

An Analysis of the Novel “The Lottery from Shirley Jackson”

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the intrinsic elements and moral messages found in the short story *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson (1948). The study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive approach to examine the literary aspects of the work. The data were collected through library research and note-taking techniques by conducting intensive reading of the short story. The analysis focuses on four intrinsic elements, namely themes, characterization, setting, and moral messages. The findings reveal that the major themes presented in the story include blind obedience to tradition, violence hidden beneath normality, conformity, injustice, and the abuse of social power. The characterization shows that the characters represent different attitudes toward tradition, ranging from unquestioning acceptance to resistance. The setting of a peaceful village creates dramatic irony that strengthens the impact of the story's shocking ending. Furthermore, the moral messages emphasize the importance of critical thinking, humanity, justice, and courage in questioning harmful traditions. This study concludes that *The Lottery* remains relevant to contemporary society because it reflects the dangers of following customs without ethical consideration.

Keywords: *analysis, intrinsic elements, moral messages, Shirley Jackson, The Lottery*

INTRODUCTION

Literature is often regarded as a reflection of human life because it portrays human experiences, values, beliefs, and social realities. Strengthening literacy has become a primary focus in various education systems. (Alam et al. 2026). Through literary works, readers can understand various aspects of society and human behavior while also gaining moral and emotional insights. According to (Bobkina & Dominguez, 2014), literary works contain intrinsic and extrinsic elements that contribute to the construction of meaning

and aesthetic value. Intrinsic elements refer to the components within the literary work itself, such as theme, characterization, setting, plot, point of view, and moral values. These elements are essential in revealing the meaning, values, and messages embedded in literary works, making intrinsic analysis an important approach in literary studies (Fitriani & Sugandi, 2025). The interpretation of every literary work cannot be separated from the elements inherent in it (Alam, 2024). The existence of these languages is important to know and study and this existence also makes the majority of Indonesians bilingual and multilingual. (wael et al. 2025)

Short stories represent one of the most popular forms of literary expression. Reading and writing literacy are fundamental competencies that need to be developed continuously. (Alam et al. 2025). Despite their relatively brief length, short stories are capable of presenting complex themes and profound messages. They often mirror social conditions and challenge readers to reflect upon their own beliefs and practices. One of the most influential short stories in American literature is *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson (Sheikh, Awan & Sheikh, 2021). Published in 1948 in *The New Yorker*, *The Lottery* immediately attracted widespread attention and controversy due to its disturbing conclusion and criticism of unquestioned social traditions. The story depicts a seemingly ordinary village gathering that gradually develops into a horrifying ritual in which one member of the community is selected to be stoned to death by fellow villagers. Jackson skillfully contrasts the pleasant atmosphere of the village with the brutal outcome of the lottery, thereby exposing the dark side of human conformity and collective violence.

Shirley Jackson was born on December 14, 1916, in San Francisco, California, and became one of America's most celebrated writers of horror and psychological fiction. Her works frequently explore themes of social anxiety, hidden cruelty, and the complexities of human nature. Through *The Lottery*, Jackson criticized society's tendency to maintain traditions merely because they have existed for generations, without questioning their morality or relevance. Several previous studies have analyzed intrinsic elements and moral values in literary works. Ardayati (2017) examined intrinsic elements and moral values in *Totto Chan: The Little Girl at the Window*, while Rahmasari (2022) investigated intrinsic aspects and moral values in *Tiger's Voyage*. However, studies specifically focusing on the intrinsic elements and moral messages in *The Lottery* remain valuable because the story continues to resonate with contemporary issues such as social conformity, discrimination, violence, and the dangers of blind obedience.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the intrinsic elements found in Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery*, including themes, characterization, and setting, as well as to identify the moral messages conveyed through the story. Through this analysis, readers are expected to gain a deeper understanding of the literary significance and social criticism embedded within the short story.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. According to W, Lim (2025), qualitative research aims to understand phenomena experienced by individuals through descriptive data in the form of words and language within their natural contexts. H. Nassaji (2020) also states that qualitative research

emphasizes meaning rather than numerical measurement. The descriptive approach was used because this study sought to describe and interpret the intrinsic elements and moral messages contained in the short story. The primary data source of this research was Shirley Jackson's short story *The Lottery* (1948). Secondary data sources included books, journal articles, and previous studies related to literary analysis and intrinsic elements.

The techniques of data collection employed in this research were library research and note-taking. The researcher conducted intensive reading of the short story to identify quotations relevant to the themes, characterization, setting, and moral messages. The selected quotations were then classified and analyzed according to the objectives of the study.

The procedures of data analysis were as follows:

1. Identifying the major themes presented in *The Lottery*.
2. Analyzing the characterization of the main and supporting characters.
3. Examining the setting of the story and its contribution to the overall meaning.
4. Identifying and interpreting the moral messages conveyed through the narrative.
5. Drawing conclusions based on the findings of the analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Themes

Several themes are found in Shirley Jackson's *The Lottery*.

a. *Blind Obedience to Tradition*

The dominant theme in the story is blind obedience to tradition. The villagers continue performing the lottery despite having forgotten its original purpose.

"The original paraphernalia for the lottery had been lost long ago...(Jackson, 1948). The quotation illustrates that although many aspects of the ritual had disappeared over time, the villagers still preserved the practice without questioning its morality. Jackson criticizes societies that maintain harmful traditions solely because they have existed for generations.

b. *Violence Hidden Beneath Normality*

Another significant theme is the coexistence of normality and violence. The story begins with a peaceful description of a summer morning, creating the impression of a cheerful community gathering.

"The morning of June 27th was clear and sunny, with the fresh warmth of a full-summer day..." (Jackson, 1948)

The contrast between the pleasant setting and the brutal ending reveals how violence can become normalized within society.

c. *Conformity and Social Pressure*

The villagers participate in the lottery because everyone else accepts it.

"There's always been a lottery," Old Man Warner added petulantly. (Jackson, 1948). This statement demonstrates society's resistance to change and the pressure placed upon individuals to conform to collective expectations.

d. Injustice

The story also emphasizes injustice. Tessie Hutchinson protests only after she becomes the victim.

"It isn't fair, it isn't right," Mrs. Hutchinson screamed. (Jackson, 1948)

Jackson suggests that people often ignore injustice until it directly affects them.

2. Characterization

The characterization in *The Lottery* consists of characters representing different social attitudes.

a. Tessie Hutchinson

Tessie Hutchinson serves as the central character. Initially cheerful and humorous, she eventually becomes the voice of protest.

"It isn't fair, it isn't right," Mrs. Hutchinson screamed. (Jackson, 1948)

Her transformation symbolizes human awareness that often emerges only when individuals personally experience injustice.

b. Old Man Warner

Old Man Warner symbolizes unwavering support for tradition.

"Pack of crazy fools," he said. "There's always been a lottery." (Jackson, 1948).

He represents conservative attitudes that reject social reform.

c. Mr. Summers

Mr. Summers functions as the organizer of the lottery.

"Little late today, folks." (Jackson, 1948).

Despite appearing friendly and respectable, he facilitates the ritualistic violence, illustrating how ordinary individuals may become instruments of harmful systems.

3. Setting

The setting contributes significantly to the story's effectiveness.

a. Place

The story takes place in a small village square.

"The people of the village began to gather in the square..." (Jackson, 1948).

The ordinary setting emphasizes that cruelty can occur even within seemingly peaceful communities.

b. Time

The events occur on June 27, during summer.

"The morning of June 27th was clear and sunny..." (Jackson, 1948).

The bright atmosphere creates irony because readers do not initially anticipate the tragic outcome.

c. Social Setting

The villagers demonstrate close relationships and cooperation. However, these social bonds quickly collapse when the ritual demands violence.

The social setting highlights how communities may prioritize tradition over compassion and ethical responsibility.

4. Moral Messages

Several moral messages can be derived from *The Lottery*.

a. Question Harmful Traditions

Individuals should critically evaluate traditions rather than accepting them blindly.

b. Uphold Humanity and Compassion

No tradition should justify cruelty toward others. Human dignity must remain a priority.

c. Resist Social Pressure

People should have the courage to challenge unjust practices even when such practices are widely accepted.

d. Promote Justice

Justice should be defended consistently rather than only when individuals become victims themselves.

The moral messages presented in the story remain relevant in modern society, where discrimination, prejudice, and social conformity continue to influence human behavior.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson presents profound themes and moral lessons through its intrinsic elements. The themes of blind obedience to tradition, conformity, hidden violence, and injustice reveal the dangers of unquestioned social practices. The characterization effectively portrays various human responses toward tradition, ranging from acceptance to resistance. Furthermore, the setting contributes significantly to the story's dramatic irony by contrasting an ordinary village atmosphere with shocking brutality. The moral messages encourage readers to think critically, value humanity, uphold justice, and question traditions that violate ethical principles. Therefore, *The Lottery* remains a timeless literary work whose social criticism continues to be relevant in contemporary society. Through this short story, Shirley Jackson reminds readers that customs and collective practices should always be evaluated based on reason, compassion, and moral responsibility.

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