



## Literary Analysis: How to Write an Impressive Essay?

### Literary Analysis of “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson

The short story “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson discusses several issues affecting people in modern society. The story examines a small village of about three hundred people who gather in a town to participate in a lottery exercise — of being sacrificed to bring good to the community. Residents in some towns already abandoned this democratic process, but in this village, it is done annually. The winner, Mrs. Hutchinson felt that she did not deserve to win. As a result, she protests. Mrs. Hutchinson ends up being stoned by her own son little Davy Hutchinson while protesting that the exercise was not conducted fairly. The short story is a shocking and powerful message about the cruelty that can happen as a result of mob mentality and blindly following tradition. The use of literary devices in “The Lottery” gives a hint at how cruelty can happen anywhere, regardless of context.

Symbolism is defined as “the use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities by giving them symbolic meanings that are different from their literal sense” (Langer 9). The author uses symbolism in various instances. The lottery itself is an example of symbolism. The lottery represents ideas from various people in their society with diverse opinions. To the residents of the town, the lottery represents ensuring good harvest, the overall well being of the community, or a general fun tradition for the young. The Residents are involved in prior talks before the democratic process begins. Men are talking about reins and tractors, women are gossiping, while children are involved in gathering stones. This shows how the residents have divergent interests. Stones gathered by children symbolize something wrong that is likely to happen, as we see Mrs. Hutchinson stoned by people at the end of the lottery exercise.



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Imagery is defined as “the use of figurative language to represent objects, actions, and ideas in such a way that it appeals to our physical senses” (Richardson 21). A picture is built in mind when the author describes the black box that was to hold voting papers. It’s said the black box was faded on the sides and wood below the black area could easily be seen. This imagery portrayed through the box gives an impression that it’s been serving a similar role for several years. We’re told about the climate on the voting day. It was a sunny and bright day, and the land was covered with green grass. This is an instance of imagery that presents the idea of a pleasant context. Given the environment of the community pre-draw, it was ironical for Mrs. Hutchinson to decline to accept to be a winner. Cosmic irony also occurs when the event, that is thought (by the reader) to end up having a positive outcome, ends up having a negative outcome. Unexpectedly, Mrs. Hutchinson is stoned by her own son Davey Hutchinson to the head — someone you would believe would be the most likely to try to help her. The imagery of this scenario is powerful and can feel somewhat plausible given the power of the context.

Foreshadowing suggests hints about what events will take place in the future of the story. In the case of “The Lottery”, all of the foreshadowing, and the simple connotation of a lottery, lead you to believe that the fate of the lottery will be something pleasant — upon your first reading. Upon resistance from Mrs. Hutchinson, or with a second reading of the short story, the foreshadowing starts to paint a sinister picture of the communities’ attitudes toward the tradition they eventually undertake. The first time you read about the children gathering stones, you might think about children simply being children and trying to pass the time. The second time you read about the children



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gathering stones, you start to get a more reliable impression of the cruel nature of such a tradition and lack of awareness and empathy of the community for the winners.

It is important to know the power of mob mentality, and blindly following tradition in modern society. Shirley Jackson paints a vivid picture in our minds through her story and the use of literary devices. The story examines how easy and natural it can be to lack the empathy to change your cruel habits if the victim is not simply yourself. “The Lottery” is a powerful example mob mentality that suggests cruelty can happen anywhere, regardless of context.

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Langer, Susanne K. *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite and Art*.

Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951. Print..

Richardson, John T. E. *Imagery*. Hove, UK: Psychology Press, 1999. Internet resource.