

Living Between Two Places (and Cultures): Shirley Lim’s “Two Lives”

While Amy Tan’s essay seems to end on a positive or ‘upbeat’ note, despite her mother’s difficulty with being treated unfairly for her way of speaking English, the story that Shirley Lim tells in “Two Lives” (pp. 15-18 in Course Pack) has quite a different ‘feeling’ (or tone) to it.

Like Tan, Shirley Geok-Lin Lim uses painful personal experience to comment upon life in America, as well contrast the differences between her old and new life. There is also some strong writing about ‘place’ in this piece, especially in the description of her life in America, as someone who feels caught between the rules and expectations of two cultures.

● In groups of 3:

• First, re-read / skim the essay after you look over the questions (pre-reading) below. (7 minutes)

1) **What is the ‘tone’ (emotional flavor) of the opening paragraph? As a group, pick a ‘tone’ word** (pessimistic, optimistic, joyful, sarcastic, humorous, etc.) and **be ready to explain why you chose this word.** (Cite a line of evidence.) As you answer this question, ask yourself who is the ‘she’ in the opening paragraph.

2) **What is the contrast made in the opening pages between “happy immigrant[s]” and “resident aliens”?** (Lim 15) **As a team, point out one contrast or difference that Lim makes in this paragraph.** Do you think she is correct about her social observations here?

3) Good ‘place writing’ often uses the senses to describe a scene and develop a sense of place. **Pick two details from Lim’s description of her life in New York that were ‘effective’ or ‘original.’** How do they reinforce the ‘tone’ or emotional flavor that Lim seems to want to develop here.

4) With the bad news from her family, Lim is brought into an obligation with people from her home country. What is the conflict? **How does she reconcile being an American ‘consumer’ with having to send money back home? Does the essay ‘solve’ this problem of different cultural expectations or rules?** Challenge Question: Do you think Lim is honest with ‘interpreting’ her personal experience? **Does she use personal experience fairly to comment upon larger cultural differences?**

• **Reporting Out** – Once again, we will spend a few minutes collecting the responses from #1 to #4 (concentrate on the sections in bold) to see what the class has discovered. Choose one or two ‘reporters’ on each team who will give your answers.

(~25 min.)