

Shirley Jackson, "The Lottery" – Discussion and Analysis Questions

Answer the following questions in complete sentences on your own paper. Provide quotations (with page/line numbers) from the story to support your answers.

1. Why has Jackson chosen common people for her characters? Could she have chosen characters from other levels of sophistication with the same effect? What is the *irony* of the tone of this story?
2. What seems to have been the original purpose of the lottery? What do people believe about it?
3. Is it important that the original paraphernalia for the lottery had been lost? What do you suppose the original ceremony was like? Why have some of the villages given up this practice? Why hasn't this one?
4. What is the significance of Tessie's final scream, "It isn't fair, it isn't right"? What aspect of the lottery does she explicitly challenge; what aspect goes unquestioned?
5. This is a different sort of story when you read it for the second time. What elements (such as Mrs. Hutchinson's attempt to have her daughter, Eva, draw with the family) might take on a different meaning the second time through?
6. Some critics insist that the story has an added *symbolic* meaning. Do you agree? If so, what is Shirley Jackson trying to tell us about ourselves? (Hint: Consider that this story was written during the height of the rise of Communism and the Soviet Union.)
7. Is the lottery a collective act of murder? Is it morally justified? Is tradition sufficient justification for such actions? How would you respond to cultures that are different from ours that perform "strange" rituals?
8. Describe the *point of view* of the story. How does the point of view affect what we know about the situation? How does it preserve the story's *suspense*?