“The Lottery” Reading Guide

1. Discussion Questions
   What seems to have been the original purpose of the lottery?

   What do the people believe it does for them?

   What is the significance of Tessie’s final scream, “It isn’t fair, it isn’t right”?

   What aspect of the lottery does she challenge; what aspect goes unquestioned?

   Is the lottery a collective act of murder? Is it morally justified? Is tradition sufficient justification for such actions?

2. Describe the setting of the story.

3. Themes: The underlying themes have been provided for you. Identify where in the story each theme can be found/proven. Tell how it is shown and explain.

   Theme 1: People are reluctant to reject outdated traditions, ideas, rules, laws, and practices.

   Theme 2: Society wrongfully designates scapegoats to bear the sins of the community.
Theme 3: Following the crowd can have disastrous consequences.

4. Some first-time readers of "The Lottery" tend to cite the ending, describing the commencement of the stoning of Tessie Hutchinson, as the only disturbing part of the story. But those who have studied the story know otherwise. Consider the following; what makes them especially disturbing?

- "[T]he whole lottery took less than two hours, so it could begin at ten o'clock in the morning and still be through in time to allow the villagers to get home for noon dinner."

- "Guess we better get started, get this over with, so's we can go back to work."

- The villagers do not excuse children from the lottery. Even Nancy Hutchinson, 12, and her little brother, Davy, must draw from the black box. If a child draws the slip of paper with the black dot, he or she will be stoned.

- Children take part in the stoning. Little Davy is so small that he throws pebbles.

- Nancy Hutchinson and her brother Bill laugh when they draw blank lots. Only two people remain to draw, their father and mother. How could Nancy and Bill laugh when they know that their father or mother will draw the lot with the black spot and die?