

Never give up cultural identity essay



**ASSIGN
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In the short story "Borders" by Thomas King, a mother who resides in a native community refuses to declare herself as American or Canadian at a border crossing and has some conflicts between herself and the border guards. The mother has pride in her culture and values where she comes from. She never gives up her cultural identity of a Blackfoot. Firstly, as the main character of this story, the mother always keeps pride in her cultural identity through what she says and what she does, and we can also see this through others' reaction to her. 'We got a water tower on the reserve,' my mother said.

'There's a big one in Lethbridge, too.' (King 15) "You can still see the mountain from here,' my mother told Laetitia in Blackfoot. " (King 16) Her words display her pride in her own culture; she wants her daughter to remember her own culture. "This is real lousy coffee. ""(King 16) "You [Laetitia]'re going to have to buy your water in bottles if you want good coffee. ""(King 16) "That Salt Lake City place sounds too good to be true,' my mother told her [Laetitia]. (King 18) She thinks everything in her culture is better than other cultures. When she is asked about her citizenship, she persistently replies with the same answer "Blackfoot" (King 16, 17, 19); her answer shows her persistence about her cultural identity, and she strongly believes that she is neither Canadian nor American.

"So I was surprised when she [mother] bought two new tires for the car and put on her dress with the green and yellow flowers. I had to dress up, too, for my mother did not want us crossing the border looking like Americans. (King 16) From what she does, we can still see that she wants to imply her cultural identity to other people and she believes she is a Blackfoot forever; she does

not want to be identified as American or Canadian. " It would have been easier if my mother had just said ' Canadian' and had been done with it, but I could see she wasn't going to do that. " (King 16) " Pride is a good thing to have, you know. Laetitia had a lot of pride, and so did my mother. "(King 18) The boy knows that her mother has too much pride and she cannot change her pride.

In brief, from what the mother says and does, as well as others' reaction to her, the mother has a strong feeling about her cultural identity. Secondly, there are some conflicts between the mother and the border guards because of her pride in her cultural identity. " It didn't take them long to lose their sense of humor, I can tell you that. The one guard stopped smiling altogether and told us to park our car at the side of the building and come in. "(King 17)

This is an unfriendly attitude to the mother, but she doesn't yield to them and continues her pride. 'I can understand how you feel about having to tell us your citizenship, and here's what I'll do. You tell me, and I won't put it down on the form. No-one will know but you and me. " (King 17) This guard pretends to respect the mother's vanity and wants the mother to declare her citizenship privately; but the mother doesn't give up, which suggests it is not just because of her vanity. " In the end, she told us that if my mother didn't declare her citizenship, we would have to back to where we came from. " (King 17)

This is apparently a threat to the mother, but it has no effect. 'I know,' said the woman, ' and I'd be proud of being Blackfoot if I were Blackfoot. But you have to be American or Canadian. '" (King 17) This is a friendly guard and

she respects the mother's pride, but still asks the mother to declare her citizenship. So there is still no resolution. In other words, these conflicts between the mother and several border guards show that the mother will not change her pride in her cultural identity in any case. Furthermore, there are some symbols in the story and they reinforce the strength of the mother's pride in cultural identity.

"But we can stop at one of those restaurants, too, right?" (King 16) The boy asks her mother twice if they can eat something at a restaurant, but the mother doesn't answer him. "That means we're not going to stop at a restaurant, right?" (King 16) The boy understands his mother's pride finally; here, the restaurants are not in the traditions of Blackfoot, so the mother doesn't like the restaurants. "Hamburgers would be even better because they got more stuff for energy." (King 18) "Do you think Mel is going to bring us any hamburgers?" (King 18) The author uses hamburger as a symbol to compare the mother's pride of their traditions and the child's desire for better food.

The hamburgers symbolize the influence of a strong external culture. It is hard to keep the pride in one's own cultural identity because of some strong external cultural pressure. "Every one of those stars has a story. '...We sat under the stars that night, and my mother told me all sorts of stories. She was serious about it, too. She'd tell them slowly, repeating parts as she went, as if she expected me to remember each one." (King 18-19)

The stars symbolize the traditions of one culture, and they all have their stories. It implies the inner opinion of the mother's pride in her cultural

identity; and the mother wants the later generations to pass down the pride of their cultural identity.

In short, the author uses symbolism to express the difficulty of the mother to keep her cultural identity. All in all, this short story depicts the conflict between the pride in cultural self-identity and the external strong influence. It is hard to keep one's own cultural traditions when there are some strong influences from other cultures. But the mother persistently keeps her pride in her cultural identity and never gives up in any case. We should keep our own cultural traditions and pass them down.