The Lottery 2 Essay, Research Paper

In the short story “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson, setting plays an important key role. It creates irony because the ending of the story completely contradicts the upbeat impression that the reader gets all throughout it. Jackson creates this irony very well in her writing. She keeps it going throughout the whole story. Jackson could have easily made the setting a cloudy, rainy, winter day. Weather would have aided the reader to predict the tragic end. The readers might feel that this would be a more suitable time for the setting of the story because winter is a time of death. Jackson, however creates this irony intentionally to create more shock and surprise in the reader at the end.

The narrator starts off the story describing the setting. She states that ‘the morning of June 27 was clear and sunny, with the fresh warmth of a full-summer day; the flowers were blossoming profusely and the grass was richly green.’ The reader immediately feels an upbeat tone for the story. The fact that it is spring and the descriptions of flowers and grass make the reader think that it is a new start on life. Readers associate spring not with death, but with new life and growth. In the end of the story the reader then realizes this is not the case.

The square also plays a part in the setting. Jackson writes how the day of the lottery “the people of the village began to gather in the square ” The square is usually a place for town gatherings and other joyous occasions. The reader gets a sense of solidarity since the entire town shows up for this event. Jackson also wrote, ‘The women, wearing faded house dresses and sweaters, came shortly after their menfolk. They greeted one another and exchanged bits of gossip as they went to join their husbands.’ The whole town comes to participate in the lottery. Everyone seems to be socializing normally on this special day. No one is giving the impression that there will soon be an innocent victim murdered. The people of the town just seem to be going through a normal routine. The kind of people that the reader sees during his or her own day are just like the people described in the story: decent, friendly, and neighborly.

The name of the man who runs the lottery, Mr. Summers, immediately arises feelings of the season in the reader’s minds. Summer is typically a time of happiness and relaxation. The person who conducts this unjustified murder is described as a man “who had time and energy to devote to civic action.” He not only is in charge of the lottery, but he also ran the square dances, the teen-age club, and the Halloween program. The reader assumes the lottery has a good connotation because Jackson puts it in the same category as these other ‘good-time programs.’ A man who seems to be so involved in his town would not be expected to run such a terrible thing as the lottery depicted in this story.

The fact that the town all gathers together for the lottery also gives the story this ‘holiday atmosphere.’ The reader assumes that the lottery will bring about someone’s great luck. The town all arrives in the square to see who will be the lucky one chosen. The reader notices the first hint of tension when the families gather together; the women, standing by their husbands, call to their children. Mr. Martin speaks sharply to Bobby when the boy runs back to the pile of stones, and Bobby comes quickly. At this point, the reader does not know what the stones are for and really does not focus much attention on it. The reader would not think that there would be any harsh actions in child’s play. This is the first subtle hint of the tragic ending.

Shirley Jackson incorporates these images to effectively create this certain setting. They all work together to create a surprising ending. In the end, the reader is completely shocked because this barbaric outcome has not at all been foreshadowed by the upbeat tone. Jackson completely offsets the reader to the ending, which makes the story all the more interesting.