Irony Of Setting In The Lottery Essay, Research Paper

Irony of The Setting in The Lottery

The setting set forth by Shirley Jackson in the beginning of The Lottery creates a mood of peacefulness and tranquillity. This setting also creates an image in the mind of the reader, the image of a typical town on a normal summer day. Furthermore, Shirley Jackson uses the setting in The Lottery to foreshadow an ironic ending.

First, Shirley Jackson begins The Lottery by establishing the setting. To begin, she tells the reader what time of day and what time of year the story takes place. This is important to get the reader to focus on what a typical day it is in this small town. The time of day is set in the morning and the time of year is early summer. She also describes that school has just recently let out for summer break, letting the reader infer that the time of year is early summer. The setting of the town is described by the author as that of any normal rural community. Furthermore, she describes the grass as “richly green” and that “the flowers were blooming profusely” (196). These descriptions of the surroundings give the reader a serene felling about the town. Also, these descriptions make the reader feel comfortable about the surroundings as if there was nothing wrong in this quaint town.

Upon reading the first paragraph, Shirley Jackson describes the town in general. The town is first mentioned in the opening paragraph where she sets the location in the town square. She puts in perspective the location of the square “between the post office and the bank” (196). This visualizes for the reader what a small town this is, since everything seems to be centralized at or near the town square. This is also key in that the town square is the location for the remaining part of the story. The town square is an important location for the setting since the ending of the story will be set in this location.

Also, Shirley Jackson creates a comfortable atmosphere while describing the residents of the town. First, she describes the children gathering together and breaking into “boisterous play”(196). Also, the children are described as gathering rocks, which is an action of many normal children. She described the men as gathering together and talking about “planting and rain, tractors and taxes”(196). Finally, she describes the women of this community as “exchanging bits of gossip”(196) which is a common stereotype of women. She creates a mood for the reader of the town and residents of this town on a normal summer morning.

Up to this point in the story Shirley Jackson has not pointed out anything out of the ordinary which would reflect an ironic ending. Upon further reading of the story, Shirley Jackson gives the reader hints about the unusualness of this town. First, she sets the time of day to be mid-morning. This is a clue to an ironic ending since most occurrences of criminal activity happen during the night. Second, she also points out key buildings that surround the town square. Furthermore, she fails to describe a church or a courthouse which are common buildings to all communities. Also, it is odd for this town to celebrate Halloween but not for Christmas or Easter. These are the largest holidays that “normal” people celebrate. In addition, she points out the fact that the children are building “a great pile of stones in one corner of the square”(196).These points should lead the reader to consider that this town is far from normal.

The introduction of the black box is a key turning point for the setting. The black box symbolizes an immoral act to the villagers. This is evident in the fact that “the villagers kept their distance”(196) from the black box. The introduction of the black box into the setting changes the mood and the atmosphere of the residents. After the introduction of the black box the villagers become uneasy around this symbol of evil. Furthermore, the black box is the key that changes the mood from serene and peaceful to ominous.

Further foreshadowing by Shirley Jackson leads the reader to consider the town as peculiar. For instance, the names of the residents foreshadow unfavorable events to occur. Furthermore, the lottery is conducted by Mr. Summers, and the time of year the story is set happens to be summertime. Also, Mr. Summers is helped by Mr. Graves, who has often stored the black box for the lottery. These names foreshadow a sinister event to occur.

The ending of the story is ironic to the setting established by Shirley Jackson in the first paragraph. The story ends with the residents murdering an innocent person. The mood created by the residents at the end of the story is totally opposite to that of the beginning of the story. For example, the residents pelted Tessie Hutchison as she screamed. The mood created at the end of the story is of misfortune and pain which is the opposite of the mood created by the setting in the beginning of the story.

To conclude, Shirley Jackson creates the mood of a typical town on a normal summer morning. This setting creates an atmosphere of tranquillity and peacefulness. Through the use of subtle details, Shirley Jackson is able to foreshadow the wicked ending through the use of the setting. For example, she sets the story in a typical town on a normal summer day. She describes the children as normal children gathering rocks, yet they create a massive pile of stones in one corner, as if they are working and are not gathering these rocks for enjoyment as normal children would. She describes the town as a normal town, yet there are oddities about the town. For example, there is no church or church activities. Furthermore, the town does not celebrate Christmas or Easter, yet they celebrate Halloween. Also, there is no governing body for this town such as a courthouse or police station. This gives the reader a hint to the fact that there is something odd about to happen. The setting set forth in the first paragraph proves to be ironic from the setting at the end of the story. For instance, the mood created by the flowers and summertime setting create a peacefulness about the town. Furthermore, the ending proves to be totally opposite of the mood presented in the first paragraph. The ending is ironic from the beginning in that everyone in this town commits an unlawful act by stoning an innocent person. Conversely, the setting created a mood of peacefulness within the town and among the residents.