

This story deals with  
a parent's  
relationship with her  
daughter essay  
sample



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Choose one other story from the anthology which also deals with emotional relationships. Look at how the author presents the relationships and whether the relationships are similar or different. Look at the structure of the stories and make a comparison of how the authors present their stories.

I have chosen to examine 'Your Shoes' by Michele Roberts and 'Chemistry' by Graham Swift. Both examine dysfunctional relationships in the family in their short stories. They present their relationships in different ways, each emphasising certain points about the relationship that they consider to be the most important. Each uses their own structure to support the way they view these relationships.

In Your Shoes, Michele Roberts presents many different difficulties in the relationship between the mother and the daughter. One of these is a failure to communicate: the mother's words, echoing across the lines of, "You're not here any longer so how can I speak to you?" and, "I don't know your address," show the lack of communication between them. The symbolism of 'reaching out to someone' is starkly contrasted here with the imagery of the mother. She says that if, "she wraps her arms around herself and holds tight it keeps the pain in." This is more of a compact position, perhaps symbolising the position she was forced to adopt around her daughter. She also says that she is 'lying curled up in the middle of the bed'. This is reminiscent of the foetal position, and demonstrates that her state of mind is vulnerable and scared, much like a baby's.

Another theme explored is the generation gap and the problems it brings.

Her statement, "Kids these days. Well," can be contrasted to her later

statement, " We weren't spoiled. Not like your generation." Both show a relatively quiet distaste towards the generation. Yet, the mother has experienced generation problems of her own, especially with her own mother. She is very critical about her, describing her as a ' bit of a tart'. The relationship between Michele Roberts and her mother is dysfunctional, along with the relationship between Michele and her daughter. The relationships are surprisingly similar, with the daughter at one point ' boasting' about sex, and Michele saying that she ' wasn't a virgin'. One can imagine that from the daughter's point of view, what Michele says about her mother would be similar to what the daughter would say about her mother.

One piece of symbolism carried out throughout the story is that of the shoes. The shoes perhaps symbolise the daughter as her mother wanted her. The mother ' washed and ironed' the laces, symbolising bringing her up properly, yet the shoes, from Michele's point of view, ' wanted to get away'. The mother tries to force the shoes onto her daughter, but they are rejected.

The relationship between the father and the daughter is not much mentioned. The speaker says that the father ' adores [her]', and is ' protective' of his daughter. However, he is said to be unable to ' stand rudeness' from anybody, including the daughter. The relationship between mother and father seems to be solid, considering Michele uses ' we' so many times, and supports her husband's behaviour. Yet, she ' locked the bedroom door so he can't get in.' All of the relationships seem to be fraught with emotions and anxieties.

The structure of the story is in the style of an interior monologue, with the author speaking to herself. Actually in the story the author is writing a letter to her daughter. This, being a personal letter, is likely to be more open in terms of the author's feelings and emotions. The text seems to flow freely, one point leading on to the next in a 'stream of consciousness'. This permits an open flood of emotions, opinions and anxieties, which helps enrich the text. However, it does lead to quite biased views.

Chemistry can be usefully compared and contrasted to Your Shoes with respect to relationships and structural format. In the story, the relationships are much less clear cut than in Your Shoes. However, they are still filled with tensions, and fraught with anxieties and emotions. The relationship between the author, as a child, and the grandfather, for example, is ambiguous, but still presents an overall image that the child likes and respects the grandfather. The child thinks it quite possible that the grandfather 'took a secret, vengeful delight in my father's death', yet he feels 'safe' with him. They are chatty, much more so than any other characters seem to be in the story. Thus one would assume that their relationship is the least damaged.

Some relationships in Chemistry take slow transformations, unlike in Your Shoes where one abrupt event leads to sudden destruction. That is why 'Chemistry' is a clever title. It showcases the slow change of relationships, as chemistry is, as the grandfather explains, 'the science of change'. The death of the author's father changed the relationship between the Grandfather and the mother for the better, but the intrusion of Ralph led to a detrimental effect for the mother's affection for her father. She 'neglects' him slightly at first, then shows appreciation for Ralph over him by 'cooks the things that

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Ralph would like', and finally blatantly harangues her father for eating slowly and 'ruining our meal', asking him to take it out into the shed.

However, some relationships are stable in their outlook throughout the story. The author always expresses a deep resentment, hatred coupled with fear, towards Ralph, and the grandfather always 'provokes' Ralph, knowing he is stealing the affection towards him from his daughter.

There are many symbols throughout the story. One of these is grandfather's shed. Of all the family members, only the author is allowed to enter. The shed here could represent the grandfather's inner self. The author himself describes it as 'somewhere where Grandfather went to be alone, undisturbed'. Another symbol is that of the launch. It symbolises the relationship between the grandfather and the author. Even though that relationship is 'laboured', the course was 'steady'. It is as if the Grandfather is 'pulling us towards him on some invisible cord'.

The structure of the story is less streamlined than *Your Shoes*, containing time shifts and flashbacks. An episodic structure is retained. Like *Your Shoes*, it is dictated from a first person view, but unlike it, the boy here is looking back on the events, giving an added value of hindsight. The creditability, therefore, can be much greater, but the emotions deadened.

In conclusion, both authors use different styles to present their stories.

Michele Roberts uses intense relationships and an interior monologue to portray her story, whereas Chemistry relies more on symbols and hindsight.

The direct relationship statuses in *Your Shoes* are different to the more

ambiguous, tense relationships in *Chemistry*. I believe Michele Roberts' style  
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is better as it really allows the full envelope of the relationship to be explored in great depth, with purposeful emotions.