

Who's irish

Literature



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

I had several different thoughts while I was reading "Who's Irish?" My first thought was that the grandmother did not do anything wrong in trying to teach her granddaughter to listen. My second thought was that I'm not surprised that Sophie, the granddaughter, is essentially completely Americanized. As the author, Gish Jen writes the story so that the reader may agree with Sophie's mother and father that the grandmother is out of line. There are obvious cultural and generational differences throughout the story. The first cultural difference is when the grandmother says that "otherwise daughter complain mother is not supportive.

I tell daughter, we do not have this word in Chinese, supportive" (Jen 396). As a reader, I am able to see that there will probably be other cultural differences throughout the rest of the story. This helps me to understand why the grandmother does what she does and why she gets so upset when Sophie, who is three years old, doesn't listen. An example of a generational difference is when the grandmother says, "When Sophie go shu-shu in her lap, Amy laugh and say there are no germs in pee. When Sophie take off her shoes, Amy say bare feet is the best, even the pediatrician say so" (398).

As the grandmother describes Amy, she seems appalled with how she cares for Sophie and even more so with the thought that Natalie, Sophie's mother, thinks that Amy is creative. This contrast allows me to see how the grandmother would go about caring for a child and how someone younger would care for that same child. As time passes, people discover new ways to care for, discipline, and raise a child. Sophie's grandmother is just used to how a woman would raise a child in China and is not accustomed to the new and different ways in America.

By emphasizing these cultural and generational differences, it allows every reader to begin to understand the tactics that the grandmother uses.

Readers can see another cultural difference when the grandmother says, "if John lived in China, he would be very happy. But he is not happy" (396). The grandmother continues to compare her daughter's family to a typical Chinese family back in China. I don't think this is fair because they are living in two completely different places, but the grandmother doesn't understand that. She thinks that everything should be how it is in China, no matter where she is.

Throughout the story, the grandmother talks about how Sophie has essentially lost her Chinese side. Although she looks mostly Chinese, her actions are far from it. The grandmother says, "now I think I can help her Chinese side fight against her wild side" (399). I truly believe that the grandmother is offended that Natalie has not tried to keep some of the Chinese culture in Sophie's life. Some of Sophie's habits and behaviors are also characteristics of any child her age. The grandmother explains that she taught Sophie how to eat with a spoon or fork or chopsticks instead of just grabbing the food with her hands.

I don't believe that grabbing food is a cultural difference; it is just normal behavior of a three-year-old before he/she is taught otherwise. I believe that in this instance, it is appropriate that the grandmother taught her the proper way to eat and also not to play with garbage. I don't believe the grandmother is completely out of line to spank Sophie a few times to reinforce her directions. However, I also believe that the grandmother needs to start accepting the fact that her granddaughter is not growing up in China,
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and Sophie's father is Irish, therefore, Sophie's life is not going to be based off of the Chinese culture.

I think that the grandmother and Natalie are going to constantly disagree on how to raise Sophie and how much of the Chinese culture to incorporate into Sophie's life as she grows older. I believe that if the grandmother doesn't push her culture on them so much, it would be more likely for Natalie to want Sophie to learn about her culture and her past and traditions. Another thing I thought about while I was reading the story was the grandmother's involvement in raising Sophie. Many people may agree that grandparents should be able to help raise their grandchild.

Toward the end of "Who's Irish," Natalie does not allow her mother to see Sophie anymore. The grandmother says, "these days when my daughter visit, she does not bring Sophie" (402). I think that it was a mistake for Natalie to not allow her daughter to see her grandmother. In my opinion, Natalie has been successful and was more than likely raised well. This leads me to think that Natalie may want her mother's advice and input in raising her child. On the other hand, since there are both the generational and cultural differences, it's understandable that Natalie would want to raise her daughter differently than her mother raised her.

I think that it would be interesting if this story were written in a 3rd person point of view because then we would see the grandmother from a different perspective and be able to see more of the Natalie and John. Changing the point of view would completely change the story because we wouldn't have such an subjective point of view from the grandmother. As readers, we would

have more of an even view on all of the characters, and we wouldn't hear all of the grandmother's thoughts.