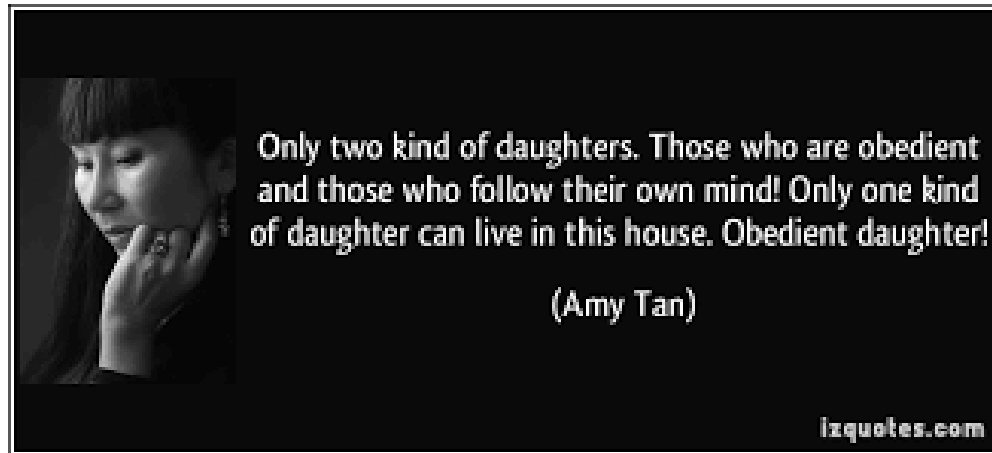


## “TWO KINDS” by AMY TAN

INSTRUCTIONS: Choose one of the following to write your essay:



- Two strong-willed characters are pitted against each other in this story. What went wrong in the relationship between mother and daughter? Can you understand them? Is the story mainly about a typical dysfunctional family or is it a short story dealing with typical multicultural challenges?
- In the conflict between mother and daughter the father is absent. Why do you think the father is not part of the conflict? Can you see any reason for this “absence” in the plot? What is the usual role of mothers and fathers in families. Can you relate in any way with your own family experience?
- Read the parts dealing with the mother’s earlier life in China carefully. How might have the mother’s earlier experiences shaped her ambitions for her daughter? Compare this with your own experiences with your mother or father and their desires or ambitions for their children.
- The daughter plays two pieces on the piano, “Pleading Child” and “Perfectly Contented.” How could these two titles be related to the author’s own life? Find information about Amy Tan and remember to use documentation (author, year) in parenthesis to indicate source of info.

**Remember to format your essay as required and include your heading aligned left:**

Your Name & Last name

Prof.

Class

Date

Write the title of Your Essay Here

Remember to write the title *of your essay* (which must be different from the title of the story) centered on the first page, without using quotation marks, underline nor bold. Use Times New Roman size #12 font, double space, and keep one-inch margins. Remember to use direct quotations from the story in your essay (and give the page or paragraph #). Also, if you use other sources, remember to avoid plagiarism; be sure include documentation in (parenthesis) in the essay and the Works Cited page, which should be a separate page at the end. (Total: 500 words)

(Total points: 25)

Two strong-willed characters are pitted against each other in this story. What went wrong in the relationship between mother and daughter? Can you understand them? Is the story mainly about a typical dysfunctional family or is it a short story dealing with typical multicultural challenges?

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GEEN 2312-43323

April 18, 2023

### Mother-Daughter Dynamic in "Two Kinds" by Amy Tan

"Two Kinds" can be generally described as a look into immigrant life in the land of the "American Dream." What can be witnessed in this story of a daughter and a mother is the clashing of ideas, the former adopting a realistic, borderline pessimistic mindset that the latter does not believe in and refuses to acknowledge. The conflict in the story can be attributed to the two characters being on opposite extremes of the spectrum. The daughter expresses a general lack of interest in trying anything, and the mother believes in every possibility and, therefore, a necessity to explore everything. Not only do these characters have opposing personalities, but their characteristics are also intensified by the different types of lives they have lived. The result is the tumultuous and tense relationship depicted, the natural clash of mother versus daughter is further exaggerated by their contradictory beliefs and expectations.

The mother is depicted as the classic immigrant parent with broken English and heightened expectations for their child. "My mother believed you could be anything you wanted to be in America. You could open a restaurant. You could work for the government and get good retirement. You could buy a house with almost no money down. You could become rich. You

could become instantly famous" (Paragraph 1). The very first sentence sets the stage and offers a crucial introduction to the consequent plot. Her beliefs can be explained by the type of life she lived before reaching the US and the hardships she faced in China, as she had experienced much loss. Her history served to bolster the expectation of what can be achieved in the US, "America was where all my mother's hopes lay" (Paragraph 1). To her, the difference in the quality of life between her and her daughter opens the doors to aspirations she could never have.

The mother displays a strong will and an attitude of excelling and following through with things. "And the next day I played a game with myself, seeing if my mother would give up on me before eight bellows. After a while I usually counted only one bellow, maybe two at most" (Paragraph 4). This quote demonstrates that failure after several tries is not enough to deter her from her goal, and only "after a while" was it enough for her to waiver in her beliefs and expectations. "Unlike my mother, I did not believe I could be anything I wanted to be, I could only be me" (Paragraph 10). The hope she gained from immigrating to the US was projected onto her daughter; she believed that simply living in America was enough for her daughter to achieve what she expected from her, which was to be a prodigy in any possible thing. "We didn't immediately pick the right kind of prodigy" (Paragraph 2). As a woman who held such strong convictions and displayed almost desperate attempts to make her hopes a reality, adamantly sticking to this attitude resulted in raising a daughter just as stubborn as her.

The daughter in the story experienced the disillusion of being unable to live up to her mother's expectations, and the eventual attitude she adopts as the story progresses is the direct cause of that. "In fact, in the beginning I was just as excited as my mother, maybe even more so. I pictured this prodigy part of me as many different images, and I tried each one on for size" (Paragraph 3). As time progressed, and not much progress was made in attaining this dream, her

mother's insistence became less encouraging and more pressuring. "But sometimes the prodigy in me became impatient. "If you don't hurry up and get me out of here, I'm disappearing for good," it warned. "And then you'll always be nothing"" (Paragraph 3). The idea of reaching her full potential and discovering the talent that would raise her high in the eyes of her mother and herself inspired the disillusion as, slowly but surely, she was unable to reach those heights. This disappointment caused her to, instead, begin believing in the opposite, that she was just "herself" and had already reached her full potential, and there was no hidden talent to discover.

"And after seeing, once again, my mother's disappointed face, something inside me began to die. I hated the tests, the raised hopes and failed expectations. Before going to bed that night I looked in the mirror above the bathroom sink, and I saw only my face staring back" (Paragraph 4). Once her belief in her abilities to achieve prodigy level turned negative, her stubbornness against her mother's insistence on discovering her talent became outright and decisive. "And then I saw what seemed to be the prodigy side of me ... The girl staring back at me was angry, powerful ... I had new thoughts ... thoughts filled with lots of won'ts... I won't be what I'm not" (Paragraph 4). Similar to her mother's attitude, the daughter was determined to stick to her newfound ideals and beliefs. This epiphany spurs her to take a dismissive attitude toward her mother's goals, and she begins to dread the search for her talent and, later on, the piano lessons she is forced to take by her mother. Her surety in the inexistence of her prodigy self allows her never to put in any actual effort, leading up to the plot's climax.

The conflict created between the two characters, as the mother remains adamant in pushing her daughter to achieve what she hopes for her and her daughter going against her at every turn, leads to the point in which both characters clash for the final time. "" Only two kinds of daughters," she shouted in Chinese. "Those who are obedient and those who follow their own

mind! Only one kind of daughter can live in this house. Obedient daughter!"" (Paragraph 9).

Until now, the daughter has gone along with her mother's wishes, although begrudgingly, but at this point – following their embarrassment in the talent show – their opposing beliefs come out in full force. This time, the daughter purposefully tries to hurt her mother due to the frustration that has been building up in her, ""Then I wish I'd never been born!" I shouted. "I wish I were dead! Like them"" (Paragraph 9). Weaponizing her past in this way, throwing it at her with the intention of hurting her, establishes the dynamic of their relationship as the daughter grows and becomes an adult.

The leading cause of such a significant strain on their relationship was the unrealistic expectation placed on the daughter and the subsequent struggle she had as she juggled those expectations and the reality of who she was. Although it caused an unhealthy dynamic between her and her daughter, the mother's intentions could be perceived as good as she hoped to assist her daughter in going down a path, she thought best for her. Considering her harsh past in China before coming to the US, it is understandable to see how she pushed and pressured her daughter. It is difficult to amend your hopes and dreams to what is reality. The daughter was forced to do that due to the pressure of expectation placed on her by her mother.

The story presented a family that did not know how to communicate their thoughts and feelings, leading to an unhealthy dynamic between all. This dysfunctionality is most likely credited to the cultural values and beliefs held in the family as immigrants from another country. The mother, who has held true to the culture she brought from her home country, conflicts with the daughter due to the different way of life she is growing up in and learning to adopt. Due to being raised in an environment with foreign culture and traditions, the daughter ultimately does not agree with the actions of her mother that result from her Chinese immigrant culture.