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Introduction

Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" is a haunting short story that explores themes of tradition, conformity, and the potential for violence lurking beneath the veneer of societal normalcy. First published in 1948, the story has become a classic example of American literature, provoking readers to question the rituals and customs that societies uphold, often without scrutiny.

One of the most pivotal moments in "The Lottery" occurs when Mr. Summers, the man in charge of the annual event, announces Tessie Hutchinson's name, saying, "It's Tessie," with a tone that reflects the grim acceptance of the ritual. This excerpt encapsulates the chilling culmination of a tradition that, for the townspeople, is an unquestioned part of life.

In this article, we will delve into the significance of this excerpt, analyze its themes, and explore how Shirley Jackson uses this moment to critique societal norms. We will also examine the story's context, its impact on readers, and how its message remains relevant today.

Context of "The Lottery" and Its Cultural Significance

Background of Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery"

Published in *The New Yorker* in 1948, "The Lottery" shocked its initial readers with its brutal depiction of a communal sacrifice. The story is set in a seemingly idyllic small town that holds an annual ritual known as the lottery. The narrative gradually reveals the dark purpose of the event: selecting one individual for a gruesome death, believed to ensure prosperity and good harvests.

Jackson's story was a critique of blindly following tradition without questioning its morality. The story's ending, where Tessie Hutchinson protests her own selection, underscores themes of conformity, mob mentality, and the capacity for violence within society.

Why the Excerpt Matters

The excerpt, "It's Tessie," Mr. Summers said, and his voice is a crucial turning point in the story. It signifies the moment when the ritual's outcome becomes clear, and Tessie's fate is sealed. This line is

a stark reminder of how societal norms can desensitize individuals to violence and injustice.

Analyzing the Excerpt: "It's Tessie," Mr. Summers Said, And His Voice

The Role of Mr. Summers in the Lottery

Mr. Summers is the official responsible for conducting the lottery. His role is somewhat ceremonial, and he embodies the authority that upholds tradition. His tone and manner reflect societal acceptance of the ritual, even as it becomes increasingly horrific.

When Mr. Summers announces, "It's Tessie," his voice is calm and matter-of-fact, which starkly contrasts with the horror of what that announcement means. This calmness signifies how normalized the event has become for the townspeople, highlighting the story's critique of societal complicity in violence.

The Significance of Tessie Hutchinson's Name

Tessie Hutchinson's name being called is the climax of the story. Her reaction—initially casual—turns into desperation when she realizes she has been chosen. Her protest, "It isn't fair," underscores her awareness of the injustice, but her words fall on deaf ears, illustrating how tradition often overrides individual moral judgment.

This moment also emphasizes the theme of individual resistance versus societal conformity. Tessie's protests are ignored, showing how the collective mindset suppresses dissent.

The Tone and Delivery of the Line

The tone of Mr. Summers' voice is crucial. It is neutral, almost indifferent, which underscores how the ritual has lost its moral significance for the community. The use of the phrase "and his voice" in the excerpt suggests a controlled, steady delivery, reinforcing the idea that this is a routine event, not a moment of crisis.

The calmness in Mr. Summers' voice contrasts sharply with Tessie's emotional plea, heightening the emotional tension and emphasizing the story's critique of societal desensitization to violence.

Thematic Analysis of the Excerpt

Tradition and Ritual

The excerpt symbolizes the unquestioned continuation of tradition. The townspeople have been conducting the lottery for generations, and Mr. Summers' calm announcement reflects their collective acceptance. The story questions whether tradition justifies action, especially when it involves harm to others.

Mob Mentality and Conformity

The calm, routine nature of the announcement demonstrates how societal norms can suppress individual moral judgment. Tessie's protests are ignored because everyone has accepted the ritual as normal.

Injustice and Moral Blindness

The excerpt highlights the tragic irony that the community perceives the lottery as necessary and justified, despite its brutal outcome. Tessie's cry of "It isn't fair" exposes the moral blindness that allows such a practice to persist.

The Role of Authority

Mr. Summers' authoritative tone lends legitimacy to the event. His calm voice signifies that the ritual is an accepted authority, not questioned by the community, illustrating how authority figures can uphold immoral traditions.

Relevance of the Excerpt in Modern Context

Reflection on Societal Norms

The excerpt prompts readers to reflect on current societal practices that may be outdated or harmful. It challenges us to question why certain traditions persist and whether they still serve a moral purpose.

Understanding Groupthink and Peer Pressure

The story exemplifies how groupthink can lead societies to commit acts that individuals might oppose if acting alone. The calm delivery of the announcement reflects how societal pressure silences dissent.

The Importance of Moral Courage

Tessie's protests serve as a reminder of the importance of moral courage—standing up against unjust practices, even when they are normalized by society.

Conclusion

The line, "It's Tessie," spoken by Mr. Summers, marks a moment of horrifying clarity in Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery." It encapsulates the story's core themes—blind adherence to tradition, societal acceptance of violence, and the suppression of individual moral judgment. Through this excerpt, Jackson masterfully critiques the ways in which societies can normalize barbarity under the guise of tradition.

As readers, reflecting on this moment encourages us to examine our own societal rituals and question their morality. It reminds us that conformity can be dangerous, and moral courage is essential to challenge unjust practices. "The Lottery" remains a powerful allegory for the potential darkness lurking within societal norms, urging vigilance and introspection.

Keywords for SEO Optimization:

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- significance of Tessie Hutchinson's selection
- symbolism in The Lottery
- societal conformity and mob mentality
- classic American literature short stories

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the significance of Mr. Summers calling out 'It's Tessie' in the excerpt from 'The Lottery'?

Mr. Summers calling out 'It's Tessie' signifies that Tessie Hutchinson has been selected in the lottery, marking her as the current 'winner' who must participate in the ritual, which is central to the story's commentary on tradition and societal conformity.

How does the tone of Mr. Summers' voice contribute to the mood of this excerpt?

Mr. Summers' calm and routine tone underscores the normalcy with which the townspeople accept the lottery, creating a chilling sense of normalcy around a violent tradition and emphasizing the story's critique of blindly following societal rituals.

What does the phrase 'It's Tessie' reveal about her character or her role in the story?

The phrase highlights Tessie's role as a victim in the story's ritual, and her reaction upon being chosen—initially protesting—serves to critique how societal pressure and tradition can lead to injustice and individual suffering.

In what way does the excerpt reflect the story's themes of tradition and conformity?

The casual announcement of Tessie's selection exemplifies how the community unquestioningly continues the lottery tradition, illustrating the story's theme of how societal customs can perpetuate violence and injustice when accepted without question.

How does the setting influence the significance of Mr. Summers' announcement in this excerpt?

The setting, a small, seemingly idyllic community, contrasts with the brutal nature of the lottery, making Mr. Summers' routine announcement more unsettling and highlighting the theme that evil can be masked by normalcy.

What might Shirley Jackson be implying about human nature through this excerpt from 'The Lottery'?

Jackson suggests that humans have a tendency to conform to tradition even when it is morally wrong, and that societal pressures can lead individuals to participate in or accept violence and injustice without question.

Additional Resources

Read The Excerpt From "The Lottery" By Shirley Jackson. "It's Tessie," Mr. Summers Said, And His Voice — this line encapsulates a pivotal moment in Shirley Jackson's masterful short story "The

Lottery." This excerpt not only highlights the chilling culmination of the narrative but also offers a rich ground for analysis about societal conformity, tradition, and human nature. In this blog feature, we'll delve deep into this excerpt, exploring its context, significance, and the literary devices Jackson employs to evoke a powerful emotional response from the reader.

Understanding the Context of the Excerpt

Before analyzing the excerpt itself, it's crucial to understand the story's setting and plot. "The Lottery" is set in a small, seemingly idyllic village where the residents participate in an annual ritual known as the lottery. This tradition, which appears to be a festive event on the surface, turns out to be a brutal practice of selecting a person for execution, a sacrifice to ensure a good harvest.

The excerpt—"It's Tessie," Mr. Summers Said, And His Voice—comes at the climax of the story when the lottery's grim purpose is revealed. Tessie Hutchinson, the central character, arrives late, and her subsequent protestation marks her as the chosen victim. Mr. Summers' calm declaration signals the acceptance and normalization of this horrific custom within the community.

Breaking Down the Excerpt: Key Elements and Literary Significance

The Power of Names and Identification

- "It's Tessie," immediately personalizes the tragedy. The use of her name signifies her selection and the moment she is designated as the victim.
- The phrase indicates the culmination of the lottery process—no longer a mere event, but a personal identification of an individual.
- Jackson's choice to identify Tessie by name emphasizes the story's theme: how societal rituals can dehumanize individuals, reducing them to mere participants or objects.

The Tone and Delivery of Mr. Summers' Voice

- "Mr. Summers Said, And His Voice" suggests a calm, authoritative tone.
- The phrase underscores the normalcy with which the community conducts the lottery, highlighting societal acceptance.
- Jackson's narrative tone here is detached, almost bureaucratic, which contrasts sharply with the gravity of what is happening, heightening the sense of horror.

The Significance of the Excerpt in the Story's Narrative Arc

- This moment marks the transition from the suspenseful build-up to the tragic conclusion.
- It underscores the story's critique of blindly following tradition—how ordinary people participate in atrocities without questioning.
- The line also signals the shift from collective anticipation to individual tragedy.

Literary Devices Employed in the Excerpt

Irony

- The most striking device here is situational irony—the lottery, which appears as a benign tradition, results in violence and death.
- The calmness of Mr. Summers' voice juxtaposed with the deadly outcome underscores the horrifying normalcy of the ritual.

Diction and Tone

- Words like "Said" and "His Voice" evoke a sense of authority and procedural regularity.
- The tone remains matter-of-fact, which amplifies the unsettling nature of the story's events.

Symbolism

- The name "Tessie" becomes symbolic of the everyman—an ordinary individual caught in societal rituals.
- The act of calling out her name signifies the community's collective participation in her fate.

Thematic Analysis of the Excerpt

The Power of Tradition

- The excerpt exemplifies how traditions can persist unquestioned, even when they are morally reprehensible.
- The community's unquestioning acceptance, reflected in Mr. Summers' calm declaration, illustrates the danger of conforming to routines without critical thought.

Human Nature and Societal Conformity

- The story explores the dark side of human nature—how societal pressures can lead ordinary individuals to commit or accept atrocities.
- The community's collective participation highlights themes of conformity, mob mentality, and the suppression of individual moral judgment.

The Randomness of Violence

- The lottery's randomness—"the drawing"—symbolizes the arbitrary nature of violence and death in societal systems.
- Tessie's protestation underscores her awareness of the injustice but also her powerlessness within the system.

Analyzing the Impact of the Excerpt on Readers

Emotional Response

- Jackson's vivid portrayal of Tessie's identification evokes empathy and horror.
- The calm, procedural tone of Mr. Summers' voice contrasts with the violence, creating a dissonance

that unsettles readers.

Critical Reflection

- The excerpt prompts readers to reflect on the ease with which societal norms can normalize cruelty.
- It challenges us to examine our own participation in or acceptance of traditions that may be unjust.

Classroom and Literary Analysis Activities

Discussion Questions

- Why does Shirley Jackson choose to identify Tessie by name at this moment?
- How does the tone of Mr. Summers' voice influence our perception of the lottery?
- What does this excerpt reveal about societal attitudes toward tradition and conformity?

Writing Prompts

- Write a reflection on a tradition in your community that might be accepted without question.
- Analyze how Jackson's use of language in this excerpt affects the emotional impact of the story.

Critical Analysis Assignment

- Examine the role of authority figures like Mr. Summers in enforcing societal rituals. How does this reflect real-world examples?

Conclusion: The Enduring Power of the Excerpt

The line, "It's Tessie," Mr. Summers Said, And His Voice, encapsulates the horrifying culmination of societal conformity and the human capacity for cruelty when traditions go unchallenged. Shirley Jackson's masterful storytelling, through her use of tone, diction, and symbolism, invites readers to critically examine the societal norms that govern our lives. This excerpt remains a powerful reminder of the importance of questioning authority and tradition, making "The Lottery" a timeless story with enduring relevance.

Final Thoughts

Reading and analyzing this excerpt from Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery" offers invaluable insights into the darker aspects of human nature and society. Whether used in classrooms or personal reflection, it challenges us to confront uncomfortable truths about our own communities and the rituals we uphold. Ultimately, Jackson's work warns us of the peril in blindly following tradition and calls for moral awareness and individual critical thinking.

Remember, the power of literature lies in its ability to mirror society and provoke thought. As you

reflect on this excerpt, consider how the themes of "The Lottery" resonate in your own life and community.

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