The Setting And Theme In The Lottery Essay, Research Paper

The Lottery

In many stories, settings are constructed to help build the mood and to foreshadow of things to come. "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson is a story in which the setting sets up the reader to think of positive outcomes. However, this description of the setting foreshadows exactly the opposite of what is to come. In addition, the theme that we learn of at the end leads us to think of where the sanity of some human beings lies.

The story begins with the establishment of the setting. To begin, Shirley Jackson 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. Shirley Jackson also seems to stress on the beauty of the day and the brilliance of nature. This provides the positive outlook and lets the reader relax into what seems to be a comfortable setting for the story.

In addition, the description of people and their actions are very typical and not anomalous. Children play happily, women gossip, and men casually talk about farming. Everyone is coming together for what seems to be enjoyable, festive, even celebratory occasion. However, the pleasant description of the setting creates a façade within the story.

The setting covers the very ritualistic and brutally violent traditions such as the stoning of Mrs. Hutchinson, who dared to defy tradition. It is very apparent that tradition is very coveted in this small, simple town. This can be proven by the ancient, black box used for the lottery and the significance of farming for the community. Farming is also the only known way of life because of tradition. The men in ?The Lottery? are ?speaking of planting and rain, tractors and taxes?. This is because the ritual performed in the story is supposed to have an effect on the harvest. ?Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon? used to be a saying heard in that town. The abundance of their harvest supposedly depended upon their performing the ritual of the lottery. Although it is implied that the abundance of their harvest depends wholly on cruel act of stoning a human being to death, there is evidence that not all in the community agree with the ritual.

Children are an important focus in ?The Lottery?. Jackson makes it easy for us to imagine their ?boisterous play? and the children are described in depth. I think these children symbolize perceived states of happiness in the story. I also believe they are vital necessities in the story because they are taught and expected to carry the traditions. For instance, ?someone gave little Davy Hutchinson a few pebbles" so that he will then be able to participate in the stoning of his own mother.

In the story, many parts of the ritual had been changed or even long forgotten by most of the people. This fact in itself, along with a few other clues, tells me that not everyone agrees with it. One character says, ?seems like there?s no time at all between lotteries anymore?. This means that the lottery is much too frequent or should not even be done at all. I believe that many disagree with the practice of the ritual, I also think that the individual feels helpless in putting a stop to it.

Mrs. Adams mentions to Old Man Warner, ?that over in the north village they?re talking of giving up the lottery? and that ?Some places have already quit the lotteries?. He replies ?Pack of crazy fools? and says, ?There?s always been a lottery?. Although she does not say it in so many words, I find it obvious that she feels that the ritual should be put to an end.

This in combination with the fact that many of the townspeople do not even remember the reasons behind the ritual has led me to the conclusion that they only continue the process for ?tradition?s sake?. It just goes to show that humans are creatures of habit and that sometimes we continue to participate in (or tolerate) harmful practices. This is simply because as individuals we feel powerless and unable to stand up against behaviors that have always been accepted.

The setting has set us up for a shocking and deadly end. What seemed like a wonderful, joy-filled day ended with an unfortunate, tragic death. This is what makes this story so disturbing and horrifying but a wonderful work of literature art.