The Lottery By Shirley Jackson Questions And Answers

†THE LOTTERY"

DIRECTIONS: Answer the following questions regarding "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson as best you can. Use your copy of the story to help you. Write your answers in complete sentences on this sheet of paper.

1. How does the setting of "The Lottery" contribute to the story? Identify the setting in your answer.

2. "The Lottery" is structured in three (3) parts. Identify each part, provide a title for each part, and explain the rationale (reason) for choosing each title.

3. How does Shirley Jackson prepare readers for the ending of "The Lottery"? Identify three (3) instances of foreshadowing in your answer.

4. In the middle of p. 57, Mrs. Hutchinson says, "'I tell you it wasn't fair. You didn't give him enough time to choose.'" (p.57) What does Mrs. Hutchinson think was not "fair"? Why? Do you agree with Mrs. Hutchinson? Why or why not? Explain.

5. What significance does the black box have in the story? Consider the age of the box, the amount of time the box has been preserved, the appearance of the box, the specific color of the box, and the reaction of the villagers to the box to help you answer the question.

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Shirley Jackson's short story "The Lottery" is a compelling exploration of tradition, conformity, and the dark side of human nature. First published in 1948, the narrative has remained a pivotal piece of American literature, prompting discussions and analyses that delve into its themes and implications. This article will provide an extensive overview of common questions regarding "The Lottery," accompanied by detailed answers that explore the story's significance and underlying messages.

Understanding the Plot

What is the main premise of "The Lottery"?

"The Lottery" takes place in a small, seemingly idyllic village where the residents gather annually for a lottery. Initially, the event appears to be a festive occasion, filled with excitement and anticipation. However, as the story unfolds, it becomes clear that the lottery is a ritualistic practice involving the drawing of names, which ultimately leads to a shocking and violent conclusion.

Who are the main characters in the story?

The story features several characters, but some of the most significant include:

1. Tessie Hutchinson - The protagonist who ultimately draws the black dot, symbolizing her selection as the lottery's victim.
2. Old Man Warner - The oldest resident of the village, who staunchly defends the lottery tradition and believes in its necessity.
3. Bill Hutchinson - Tessie's husband, who participates in the lottery but is unable to protect his wife from the community's decision.
4. Mr. Summers - The man who conducts the lottery, representing the bureaucratic nature of the ritual.
5. The children - Including Tessie's own children, they play a significant role in the story's chilling atmosphere as they participate in the lottery with naivety.

Thematic Elements

What are the central themes explored in "The Lottery"?

Several key themes are woven throughout "The Lottery," including:

- Tradition vs. Change: The villagers cling to the lottery as a tradition, despite its barbaric outcome. This theme raises questions about the value and consequences of blindly following customs without questioning their morality.
- The Nature of Humanity: Jackson examines the darker aspects of human nature, illustrating how ordinary people can commit atrocious acts when social norms dictate their actions.
- Conformity and Social Pressure: The villagers' collective behavior demonstrates how societal expectations can compel individuals to act against their own morals and ethics.

How does Jackson use symbolism in the story?

Symbolism is prevalent in "The Lottery," with several elements representing broader concepts:

- The Lottery Itself: The lottery symbolizes the arbitrary nature of violence and the capacity for cruelty that lies within a seemingly civilized society.
- The Black Box: This box, used to hold the lottery slips, symbolizes tradition and the unquestioned continuation of outdated practices.
- The Stones: The stones used by the villagers to execute the lottery's victim represent collective violence and the ease with which individuals can partake in brutal acts when they are normalized by society.

Character Analysis

What motivates the characters in "The Lottery"?

The motivations of the characters in "The Lottery" vary, reflecting their roles in the village and their relationships with the tradition:

- Tessie Hutchinson: Initially carefree and dismissive of the lottery, her motivations shift dramatically when she becomes the victim. Her desperation for survival showcases the instinctual human drive to resist death.
- Old Man Warner: His unwavering support of the lottery stems from a belief in tradition and a fear of change. He embodies the resistance to evolve or question societal norms.
- Bill Hutchinson: Torn between his loyalty to tradition and his love for Tessie, Bill's character represents the conflict between familial connections and societal obligations.

How does the setting influence the story?

The setting of "The Lottery" plays a crucial role in shaping the narrative. The story takes place in a small, rural village, which evokes an atmosphere of simplicity and normalcy. This contrast between the setting and the horrific outcome of the lottery amplifies the shock value of the story. The familiar surroundings make the violence more jarring, emphasizing that such brutality can occur in any community.

Critical Reception

How was "The Lottery" received upon its publication?

Upon its publication in 1948, "The Lottery" elicited a strong and often negative reaction from readers. Many were outraged by the story's violent conclusion and the suggestion that such practices could exist in modern society. The backlash included canceled subscriptions to The New Yorker, where the story was first published, reflecting the discomfort it caused among the audience. Over time, however, "The Lottery" has been reevaluated and is now regarded as a classic of American literature, studied for its social commentary and literary merit.

What impact has "The Lottery" had on literature and society?

"The Lottery" has left a profound impact on both literature and society. It has inspired countless discussions about tradition, morality, and human nature. The story has also

influenced other writers and filmmakers, prompting adaptations and reinterpretations in various forms. The themes presented in Jackson's narrative remain relevant today, encouraging readers to reflect on their values, societal norms, and the potential consequences of conformity.

Discussion Questions

Engaging with "The Lottery" can lead to deeper insights into its themes and implications. Here are some discussion questions to consider:

1. What does the lottery reveal about the nature of community and social bonds?
2. How does Jackson's portrayal of women in the story contribute to its overall message?
3. In what ways does the story challenge the reader's perception of morality?
4. How do the characters' reactions to the lottery reflect their understanding of tradition?
5. What role does fear play in the villagers' participation in the lottery?

Conclusion

Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" serves as a powerful commentary on human nature, tradition, and the capacity for violence that can lurk beneath the surface of society. Through its rich symbolism and complex characters, the story invites readers to question the morality of their own traditions and the consequences of blind conformity. As discussions surrounding "The Lottery" continue to evolve, its relevance remains steadfast, making it an essential piece of literature that resonates with contemporary audiences.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of 'The Lottery' by Shirley Jackson?

The main theme of 'The Lottery' is the danger of blindly following traditions without questioning their morality or relevance.

How does Shirley Jackson create a sense of foreshadowing in 'The Lottery'?

Jackson uses subtle clues, like the villagers' uneasy behavior and the children gathering stones, to foreshadow the shocking conclusion of the lottery.

What role does the setting play in 'The Lottery'?

The setting, a small, seemingly idyllic village, contrasts sharply with the dark event that unfolds, highlighting the theme of normalcy masking brutality.

How do the characters in 'The Lottery' react to the lottery?

Most characters in 'The Lottery' accept the event with indifference or resignation, showcasing how societal norms can desensitize individuals to violence.

What does the lottery itself symbolize in the story?

The lottery symbolizes the arbitrary nature of violence and the capacity for ordinary people to commit heinous acts under societal pressure.

What is the significance of the black box in 'The Lottery'?

The black box represents tradition and the villagers' reluctance to change, as it is worn and shabby yet still holds significant power over the community.

How does Shirley Jackson use irony in 'The Lottery'?

The irony lies in the contrast between the villagers' festive atmosphere and the horrific act of violence that the lottery culminates in, subverting expectations.

What is the public's reaction to 'The Lottery' upon its publication?

Upon its publication, 'The Lottery' sparked outrage and confusion among readers, many of whom were shocked by its unexpected and brutal ending.

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