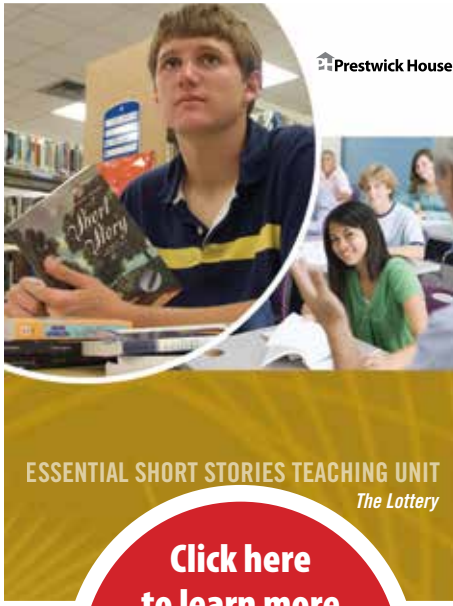




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**The Lottery**

by Shirley Jackson

written by Paul Moliken

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# The Lottery

## Biography

Shirley Jackson (1919-1965) is an American author, most famous for the short story, *The Lottery*, which was written in 1948.

Jackson grew up in Burlingame, California, in a middle-class family. She attended two colleges after moving to the East Coast, and in 1940, she married soon-to-be literary critic, Stanley Edgar Hyman. They had four children and lived in Vermont, near where Hyman taught. Jackson was a disciplined author who wrote a few hours every day; she submitted her work to various magazines for publication. In 1963, her novel, *The Haunting of Hill House*, was made into a very well received horror movie entitled *The Haunting*, which inspired Stephen King's *The Shining*.

While some of her other writing, almost all of which deal with terrifying aspects of life, have achieved a small amount of success, "The Lottery" brought her fame. However, it also caused a great deal of controversy. It was first published in *The New Yorker Magazine*, and hundreds of people immediately cancelled their subscriptions. But some people wrote to Jackson and asked where this lottery was being held and wondered if they could attend.

Jackson was walking with her groceries and her child when the idea for the story came to her. She went home, sat down, and composed the first draft of "The Lottery." Her own recollection of writing the story is that very few revisions were made in her original draft. She wanted it to be very close to the idea she had in her imagination.

Jackson herself was somewhat mystified over the huge number of negative comments about her story, and she addressed people's reactions a few times. In the *San Francisco Chronicle*, shortly after the story was printed, Jackson commented, "Explaining just what I had hoped the story to say is very difficult. I suppose, I hoped, by setting a particularly brutal ancient rite in the present and in my own village to shock the story's readers with a graphic dramatization of the pointless violence and general inhumanity in their own lives."

Many adaptations of "The Lottery" have been made—a TV program, a one-act play, a ballet, and even a parody on an episode of the cartoon show, *South Park*. The story is consistently on the list of America's most frequently banned high school books, and the country of South Africa banned it completely soon after its publication.

Shirley Jackson died in her sleep, possibly from a heart attack, on August 8, 1965.

# The Lottery

## Objectives

*By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:*

1. identify several themes Jackson employs in “The Lottery” and point out how they are depicted:
  - A. the role of women, as opposed to that of men, in the village
  - B. the importance of tradition
  - C. the darker aspects of human nature
  - D. the danger in not questioning rituals
  - E. intellect versus superstition
  - F. the lack of emotion that sometimes accompanies brutality
  - G. the contrast between the ordinary and the unthinkable
2. describe how specific names of characters figure prominently in the story.
3. follow Jackson’s use of irony, foreshadowing, understatement, and suspense.
4. comment on the juxtaposition between ancient and modern.
5. identify how setting plays an important part in the story.
6. explain various symbols and motifs, including:
  - A. the black box
  - B. the lack of guilt over stoning a neighbor
  - C. the time the lottery is held
  - D. the reasons for having a lottery
7. discuss the differences between Tessie and the rest of the villagers.
8. point out examples of Jackson’s “flat” style.

# The Lottery

## Study Guide

### Vocabulary

**lottery** – a drawing to determine a winner; a chance  
**profusely** – in a great amount, abundantly  
**boisterous** – engaging in loud, happy, noisy fun  
**reprimands** – punishments, scoldings  
**reluctantly** – unwillingly; with hesitation  
**jovial** – happy, joyful  
**paraphernalia** – items that are necessary for a particular activity  
**preceded** – happened earlier; came before  
**ritual** – a specific ceremony; an act done a certain way  
**underfoot** – in the way; preventing progress  
**perfunctory** – done as routine, without importance  
**interminably** – seemingly never ending

1. Using textual references, explain how Jackson shows differences among the characters.

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2. What point of view does Jackson use in “The Lottery”?

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3. What is the major theme of the story?

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4. What is the primary conflict in the story?

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**Questions for Essay and Discussion**

1. How do these characters' names figure prominently in this short story?

Mr. Summers:

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Old Man Warner:

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Mrs. Delacroix:

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Tessie Hutchinson:

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Mr. Graves:

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Mr. Adams:

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2. Cite and explain some instances of irony in the story.

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