Maxine Hong Kingston outlines the relationship between her and her mother, Brave Orchid, in her book, The Woman Warrior. Kingston talks about her experience growing up in a Chinese immigrant family in Fresno, California. Growing up, Kingston struggles with confidence while talking to people. Her mother, Brave Orchid, also frequently tells her seemingly pointless and confusing stories and Kingston reflects on them in her book. Kingston has issues determining whether those stories are real or fake, so she has to question whether they help her with confidence or not. On the surface, Brave Orchid seems to neglect Kingston, making her lose confidence, but Brave Orchid uses the stories to encourage Kingston to be a confident woman which then positively influences her actions.

Brave Orchid seems to not care about Kingston by telling her stories that could be real or fake, but actually had a purpose behind it. When Kingston reflects on her mother, Kingston says by telling her stories, “She tested our strength to establish realities.”[5] Brave Orchid used stories to teach Kingston to be confident about reality and mostly herself. To be confident, one must be able to distinguish what is real and what is not and the stories develop that skill. When one knows that something is real they can progress forward with confidence. At first when she heard the stories her mother told, she thought they held her back. The stories were difficult to decide whether they were real or not, so they made her realize her inability to figure out reality. Now, Kingston sees that the stories actually helped her out. Brave Orchid uses stories to develop Kingston’s confidence instead of making her lose confidence. By telling Kingston all those seemingly confusing stories, Brave Orchid is actually trying to make Kingston more confident in herself. When Kingston’s mother tells her a beautiful story about a powerful woman warrior in ancient China, she reflected, “When we Chinese girls listened to the adults talk-story, we learned that we failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves. We could be heroines, swordswomen.” [19] Typically in Chinese culture, girls grew up to be “wives or slaves” and the story would help them have the motivation to become something more than that. The story is liberating and gave Kingston confidence that she could be better than a wife or a slave. It gave Kingston confidence and hope that she could be powerful and confident just like the woman in the story. When Brave Orchid tells this story to Kingston, she is not only inspiring Kingston but also giving her confidence on being more than what people expect of her. By telling Kingston stories, Brave Orchid isn’t weakening her confidence, but strengthening it.

Kingston then uses the skills she gains from the stories to try to be confident when confronting people. Kingston finds out that her company’s banquet is going to be held at a picketed restaurant. When she asks her boss about it, he told her that he chose it because it was picketed. Kingston reacts, thinking, “If I took the sword, which my hate must surely have forged out of the air, and gutted him, I would put color and wrinkles into his shirt.” [49] Kingston uses the confidence she received from the story about the woman warrior to attempt to stand up to her boss about what she thinks is wrong. Kingston used all the confidence she gained from her mother to push back. Even though it wasn’t much, she still stabbed him with her sword of rage. To have rebellious thoughts like that requires true confidence in what she stood for and a knowledge of who her enemies were. She had the confidence to fight back and that show's development from who she was before. Kingston tries her best and uses the the confidence gained from the stories her mother told her, even though it isn’t much. Kingston describes an experience she had when she was young, “When one of my parents or the ignorant villagers said, ‘Feeding girls is feeding cowbirds,’ I would thrash on the floor and scream so hard I couldn’t talk. I couldn’t stop.” [46] Kingston tries to rebel against the sexist villager by screaming, which is her way to push back against the villager, and sexism in general, though not effective. The woman warrior in the story pushes back against people who are sexist and think women are weak. Kingston also does that by showing everyone around her that she disagreed with that. Like the story with her boss, Kingston was able to use the story to take a stand on what she believed and requires a high level of confidence. The stories that her mother told her influence her to try to be strong and give her a sense of self-esteem that she couldn’t have gotten before.

When she was a child, Kingston thought the stories her mother told confused her because it showed Kingston’s inability to determine what is real. Later, Kingston realizes that Brave Orchid’s stories empower her to be confident in what she stands for. Kingston then translates that confidence into taking a strong stand and fighting what she believes in.