Symbolism in “The Lottery”

Character names

Graves, Summers, Delacroix - do you suspect anything when you hear these names? The names Mr. Graves, Mr. Summers, and Mrs. Delacroix and other names have interesting meanings and the author, Shirley Jackson, uses them to foreshadow the story and tell what "The Lottery" really is. This section will show some ideas that foreshadow the end of the story. Mr. Graves is the one who carries the three-legged stool, which can mean two things: the Blessed Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, or it could also mean the past, the present and the future, saying that "the Lottery" will always be among us. When Mr. Graves asks for some help, and there's a big hesitation before Mr. Martin and his son Baxter agree (“there was a hesitation before two men, Mr. Martin and his oldest son, Baxter, came forward to hold the box steady on the stool”) Of course, there’s his name, Mr. Graves, which is signaling tombstones, death and a cemetery. He is also the owner of the post office. As the Postmaster, he delivers the news, as well as with the lottery, he delivers the news of who will get stoned to death.

When you read the story, you don't suspect anything about the name Mr. Summers. It almost foreshadows something good; in other words, it deceives you. Summers symbolize life, changing of seasons, fertility, a new life, but Mr. Summers is exactly the opposite; instead of a new life, he takes one away. He also runs the other clubs and activities that are normally fun such as the square dancing, the teen club and the Halloween program, which leads you to think he’s a good person, but yet, he still continues the horrid tradition. Mr. Summers also runs the coal mine, and coincidentally coal is black and black denotes death.

Mrs. Delacroix is supposed to be friends with Tessie Hutchinson but when the stoning part comes along, there seems to be another story. Mrs. Delacroix in Latin and French and various other languages means "of the cross". Christians believe in the cross, but although she shows to be Christian, when the stoning comes along she picks up the biggest stone to throw at Tessie: "Mrs. Delacroix selected a stone so large she had to pick it up with both hands." Old Man Warner is also suspicious, he doesn't think that they should quit "the Lottery", he thinks that the person that deserves the stoning will receive it, and he says that he has lasted more than 70 years and still has not won, showing that he will never win so he isn’t scared every year they do "The Lottery." He also "warns" the town not to quit "The Lottery" and explains how other towns are thinking of giving "The Lottery" up; Old Man Warner snorts "Pack of crazy fools."

In this story, there is so much foreshadowing but it is very well disguised and very few readers pick up on the meaning of "The Lottery." Such as the children picking up stones, the hesitation before someone helps Mr. Graves with the stool, and people being late for the lottery, when normally people would rush to
want to see if they won, and not one person did. Neither Mr. Graves nor Mr. Summers have to quiet the crowd of over excitement; everyone is silently waiting to see if they had "won."

**The Black Box**

The shabby black box represents both the tradition of the lottery and the illogic of the villagers' loyalty to it. The black box is nearly falling apart, hardly even black anymore after years of use and storage, but the villagers are unwilling to replace it. They base their attachment on nothing more than a story that claims that this black box was made from pieces of another, older black box. The lottery is filled with similar relics from the past that have supposedly been passed down from earlier days, such as the creation of family lists and use of stones. These are part of the tradition, from which no one wants to deviate—the lottery must take place in just this way because this is how it's always been done. However, other lottery traditions have been changed or forgotten. The villagers use slips of paper instead of wood chips, for example. There is no reason why the villagers should be loyal to the black box yet disloyal to other relics and traditions, just as there is no logical reason why the villagers should continue holding the lottery at all.

**The Lottery**

The lottery represents any action, behavior, or idea that is passed down from one generation to the next that’s accepted and followed unquestioningly, no matter how illogical, bizarre, or cruel. The lottery has been taking place in the village for as long as anyone can remember. It is a tradition, an annual ritual that no one has thought to question. It is so much a part of the town’s culture, in fact, that it is even accompanied by an old adage: "Lottery in June, corn be heavy soon." The villagers are fully loyal to it, or, at least, they tell themselves that they are, despite the fact that many parts of the lottery have changed or faded away over the years. Nevertheless, the lottery continues, simply because there has always been a lottery. The result of this tradition is that everyone becomes party to murder on an annual basis. The lottery is an extreme example of what can happen when traditions are not questioned or addressed critically by new generations.