

Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery"
Questions for study
Mr. Coia
English 5 6

In your small groups, discuss the following questions about "The Lottery." Try to get beyond just talking about the plot; use your critical thinking skills to deeply examine this story.

For homework, turn your small group notes into typed responses to turn in. In our next meeting, we will use these questions to discuss the story.

1. How do the commonplace details of life and the folksy language contribute to the impact of the story? Why had Jackson chosen common people for her characters? Could she have chosen characters from other levels of sophistication with the same effect? What is the irony of the trite dialogue and casual tone of this story?
2. What seems to have been the original purpose of the lottery? What do people believe about it?
3. Is it important that the original paraphernalia for the lottery had been lost? What do you suppose the original ceremony was like? 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. How many hints of the seriousness of the occasion can you find in the early parts of the story? For this question, underline in your story places where foreshadowing occurs. From which characters do you get the best indication of what is to follow?
6. Some critics insist that the story has an added symbolic or allegorical dimension. Do you agree? If so, what is Shirley Jackson trying to tell us about ourselves?
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?