

## Reader-Response Analysis in The Lottery Short Story by Shirley Jackson

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### ABSTRACT

This reader response analysis explores Shirley Jackson's short story "The Lottery" through the reader's perspective and interpretation. This study investigates the dynamic and subjective nature of reading, recognizing the reader's role in actively constructing meaning. The main characters, including Tessie Hutchinson, Mr. Summers, and Old Man Warner, examined based on reader responses, reveal insights into themes of tradition, authority, and resistance to change. The characters' personalities are closely tied to their roles in the community, thus influencing the reader's interpretation. Through qualitative research methods, including interviews, book excerpts, and surveys, this research captures how readers discover the factors of the main characters' characters. This analysis emphasizes the importance of reader response theory in understanding the diverse ways individuals connect to and derive meaning from literary works, ultimately contributing to an understanding of "The Lottery". From the research results, it was concluded that the analysis of readers' responses to Shirley Jackson's short story "The Lottery" revealed a complex interaction between the reader's interpretation and the character's personality, emphasizing the themes of blind obedience to tradition, the dangers of fanaticism, and the resulting cruelty.

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## Introduction

A short story is one form of literature. This means that a short story is a prose narrative that can be read in a short amount of time (Rahmawati & Rakhmawati, 2022). Short stories are part of the prose category and play an important role in English language learning by expanding vocabulary, enhancing grammar understanding, and improving reading skills. The short story to be discussed is "The Lottery" by Shirley Jackson.

"The Lottery" is a short story written by Shirley Jackson and first published in 1948. Set in a seemingly idyllic small town on a summer day, the story unfolds to reveal a chilling tradition where townspeople gather for an annual lottery with a shocking and violent outcome. Through this narrative, Jackson explores themes of blind obedience to tradition, the dangers of fanaticism, and the cruelty that can result from unquestioning adherence to tradition. The implied violence in the narrative also contributes to its impact on readers. (Apriadi, 2021)

This story offers readers a deeper understanding of blind obedience to tradition, the dangers of fanaticism, and the cruelty that can arise from thoughtless adherence to rituals. Like many stories, "The Lottery" has been subject to countless interpretations. For example, it has been read as a commentary on World War II or as a critique of entrenched social order (Sustana, 2019). As previous research has shown, the story challenges traditional ideas and explores themes such as social conformity, violence, and mass psychology.

The concept employed in this research is reader response analysis, which involves studying how readers respond to a short story. Reader-response theory posits that reading is an active, dynamic process where readers create and develop meaning (Khatib, 2011). This approach allows researchers to delve into the subjective experiences and interpretations of readers, providing insights into how the story is received by different individuals and the emotions it evokes. Each reading experience is unique, involving the reader on ethical, intellectual, social, and aesthetic levels (Bondan & Dilek, 2018). By going beyond the author's intended meaning, reader-response analysis explores how readers engage with the text, illuminating the complexities of human interpretation and the power of literature to elicit personal reactions.

This study aims to explore how readers respond to Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" and examine the themes of tradition, community, and power. Through reader-response analysis, this study seeks to understand the emotions and personal experiences readers encounter while engaging with the story. The research question is: What factors influence the personality of the main character in "The Lottery" based on an analysis of reader responses.

## **Method**

According to the reader-response theory, the student actively participates in deriving meaning from a literary work based on past knowledge. (Boubekeur, 2021) The author uses reader-response analysis, which involves analyzing readers' responses to a short story. In the reader-response theory, the act of reading is considered an active, dynamic process constantly prone to change in which readers are in charge of the creation and development of meaning (Khatib, 2011). The author believes that by analyzing readers' responses, they can gain valuable insights into how the short story is being interpreted and understood. When someone's love literature, different people experience it in different ways. They frequently evaluate the texts they read by applying their own interpretations. (Rahayu . 2011) This method allows for a more holistic understanding of the text, as it takes into account the diverse perspectives and experiences of the readers. Furthermore, the author acknowledges that meaning is not fixed or predetermined but rather shaped by the interactions between the reader and the text.

The method for this study involves conducting a qualitative analysis of reader responses through interviews and surveys. In conducting qualitative research, beginning analysis is when researchers must first look at the data to see what they should look for. By conducting interviews and surveys, researchers will be able to gather rich and detailed information about the readers' responses to the story in terms of tradition, community, and power. Using qualitative methodology, the author conducted a content analysis of the survey responses (Ivey & Broadus 2011). This method allows for a deeper understanding of the readers' perspectives and experiences. Additionally, analyzing the data collected through qualitative research will provide insights into the emotions that readers may experience while reading the story. This approach will help identify the range of emotions elicited by the narrative and contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the reader's engagement with the story.

## **Finding and Discussion**

### **Analysis The Main Character**

#### **1. Tessie Hutchinson**

This short story highlights the dynamics of groups in a small community, but there is one character who is part of the focus of this story when he is chosen as the winner of the lottery. She is a housewife named Tessie Hutchinson who is involved in the routine in her village. Ordinary villager Tessie Hutchinson arrives late because she can't remember the date. She stands behind her husband Bill and says hello to her pals.(Moliken. 2021) At the beginning of the story, Tessie Huchinsosn is a citizen who is obedient to the tradition and Undia Lotre in their community.

“The people of the village began to gather in the square, between the post office and the bank, around ten o'clock, in some towns there were so many people that the lottery took two days and had to be started on June 27th. But in this village, where there were only about three hundred people, the whole lottery took less than two hours, so it could begin at ten o'clock in the morning and still be through in time to allow the villagers to get home for noon dinner. (p. 1, par.1)

According to the respondent at the beginning of the story, Tessie Hutchinson was a passive person and relatively indifferent to the lottery, but everything changed when his name was chosen as the winner of the lottery. Change suddenly happened to her, her character showed panic and a desire to live and oppose the decision that threatened him

“Tessie Hutchinson shouted to Mr. Summers. “You didn’t give him time enough to take any paper he wanted. I saw you. it wasn’t fair! ‘Be a good sport, Tessie,’ Mrs. Delacroix called, and Mrs. Graves said, ‘All of us to took the same chance.’ ‘Shut up, Tessie,’ Bill Huchinsin said.” (p. 4-5, par 46-47)

Hutchinson's transformation from a passive and indifferent person to someone filled with panic and a desire to live is evident in her outburst towards Mr. Summers. She accuses him of not giving her husband enough time to gather any important documents, claiming that it wasn't fair. Despite the attempts of others to silence her and justify the lottery, Hutchinson's newfound determination to oppose the decision becomes clear as she defiantly shouts back at them, refusing to be silenced.

## **2. Mr. Summers**

Mr. Summers is the person responsible for organizing and running the annual lottery in their village. According to the respondent Mr. Summers is described as an authoritative male character, has a significant role in community activities, and is known to have sufficient energy and time to dedicate himself to electoral activities in the village.

According to other respondents, he was also the person who led the lottery process and often carried the black box where the lottery took place. "Important" highlights his importance in the community. Mr. Summers plays a key role in carrying out the rite. (Kadhim, 2023) He has a sullen wife and no children, but he is highly respected in his village because of his involvement in the community.

## **3. Old Man Warner**

Next, the character is the oldest person in the village. Respondents thought that this character adhered to and admired this tradition. He is the oldest in the village and is seen as a symbol of authority. He is also seen as a symbol of stability and predictability, in contrast to the younger generation's more modern ideas.

"Seventy-seventh year I have been in the lottery". (p. 4, par 41)

"there's always been a lottery". (p.4, par. 33)

Old Man Warner's age and long-standing participation in the lottery give him a sense of authority and credibility amongst the villagers. He believes that the lottery is necessary to maintain tradition and prevent chaos in their society. His repeated remarks about the longevity of the tradition emphasize his resistance to change and his belief in the importance of upholding the village's customs, no matter how controversial they may be.

## **4. Mr. Graves**

Mr. Graves is the post office manager. Mr. Graves assists Mr. Summers with the ritual and helps him gather paperwork and compile a list of family names for the lottery. (Qudwatunnisa, 2019)

“The postmaster, Mr. Graves, followed him, carrying a three-legged stool”. (p. 1, par. 4)

Respondents also said that he is also seen as a symbol of resistance to change and tradition, and he often speaks out against the younger generation's ideas. He is also seen as a symbol of the older generation's wisdom and experience.

## **5. Bill Hutchinson**

Bill Hutchinson is also a figure or character involved in the annual lottery in this village. he was also a winner in the lottery.

“Bill Hutchinson was standing quiet, staring down at the paper in his hand”. (p. 4, par. 46)

Respondents see this character as an authority figure and a symbol of the older generation's wisdom and experience. He is also seen as a reminder of the tradition of the Lottery and the importance of following the rules.

“Bill Hutchinson reached into the box and felt around, bringing his hand out at last with the slip of paper in it.” (p. 5, par. 47)

The fact that Bill Hutchinson is involved in the annual lottery and is also a winner adds to his authority and credibility in the eyes of the villagers. His quiet demeanor and intense concentration as he stares at the paper in his hand further solidify his role as a respected figure. As he reaches into the box and retrieves the slip of paper, he embodies the importance of adhering to tradition and following the rules of the Lottery, which serves as a reminder to the community of the consequences of deviating from their customs.

## **Analysis of the Factors**

### **1. Transformation Under Stress**

Tessie Hutchinson's personality is reflected as she shouts out against the perceived unfairness of the lottery process. Her vocal opposition, defiance, and plea for fairness highlight a shift in her character from a passive participant to an actively resistant one when faced with the imminent consequence of being chosen. Tessie Hutchinson, is a

contradictory figure who seeks justice while also attempting to rescue herself. (IvyPanda. 2023) This moment captures the transformation in Tessie's demeanor under the stress of the lottery situation.

"You didn't give him enough time to take any paper he wanted. I saw you. it wasn't fair! 'Be a good sport, Tessie,' Mrs. Delacroix called, and Mrs. Graves said, 'All of us took the same chance.' 'Shut up, Tessie,' Bill Hutchinson said." (p. 5, par. 46-47)

## **2. Authority and Tradition**

Mr. Summers in Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" is portrayed as an authoritative figure integral to the administration of the lottery, and this depiction is emphasized through the quote describing him as "very proper and important." The choice of words, "very proper," suggests a meticulous and dignified demeanor, while "important" underscores his significance within the community. Mr. Summers becomes a central figure in the execution of the ritual, and his proper and important aura reflects a sense of control and authority. The image of him with "one hand resting carelessly on the black box" conveys a casual yet confident posture, further reinforcing his role. The community's reliance on Mr. Summers to orchestrate the lottery highlights his pivotal position in upholding the village traditions. Through this portrayal, Jackson subtly comments on the authority vested in individuals who carry out age-old customs, contributing to the story's unsettling exploration of blind adherence to tradition and the potential consequences of unchecked power within a community.

"Mr. Summers was very good at all this; in his clean white shirt and blue jeans, with one hand resting carelessly on the black box, he seemed very proper and important..." (p. 1, par. 2)

Old Man Warner in Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" embodies the unyielding influence of tradition on an individual's personality. The statement "There's always been a lottery" encapsulates Warner's unwavering commitment to the established ritual, illustrating his deep-rooted belief in the necessity of maintaining the tradition. This quote not only emphasizes the continuity of the lottery but also serves as a testament to Warner's resistance to change. The additional remark, "Pack of young fools," further illuminates his character, portraying him as disdainful of those who question the longstanding practice. Warner's personality emerges as a symbol of resistance to any

deviation from tradition, emphasizing the conservative values of the older generation. In this role, he becomes a poignant reflection of the community's collective reluctance to challenge customs, and family when confronted with the moral implications of the lottery. It is common knowledge that members of a small community known as a village have a tradition of treating one another equally. If a group of people fight a custom, the other residents will punish them by isolating, gossiping about them, and even humiliating them. (Anggriawan, 2013) Warner's character serves as a stark reminder of the power tradition holds over individuals and communities, even when faced with the need for reevaluation and change.

"There's always been a lottery." (p. 4, par. 33)

"Pack of young fools." (p. 4, par. 33)

### **3. Family Role and Social Expectations**

Mrs. Hutchinson's behavior in "The Lottery" is deeply molded by her roles as a wife and mother, as well as societal expectations associated with traditional gender roles. The phrase "Thought my old man was out back stacking wood" encapsulates her daily responsibilities and domestic duties. This choice of words not only reflects a familiarity with her family dynamic but also aligns with societal norms of the time, where women were often assigned primary responsibilities within the household. Tessie finds a unique method to endure all of the anguish and agony. (Kinanti, 2014) The quote provides a poignant insight into Mrs. Hutchinson's life, emphasizing the impact of her family's role on her actions. In the broader context of the story, Mrs. Hutchinson becomes a symbol of conformity to societal expectations, contributing to the eerie atmosphere of a community where individuals unquestioningly adhere to established roles, even when those roles involve participating in a disturbing ritual. Considering that the individuals who injured Mrs. Hutchinson were among her closest friends, this is quite tragic. (Syam, 2015) This aspect of her character invites readers to contemplate the societal pressures placed on individuals based on their familial roles and the consequences of blindly following tradition.

"Thought my old man was out back stacking wood." (p. 5, par. 44)

From the discussion the characters in Shirley Jackson's 'The Lottery' intricately weave narratives of societal dynamics, transformation under pressure, and the burden of tradition. Tessie Hutchinson's striking transformation from passive participant to outspoken and desperate individual when faced with the consequences of the lottery mirrors the consequences of the lottery. The profound impact of stress on human behavior. Mr. Summers and Old Man Warner each symbolize authority and tradition, demonstrating the power wielded by those who uphold long-standing customs. Mrs. Hutchinson's adherence to traditional gender roles highlights expectations society imposed on individuals within a family. The characters collectively embody the resistance to change and the frightening atmosphere of a community bound by disturbing rituals. As the story progresses, it reveals a complex web of community dynamics, social pressures, and consequences of blindly following existing norms, leaving the reader with haunting reflections on the dark aspects of human nature and conformity."

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the reader-response analysis of Shirley Jackson's short story "The Lottery" reveals a complex interplay between readers' interpretations and the characters' personalities, emphasizing the themes of blind obedience to tradition, the dangers of fanaticism, and the cruelty resulting from unexamined adherence to established norms. The central character, Tessie Hutchinson, undergoes a notable transformation under the stress of the lottery, shifting from a passive participant to an actively resistant individual when faced with the consequences of being chosen.

The characters of Mr. Summers, Old Man Warner, Mr. Graves, and Bill Hutchinson contribute to the narrative's exploration of authority and tradition. Mr. Summers is portrayed as an authoritative figure, emphasizing the role of key individuals in upholding established rituals within a community. Old Man Warner represents the unyielding influence of tradition, embodying resistance to change and disdain for those who question established practices. Mr. Graves, as the village head and Mr. Summers's assistant, reinforces the authority and rigidity associated with the annual lottery. Bill Hutchinson, a lottery winner, symbolizes the older generation's adherence to tradition and the importance of following established rules.

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