Correlation between violence and happiness

The lottery is a short story that written by Shirley Jackson. Jackson was born in San Francisco (pg.781). She went to the University of Syracuse for her undergraduate education (pg.781). She became a teacher at Bennington College after she got married(Pg.781). She wrote the lottery in 1944 (pg.781). She has also written and published novels and other well known short stories such The Magic of Shirley Jackson (pg.781). After reading this short story, I had a question that popped in my mind about what Jackson’s message was to the reader. Is there a correlation between violence and happiness in the lottery? The title of this story is “The Lottery” which by first impression would lead me to believe there is happiness by winning but as I familiarized myself with the story, I realized that there is violence and Irony in this story.

The lottery is a short story that is mainly about a tradition in a small village. The lottery was a job that was conducted by Mr. Summers who also conducted other important events in the village such as dances and the Halloween program. “The lottery” is not like our modern day lottery which involves winning a lot money. It is an events that is really violent. It seems that the happiness in this story is caused by suffering of others. This story involves a black box that has been part of a tradition in this village for decades. The black box has pieces of paper that were put in there by Mr. Graves, the village’s postmaster. The papers in the box were all blank except for one that had a black mark made my Mr. Summers who used coal to make the mark. The
villagers draw from the box. The head of each family or the men are the ones who draw from the box. A family is then selected to draw. A member from the family that draws the paper with the black spot is stoned to death by the rest of the villager. This event is a tradition that is older than the oldest member of the village. It also practiced by other nearby villages.

The black box seems to symbolize risk in this story. There is violence in this risk which is entertaining to the villagers. For decades the villagers have practiced this tradition and never seem to get tired or realize that this is murder. Jackson does not go into detail about the motive of this event. I am not sure why this is a tradition or how it started. Murdering people that you know as a form of entertainment seems to be a very weird tradition to have. The tradition also does not seem to be fair. “I tell you it wasn't fair. You didn’t give him enough time to chose. Everybody saw that.” Mrs. Hutchinson stated. (Pg.786). The lottery seems like a form of entertainment at the cost of someone’s life. Even though the not all villagers may agree with this event, they seem to be happy with violence as a long as the violence is not imposed on them.

Russian roulette, which is a popular game that is shown frequently in movies and many other forms of media is a similar form of entertainment that may result in death that I can relate to this story and the black box. Russian roulette is when several participants put a single bullet in a gun cylinder, spin it and pull the trigger. The participants each take turns passing the gun around, and repeat this action until the bullet fires and the individual who has fired it dies. Russian roulette is comparable to the black box in many ways. For example, the black box is a very risky form of entertainment with one dotted slip of paper, just as russian roulette is often depicted in our society as a risky form of entertainment, where there is one bullet in the chamber. We often see russian roulette in movies, and the point of this being in there is to entertain the
audience. The point of entertaining content is to provide people with a sense of pleasure and/or happiness. The same goes for the black box. This is a tradition that many people in the village find entertaining, and considering that they are not quite modernized and do not have access to types of media where one might find entertainment in the practice of Russian roulette, they have to resort to creating their own real-life entertainment and happiness. Participating in the black box event each year is something that pleases the people of the village, and is yet another example of how the pursuit of happiness can have violent consequences along the way.

From our perspectives, we look at something like this and say it's horrific and sickening, but from the perspective of this society, The Lottery is always the most anticipated yearly event. Why do people in this society enjoy the lottery so much? It’s simple. The Lottery makes them happy. It provides the members of the society with entertainment. As humans, we sometimes become numb to human suffering if it is not our own or the suffering of a loved one. The black box is a perfect example of this. The villagers who did not have to be stoned or have a member of their family stoned were the ones who got the greatest amounts of happiness and pleasure out of the event. In the pursuit of happiness, people often disregard the suffering of others. The black box perfectly illustrates how people can often find happiness through violence. As long as this violence is entertaining to them, they will in fact become happy. One person stoned to the death sounds gruesome, but since it becomes publicized and promoted by the society, it subsequently becomes entertaining and therefore creates happiness.

“Mr summers spoke frequently to the villagers about making a new box, but no one liked to upset even as much tradition as was represented by the black box” (782). The black could also represent a tradition instead of a form of entertainment. Its seems that the box has been part of
this village and other surrounding villages for quite a long time. The lottery could have been started by one person or one village a long time back when the villages started forming. The villages could have used a black box to represent the tradition of the lottery. The tradition is then passed down and practiced by generations after generations. The tradition seems to be really old because in the story it is mentioned that the lottery started before the oldest man in the village was born. “The black box now resting on to the stool had been put into use even before Old Man Warner, the oldest man in town was born” (782). This event is also practiced once a year. If it was a form of entertainment to create happiness it would be practiced more than once a year. This is what has led me to believe that the box may just be a form of tradition practiced by the villagers and not a gruesome act of murder to supplement them with happiness.

In “The Lottery” Jackson uses the black box to signify how the correlation of violence and happiness is an extremely prevalent theme in countless forms of societies. In the pursuit of happiness through the form of entertainment that the lottery offers, Jackson makes the villagers seem somewhat inhumane or ruthless, however, upon further analysis it becomes clear that essentially all form of human societies have forms of entertainment that involve violence. The violence in “The Lottery” is real but is simply because they do not have access to any other form of entertainment. In our society, we are able to rely on movies and other form of media to provide us with this kind of entertainment. Whether real or fake, Jackson makes a strong point in “The Lottery” that humans often find themselves entertained by violence and this directly leads to their happiness.
Works Cited