

Shirley Jackson, "The Lottery" – Discussion and Analysis Questions

1. What seems to have been the original purpose of the lottery? What do people believe about it?
2. Is it important that the original paraphernalia for the lottery had been lost? What do you suppose the original ceremony was like?
3. Why have some of the villages given up this practice? Why hasn't this one?
4. What is the significance of Tessie's final scream, "It isn't fair, it isn't right"? What aspect of the lottery does she explicitly challenge; what aspect goes unquestioned?
5. This is a different sort of story when you read it for the second time. What elements (such as Mrs. Hutchinson's attempt to have her daughter, Eva, draw with the family) might take on a different meaning the second time through?
6. Some critics insist that the story has an added *symbolic* meaning. Do you agree? If so, what is Shirley Jackson trying to tell us about ourselves? (Hint: Consider that this story was written during the height of the rise of Communism and the Soviet Union.)
7. Is the lottery a collective act of murder? Is it morally justified? Is tradition sufficient justification for such actions? How would you respond to cultures that are different from ours that perform "strange" rituals?