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The Analysis of “Champion of the World” and “Fish Cheeks”

Maya Angelou and Amy Tan have much in common in their literary works discussing cultural differences and diversity and its effects on people’s life and activity in the community. The real-life experiences helped to understand these issues properly, as examples supporting theory might be always effective and valuable in the overall understanding of cultural diversity in various settings. Although the authors described different cultural backgrounds and diverse cultural groups in their short essays, both authors showed the impact and attitudes of the American society towards such individuals treating them as outcasts in the community due to their cultural differences and different beliefs and values compared to American citizens residing in the same setting. The main characters in both stories tried to overcome various challenges and troubles wanting to feel valued, important and secure in the foreign setting.

Maya Angelou described the issue of racism and racial oppression of African Americans in her short story describing her own experiences while growing up in a white community in Arkansas. Both authors succeeded to show the differences between their characters and white Americans as being the native citizens controlling the community and managing people’s involvement into different activities and processes. Racial oppression of African-Americans was rather common at that period of time affecting the relationships between people and intercultural communication between white Americans and representatives of other cultural groups.

People with different skin colors showed the tense relationships between these two races promoting different values, beliefs and principles managing people’s work and activity in the community. Maya Angelou did not only want to show the conflict between two different races but

also succeeded to show her personal concerns and values as she also lived at that period of time and was African-American. The author did not only provide general description of the problem but also provided specific examples helping to understand the opposition between different cultural groups living and interacting in the same community.

Angelou stated that “it was our people falling, it was another lynching, yet another black man hanging on a tree, one more woman ambushed and raped” (Angelou 131). African Americans living in the white American community always experienced much suffering and oppression on the part of the native citizens preventing them from the productive activity and success similar to the benefits received by white Americans residing in the same setting. In fact, African-Americans constituted a small portion of Arkansas’s population mostly preoccupied by whites.

Oppression and cultural prejudices towards African Americans caused numerous conflicts and problems arising between representatives of different nations residing in the same setting. Amy Tan in her essay “Fish Cheeks” focused on the opposition between Asians and Americans having many differences in values, beliefs and experiences. The young girl Amy who fell in love with American boy Robert was afraid of being not accepted by him due to these differences in culture, manners, and values. Such personal experiences also helped to feel the difference between different cultures.

The author of this short story described Christmas Eve dinner uniting Chinese and Americans showing differences in manners, habits, and food patterns helping to understand the gap between two different cultures. However, the author also highlighted the idea that people should value their culture, traditions and values stating that “people should be proud to be different, with the only shame being to have shame” (Adams 219). Tan succeeded to show the story of a young Chinese girl who felt embarrassed by her culture and traditions wanting to fit into American

community.

This is the major difference between two short stories and authors' cultural beliefs. Maya Angelou was proud of being African American valuing the customs and traditions of her race highly struggling against oppression and inappropriate treatment and attitudes towards African Americans. Amy Tan was also probably proud of being Chinese but the experience described in the short story showed that while being a young girl, Amy was embarrassed of cultural traditions and food patterns of her family being completely different from American culture. These experiences helped to understand the nature of people's personality and their attitudes towards their cultural background and traditions.

Thus, both authors focused on the differences and gaps between cultures in specific chosen settings and time. Though both authors chose different time periods and places telling the stories of people sharing different cultural backgrounds and traditions, they showed the similarity of the problems faced by those persons feeling different and excluded from the American community. Representatives of different cultural groups were always treated in a different manner if compared with native American citizens, and people might either accept such treatment or struggle against inappropriate attitudes.

In either case, individuals should value, understand and respect their cultural traditions and beliefs occupying the proper place in the community. People's culture is a part of their identity and it should not be simply ignored. Representatives of different cultural groups should simply learn to co-exist in the community relying on the mutual understanding and respect to specific traditions and backgrounds.

SURNAME 4

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