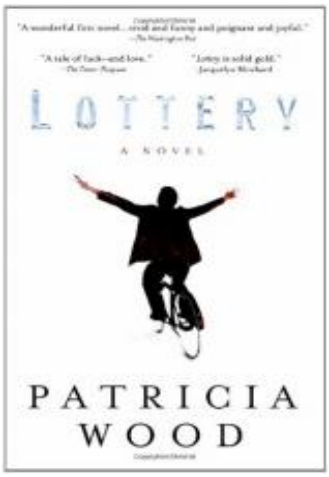
Lottery

by Patricia Wood



About the Book

With an IQ of 76, Perry L. Crandall is often mistaken for retarded. But he knows the truth: ?You have to have an IQ number less than 75 to be retarded. I read that in Reader?s Digest.? Abandoned by his mother at a young age, Perry lives with his cantankerous but good-hearted Gram, who tells him that there?s nothing wrong with being a little slow. She teaches him how to get along in the world: always write things down, study the dictionary to learn new words, know whom to trust and who?s trying to take advantage. Most of all, she reminds Perry that for all his disadvantages, he?s a lucky boy --- that?s what the L stands for.

Shortly after her death, Gram?s belief in Perry?s luck is borne out in spectacular fashion. Cheated out of his inheritance by his conniving family, he moves into an apartment above his employer?s shop and is watched after by his best friend, Keith, a troubled Vietnam vet who lives on a boat in the harbor below. Money is tight, but Perry does his best to maintain his routine: daily vocabulary words, Sunday crossword puzzles, and weekly lottery tickets. When one of those tickets turns out to hold a $12 million jackpot, Perry?s world is transformed overnight.

After a lifetime of being teased, ignored, and shunned, Perry is suddenly everybody?s best friend. His newfound fame makes him a star attraction at work, and he is inundated by letters, phone calls, and visitors, all looking for the same thing: a piece of the winnings. His friend Keith and his employer, Gary, help him fend off the day-to-day petitioners, but Perry?s family has a more elaborate scheme in mind. Playing on his trusting nature and his innate goodwill, they maneuver to swindle him out of every last dime.

Patricia Wood?s **Lottery** offers a glimpse of the world as seen through the eyes of a man with limited cognitive abilities but boundless generosity of spirit.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the author?s use of language. What techniques does she employ to take the reader inside a mentally challenged mind?

2. At several points in the novel, various characters use the word ?retarded.? How do you feel about this word and other words we use to describe the mentally and physically challenged?

3. Gram tells Perry that his brother David is weak, and that ?the weak are more dangerous in the end.? Discuss the character of David and his interactions with Perry. Is Gram?s warning justified?

4. Perry calls Gram ?a good teacher. She didn?t mind that I was slow, but lots of people do.? How do Gram?s lessons prepare him for the challenges he faces throughout the novel?

5. Keith and Cherry, Perry?s closest friends, have both lived traumatic lives?Keith served in Vietnam, Cherry has been abused by her father. Why do these characters form such a close bond with Perry? In what ways do their life experiences inform their relationships with him?

6. Which character are you most drawn to? Why?

7. Perry views things in highly literal terms, as illustrated when he refuses to spread part of Gram?s ashes in Hawaii because ?she needs to be kept together.? In what ways does this literalism prove to be an asset? In what ways is it a deficit?

8. Perry says that Gary ?was always nice to me before, but now he listens? Money has made the slow part of me not so important.? Discuss the relationship between Gary and Perry. In what ways does it change after Perry wins the lottery?

9. Perry?s vocabulary words are a motif throughout the novel. Discuss these words in terms of the chapters in which they appear and the story as a whole. What symbolic or metaphoric insights do they offer?

10. What do you think of Perry?s decision at the end of the novel? What would you have advised him to do?

11. Does money buy happiness? Does it buy love? What do you think Perry?s life would have been like without it?

Author Bio

Critical Praise

?Fear not: This novel about a mildly retarded man who wins the Washington State Lottery is no Forrest Gump retread --- we much prefer this (admittedly folksy) narrator to Tom Hanks as a mentally challenged Zelig. Patricia Wood?s mentor, Paul Theroux, lent his literary wisdom to a book that manages to be heartfelt and totally not corny.?

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