Discussion Questions for Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery”

Working in small groups of up to 3 people, answer the following questions on separate paper.

Analysis:
1. At what point did you know what was going to happen? What lines show the first clues in the story? What rhetorical tone does Jackson use to try and convince the reader that this is a normal town? (4 pts)

2. When you evaluate Tessie’s reaction to “winning,” do you think she should have won? (4 pts)

3. List five examples of irony, and explain why they work. (3 points each)

4. Some of the character names are surely deliberately chosen. What connotative aspects are carried by the following names? (2 points each)
   a. Graves
   b. Summers
   c. Bentham
   d. Delacroix
   e. Hutchinson

5. What is Shirley Jackson’s attitude toward the lottery and its results? Dig deeper than “She doesn’t like it.” (3 pts)

Synthesis:
Contemporize the theme of this work. What current “lotteries” – practices, traditions, or rituals that infringe on human rights or dignities – exist today? Example: The 9-11 terrorist incident changed the way America viewed national security. Not long prior to that day, people could use someone else’s ticket to fly; people could walk up to the tunnel to greet passengers as they got off the plane, and security consisted of a couple guys chatting near the entrance of the airport. Now we have people yelling at us, checking our bags closely, and throwing away our shaving gel because it comes in a 4 ounce can, not the 3 ounces allowed for flights, etc.
Brainstorm and describe – in a couple paragraphs or in a list format – 3 examples of contemporary “lotteries.” (20 points each)