusion to Anne Hutchinson (1591-1643), American religious enthusiast who founded the Puritan colony of Rhode Island. She had new theological views which opposed her to other ministers. After a local trial banished her she was tried before the Boston Church and formally excommunicated. Anne and fifteen of her children were subsequently murdered by the Indians in 1643. The parallelism between her story and Tessie's is clear: to her, excommunication meant spiritual death just as to Tessie being cast out from the group = death.

### Symbolism: Names



- **Summers:** the season of summer is associated with youth, strength, growth, prime of life, warmth, leisure, prosperity, happiness, blooming, blossoming
- Mr. Summers is the head of the coal business, which could symbolize close contacts with the underworld, evil; lurking just beneath the surface.
- Coal is earthly (as opposed to heavenly); black; formed in the process of many years (long-term process); formed from compressed, decaying matter; early chemistry used a black spot to symbolize *coal*.
- Marxist critics point out how Mr. Summers, who would have been one of the wealthier citizens, leads the lottery— those with money control the people's activities.

### Symbolism: Names



- **Graves :** the obvious grave = place of entombment/death
- Mr. Graves quietly assists Mr. Summers, with "Graves" hinting at a dark undertone.
- Grave = serious; hints that the lottery may not be a frivolous contest ("Mr. Graves said gravely")

### Symbolism: Names

- **Adams :** reference to the first man, the first sinner
- 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. Like the biblical Adam, Adams goes along with the sin; he follows others in their evil.



### Symbolism: Names

- Old Man Warner: Resistant to change and representing the old social order, he warns about how important the event is to the survival of the village.
- Old man Warner is 77 years old → the number 7 has many connotations, but one common connotation is that 7 is lucky ...he has been lucky to avoid the lottery so many times.

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### Symbolism from History

- After World War II America experienced a trend toward general social conformity.
- People tended to imitate those around them rather than follow their own separate paths.
- Encouraging this conformity was the spread of television, which broadcast the same set of images to Americans scattered through the country.
- Meanwhile, patriotic rhetoric dominated the public mood in politics. Fears about fascist dictatorships and communism, issues that had been highlighted by the war-induced paranoia and suspicion among seemingly peaceful American communities.
- In the story, the townspeople are swept away by the tide of conformity, and the lottery goes ahead as always



### Symbolism from History

- By 1943 news of the Nazi concentration camps had finally reached America.
- A number of Americans responded with horror and concern that communities could have stood by and silently allowed the Holocaust to occur.
- Jackson hints at a similar situation in her story when the townspeople are unable to fully question or prevent the brutal lottery practice.



### Historical Symbolism

- During World War II, Jews and other targeted groups were torn from their communities and sent to their death while the world stood by in silence.
- In "The Lottery," Tessie is similarly suddenly ostracized from and killed by members of her own community.
- A few of the townspeople disagree with the ritual, but they merely mutter their displeasure under their breath, afraid to speak out more boldly against the practice.
- Not only do humans blindly perpetrate evil, the story tells us, but they are also capable of closing their eyes to and even participating in terrors that occur in their midst.



## Themes



(almost done...)

- Acts of violence, hatred, murder are not acceptable just because many people participate
- Society is reluctant to reject outdated traditions, ideas, rules, laws, and practices.
- People are not all good or all evil but a mixture of both.
- Horrifying acts of violence can take place anywhere at anytime, and they can be committed by the most ordinary people.
- Following the crowd can have disastrous consequences.
- The unexamined life is not worth living.
- Many more ideas/themes can be applied to "The Lottery"



## "The Lottery":

More than you expected, right...?

End of presentation.

*(Finally)*

