

About the Story:

When “The Lottery” begins, readers learn that people in the small village are gathering together. School has just been released and children are still talking about the work they finished and the interactions they had with their teachers. The children gather rocks while their parents meet and make small talk about the weather, taxes, and small town gossip. The story begins to develop when Mr. Summers enters with all of the items needed to conduct the town’s annual lottery.

The lottery is compared to all of the other fun activities in the town including the square dances, teen club, and Halloween program. Readers are not told what the outcome of the lottery will be, but there is no reason to have any expectation other than it being something positive. While each family draws their slip, there is much discussion about how important this tradition is in this town. One character, Old Man Warner, says that he has been doing it for 77 years and that other towns who have stopped doing it are completely foolish. This all changes when the winner is revealed and his wife starts proclaiming that it is not fair. Readers suddenly realize that something is wrong.

Writer’s Craft:

Shirley Jackson shocks readers in “The Lottery” with the pacing of the plot’s events. At first, it doesn’t seem like much is happening. People are gathering for a lottery and the characters’ actions create a feeling in the reader that this is just like every other year in the lottery tradition. As each name gets called, readers continue to assume that this is commonplace and they have no reason to think that anything other than a positive action will occur.

The reader quickly learns that the characters’ seemingly insignificant activities are actually the foreshadowing of a terrible occasion. What is not identified about the lottery’s end is actually a very effective building of suspense that results in the reader being shocked at the story’s resolution. Jackson’s implementation of these key techniques helps convey her message about people’s commitment to tradition quite effectively in a way that is specifically memorable.