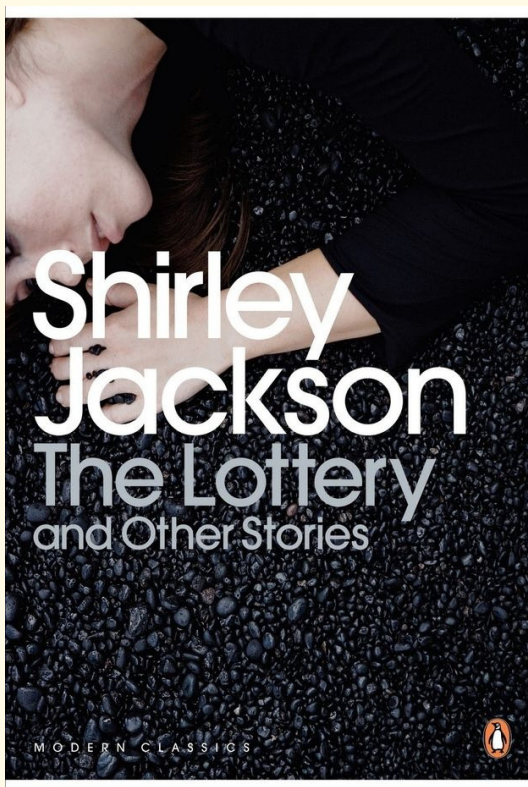


THE LOTTERY

by

Shirley Jackson

*“But no one liked to upset even as much tradition
as was represented by the black box.”*



Published: 1948, New Yorker

Author: Shirley Jackson

Themes: Ritual & belief; violence
& tradition; power & gender;
inevitability of change

Symbols: the black box;

What is it to shock, to be shocking?

It's a question I revisit whenever I run a class on "The Lottery" because it never fails to shock, and finding out what shocks us is always interesting feedback!

One aspect of this is boundaries; where we draw the line between normal and abnormal, acceptable and unacceptable. It's about how we see the world - what's right behaviour and what isn't.

"The Lottery" plays in and around these boundaries. It gives you rose-tinted spectacles, and gently shows you a familiar, civilised, and recognisably benign world... Then it stamps on those rose tints, and brutalises your safe and reasonable vision, right before your eyes...

People come to me after class with that look in their eyes, and ask, "Why?". I imagine it's the same look people had back in 1948, when they wrote their letters to the New Yorker. There's something traumatic about having your view of the world, not simply challenged, but turned into the very thing it seems to stand against. 1948 to 2018, the reaction is often the same.

This is the power of fiction, the power of stories. and this is why we need to keep reading.

T H E L O T T E R Y

by

Shirley Jackson

***“Mr Graves opened the slip of paper
and there was a general sigh through the crowd.”***

Shirley Jackson - Biographical Sketch

Born in 1919 in San Francisco, and raised in Burlingame, California, Jackson's family relocated to Rochester, New York when she was 14.

Initially unhappy at university, Jackson withdrew to concentrate on writing, before enrolling at Syracuse in 1937. There she flourished, editing the student magazine, writing fiction and non-fiction (including articles denouncing campus prejudice), and meeting her future husband, Stanley Edgar Hyman.

Between 1948 and 1962, Jackson published six novels and numerous short stories, winning the Edgar Allan Poe Prize in 1961.

Shirley Jackson had four children with Stanley. She suffered bouts of depression throughout her life, and died of heart failure in 1965.

"The Lottery" - Context

"The Lottery" was published three years after the end of World War II. Millions had died, the rebuilding of Europe was in its early stages, and societies across the world were trying to come to terms with the dropping of the atomic bomb and the horrors of the Holocaust.

Economically America was at the beginning of a boom period, with productivity, GDP and average incomes all increasing rapidly. However, the first skirmishes of the cold war with the USSR had begun, ushering in an era of nuclear proliferation and paranoia.

Jackson herself suggested the village depicted in "The Lottery" was based on her home town of Bennington, Vermont, and one can imagine the utter shock of middle-class readers curling up with the story, only to find such brutality depicted in town just like theirs.

"The Lottery" is said to have garnered greater response than any story in the New Yorker's history.

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***“It isn't fair, it isn't right,' Mrs Hutchinson screamed,
and then they were upon her.”***

"The Lottery" - Outline

On a summer's day in June, the people of a small unnamed, but familiar feeling village gather to conduct their annual lottery.

Free from school, children build piles of stones, while the adults, rather less ebullient, watch and wait. The black box that holds the lottery slips is brought out, and we are given some details of its (and the lottery's) history.

Tessie Hutchinson arrives late, and Mr Summers, who conducts all the town's civic events, starts the lottery. Men draw for their families. There is talk of other villages giving up the lottery. The oldest man in the village, Old Man Warner, voices his disapproval.

The draw finishes, and Bill Hutchinson has the ticket. Tessie protests it wasn't fair. The Hutchinsons now draw, and it's Tessie who picks the ticket. The villagers gather their stones, and as Tessie protests, frantically now, they begin to stone her to death.

"The Lottery" - Questions

- ~ Why does the village (still) conduct the lottery? What purpose does it serve?
- ~ What's behind the villagers' belief in the lottery?
- ~ Has Tessie Hutchinson been unfairly treated?
- ~ Should we judge the village as wrong for conducting the lottery? By what standards do we judge this?
- ~ Is violence of any kind justifiable? Yes or no, give reasons why.
- ~ How will people of the future judge our society morally?
- ~ What possible blind spots do we have in our daily lives?
- ~ What are some of your own beliefs that might be based on opinion and not actual evidence?
- ~ Is it acceptable to have belief without evidence? What about faith?

THE LOTTERY

by

Shirley Jackson

Some links for further reading!

Shirley Jackson - Biography

~ Encyclopaedia Britannica - <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Shirley-Jackson>

~ Wikipedia - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shirley_Jackson

~ New York Times -

<https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/1214.html>

~ The Guardian - <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/feb/10/shirley-jackson-ruth-franklin-review-a-rather-haunted-life>

~ Abe Books - <https://www.abebooks.com/books/lottery-short-stories-new-yorker/shirley-jackson.shtml>

~ The Guardian - <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/22/shirley-jackson-america-queen-gothic-noir>

"The Lottery" - Reviews

~ Wikipedia - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lottery

~ Thought Co. - <https://www.thoughtco.com/analysis-the-lottery-by-shirley-jackson-2990472>

~ The New Yorker - <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-lottery-letters>