

Sample essay on critique

[Family](#), [Father](#)



Abby Chung's "You Must Have Some Great Stories to Tell," was a short, but powerful and moving piece on what it means to be many things in America today. She spoke of being a writer, and an observer. The essay also spoke of being a minority. Chung bore the markings of her heritage; she appeared Asian, but was from North Carolina. Her parents were raised American as well, though her father also looked Chinese, adding the confusion of Chung's childhood at times. The essay, though short, is complex, examining many facets of Chung's personal identity, as well as how it is viewed from outsiders. Despite her in-depth examinations, the paper was difficult to follow, and did not seem to have a cohesive theme. While she gave complexity to what she discussed, Chung neglected to string many of her ideas together in a cohesive thought.

Chung begins the essay by speaking candidly about President Barack Obama's first press conference. He spoke of getting a puppy for his girls, though probably not a mutt, even though the family was not opposed to them because he was one, after all. Overjoyed at the "hyperbolic bigotry" of the phrase, Chung related and felt welcomed by the president, as she too was a mutt. Having sometimes felt like an outcast herself, it was nice to see somebody claim something that could be used against them like that. Her father was Chinese, raised American, and her mother was American. Chung, herself, had also been raised American, but also looked Chinese. Throughout the essay, she confronts the various conflicts this presented her growing up. This could have been her theme, the conflicts it presented her alone, but instead Chung also examines her father's history, her own personal tastes having grown up in the south and how she believes it makes her look, as well

as her dead grandmother's past. Though the ideas are relatively related, they do not make a unified thought.

It could be argued that Chung explained her grandmother's past because, as a "pure" Chinese woman, she had better stories to tell. The woman moved from China to America to raise five children in a country she knew nothing about. If Chung had restricted the essay to this train of thought, it would have been a success. However, she meanders throughout the monologue, into territory that has nothing to do with her grandmother's great stories, nor her lack of great stories. For example, she recalls her grandmother's advice to her father about bullies, and how her clipped English made her think elderly people spoke in articles as they aged. While the story is heartwarming, and undoubtedly helped her father through some bullying during his formative years, it has little to do with the matter Chung appears to be trying to explain. Furthermore, it is still unclear what matter Chung is trying to explain because the papers two primary topics bounce back and forth between a struggle and acceptance with her own identity, and the comparison between who has great stories to tell and who does not. Both are plausible topics; they could be melded together, but alas, Chung fails to do this.

Focusing on the topic of great stories, it turns out that Chung has many. Some are not hers, some are, but she still has many to tell. Indefinitely, it appears to be how she tells them that is the problem. That aside, she does have stories. For instance, an ignorant and bigoted teacher once accosted her in class, expecting a good story about how she learned English because she did not look American. When explaining that she was from North

Carolina, and her parents were from America, as well, the teacher was admittedly disappointed. Once more, this was an opportunity for Chung to pick a train of thought. She could have explained why she felt she had no stories to tell and elaborated on the confusion or struggle with looking exotic while being American. Alternatively, she could have explained why her stories paled in comparison next to her grandmother sending her second child to an American school only knowing Mandarin Chinese, and watching him be denied a second helping of juice from outside his classroom because the teacher did not understand what he was saying. This viewing would be followed by the painful decision to renounce her Chinese ways with the next three children she birthed, raising them in an English speaking, American household, where Mandarin was a secret language between she and her husband. Each story would have been carefully planned and organized. Instead, Chung decided to explain all of it in a jumbled piece, as if she had written each part of her essay on a jigsaw puzzle and throw the pieces on the table only to write them down in the order they fell.

Given the material in the essay would lead any reader to believe the obvious route Chung should have taken was a comparison between how feeble her stories seemed compared to her grandmother's, ending in a culmination of relations between that of she and her father, who appear to share similar experiences. Both looking Asian, but having been raised American, they can understand one another. For example, her father does not know Chinese either, yet is still greeted with foreign languages whenever their family dines in an Asian restaurant. He must sheepishly correct the staff, explaining he does not know their language, but merely looks the part. In his youth, he

grew his hair long and rode a motorcycle. Though he looked Asian, his actions were very American.

Chung can share these feelings. She looks Chinese, but is adamant about having been raised a North Carolinian with southern roots. She explains how she can name several different types of nature in the south, which is full of plants not native to China, and can cook grits, a typically southern American dish. Rather than growing on typically oriental music, she was first exposed to Tom Petty and Grateful Dead records as a child, defying all Asian stereotypes. She even knows how to treat chigger bites, which are a frequent occurrence during the southern summers . She shares her father's juxtaposition between outward appearance and inward perception. She is a stereotype on the outside, but inside she is somebody that you must get to know. This would have been the perfect end to her piece, and a well-organized conclusion. Not only that, but it would have been just as decent of a story as any her grandmother had to share. Chung did not share these thoughts, evidently, because all of this material was scattered throughout the paper with no means of organization.

It is arguable that the lack of organization in the essay represents the lack of organization in Chung's identity. Perhaps the scattered mess of information is Chung's attempt to make sense of herself and her history. However, it does not account for information that has nothing to do with her two primary themes: great stories and identity. Obama's address, for example, had nothing to do with the real information Chung was offering about her life, identity, or family history. A small penance can be offered for the president's own family history and the fact that it made Chung feel more welcome in the

world, but this was a brief sentence that added nothing to the piece. It was irrelevant.

In sum, though Chung shared intimate, thoughtful information with the reader, it was disorganized and lacked a theme. These factors made the essay rather pointless. It is clear she was struggling with her lack of great stories when weighed against the history of others. A theme could have also been constructed out of her emerging identity. However, she did not take the time to construct anything sensible from either of these ideas. Instead, it seems as though she simply wrote. Her essay reads like a first draft. While it is sentimental in nature, and filled with complex ideas, that does not make up for the fact that there was irrelevant information and portions of it that were difficult to understand.

References

Chung, Abbey. " You Must Have Some Great Stories to Tell." (n. d.): 66-73.