

THE MULHERN STORY LIBRARY — SALON READING GUIDE

The Lottery

Shirley Jackson · Mid-Century American · first published 1948

AUTHOR	Shirley Jackson
PUBLISHED	1948
ERA	Mid-Century American
THEMES	Tradition, Conformity, Violence
READER PATHWAY	College seminar / adult discussion

INTRODUCTION FOR THOUGHTFUL READERS

On a sunny June morning, the residents of a small village gather for an annual lottery. The cheerful ordinariness of the ritual masks its horrifying purpose, revealed only in the story's final, shocking turn.

HISTORICAL & LITERARY CONTEXT

Published in *The New Yorker* on June 26, 1948, the story provoked an unprecedented volume of reader mail. It endures as a parable about blind adherence to tradition and the violence latent in conformity.

DISCUSSION FOCUS

Foreshadowing, irony, symbolism (the black box, the stones), setting as misdirection, and allegory. A powerful text for discussing tradition, ritual violence, scapegoating, and civic complicity.

SALON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why is ordinary social detail essential to the horror of the story?
- How does Jackson distinguish tradition from moral legitimacy?

Copyright note. Jackson's text remains under copyright. We link to the publisher's authorized full text at The New Yorker and a reputable overview; we do not reproduce the story.

READ & RESEARCH

1. Authorized full text at The New Yorker — <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1948/06/26/the-lottery>
2. Encyclopedic overview at Wikipedia — https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lottery