**Written Responses: Style and Structure**

1. Read the question CAREFULLY! Make sure you understand what the question is asking.
2. You can use the **phrasing in the question** to help structure your **topic sentence.** This is the first sentence or two of your response and should state your **main idea .**
3. Remember, you are being asked to prove a point about the work (e.g., story, essay, poem, etc.), so you must **use evidence from the work to support your response**. This can be in the form of **direct quotations and/or paragraphing.**

Direct Quotation: The setting is described as “clear and sunny, with the fresh warmth of a full-summer day; the flowers were blossoming profusely and the grass was richly green” (1). This jovial atmosphere contrasts with the dark reality of the lottery . . .

Paraphrase: The setting of the story, a bright summer’s day, in the center of seemingly typical village, contrasts the sinister reality of the lottery . . .

1. Analyze your examples! Explain HOW they support your main idea. Try using a verb of analysis to link your example to your main idea.

Mrs. Hutchison is even willing to sacrifice her own children in order to escape death. This illustrates . . .

5) Avoid summarizing the story, but make sure you fully explain examples. Assume your audience has read the work, so there is no need to summarize, but provide relevant details to support you response.

6) Create a memorable concluding statement! Ask yourself: why is this important to our understanding of our world and ourselves and/or how does this affect our understanding of the story/characters/topic/way that language is used, etc.?

*The final image of the villagers moving in on Mrs. Hutchison, stones in hand, paints a bleak picture of humanity as a species whose darkest impulses can often be too easily unearthed.*

1. Unless it is a personal response or the question asks for your opinion, **write in third person**. (i.e., Avoid using the following pronouns: you, your, us, we, our, I, me)

***I*** *believe that the author is trying to tell* ***us*** *that* ***we*** *have a dark side.* ***X***

*The author develops the idea that human nature has a dark side.*

1. When discussing work and giving examples from the text, **use the present tense**. For example:

*Even Tessie Hutchison’s son, Davy,* ***was*** *given stones to help kill his own mother.*  **X**

*Even Tessie Hutchison’s son, Davy,* ***is*** *given stones to help kill his own mother*.

1. Avoid using figurative language when analyzing examples. You can use this type of language in your concluding statement but otherwise be clear and direct.

*Mrs. Hutchison exploded like a volcano after “winning the lottery”*. **X**

1. Avoid self-referential comments such as, “As mentioned earlier…”, or “In this paragraph it will be shown...”, or “The following three points . . . “; those ideas should speak for themselves.
2. After stating the author’s full name, always refer to her by her last name only.

*Jackson (not Shirley!) suggests that …*

1. Avoid informal language and idioms.

*Mrs. Hutchinson* ***freaked out*** *when she was chosen for the lottery.*

Instructions: For each sample paragraph, identify areas in need of improvement. What needs to change in order to fit the criteria of a good paragraph?

Example One

In the story people blindly believe in Old Man Warner who said, “We’d all be eating chickweed and acorns after a lottery.” Therefore, they all joined the game and hurt the innocent person who got the paper with the black spot. Mrs. Hutchinson was sacrificed in the lottery, but she was so selfish as to put her kids into the draw. Shirley Jackson talks about the bad side of human nature in the story.

Example Two

I think the author is trying to say that humans are born as selfish individuals. When a crisis comes humans will protect themselves, even if it means sacrificing a loved one. In the story *The Lottery*, the village has a tradition of conducting a lottery every year in June. The “winner” is randomly picked from a black box, and is stoned to death by the villages. In the story, Mrs Hutchinson is chosen. Her family does not express sadness or protest. Instead, they appear relieved because they did not get picked. Therefore the people in the story are selfish.

In her short story, “The Lottery”, Shirley Jackson is implying that there is a dark side to human nature. The characters in the story appear to lack any trace of compassion or sympathy for the innocent person who is being stoned to death as sacrifice for the harvest. For example, Mr. Summers gives no comforting words to Mrs. Hutchinson in her last moments, but, instead, tells the villagers to finish the stoning quickly, as if it is a tedious task that must be completed and not the taking of a life.

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Author Shirley Jackson argues that part of human nature is to adhere blindly to traditions, even at the expense of compassion. The lottery is a tradition that predates Old Man Warner, the oldest man in town. Their unwillingness to change is shown in their treatment of the box they use to draw names for the lottery: “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” (1). Even replacing the ritual paraphernalia is met with strong aversion, indicating the villagers dislike the notion of change and prefer to follow a cruel tradition.

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