

FAST FACTS

Author's Works and Themes: Shirley Jackson

“Author's Works and Themes: Shirley Jackson.” Gale, 2019, www.gale.com.

Writings by Shirley Jackson

- *The Road through the Wall* (novel) 1948
- *The Lottery; or, The Adventures of James Harris* (short stories) 1949
- *Hangsaman* (novel) 1951
- *Life among the Savages* (nonfiction) 1953
- *The Bird's Nest* (novel) 1954
- *Witchcraft of Salem Village* (juvenile fiction) 1956
- *Raising Demons* (nonfiction) 1957
- *The Sundial* (novel) 1958
- *The Bad Children: A Play in One Act for Bad Children* (drama) 1959
- *The Haunting of Hill House* (novel) 1959
- *We Have Always Lived in the Castle* (novel) 1962
- *The Magic of Jackson* (short stories and novels) 1966
- *Come Along with Me: Part of a Novel, Sixteen Stories, and Three Lectures* (short stories, novel, and lectures) 1968

Major Themes

The principal themes of "The Lottery" rely on the incongruous union of decency and evil in human nature. Citing James G. Frazer's anthropological study of primitive societies, *The Golden Bough* (1890), many critics observe that the story reflects humankind's ancient need for a scapegoat, a figure upon which it can project its most undesirable qualities, and which can be destroyed in a ritually absolving sacrifice. Unlike primitive peoples, however, the townspeople in "The Lottery"—insofar as they represent contemporary Western society—should possess social, religious, and moral prohibitions against annual lethal stonings. Commentators variously argue that it is the very ritualization that makes the murder palatable to otherwise decent people; the ritual, and fulfilling its tradition, justifies and masks the brutality. As a modern parable on the dualism of human nature, "The Lottery" has been read as addressing such issues as the public's fascination with salacious and scandalizing journalism, McCarthyism, and the complicity of the general public in the victimization of minority groups, epitomized by the Holocaust of World War II.

Paper Topics

- Explore the nature of evil as it is portrayed in *The Lottery*. What purpose is served by placing the story in a nondescript American small town?

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