The Lottery: A Setting Analysis Essay, Research Paper

Shirley Jackson takes great care in creating a setting for the story, The Lottery. She gives the reader a sense of comfort and stability from the very beginning. It begins, “clear and sunny, with the fresh warmth of a full-summer day; the flowers were blossoming profusely and the grass was richly green.” The setting throughout The Lottery creates a sense of peacefulness and tranquility, while portraying a typical town on a normal summer day.

With the very first words, Jackson begins to establish the environment for her plot. To begin, she tells the reader that the story takes place on an early summer morning. This helps in providing a focus of the typicality of this small town, a normal rural community. She also mentions that school has just recently let out for summer break, which of course allows the children to run around at that time of day. Furthermore, she describes the grass as “richly green” and “the flowers were blooming profusely.” These descriptions of the surroundings give the reader a serene feeling about the town. The location of the square, “between the post office and the bank”, proves the smallness of this town, since everything centralizes at or near the town square and it acts as the primary location for the remaining part of the story, playing a significant role at the end setting of the story.

Up to this point, nothing unordinary has happened, which might later reflect an ironic ending. Eventually, small hints about the unusualness of this town are added. The author points out significant buildings that surround the town square, but fails to describe a church or a courthouse, which are common buildings to all communities. In this, there seems to be no central governing body for this town, such as a court or a police station. Also, oddly enough, these people celebrate Halloween but not Christmas, Easter or Thanksgiving, the largest holidays that “normal” people celebrate. However, Halloween implicates a certain proneness to defiant, evil activities. In addition, the children are building “a great pile of stones in one corner of the square.” An impression of the children as normal children gathering rocks is counterbalanced by their ironical construction a massive pile of stones in one corner, as if they were punished through labor.

The introduction of the black box acts as the major turning point for the setting. It symbolizes an immoral act to the villagers as “the villagers kept their distance” from it. The introduction of the black box into the setting changes the mood and the atmosphere of the residents as they become uneasy around it. Furthermore, the black box changes the mood from serene and peaceful to ominous, where the moment of illumination reaches climax at the very end of the story. Through her use of subtle details in the setting, Shirley Jackson foreshadows the wicked emotional ending, which lacks official authorities, by the incoherent mentioning of stones. Indeed, the story starts to feel more and more uncomfortable, and the commonplace attitude of the townspeople remains even during the stoning of Mrs. Hutchinson. They are all unaffected by the outcome except for, obviously, the victim of their collaborate murder. Near the end, one of the women casually tells the victim to “be a good sport” as they slaughter her with stones. In spite of the peaceful mood created by the town setting, everyone commits a brutal act by stoning an innocent person.

Throughout The Lottery, the setting plays a significant role in portraying irony in the plot. However, Shirley Jackson does not end her story with a resolution to the plot, but she illustrates the irony she sees in the world through a creative ironical setting. Indeed, the setting expresses The Lottery’s theme of a hidden reality beneath the surface of everyday lives.