

Although amy tan,  
frank o'connor, and  
tom whitecloud



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BUSTER**

Although Amy Tan, Frank O'Connor, and Tom Whitecloud are three different writers with very diverse backgrounds, their stories have some similar themes. All three of these stories deal with problems that children face because they come from a different culture than others in their family.

Some characters choose to rebel and others feel that they must do it, but in the end all three of the narrators rebel against something, whether it be specific people in their lives or culture in general. Amy Tan's "Two Kinds," Frank O'Connor's "First Confession," and Whitecloud's "Blue Winds Dancing" have much to say about culture, conformity, and rebellion.

In Amy Tan's "Two Kinds," the narrator's mother is from China, which affects the way she looks at the world. To the mother, America is the land of opportunity. "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" (Tan). Because of this she pushes her daughter. She forces her daughter into piano lessons. When her daughter purposefully fails at piano, it is her first act of rebellion. It is her way to reject her mother and her mother's strict Chinese rules. After that, she continues to be a nonconformist and fails to meet her mother's expectations in every way. She believes that she has thoroughly disappointed her mother, but instead her mother gives her the piano because she is the only one who can play it.

As she sits down to play the two songs (Pleading Child and Perfectly Contented), she realizes that they are similar. " And after I had played them both a few times, I realized they were two halves of the same song" (Tan). This summarizes her relationship of push-pull with her mother. The two songs represent her conformity in trying to please her mother versus her rebellion when she becomes her own person. She realizes that conformity and rebellion are both real parts of who she is.

In Frank O'Connor's story " First Confession," the narrator also tries to rebel against his grandmother's cultural differences. He calls his grandmother " a real old countrywoman and quite unsuited to the life in town" (O'Connor). He dislikes her old ways of walking barefoot and eating potatoes with her fingers.

His sister is the conformist and kisses up to the grandmother, but the narrator does not. In fact, when the grandmother goes so far as to arrange a first communion, he vows to confess all, including the fact that he wants to kill his grandmother and sister. He rebels against her cultural differences and finds that rebellion suits him. When he tells the priest his heart, the priest gives him only three " Hail Mary's."

At that point, his sister recognizes that in fact, rebellion may be the way to go. Her final statement in the story is, " Lord God, some people have all the luck! Tis no advantage to anybody trying to be good. I might as well be a sinner like you" (O'Connor). So this story becomes kind of a manual in teaching rebellion.

Similarly in Tom Whitecloud's "Blue Winds Dancing," the narrator learns about conformity and rebellion. He goes away to an Indian school, but when he comes back to the reservation, he never knows where he fits. "Before the lodge door, I stop, afraid, I wonder if my people will remember me.

I wonder-' Am I Indian or am I white?'" He conforms in going away to the Indian school, but is very concerned that this draws him further away from his own people. He truly seems to want to conform, but knows that he will not be accepted even if he does. "But we are inferior. ... It is terrible to sit in classes and hear men tell you that your people worship sticks of wood- that your Gods are false, that the Manitou forgot your people and did not write them a book" (Whitecloud). He understands that while the whites want him to conform, they will never truly welcome him into their society.

However, in the end, he does rebel against the values of white culture as he finds that he is accepted into the Native American culture once again. "" All eyes are friendly... No one questions my being here" (Whitecloud). So, while this narrator did not really want to rebel, he ended up rebelling for the security of acceptance.

The stories are different in that the characters come from three distinctly different cultures. They differ in the reasons that they choose to conform and rebel, but they all have something to say about both. In Amy Tan's story, as much as the narrator wants to please her mother, she finds that she reaches an age where she must rebel. In order to lead a normal life, she must rebel against her mother. She is clearly first-generation American and does not enjoy the strict ways of her mother. In Frank O'Connor's story, the

narrator wants to rebel from the start. He is disgusted by his grandmother's "old" ways.

He wants no part of learning or understanding her culture or being part of it in any way. When he does rebel, he ends up teaching his sister how to do it as well. And in Tom Whitecloud's story, the narrator really does not want to rebel at all, but finds that he must in order to retain his cultural identity. He recognizes that if he continues learning white ways, these will not get him anywhere. White culture will not accept him, so he must rebel in order to keep acceptance in his own Native American culture. He chooses rebellion as all the characters in these stories do.