

Final



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

English Literature (IC and Modern) Using the two stories, explain what you have learned about the element in relationships that can make them succeed or fail, and explain how the stories illustrate these elements. In the conclusion, make a personal comment about your perception of the most important element(s) of relationships. The two stories *The Girls in Their Summer Dresses* by Irwin Shaw and *Half and Half* by Amy Tan both describe a romantic relationship which is in trouble. In *The Girls in Their Summer Dresses* the couple Michael and Frances are described on a day out together but the story's title and the narrative make it clear that Michael is more interested in the girls he sees passing by than in his wife. There is very little explanation for the reader in this story, but the dialogue shows a failure to communicate between Frances and Michael. When Frances says "Some day ... you're going to make a move... aren't you" (lines 245-249) and Michael answers first with silence and then with evasive words like "Maybe...How the hell do I know?" (lines 250-251) it is obvious that he does not love her in the exclusive and committed way that one would expect within a marriage. He seems ready to move on. Frances is upset, and crying, which shows that she is still learning to come to terms with the differences that are driving her and her husband apart. Frances, on the other hand, wants to have a romantic relationship like the ones we see in American films and novels. Her tears are evidence that she is sad and disappointed, and that she had wished for something better. This story illustrates how relationships often look happy and stable on the surface, while underneath there may be big problems. Knowing how to face up to problems, and being able to state clearly what each person is looking for, is a key element in relationships. In *Half and Half*, Rose understands her predicament more clearly. She

describes the two mother figures, her own and Mrs Jordan, as controlling women who want to see their children having socially acceptable marriages, with the right people at the right time. For the mothers, appearances are more important than the reality of the relationship between the young people. Rose is quite resigned about the failure of her marriage. This may reflect Rose's Chinese background, and the experience of losing her brother Bing, both of which encourage a fatalistic approach to life. In *Half and Half* the first person narrator makes it clear that Rose's marriage is already over, but the problem she has is simply finding a way to tell her conservative mother about it. This story is told from the point of view of the woman, Rose, while the figure of Ted is referred to but does not take part in the action of the story. The two stories made it abundantly clear that romantic love is not something that automatically lasts a lifetime. If problems arise then fatalistic passivity, such as that shown by Rose, or angry accusations, such as those shown by Francis do not seem to help. The interference of mothers may also be a bad thing, since it puts pressure on the couple to keep up appearances rather than reality. The story reminds us that relationships require honesty and openness, in communication within the couple and with the wider family circle. References Shaw, Irwin. *The Girls in Their Summer Dresses*. Tan, Amy. *Half and Half*. From *The Joy Luck Club*. New York: Ivy Books. 1989.