

Scaffolded Reading Experience™ for Fostering Higher Order Reading and Comprehension Skills

with

“Two Kinds”

by Amy Tan

An SRE™ Created by Ann Swanson
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This SRE™ and a number of other SRE™s are available online at
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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
Introduction	2
Objectives	3
Higher Order Thinking Skills	3
Chronological List of Activities	4
Detailed Description of Activities	5
Student Materials	9
Sources of the Reading Selection, Additional Readings, and Other Material	15

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Introduction

Amy Tan's work has captured the imaginations of thousands of readers. Her novels, especially, have explored themes of loss, resistance, endurance, and coming of age just before as well as during China's Cultural Revolution. Another theme familiar to fans of Tan's work revolves around Chinese Americans whose connections to their cultural heritage waver over time as they attempt to live in two worlds—one of the Chinese immigrant, whose existence is necessarily composed of experiences in China with a belief that America provides the only place of promise for a new life, and one of the American, whose hope lies in the future but who is irrevocably drawn to the past lived in China.

"Two Kinds" is a short story that explores these same themes common in Tan's larger works. Jing-Mei is a young Chinese American girl whose mother experienced tremendous loss as she escaped the Communist takeover of China. Jing-Mei knows some of her mother's story, yet the tragedy of her mother's struggles does not soften Jing-Mei's pre-adolescent heart. Jing-Mei's mother desires success for her daughter and sets her heart upon Jing-Mei becoming a child piano prodigy. After much resistance, Jing-Mei half-heartedly tries to learn the piano and embarrasses her mother during a public talent show. This setback does not deter Jing-Mei's mother, as she continues to push Jing-Mei to persevere and is met by Jing-Mei's constant resistance.

This SRE™ unit is designed to help students develop their skills at literary analysis as they examine the conflicts between Jing-Mei and her mother and the dissonance created when differing points of view clash. Students are given several opportunities at various levels to reflect on what they are reading through writing and discussion. Many of the ideas and activities in SRE may also be applied to several of Amy Tan's short stories as well as chapters from her novels, as Tan's themes of loss, resistance, endurance, and coming of age weave themselves throughout her work.

Objectives

- To develop an understanding of how conflicts, both external and internal, work throughout a story, and even past the actions represented in the story
- To develop an appreciation for characters' point-of-view in literature
- To appreciate the role that loss plays in the life of an immigrant who attempts to build a new life in America
- To understand how the interplay of point-of-view, assumptions, and expectations create friction and interpersonal obstacles between people.

Higher Order Thinking Skills

- Understanding — Constructing meaning from instructional messages, including oral, written, and graphic communications.
- Analyzing — Breaking material into its constituent parts and determining how the parts relate to one another and to an overall structure or purpose.
- Evaluating — Making judgments based on criteria and standards.

Chronological List of Activities

Day 1

Pre-Reading Activities

- (1) Building Background Knowledge: About author, *10 minutes*
- (2) Relating the Reading to Students' Lives, *10 minutes*
- (3) Building Background Knowledge: Relevant to the Story, *5-10 minutes*

During-Reading Activities

- (1) Begin Reading Aloud Together, *5-10 minutes*

Day 2

During-Reading Activities

- (1) Silent Reading and Story Map, *40 minutes*

Day 3

Post-Reading Activities

- (1) Vocabulary Activity, *15 minutes*
- (2) Class Discussion, Focus on the Mother's Point-of-view as an Immigrant, *10 minutes*
- (3) Graphic Organizer on the Pressures of Being an Immigrant, as Presented in this Story, *15 minutes*

Day 4

Post-Reading Activities

- (1) Class Discussion, Focus on Conflict, *10 minutes*
- (2) Graphic Organizer on Conflict in the Story, *10 minutes*
- (3) Writing, *20 minutes*

Detailed Description of Activities

Day 1

Pre-Reading Activities

1. **Building Background Knowledge (about author), 10 minutes**

- Begin the class by showing the students the novels that Amy Tan has written—*The Joy Luck Club*; *The Kitchen God's Wife*; *The Moon Lady* and *The Chinese Siamese Cat*, both juvenile or easy-reading fiction; *The Hundred Secret Senses*; and *The Bonesetter's Daughter*—and describe a bit about her life and that of her mother's detailed in those novels. Tan pulls her themes from heavily autobiographical material.
- Amy Tan was born on February 19, 1952 in Oakland, California. Her parents both immigrated from China, and the horrific experiences her mother endured while escaping the Communist takeover of China resonated in Tan's life, as her mother encouraged Amy to become the embodiment of the American success story.
- Tan's own family endured loss when her father and her eldest brother both died of brain tumors within a year of each other. Mrs. Tan moved the family to Switzerland, and Amy finished high school there. Amy and her mother were in constant conflict over Amy's choices in colleges and in boyfriends. They did not speak for several months at various times due to those conflicts.
- Amy Tan studied English and linguistics and earned both a bachelor's and master's degree in both fields. She married a boyfriend, Louis DeMattei, over which she and her mother quarreled, and the two became successful professionals in San Francisco—she, ultimately, as a business writer and he as a tax attorney.
- Tan eventually began to write fiction based heavily on her own growth as the daughter of immigrant parents who embrace life in America yet remain anchored to their own pasts and cultures in China. Her novels have won Tan literary acclaim as a writer who unflinchingly examines the joys and tragedies of lives tightly tied to conflicting cultures and expectations about life.

2. **Relating the Reading to Students' Lives, 10 minutes**

- Ask students to consider the following:
 - A. What expectations do you have for yourself?
 - B. What expectations do others place on you?
 - C. What happens when those expectations conflict with the plans and expectations you have for yourself?

- Students may need to have the ideas behind the word *expectations* explained to them. For instance, they may have expectations for their own lives that revolve around how they spend their free time, what activities they pursue, how they pursue success in school, and what talents and interests they might explore. After discussing the ideas behind the word *expectations*, students can answer these questions in their journals or notes and then discuss them, if discussion encourages them to connect to the story and to the character of Jing-Mei.

3. *Building Background Knowledge (about story), 5-10 minutes*

- This story revolves around the characters Jing-Mei and her mother. Jing-Mei's mother wants Jing-Mei to be a successful person in American society, and she believes the surest way to do accomplish this feat is for Jing-Mei to become a child prodigy in some kind of activity. Through the inevitable conflicts that arise out of her mother's expectations for and disappointment in Jing-Mei, the reader also sees the conflicts that arise as immigrants build their new lives in a new country.

4. *Begin Reading Aloud Together, 5-10 minutes*

- With the time left in this class period, begin reading this story aloud with students. Students can then stop and answer question from the story map as necessary.

Day 2

Reading Activities

1. *Silent Reading and Story Map, 40 minutes*

- Students will independently read the story and answer the questions from the story map as they read. Students should be sure to answer the extension questions as well.

Day 3

Post-Reading Activities

1. *Vocabulary Activity, 15 minutes*

- Have students look for the following vocabulary words in the story and complete the worksheet on vocabulary (in the student materials section). The second portion of the worksheet may be somewhat difficult for some younger students who are not used to using vocabulary words in and original context born from the story they just read. If this activity is

both new and difficult, students may be grouped together in order to complete the task, or the activity may take more time than designated here.

2. Class Discussion, Focus on the Mother's Being an Immigrant, 10 minutes

- The mother's point-of-view in "Two Kinds" is born directly from her experiences in China and her understanding of what it takes to be successful in America. The mother is also affected by the successes of her friends' children, which causes additional friction between her and Jing-Mei. The teacher and the students will need to discuss the mother's point-of-view in order to not dismiss the mother's concern for her daughter as simple misunderstanding of her daughter's individuality.
- This discussion serves as a segue to the student activity where they focus on the mother's point-of-view in an attempt to understand the story more thoroughly. Ideally, students may also come to see the expectations of the adults in their own lives as born from genuine concern and love.

3. Graphic Organizer on the Experience of Being an Immigrant, as Presented in this Story, 15 minutes

- Students complete the graphic organizer concerning the pressures of being an immigrant as presented in this story. This graphic organizer is located in the student materials section. Following completion of the organizer, students are asked to write a paragraph of reflection, which is designed to help them understand why Jing-Mei's mother behaves in seemingly harsh ways toward her daughter.
- After students have completed this graphic organizer, the class should discuss their answers and their paragraphs, as they may vary and should help to review events from the story.

Day 4

Post-Reading Activities

1. Class Discussion, Focus on Conflict, 10 minutes

- Conflict in literature is grouped into four or five categories—namely person vs. self; person vs. person; person vs. society; person vs. nature; and, according to some, person vs. technology. Students should note these forces of conflict in the graphic organizer in the student materials section. Then the teacher and the students can discuss specific examples

of the types of conflict that are present in the story. Some of the categories of conflict, namely person vs. nature and person vs. technology, may not be present in this story.

2. *Graphic Organizer on Conflict in the Story, 10 minutes*

- Students should complete the graphic organizer on conflicts from the story. The teacher and students should discuss their answers in order to share the variety of ideas with one another.

3. *Writing, 20 minutes*

- As a culminating activity for this SRE™, students will complete one final short written product. The prompt, based on conflict and their own experiences with friction regarding expectations, is located in the student materials section.

Student Materials

Student materials for “Two Kinds” include a story map, a vocabulary activity, two graphic organizers, and a final prompt for an extended writing:

- Story Map for "Two Kinds." A story map (Beck & McKeown, 1981) is a set of questions which when answered reveals the essence of the story. The basic set of story map questions follow the order of the story, focus on events of central importance in the story, and require both factual knowledge and inferences. In the story map used here, the basic story map questions are followed by a set of extension questions. These questions are posed after students have answered the story map questions and thus have a basic understanding of the story. They require students to step back from the story and think critically as they consider such matters as the author's craft, literary devices and concepts, relationships between the story and other literature they have read, and relationships between the story and their lives.
- Vocabulary Worksheet for "Two Kinds." The vocabulary activity requires students to focus on only seven words present in the story. Students will find the words in context, define them using that context or a dictionary, and then use the word in another context taken from the story.
- Graphic Organizer: The Pressure of Being an Immigrant, as Expressed in "Two Kinds." Graphic organizers (Alvermann, 1991) focus students' attention and make their thinking and claims public as they consider a question. This first one scaffolds students efforts in understanding Jing-Mei's mother's point-of-view.
- Graphic Organizer: Conflict in "Two Kinds." This graphic organizer focuses on the conflict present in this story.
- Final Writing Assignment on "Two Kinds." The final writing prompt allows students to integrate their understanding of conflict in the story with their own personal experiences of conflict. It is hoped that students will also discuss the competing points-of-view inherent in virtually any conflict.

Story Map for “Two Kinds”

- 1) Initially, how did Jing-Mei feel about becoming a prodigy?
- 2) What were some of the failures Jing-Mei experienced as her mother explored her areas of talent?
- 3) What happened to cause Jing-Mei to resist her mother’s influence?
- 4) What does Jing-Mei’s mother finally decide to do to help Jing-Mei become a prodigy?
- 5) What kind of a teacher is Mr. Chong?
- 6) How do Jing-Mei’s lessons and practice go?
- 7) What happens at the talent show?
- 8) After the talent show, what are the reactions of Jing-Mei’s father and mother? What reaction does Jing-Mei expect when they return home from the show?
- 9) During Jing-Mei’s argument with her mother over practicing the piano, what two kinds of daughters does her mother say exist? At that moment, which kind is Jing-Mei?
- 10) What does Jing-Mei say that prompts her mother to give up hope?
- 11) What two songs are in the piano book?

Extension Questions

- 1) What two kinds of daughters are there?
- 2) How do those two kinds of daughters match up with the two songs at the end of the story?
- 3) Jing-Mei observes that “they were two halves of the same song.” How are the songs and the daughters two halves of one?

Vocabulary Worksheet for “Two Kinds”

Find the following words in the story “Two Kinds.” Write the sentence in which you find the word, then write the definition of the word. If you do not know the word’s definition, look it up in the dictionary.

Finally, write your own original sentence using the word in a situation that comes from the story. The first word is completed for you.

Vocabulary Word	Sentence from book	Definition	Original Sentence
Devastate	But m mother’s expression was what devastated me; a quiet, blank look that said she had lost everything.	Destroy completely	When Jing-Mei’s mother gave up hope for her success, Jing-Mei was devastated, too.
Discordant			
Envision			
Fiasco			
Lament			
Prelude			
Prodigy			

Graphic Organizer: The Pressure of Being an Immigrant, as Expressed in “Two Kinds”

Jing-Mei’s mother desires success for her daughter, but she does not express that desire in ways that most American teenagers might accept. Because of her Chinese heritage and culture, her experiences in China before she left, and her attempts to live a successful American life, Jing-Mei’s mother exerts pressure on Jing-Mei.

Direct your thinking to Jing-Mei’s mother and reflect on her experiences. Complete the questions regarding the mother’s point-of-view.

Lastly, write a short paragraph about why Jing-Mei’s mother exerts pressure on her daughter. If it helps, write this paragraph in her mother’s own words.

Whom did Jing-Mei’s mother leave behind in China?	
What expectations for success does Jing-Mei’s mother have, now that she lives in America? On whom does the mother and Jing-Mei’s success depend?	
Who and what puts pressure on Jing-Mei’s mother? Be very specific.	
How will Jing-Mei’s mother know that she has been successful in raising a daughter who is an American success story?	
Why is success so important to Jing-Mei’s mother?	

Write your paragraph on the back of this page, using the information you have written above.

Graphic Organizer: Conflict in “Two Kinds”

Conflict, or two or more forces working in opposition, is necessary in all literature. As you may know, there are four or five types of conflict. Complete the following chart on the types of conflicts present in literature:

Conflict Type	Example from this story or another work of literature
Person vs.	
Person vs.	
Person vs.	
Person vs.	
Person vs.	

In the story “Two Kinds,” several conflicts dominate the action in the story. List as many conflicts as you can to fill the chart, and then briefly describe a specific example of that conflict. An example is completed for you.

Conflict	Specific example from “Two Kinds”
Jing-Mei vs. her mother	Jing-Mei’s mother wants her to take piano lessons, but she resists. Jing-Mei knows that she is smart enough to do well, but she fights her mother in order to show her mother that she can’t be bossed.

Final Writing Assignment on “Two Kinds”

In two to three paragraphs, describe the conflicts between Jing-Mei and her mother. Pay particular attention to the expectations that Jing-Mei’s mother has for her and to Jing-Mei’s reactions to those expectations. What was the ultimate outcome of the conflicts between Jing-Mei and her mother?

In one or more paragraphs, describe a time when you experienced conflict regarding your own and someone else’s expectations for you. What was the outcome of that conflict?

Sources of the Reading Selection, Additional Readings, and Other Material

Source of the Reading Selection

Tan, A. (1993). "Two Kinds." *Multicultural Perspectives*. Evanston, IL: McDougal, Littell & Company.

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Additional Readings by the Same Author

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http://www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec/ieo/bibs/mytan.html. *ERIC Bibliography on Amy Tan*.

<http://www.webenglishteacher.com/tan.html>. *Web English Teacher: Amy Tan*. Includes graphic organizers, essay questions, and various follow-up activities.

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