

"barn burning" by
william faulkner, and
"two kinds"



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The key to great literature is in the possession of the ability to create characters that the reader can relate with. By incorporating verisimilar struggles and keeping the interest level of the reader heightened until the end of the story, the author has the ability to produce endless pieces of great literature. There are few authors who can achieve this level of literary success, those who do, obtain virtual immortality in the world of writing.

In the short stories " Barn Burning" by William Faulkner, and " Two Kinds" by Amy Tan, the main characters Sartoris (Sarty) Snopes and Jing Mei possess these life like or relatable qualities. Their desire to be accepted by their parents and their need to obtain their own identity make these characters quite similar, and epitomize the struggle between parent and child. In " Barn Burning", Faulkner portrays Sarty as a child who remains devoted to his father Abner, regardless of his behavior and actions.

Throughout the novel, the belief that being honest about his father's activities would result in his family abandoning him played a major role in Sarty's decisions. When Abner is accused of burning Mr. Harris's barn, Sarty remains loyal to his father and is prepared to say that Abner had not set the barn ablaze, in hopes of gaining his father's acceptance. Towards the end of the story, Sarty's conscience gets the better of him. He believes that what his father is doing is wrong.

When Abner sets fire to Mr. De Spain's barn Sarty decides to inform De Spain of what his father has done. As a result Sarty knows that he can not return home, and although momentarily his future appears to be bleak, the rising of the sun and the singing of the birds show Sarty and the readers that

tomorrow holds a new and hope filled day. Similarly, in "Two Kinds", Tan introduces the reader to Jing Mei, who is a character who desperately seeks acceptance from her mother. Her mother's belief that America provides great opportunities for success to everyone is a driving force throughout Jing Mei's childhood.

Her mother's quest to find the prodigy within Jing Mei, included perming Jing Mei's hair in order to resemble Shirley Temple, and making Jing Mei take piano lessons with a deaf, retired piano teacher. This quest to reveal Jing Mei's hidden talent resulted in numerous failures and in a little girl scorned. Her fear of disappointing her mother with yet another failed attempt to reveal her prodigy pushes Jing Mei into self sabotage. She begins to fail the tests administered by her mother purposely.

She loses her desire for acceptance from her mother through these tests, and yearns for her mother to accept for who she is. Jing Mei's desire to gain her mother's approval ultimately results in her emotional demise. After a very significant argument between the two, in which Jing Mei reveals her mother's old unhealed wounds (The two children she killed from a previous marriage in China), Jing Mei gains her independence from her mother's persistent search for Jing Mei's hidden genius.

Ultimately she discovers that her mother believed in her all along and knew that she wasn't performing to the best of her abilities. Sarty's struggle to gain acceptance from his father who he believes, even when he abandons Sarty, to be a brave, courageous veteran and father, and Jing Mei's desire to appease her mom by participating in the sometimes degrading tests to

discover her hidden talent, both result in a small demise of each character's inner being.

The belief that in order to gain their parents love, attention, and acceptance, resulted in each character being very unhappy. Both characters begin to resent their parent's views of life. Eventually when they go against their parent's wishes and venture out into what they consider to be the correct path, they gain their own form of independence even though they believe that they are losing their parents acceptance. The search for acceptance and independence is a lifelong struggle that people of all ages, races, and genders experience.

Although personified through the relationship between parent and child, this is a lesson that is learned at all stages in life. For the characters in the stories discussed, the struggle is illustrated more thoroughly and recognized by a larger audience than the experience of what a normal human being may be. The devices and ingredients used in both short stories create verisimilitude, which not only make these great pieces of literature, but also capable of being understood and accepted by all readers.