

Alice walker's
"everyday use" and
gish jen's "who's
irish" essay sample



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Compare and Contrast

The central conflict of both stories Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" and Gish Jen's "Who's Irish" is the generation gap as both protagonists belong to the older generation and look at the things from a different perspective as compared with the younger generations. Both protagonists are similar as they look at the new socio-cultural realities from their pre-conceived socio-cultural notions and experiences. This makes their personalities alike but different from the younger generations. Beside this similarity, there are certain other resemblances in their character as well disposition. Both are old and their main conflict is with their children (daughter or granddaughter). Both symbolize strong personalities but they are not rigid. They possess enough flexibility that they can mould themselves to adjust according to the new realities and socio-cultural environment.

In "Everyday Use" the central conflict is symbolized by two main characters; Mrs. Johnson and Dee. Dee is an epitome of shallow materialism and an adherent of prevailing concept of heritage where heritage is revered only for trendiness and aesthetic attraction whereas Mrs. Johnson admires heritage for its practical utility and personal importance. Piedmont-Mortob is of the view that central conflict is between Maggie and Dee and "is about whether heritage exists in *things* or in *spirit*, or process." Dee's longing for heritage is for ostentatious reasons. Contemporary periodical necessities make her cherish and celebrate her Afro-American heritage. "Dee views her heritage

as an artifact which she can possess and appreciate from a distance instead of as a process in which she is always intimately involved." (Piedmont-Marton) But Mrs. Johnson and Maggie have learnt to live with their heritage. Dee is captivated by the beauty of " churn top" and wanted to have it to be used as centerpiece for her alcove table whereas Mrs. Johnson has used it practically for churn butter hitherto. Walker utilizes the butter churn to demonstrate Mrs. Johnson's intrinsic understanding of heritage.

In Who's Irish?, the mother has conflict with his daughter who marries to an jobless Irish American. Her sole concern is not the joblessness but the differences in the socio-cultural backgrounds. But her daughter is socialized according to the new socio-cultural situations. She cherishes her Chinese heritage (similar to Mrs. Johnson values and appreciates her heritage) whereas her Daughter (like Dee) believes in materialist world and hankers after materialist success. Chinese mother tries to adopt herself to the new environment by socializing with members of household and mingling up with her granddaughter but she realizes that beside cultural gaps, there exists the generation gap (same as Mrs Johnson).

The main difference between both protagonists is their final adaptability to the situation. Mrs. Johnson adapts to the situation in a perfect way as she allows Dee to take whatever she wants reside wherever she wants. Although Dee's sister insists that she should stay with them but her mother (Mrs Johnson) does not want to detain Dee and wants her to live her life in her own way. Chinese mother does not adapt to the new situation and prefers to live with her daughter's mother-in-law instead of staying with her daughter

and her family. In a way, she parts way with her daughter but on the other, she provides her with maximum independence to live in her own way.

So it obvious that both stories are similar in their thematic expression of a particular central conflict and their main characters (Chinese mother and Mrs. Johnson) suffer from the same generation gap and socio-cultural difference from their subsequent generation. These protagonists have same characteristics but they adopt different strategies to tackle these problems.