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**Literary Reading - Symbolism/Coming of Age**  
**High School, 9<sup>th</sup> Grade**  
**Fall 2011**

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Project READI Curriculum Module  
Technical Report CM #1

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PROJECT **READi**

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Project READI operated as a multi-institution collaboration among the Learning Sciences Research Institute, University of Illinois at Chicago; Northern Illinois University; Northwestern University; WestEd’s Strategic Literacy Initiative; and Inquirium, LLC. Project READI developed and researched interventions in collaboration with classroom teachers that were designed to improve reading comprehension through argumentation from multiple sources in literature, history, and the sciences appropriate for adolescent learners. Curriculum materials such as those in this module were developed based on enacted instruction and are intended as case examples of the READI approach to deep and meaningful disciplinary literacy and learning.

## Objective of Module: Relationship of symbolism to theme in literary texts\*

### Literal Understanding

- Gateways for relevant background knowledge
- Close reading and annotating
- Plot and setting support sheets
- Character map

### Symbolism

- CDS
  - How do you know it is a symbol?
  - How do you know what the symbol means?
- Interpreting symbolism support sheet
- Rules of Notice (Mr. BICEPS)

### Thematic Inferences

- Gateway for building criteria for coming of age theme
- CDS
  - How do you know the larger meaning of the text?
- Close reading questions

### Argument

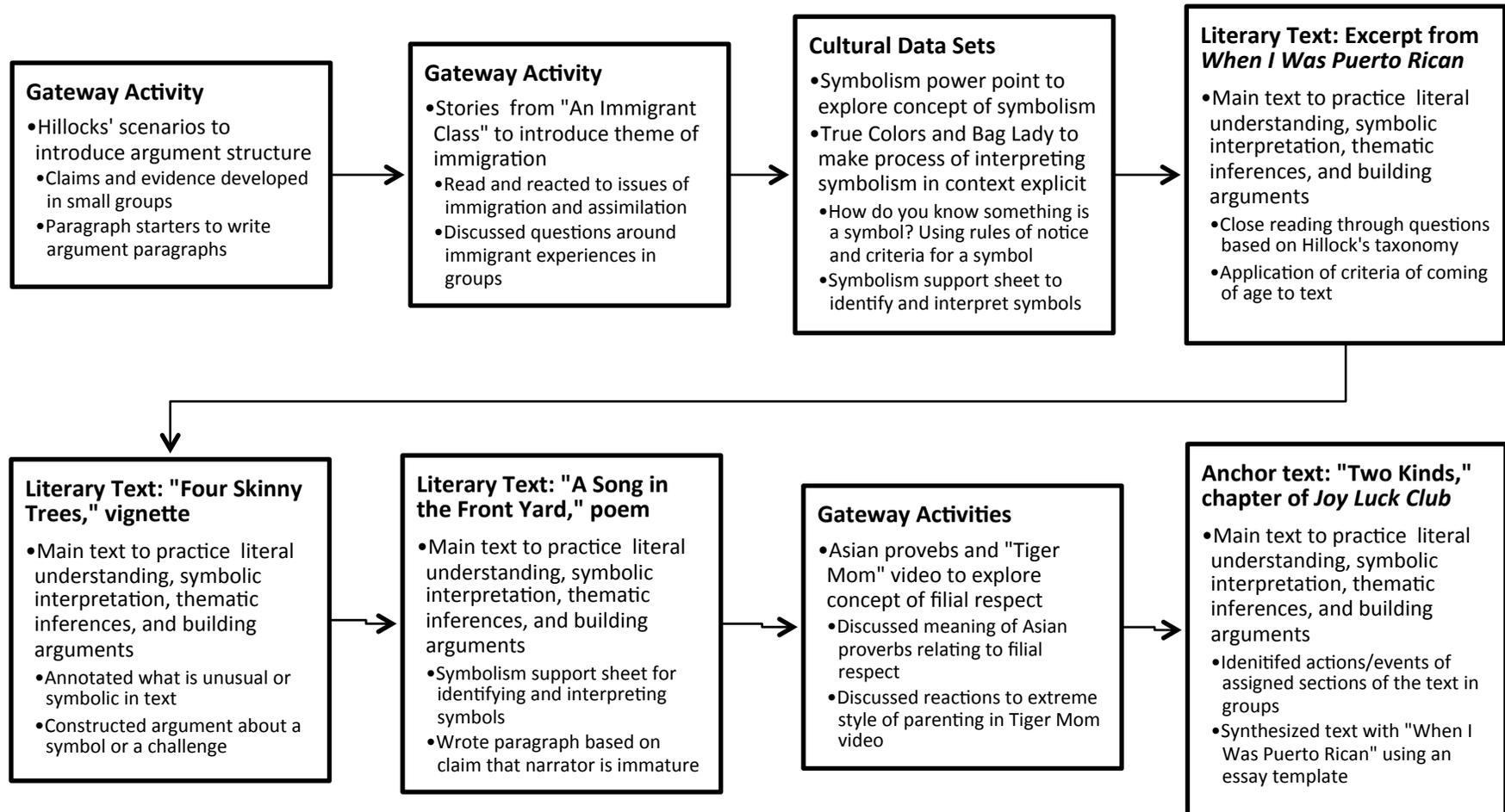
- Gateway for understanding argument structure (claims, evidence warrants)
- Sentence stems
- Templates
- Academic language examples

\*This is the overarching module objective. All designed modules are guided by the six interrelated learning objective below.

#### Literature Learning Objectives

- 1 Engage in close reading of literary texts to construct interpretations
- 2 Synthesize within and across literary texts to construct generalizations about theme, characterization, structure, and language
- 3 Construct claim-evidence relations based on evidence from texts, reader's experiences, other texts, and literary constructs
- 4 Establish criteria for judging interpretations of theme
- 5 Develop structural and thematic interpretations derived from general knowledge of literary conventions and genre structures
- 6 Demonstrate understanding that literary interpretation is based on an open dialogue between texts and readers

## Sequence for 9<sup>th</sup> grade Symbolism/Coming of Age Module



# READI Literature Intervention MWJG

## I. Text Selection

Based on the school's demographic, text selection emphasizes many cultural, immigrant, and assimilation issues related to coming of age. These literary texts focus on a set of experiences that students may be able to connect to their own life experiences. Specifically, these texts deal with experiences related to being torn between two ways of life, between competing allegiances, and between assimilating and trying to stay connected to one's own heritage and values.

### *Text sequence*

The sequence of texts begins from a younger coming of age perspective (closer to the age of the student population) and with experiences that may be more closely related to students' experiences. The last text reflect an older coming of age perspective and cultural norms that may not be related to student experiences.

Scenarios-Hillocks, George, Jr. (2011).

Song lyrics "True Colors" -Cyndi Lauper, 1986

Song lyrics "Bag Lady" - Erykah Badu, 2000

Excerpt from *When I Was Puerto Rican*— Esmeralda Santiago, 1993.

Vignette "Four Skinny Trees" from *The House on Mango Street* – Sandra Cisneros, 1984.

Poem "A Song in the Front Yard" —Gwendolyn Brooks, 1962.

Chapter "Two Kinds" from *The Joy Luck Club*— Amy Tan, 1989.

## II. Lessons

### 1. Intro to argumentation (October 13 and 14, 2011)

Developing basic arguments; learning the general structure of arguments

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Learning objectives guiding activities

- Construct claim-evidence relations based on evidence from texts, reader's experiences, other texts, and literary constructs
- Establish criteria for judging interpretations of theme

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Supports

- Slip or Trip text and picture
- The Case of the Dead Musician text and picture

Hillocks, G. Jr. (2011). *Teaching Argument Grades 6-12: Supporting Claims with Relevant Evidence and Clear Reasoning*. Heinemann: Portsmouth, NH

- T-charts of evidence and rules

### Activities Description

The goal of this activity was for students to learn the general structure of arguments and how to develop arguments. The materials for the activity were taken from Hillocks' *Teaching Argument Writing, Grades 6-12: Supporting Claims with Relevant Evidence and Clear Reasoning*, 2011.

Using *Slip or Trip*, claims and evidence were developed in small groups and pairs. Also, with help of a paragraph starter, students moved to individually adding their own evidence. Student shared what they wrote as a class and the teacher wrote a paragraph using their ideas on the overhead.

Using *The Case of the Dead Musician*, students used a T-chart and worked with partners to come up with evidence and rules. Again they shared out with the class and wrote a paragraph.

Overall, these activities engaged students and seemed to give them a good understanding of the basic structure of an argument. The biggest struggle for students was in making their rules general instead of specific to the story in the text. They were able to generalize the rules with scaffolding from the teacher.

## **2. Cultural data sets (October 18 and 19, 2011)**

Cultural data sets specific to strategies for interpreting symbolic meanings

### Learning objectives guiding activities

- Develop structural and thematic interpretations derived from general knowledge of literary conventions and genre structures

### Supports

#### Handouts

- "True Colors" lyrics
- "Bag Lady" lyrics
- Introduction to symbolism

#### PowerPoint

- Introduction to symbolism

#### Music videos and other clips

- Glee version of “True Colors”
- “Bag Lady”-Badu
- Spartan Race
- “300”

#### Activities description

In an attempt to orient students to the concept of symbolism, the activity began with a short PowerPoint presentation that gave a general definition and examples of every day symbols (e.g., wedding bands, American flag) and briefly discussed symbols in literature. The general criteria that a symbol can be a person, event, object, or place and that it represents something beyond itself served as a springboard for symbolism for the rest of the texts in the unit.

Keeping in mind the discussion from the PowerPoint presentation on symbolism, students moved on to watching the “True Colors” video and reading the lyrics. The focus was on rules of notice (“True Colors” is not only the title of the song but it’s repeated several times) and on the criteria of what may be symbolic (a person, event, object, or place).

In conjunction with the song lyrics, students used the handout “introduction to symbolism” to write down a target in the text they thought might be symbolic and a possible interpretation of the symbol. The purpose of this strategy was useful in helping students to provide evidence from the text for their claim that the target text was symbolic.

Students struggled with picking out text that was symbolic in True Colors. In order to emphasize that symbolism often conveys strong feelings or emotions, the clips of the film “300” and Spartan Race (obstacle course and racing event in which the teacher participated) were used at the beginning of day two. Students were able to make the connection of what Spartans symbolized or represented as depicted in the movie and in history and why Spartan is an appropriate name for the race/obstacle course.

For further practice in detecting symbols and on how to connect associations and the larger text to the interpretation of a symbol, the video and lyrics of “Bag Lady” were used. Students again were asked to fill in the chart “Introduction to symbolism.” This activity was shortened and ended because video and song lyrics proved to be a bit too difficult and distanced from students’ world to the point that they had difficulty in determining the meaning of symbols.

### **3. “When I was Puerto Rican” (October 17-28, 2011)**

*Gateway Activity* (October 17, 2011)

### Learning objectives guiding activities

- Establish criteria for judging interpretations of theme

### Supports

Book and excerpts from “An Immigrant Class” (Libman, 2004) around oral histories of recent immigrants. Excerpts were used to highlight issues of immigration and assimilation

<http://www.animmigrantclass.com/excerpts.html>

### Activities Description

Students were provided copies of the excerpts from the book *An Immigrant Class*. Students were then given four questions (on the overhead) and instructed to work in groups answering the questions. These questions were to be discussed as a whole class after groups had a chance to answer the questions.

The questions were the following:

- What are some specific obstacles that individuals discuss?
- What do the excerpts tell you about these individuals? What does what they share tell you about their experiences?
- Share with your groups something you may have heard, read about, or know someone who has had a similar experience to the ones described in the excerpts.
- How do these excerpts relate to the unit on culture you did in World Studies?

### Change/ change decisions

Students had difficulty in getting to the larger concepts (i.e., generalizing experiences of multiple individuals, making connections among experiences, etc.) This may have been due to lack of discussion after reading the excerpts and also the short excerpts not being able to provide enough information/background for answering the questions and overall purpose of lesson.

In the revised lesson, students were given the excerpts, the teacher talked briefly about the book and then they read the last two excerpts on their own, underlining and annotating anything they thought was important, something that struck them, or something they had a question about. Students shared what they annotated and began getting at the larger picture about how these individuals were making statements about not judging people based on looks, to not mistreat others, etc.

This activity continued on the following day since students were able to get at the sense of alienation, discrimination, and hard times the individuals in the excerpts experienced. Students may be able to connect these to Esmeralda’s experience in the first text.

*“When I was Puerto Rican”*

### Learning objectives guiding activities

- Engage in close reading of literary texts to construct interpretations
- Develop structural and thematic interpretations derived from general knowledge of literary conventions and genre structures
- Construct claim-evidence relations based on evidence from texts, reader's experiences, other texts, and literary constructs

### Supports

- Excerpt of "When I Was Puerto Rican"
- Follow the Plot graphic organizer
- Character Map graphic organizer

### Activities Description

Students practiced developing arguments related to identifying text as symbolic and used worksheets as supports for attending to important aspects in literature. There was also emphasis in how coming of age is about some changes that a character experiences, and in the case of the first few texts, it is about growing into adulthood. Rules of notice (title and repetition) were also emphasized as possible ways to detect symbols.

During the week spent on the excerpt from "When I was Puerto Rican," the teacher incorporated much about plot and character and connecting actions/events in the story. Another foci was close reading through questions (using Hillocks' taxonomy as a guide) as a way to understand the text. Students also focused on the concept of coming of age and how and why this excerpt is a good example of that.

### Change/change decisions

An extra day was spent on going over group arguments constructed after reading the text. These arguments were related to symbolic meaning and made public by writing them out on large post-it notes and presenting to the class. Making their arguments public helped the teacher to see where kids were at in terms of symbolism, making claims and finding support, and making links among what is repeated, what the title is, and what's in the story. The extra class period was spent on improving the arguments and highlighted the purpose for the group work and a continuance/coherence in the lessons. It was also helpful in noting how students were able to point out stronger claims over others and start determining some sort of criteria for what makes a stronger claim, or stronger evidence over another.

## **4. "Four Skinny Trees" (October 28 and 31, 2011)**

### Learning objectives guiding activities

- Engage in close reading of literary texts to construct interpretations
- Develop structural and thematic interpretations derived from general knowledge of literary conventions and genre structures
- Construct claim-evidence relations based on evidence from texts, reader's experiences, other texts, and literary constructs
- Demonstrate understanding that literary interpretation is based on an open dialogue between texts and readers

### *"Four Skinny Trees"*

#### Supports

- "Four Skinny Trees" text
- Symbolism graphic organizer

#### Activities Description

This text served as practice for identifying and interpreting symbolic meaning. Students read the text silently then aloud. Students focused on annotating anything unusual and circling anything that might be a symbol. Then also wrote a sentence about what challenges or conflicts the narrator was facing. Students shared what they marked and wrote with a partner. Then they constructed an argument, making a claim about a symbol or a challenge. Students shared their ideas with the class. Students filled out the symbolism chart about Four Skinny Trees on their own. The students read the text again and then discussed the symbol of the trees. The evidence and warrants for students' ideas were examined to show how some interpretations make more sense than others. The discussion about the different interpretation of symbols seemed productive. It showed how there could be variability in interpretation but that it has to be grounded in evidence from the text.

## **5. "A Song in the Front Yard" (November 1 and 2, 2011)**

### Learning objectives guiding activities

- Establish criteria for judging interpretations of theme
- Engage in close reading of literary texts to construct interpretations
- Develop structural and thematic interpretations derived from general knowledge of literary conventions and genre structures
- Construct claim-evidence relations based on evidence from texts, reader's experiences, other texts, and literary constructs
- Demonstrate understanding that literary interpretation is based on an open dialogue between texts and readers

#### Supports

- A Song in the Front Yard
- Symbolism graphic organizer

### Activities Description

This lesson began with a reminder that we were focusing on a few things in this unit: issues related to immigration/assimilation, coming of age and symbolism. This may help student see the connections across the activities more clearly and to be explicit in how this poem fits the unit since it has a strong coming of age theme. Students read the poem aloud Students then worked in pairs to answer the questions on the overheard:

- Why does the narrator want to go to the back yard?
- Name specific things the mom does not let the narrator do.
- How old do you think the narrator is? Is she mature or immature? How do you know?

Based on their responses, it seemed that the questions got students to begin making sense of the poem and also about what the back yard/front yard might be alluding to and how the narrator's age and immaturity influences the way she sees the world. Students worked on filling in a chart for the symbols in the poem.

After filling in the chart, the class discussed possible symbols, and students were provided a few minutes to revise/add to their interpretations and to add new symbols to their chart. The teacher reminded students about the narrator and made it clear that the narrator is different than the author and different than the mom. The age of the character and her maturity level are important in that they help us see the dichotomy of views between the narrator and mother. It also explains the language of the poem (as a student in 3rd period pointed out), statements such as "play with children" and "paint their faces" (as opposed to "make up") makes sense when we know the narrator is rather young and naïve.

The narrator's age was again emphasized as students began a whole class activity of coming up with evidence about her immature views of the world. The class also went over themes in the poem: the narrator is young, immature and has not fully made that shift to a complete coming of age. Students worked on a T chart where they came up with the narrator's immature views of the world and with the more mature view (the mother's). Students used their T-charts, and symbolism sheet to write a paragraph with evidence and reasoning for the following claim: "Though I agree that the poem "A Song in the Front Yard" by Gwendolyn Brooks illustrates a coming of age theme, I still maintain that the narrator's views of the world are false/innocent/immature."

The class went through the claim and the T chart and students were given a couple of things to consider from the poem, such as using evidence of how the narrator sees places such as the backyard and the alley. Students wrote the paragraphs on his/her own.

## 6. "Two Kinds" (November 3-9, 2011)

*Gateway Activity* (November 3, 2011)

"Two Kinds" is related to Asian cultural values and the gateway activities are intended to help students gain some prior knowledge about Asian cultural norms.

### Learning objectives guiding activities

- Establish criteria for judging interpretations of theme

### Supports

- Power point with a few common proverbs and Asian proverbs regarding filial respect and obedience
- An ABC Nightline report "A New Breed of Moms" about Chinese parenting <http://abcnews.go.com/Nightline/video/mommy-wars-tiger-mom-parenting-books-education-school-12774221>

### Activities description

The teachers introduced the idea of proverbs to the students using the common proverbs in the power point presentation. After understanding what proverbs were student explored the meanings of Asian proverbs about filial respect and obedience. After discussion, the students watched the video of the interview with the Tiger Mom and discussed their reactions to her extreme style of parenting. This was to provide some cultural background on the themes in "Two Kinds."

### Change/change decisions

The teacher created a slide to show the proverbs and added more common ones that students might know. The more common proverbs seemed as a good starting point for students.

*"Two Kinds"*

### Learning objectives guiding activities

- Establish criteria for judging interpretations of theme
- Engage in close reading of literary texts to construct interpretations
- Develop structural and thematic interpretations derived from general knowledge of literary conventions and genre structures
- Construct claim-evidence relations based on evidence from texts, reader's experiences, other texts, and literary constructs

- Synthesize within and across literary texts to construct generalizations about theme, characterization, structure, and language

### Supports

- “Two Kinds” text
- Wall charts
- Interpreting Symbolism graphic organizer

### Activities Description

The class began reading the chapter and spent much time on the first paragraph, establishing the narrator, her age (somewhat, it was determined that we needed more info) and the situation. Going paragraph by paragraph at the beginning was good practice because some students had serious misunderstandings of the plot. As a class, they filled out the symbolism graphic organizer for a few symbols in the text.

In moving students from instructor initiated clarity of plot and character changes, students worked in groups where part of their public work on wall charts focused on identifying actions/ events from their assigned section of the text. In each class, there were four groups made up of three students and each team was responsible for specific parts of the text and a specific task (i.e., connecting actions/ events that indicate the narrator is changing; connecting a possible symbol to what it tells us about the main character).

The last two days of the module was an attempt to help students synthesize two literary texts: “When I was Puerto Rican” and “Two Kinds.” Students were provided support worksheets where they needed to identify symbols and connect them to what the symbols may be indicating about the character or their world. Students struggled with thinking about each story as a whole and making statements of the characters and their situations. The support sheets were meant to help students construct an essay comparing both texts.

For this writing, students used an argument template that heavily scaffolded the first paragraph to present a synthesis argument on how the symbols in each story help readers to understand the characters and their worlds. The second through fourth paragraphs of the template provided less support with each successive paragraph. The first paragraph was written as a whole class; students then went on to complete their essays individually. Students struggled with the task and no student completed the five paragraphs. The difficulty was due to this being so new to them and also because the move from talking about symbolism to writing and specifically linking it to what the symbols indicate about the characters and their worlds was not practiced throughout the module.

### Change/change decisions

More support, clarification and guidance were provided than previously determined. This had more to do with the confusing template and lack of practice in this task.

### SLIP OR TRIP

At five-feet-six, and a hundred and ten pounds, Queenie Volupides was a sight to behold, and to clasp. And when she tore out of the house after a tiff with her husband, Arthur, she went to the country club where there was a party going on.

She left the club shortly before one in the morning and invited a few friends to follow her home and have one more drink. They got to the Volupides house about ten minutes after Queenie, who met them at the door and said, “Something terrible happened. Arthur slipped and fell on the stairs. He was coming down for another drink--he still had the glass in his hand--and I think he's dead. Oh, my God--what shall I do?”



The autopsy concluded that Arthur had died from a wound on the head and confirmed the fact that he'd been drunk.

### **The Case of the Dead Musician**

Anton Karazai had amassed a great fortune in his 70 years as a world-famous pianist, performing for presidents and parliaments, kings and queens, in all the greatest cities' concert halls and children's hospitals. Anyone who watched Mr. Karazai perform understood immediately that he loved his music above and beyond anything else. Music--playing the piano--was his life.

Yesterday evening, My 16, 2006, however, Mr. Karazai's only son and sole heir phoned the police and reported that his father had hanged himself from the chandelier in the piano room at his estate. When the police arrived, they took several pictures of the scene. One of those pictures appears on the next page. The police noted that Karazai had been hanged by a cord from the set of

drapes in the corner window of the room such that his feet hung about two feet above the stool beneath him. They also noted that several pieces of the steel piano wire had been ripped from the piano.

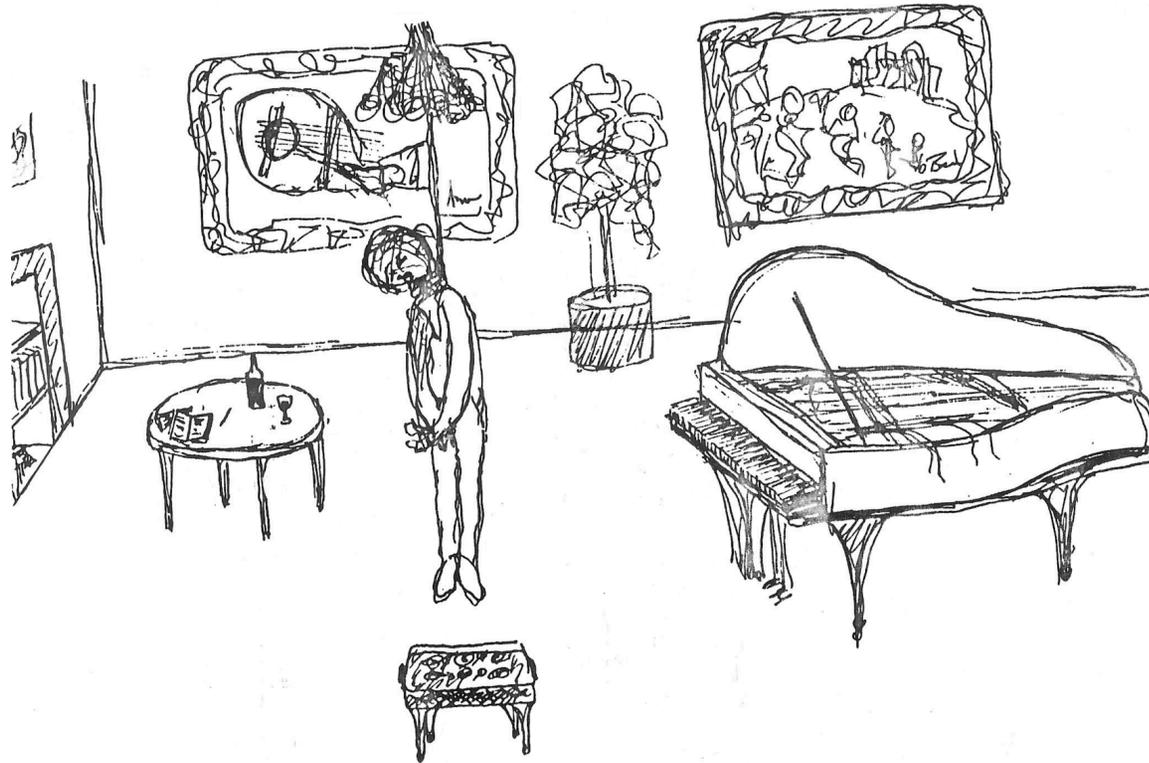
The coroner's report confirmed that Mr. Karazai died from asphyxiation. Inspection of his neck revealed a single, thin, skin-breaking line with a small amount of blood across the Adam's apple.

Since it is too small to read from the picture, here is Mr. Karazai's last journal entry in its entirety:

May 16, 2006. Have been sad for weeks now. My strength diminishes every day. It is even difficult for me to play the piano. Sometimes, even piano fails to cheer me. Sometimes my failing ability makes me angry. Yesterday I actually kicked my piano! But my 90 year old legs could hardly hurt a little bird. Only my son remains, my only son and the sole heir to all that I have earned and collected over this incredible, but lonely life. I wonder if he knows what he will be getting when I die. Perhaps. But perhaps not. I will try to play something simple to cheer me before I retire for the evening—perhaps something from Debussy's "Children's Corner," a wonderful collection of happy, beautiful melodies.

You are the investigator reading the reports above and inspecting the picture of the scene. Mr. Karazai's son claims that his father hanged himself. What do you think is the truth? From the evidence available, make a case for what

you think really happened. Before you begin to write your report, list the evidence and warrants you will use in making



your case.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### Introduction to Symbolism

Symbol in Text	Associations I can make with the image, event, character, action, object, name, or place	What does the symbol represent?

## *An Immigrant Class (Libman, 2004) Excerpts*

I've never met someone who is living in our building. "Is there someone really living here? Are we alone? Never. I said, "That's impossible." Most of the time I try for the first time to say, "Hello," but they don't answer. That's so hard to believe. People in my country in the neighborhood where I live, every morning you will say, "Hi," to more than hundreds of people. You will meet everybody first in the street, just raise your hand or say, "Hi," and keep going and everybody knows everybody or least they try. You don't feel alone. There is no loneliness [in Burkina Faso]. None at all. You are always surrounded by people you know.

### **Amadou Tandina – Burkina Faso**

I got my ID card. I got my social security, everything. Just a funny thing I remember. I went to get my driver's license. And usually in the back of the license they ask you agree to donate your organs. And I was new. I was her like one month. I tried to get my driver's license. And the guy ask me, "Do you want to give your organ?" Something like that.

And I didn't know organ means also tissue. I thought organ means, "Can you play organ?" [Laughs.]

I said, "What is relation between driving and playing organ? Why is he asking me?" I said, "I cannot play organ."

He told me, "Oh, we cannot give you driver's license then!" [Laughs.] He just teasing me. He said, "You cannot do any playing? Nothing? Guitar? Anything?" I said, "No." [Laughs.]

### **Javad Kiani - Iran**

March 30<sup>th</sup>. We landed at O'Hare. It was already 5:00 at night, getting dark and all my husband's relatives were inside the building, and Boris, also. Oh, my goodness. It was hugness! I was almost dead. I thought that I was dreaming. Hugness, laughness,

tears, smileness. They touched me and they touched my family like we were not here, just the shape of us is here. Boris said, "You're here, you're here!" 200 percent we knew it was for good.

### **Elena Raskin – Belarus**

If I think of my daughter, try to understand this. I would like her to study here but to live over there because I love my culture, I love my country, I love how parents grow up their children over there. When you are here and you see that parents are always working or somewhere else, and several times you have to take your children to other people to take care of them. I think that sense of family and parenthood and all that, it's kind of secondary. But in our country, whew, since a child is born and starts breast-feeding and is always with their parents and everything. I think the education of childrens is better in my country 'cause that sense of family and respect and all that stuff.

### **Eli Ramírez – Guatemala**

I wrote extensive, large, huge letter to my family explaining everything, but I say, "You know what, I am buying at the Aldi [supermarket]. This is very, very cheap place. I don't know why people doesn't like to buy here. It's the same food that's in the Jewel[supermarket]. It is excellent. It is good. I will buy there forever." And I say, "The Family Dollar. Oh, this is fantastic. For one dollar you can buy very good things here."

Now I don't know how long I have been in this Aldi or this Family Dollar. Now I hate these places [Laughs.] because the quality is not the same. I have learned that the things that are cheap are no good....At the beginning I have to buy my shoes at the Payless Shoes. Now, I don't buy any shoes at Payless Shoes. Now my shoes have to be no less than \$40 or \$60.

### **Pilar Landa – Cuba**

The American dream for me is leave many things which you have in your country. Maybe a good life. American dream is leave many things, many friends, many good times, is work a lot, is feel many times frustrated. That is for me the American dream.

### **Luisa Cardenas – Chile**

[I was a] waitress. To waitress where I have to heat the food, pizza, or strudel, take the order and take the money, too. And then it really was hard. I didn't know the English...

The worst of all was one guy get there asking me something, and I couldn't understand what he was talking about. And then he said to me, "Can you find somebody that speak English!?" But in a way like you were [dirt].

I didn't answer...But the way I look at him, I was showing how much I hate him. And in myself I was thinking, "Yes, I don't speak English, this is true, but how many languages do you speak? What is your degree? Who are you? I don't speak language, but I'm not stupid" But I didn't say nothing. I only look at him all the time until he sit down. And when he left, I still keep my eyes on him and I look to let him know what my feeling was about him.

### **Pilar Landa – Cuba**

What I think is to be immigrant—what an immigrant feel, only an immigrant can really understand. But really, when you know that you are closing the door you have behind, it is closed, and you are opening a door that you doesn't know what is in front of you, you doesn't know your destiny, it is really hard, really hard. You have to change the way you think sometimes. You have to change some of your culture. You're obligated to change. Not everything. I don't mean you have to Americanize, but I mean you have to make a lot of change. And it is really hard. Everybody are not so lucky like us...

I think we sometimes work harder than the Americans because we have to jump many barriers. The barrier of language, the barrier of culture. We didn't, for example, never before knew about taxes or credit card, or nothing like that. We have to learn. When you are a boy, you have five years to learn the basic language. When you are immigrant, you don't have any years. You have to come here and you have to start speak if you want to survive... The immigrant doesn't have time... I think many people can get so stressed and so depressed... Maybe the people that was before very fun, or happy, or very nice, they can get angry, sad, until they suicide. We have to think that an immigrant usually, I think, 95 percent are depressed. And I'm very conservative because we sometimes are depressed, too. They feel that they are not human, that somebody's better than you and you are nothing.

### **Pilar Landa – Cuba**

I remember sometimes at the time I used to go to bed in Cuba, I was so, so, so hungry that I got a pain in my stomach and I couldn't sleep. And I told Pilar, "Pilar, you know what? I am so hungry that the pain is killing me."

And Pilar told me, "You know what? There is nothing to eat, so go and drink a little water with sugar and there is nothing more." And in this country, a homeless has \$5 to go to McDonald's or Denny's or whatever. Even I don't understand now, I couldn't understand before, and I won't understand in the future how come in this country there are people homeless. Because here if you got a job, even the worst job, \$5 and hour, you can live, because we did it. Without English, without anything. So how come American people can be homeless?

### **Carlos Dominguez – Cuba**

Let's not talk about immigrants. Let's talk about in general all the people. You can't judge anybody just for the appearance or the color of skin or the nationality. Or you can't judge anybody for the money they have. You have to go a little more behind the rags the banker can have on, or maybe a little more than the blond and the pretty eyes. You have to go to the person, not the body or the appearance. You have to go for the person because everybody has a lot of story behind, and you don't know why the person

is here, what circumstances of his life brought him here. And maybe you have to think that maybe you can be in that position sometime because the life, you don't know where you are going to end. In my country there is an ancient saying that, "You don't spit to the sky because sometime it come back to you." *No escupas al cielo porque te puede caer a ti mismo.* So, you can't judge anybody, so you are not going to be judged. Well, I think this is it.

### **Felipe Ching – Peru**

I'm not going to say I'm Haitian only. I'm Mardocheé Jean Charles. I feel everywhere I go is my country, I can live. Even if someone wanna send me to Africa, I'm not gonna have any problems to go there, because I'm gonna live anyway. I'm a person and the world is for everybody. It's not Haiti for me and U.S. for you. I'm Haitian because my culture, my country, but I'm not gonna say, "I'm Haitian," like I wanna be just Haitian. I'm a man in the world.

### **Mardocheé Jean Charles – Haiti**

The people talk about the freedom, but the people do not understand exactly what is freedom. You have to stay in a freedom place, but it's important that the other countries, the other place have to be freedom, too. If not, you never will be freedom. If the people there don't have a good country, a good life, they come here to damage you.

I think Americans need to learn about that. For me, I understand that more. I know the bad countries. I know the freedom countries. And I know what the people think about that. You cannot be free if the others is not free. This is the situation.

### **Sergio Soares – Brazil**

Every day was just a hustle day. At times you got one meal at night. The war just disrupted the economy and everything and hunger was all over. To get a meal is very hard, too. Even you have the money, but you can't get it. If you got one meal, you can stay until the next day. But mostly with the kids what happened was we have those trees like mango trees and you just go and hustle on your own and get something. If you get one or two, you eat it and you drink water.

That's how survival was because if you depend on the meal at home, you're not gonna survive on it because it was hard to come by...And sometimes you walk miles to go in the bush and find some fruit and take some, eat it, and come back home. It was just survival. That's it. It was not eat and enjoy. We were going to school sometimes, sometimes not, because even sometimes you don't want to go to school because you're hungry. And at that time, nothing get in your head. You're thinking about when you're gonna get a meal today.

I started as a steward [at the Hyatt Regency]. You wash dishes basically on the machine. We got a big machine I never seen before. [Laughs.]

I think what I learned from that was that it was so hard for me to look at that and waste food actually. I didn't want to do that, but it's part of the job. I just think if I could have a way to feed people back there with all this food, I would have done it. But there is no way that you can do that. But there is so much food that is wasted in most of the hotels in the United States. It's not given to anybody. Even some food comes back and nobody touched it and it's your job, it's your duty. You have to waste it. So that was a difficult thing. Sometimes I would just look at the food and stare at it and think, "How many people will this save at this time?"

## **Deng Deng Agot – Sudan**

### **Instructions for "An Immigrant Class" activity**

Purpose: Gateway activity used to activate prior knowledge regarding experiences to assimilation/culture/language issues

Students get into groups of four (ideally groups by ability: one high, two mid, one lower) and they are given the excerpts. Each student also gets a copy of the book to look through.

T explains that the excerpts are from the larger writings of some of the individuals featured in the book. They may want to thumb through the book as they do their group activity.

## Questions for “An Immigrant Class” activity

Students in groups of four

Questions to keep in mind as you are reading the short excerpts:

What are some of the feelings/emotions that these individuals are experiencing? Why do they feel this way?

What are some specific obstacles that individuals discuss? What are some specific experiences that individuals share?

Discuss and jot down notes. Be prepared to discuss with whole class:

What do the excerpts tell you about these individuals? What does what they share tell you about their experiences? About their concerns or worries? About the issues that they face?

Share with your group something that you may have heard, read about, or know of someone who has had a similar experience to the ones described in the excerpts.

**Four Skinny Trees**  
by Sandra Cisneros

*From The House on Mango Street*

They are the only ones who understand me. I am the only one who understands them. Four skinny trees with skinny necks and pointy elbows like mine. Four who do not belong here but are here. Four raggedy excuses planted by the city. From our room we can hear them, but Nenny just sleeps and doesn't appreciate these things.

Their strength is secret. They send ferocious roots beneath the ground. They grow up and they grow down and grab the earth between their hairy toes and bite the sky with violent teeth and never quit their anger. This is how they keep.

Let one forget his reason for being, they'd all droop like tulips in a glass, each with their arms around the other. Keep, keep, keep, trees say when I sleep. They teach.

When I am too sad and too skinny to keep keeping, when I am a tiny thing against so many bricks, then it is I look at trees. When there is nothing left to look at on this street. Four who grew despite concrete. Four who reach and do not forget to reach. Four whose only reason is to be and be.

Interpreting Symbolism			
What I think is symbolic: Image, event, character, action, object, name, places	What the text says (page #)	Associations I can make with the image, event, character, action, object, name, or place	What do the words in the text and the associations I make lead me to think about what the symbol means?


# A song in the front yard

By [Gwendolyn Brooks](#)

I've stayed in the front yard all my life.  
I want a peek at the back  
Where it's rough and untended and hungry weed grows.  
A girl gets sick of a rose.

I want to go in the back yard now  
And maybe down the alley,  
To where the charity children play.  
I want a good time today.

They do some wonderful things.  
They have some wonderful fun.  
My mother sneers, but I say it's fine  
How they don't have to go in at quarter to nine.

My mother, she tells me that Johnnie Mae  
Will grow up to be a bad woman.  
That George'll be taken to Jail soon or late  
(On account of last winter he sold our back gate).

But I say it's fine. Honest, I do.  
And I'd like to be a bad woman, too,  
And wear the brave stockings of night-black lace  
And strut down the streets with paint on my face.

Gwendolyn Brooks, "a song in the front yard" from *Selected Poems*. Copyright © 1963 by Gwendolyn Brooks. Reprinted with the permission of the Estate of Gwendolyn Brooks.

Source: *Selected Poems* (1963)

## **Two Kinds** by Amy Tan

My mother believed you could be anything you wanted to be in America. You could open a restaurant. You could work for the government and get good retirement. You could buy a house with almost no money down. You could become rich. You could become instantly famous. "Of course, you can be a prodigy, too," my mother told me when I was nine. "You can be best anything. What does Auntie Lindo know? Her daughter, she is only best tricky." America was where all my mother's hopes lay. She had come to San Francisco in 1949 after losing everything in China: her mother and father, her home, her first husband, and two daughters, twin baby girls. But she never looked back with regret. Things could get better in so many ways.

We didn't immediately pick the right kind of prodigy. At first my mother thought I could be a Chinese Shirley Temple. We'd watch Shirley's old movies on TV as though they were training films. My mother would poke my arm and say, "*Ni kan*. You watch." And I would see Shirley tapping her feet, or singing a sailor song, or pursing her lips into a very round O while saying "Oh, my goodness." "*Ni kan*," my mother said, as Shirley's eyes flooded with tears. "You already know how. Don't need talent for crying!" Soon after my mother got this idea about Shirley Temple, she took me to the beauty training school in the Mission District and put me in the hands of a student who could barely hold the scissors without shaking. Instead of getting big fat curls, I emerged with an uneven mass of crinkly black fuzz. My mother dragged me off to the bathroom and tried to wet down my hair. "You look like a Negro Chinese," she lamented, as if I had done this on purpose. The instructor of the beauty training school had to lop off these soggy clumps to make my hair even again. "Peter Pan is very popular these days" the instructor assured my mother. I now had bad hair the length of a boy's, with curly bangs that hung at a slant two inches above my eyebrows. I like the haircut, and it made me actually look forward to my future fame.

In fact, in the beginning I was just as excited as my mother, maybe even more so. I pictured this prodigy part of me as many different images, and I tried each one on for size. I was a dainty ballerina girl standing by the curtain, waiting to hear the music that would send me floating on my tiptoes. I was like the Christ child lifted out of the straw manger, crying with holy indignity. I was Cinderella stepping from her pumpkin carriage with sparkly cartoon music filling the air. In all of my imaginings I was filled with a sense that I would soon become perfect: My mother and father would adore me. I would be beyond reproach. I would never feel the need to sulk, or to clamor for anything. But sometimes the prodigy in me became impatient. "If you don't hurry up and get me out of here, I'm disappearing for good," it warned. "And then you'll always be nothing."

Every night after dinner my mother and I would sit at the Formica topped kitchen table. She would present new tests, taking her examples from stories of amazing children that she read in *Ripley's Believe It or Not* or *Good Housekeeping*, *Reader's digest*, or any of a dozen other magazines she kept in a pile in our bathroom. My mother got these magazines from people whose houses she cleaned. And since she cleaned many houses each week, we had a great assortment. She would look through them all, searching for stories about remarkable children.

The first night she brought out a story about a three-year-old boy who knew the capitals of all the states and even the most of the European countries. A teacher was quoted as saying that the little boy could also pronounce the names of the foreign cities correctly. "What's the capital of Finland? My mother asked me, looking at the story.

All I knew was the capital of California, because Sacramento was the name of the street we lived on in Chinatown. "Nairobi!" I guessed, saying the most foreign word I could think of. She checked to see if that might be one way to pronounce *Helsinki* before showing me the answer.

The tests got harder - multiplying numbers in my head, finding the queen of hearts in a deck of cards, trying to stand on my head without using my hands, predicting the daily temperatures in Los Angeles, New York, and London. One night I had to look at a page from the Bible for three minutes and then report everything I could remember. "Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honor in abundance and...that's all I remember, Ma," I said.

And after seeing, once again, my mother's disappointed face, something inside me began to die. I hated the tests, the raised hopes and failed expectations. Before going to bed that night I looked in the mirror above the bathroom sink, and I saw only my face staring back - and understood that it would always be this ordinary face - I began to cry. Such a sad, ugly girl! I made high - pitched noises like a crazed animal, trying to scratch out the face in the mirror. And then I saw what seemed to be the prodigy side of me - a face I had never seen before. I looked at my reflection, blinking so that I could see more clearly. The girl staring back at me was angry, powerful. She and I were the same. I had new thoughts, willful thoughts - or rather, thoughts filled with lots of won'ts. I won't let her change me, I promised myself. I won't be what I'm not.

So now when my mother presented her tests, I performed listlessly, my head propped on one arm. I pretended to be bored. And I was. I got so bored that I started counting the bellows of the foghorns out on the bay while my mother drilled me in other areas. The sound was comforting and reminded me of the cow jumping over the moon. And the next day I played a game with myself, seeing if my

mother would give up on me before eight bellows. After a while I usually counted only one bellow, maybe two at most. At last she was beginning to give up hope.

Two or three months went by without any mention of my being a prodigy. And then one day my mother was watching the *Ed Sullivan Show* on TV. The TV was old and the sound kept shorting out. Every time my mother got halfway up from the sofa to adjust the set, the sound would come back on and Sullivan would be talking. As soon as she sat down, Sullivan would go silent again. She got up - the TV broke into loud piano music. She sat down - silence. Up and down, back and forth, quiet and loud. It was like a stiff, embraceless dance between her and the TV set. Finally, she stood by the set with her hand on the sound dial. She seemed entranced by the music, a frenzied little piano piece with a mesmerizing quality, which alternated between quick, playful passages and teasing, lilting ones. "*Ni kan,*" my mother said, calling me over with hurried hand gestures. "Look here." I could see why my mother was fascinated by the music. It was being pounded out by a little Chinese girl, about nine years old, with a Peter Pan haircut. The girl had the sauciness of a Shirley Temple. She was proudly modest, like a proper Chinese Child. And she also did a fancy sweep of a curtsy, so that the fluffy skirt of her white dress cascaded to the floor like petals of a large carnation. In spite of these warning signs, I wasn't worried. Our family had no piano and we couldn't afford to buy one, let alone reams of sheet music and piano lessons. So I could be generous in my comments when my mother badmouthed the little girl on TV. "Play note right, but doesn't sound good!" my mother complained "No singing sound." "What are you picking on her for?" I said carelessly. "She's pretty good. Maybe she's not the best, but she's trying hard." I knew almost immediately that I would be sorry I had said that. "Just like you," she said. "Not the best. Because you not trying." She gave a little huff as she let go of the sound dial and sat down on the sofa. The little Chinese girl sat down also, to play an encore of "*Anitra's Tanz,*" by Grieg. I remember the song, because later on I had to learn how to play it.

Three days after watching the *Ed Sullivan Show* my mother told me what my schedule would be for piano lessons and piano practice. She had talked to Mr. Chong, who lived on the first floor of our apartment building. Mr. Chong was a retired piano teacher, and my mother had traded housecleaning services for weekly lessons and a piano for me to practice on every day, two hours a day, from four until six.

When my mother told me this, I felt as though I had been sent to hell. I whined, and then kicked my foot a little when I couldn't stand it anymore. "Why don't you like me the way I am?" I cried. "I'm *not* a genius! I can't play the piano. And even if I could, I wouldn't go on TV if you paid me a million dollars!" My mother slapped me. "Who ask you to be genius?" she shouted. "Only ask you be your best. For you sake. You think I want you to be genius? Hnnh! What for! Who ask you!?" "So ungrateful," I heard her mutter in Chinese, "If she had as much talent as she has temper, she'd be famous now."

Mr. Chong, whom I secretly nicknamed Old Chong, was very strange, always tapping his fingers to the silent music of an invisible orchestra. He looked ancient in my eyes. He had lost most of the hair on the top of his head, and he wore thick glasses and had eyes that always looked tired. But he must have been younger than I thought, since he lived with his mother and was not yet married. I met Old Lady Chong once, and that was enough. She had a peculiar smell, like a baby that had done something in its pants, and her fingers

felt like a dead person's, like an old peach I once found in the back of the refrigerator: its skin just slid off the flesh when I picked it up. I soon found out why Old Chong had retired from teaching piano. He was deaf. "Like Beethoven!" he shouted to me: We're both listening only in our head!" And he would start to conduct his frantic silent sonatas.

Our lessons went like this. He would open the book and point to different things, explaining, their purpose: "Key! Treble! Bass! No sharps or flats! So this is C major! Listen now and play after me!" And then he would play the C scale a few times, a simple cord, and then, as if inspired by an old unreachable itch, he would gradually add more notes and running trills and a pounding bass until the music was really something quite grand. I would play after him, the simple scale, the simple chord, and then just play some nonsense that sounded like a cat running up and down on top of garbage cans. Old Chong would smile and applaud and say Very good! But now you must learn to keep time!" So that's how I discovered that Old Chong's eyes were too slow to keep up with the wrong notes I was playing. He went through the motions in half time. To help me keep rhythm, he stood behind me and pushed down on my right shoulder for every beat. He balanced pennies on top of my wrists so that I would keep them still as I slowly played scales and arpeggios. He had me curve my hand around an apple and keep that shape when playing chords. He marched stiffly to show me how to make each finger dance up and down, staccato, like an obedient little soldier.

He taught me all these things and that was how I also learned I could be lazy and get away with mistakes, lots of mistakes. If I hit the wrong notes because I hadn't practiced enough, I never corrected myself; I just kept playing in rhythm. And Old Chong kept conducting his own private reverie. So maybe I never really gave myself a fair chance. I did pick up the basics pretty quickly, and I might have become a good pianist at the young age. But I was so determined not to try, not to be anybody different, and I learned to play only the most ear-splitting preludes, the most discordant hymns.

Over the next year I practiced like this, dutifully in my own way. And then one day I heard my mother and her friend Lindo Jong both after church, and I was leaning against a brick wall, wearing a dress with stiff white petticoats. Auntie Lindo's daughter, Waverly, who was my age, was standing farther down the wall, about five feet away. We had grown up together and shared all the closeness of two sisters, squabbling over crayons and dolls. In other words, for the most part, we hated each other. I thought she was snotty. Waverly Jong had gained a certain amount of fame as "Chinatown's Littlest Chinese Chess Champion." "She bring home too many trophy." Auntie Lindo lamented that Sunday. "All day she play chess. All day I have no time do nothing but dust off her winnings." She threw a scolding look at Waverly, who pretended not to see her. "You lucky you don't have this problem," Auntie Lindo said with a sigh to my mother. And my mother squared her shoulders and bragged: "our problem worser than yours. If we ask Jing-mei wash dish, she hear nothing but music. It's like you can't stop this natural talent." And right then I was determined to put a stop to her foolish pride.

A few weeks later Old Chong and my mother conspired to have me play in a talent show that was to be held in the church hall. But then my parents had saved up enough to buy me a secondhand piano, a black Wurlitzer spinet with a scarred bench. It was the showpiece of our living room. For the talent show I was to play a piece called "Pleading Child," from Schumann's *Scenes from*

*Childhood.* It was a simple, moody piece that sounded more difficult than it was. I was supposed to memorize the whole thing. But I dawdled over it, playing a few bars and then cheating, looking up to see what notes followed. I never really listened to what I was playing. I daydreamed about being somewhere else, about being someone else.

The part I liked to practice best was the fancy curtsy: right foot out, touch the rose on the carpet with a pointed foot, sweep to the side, bend left leg, look up, and smile. My parents invited all the couples from their social club to witness my debut. Auntie Lindo and Uncle Tin were there. Waverly and her two older brothers had also come. The first two rows were filled with children either younger or older than I was. The littlest ones got to go first. They recited simple nursery rhymes, squawked out tunes on miniature violins, and twirled hula hoops in pink ballet tutus, and when they bowed or curtsied, the audience would sigh in unison, "Awww, and then clap enthusiastically.

When my turn came, I was very confident. I remember my childish excitement. It was as if I knew, without a doubt, that the prodigy side of me really did exist. I had no fear whatsoever, no nervousness. I remember thinking, This is it! This is it! I looked out over the audience, at my mother's blank face, my father's yawn, Auntie Lindo's stiff-lipped smile, Waverly's sulky expression. I had on a white dress, layered with sheets of lace, and a pink bow in my Peter Pan haircut. As I sat down, I envisioned people jumping to their feet and Ed Sullivan rushing up to introduce me to everyone on TV.

And I started to play. Everything was so beautiful. I was so caught up in how lovely I looked that I wasn't worried about how I would sound. So I was surprised when I hit the first wrong note. And then I hit another and another. A chill started at the top of my head and began to trickle down. Yet I couldn't stop playing, as though my hands were bewitched. I kept thinking my fingers would adjust themselves back, like a train switching to the right track. I played this strange jumble through to the end, the sour notes staying with me all the way.

When I stood up, I discovered my legs were shaking. Maybe I had just been nervous, and the audience, like Old Chong had seen me go through the right motions and had not heard anything wrong at all. I swept my right foot out, went down on my knee, looked up, and smiled. The room was quiet, except for Old Chong, who was beaming and shouting "Bravo! Bravo! Well done!" By then I saw my mother's face, her stricken face. The audience clapped weakly, and I walked back to my chair, with my whole face quivering as I tried not to cry, I heard a little boy whisper loudly to his mother. "That was awful," and mother whispered "Well, she certainly tried."

And now I realized how many people were in the audience - the whole world, it seemed. I was aware of eyes burning into my back. I felt the shame of my mother and father as they sat stiffly through the rest of the show. We could have escaped during intermission. Pride and some strange sense of honor must have anchored my parents to their chairs. And so we watched it all. The eighteen-year-old boy with a fake moustache who did a magic show and juggled flaming hoops while riding a unicycle. The breasted girl with white make up who sang an aria from *Madame Butterfly* and got an honorable mention. And the eleven-year-old boy who was first prize playing a tricky violin song that sounded like a busy bee.

After the show the Hsus, the Jongs, and the St. Clairs, from the Joy Luck Club, came up to my mother and father. "Lots of talented kids," Auntie Lindo said vaguely, smiling broadly. "That was somethin' else," my father said, and I wondered if he was referring to me in a humorous way, or whether he even remembered what I had done.

Waverly looked at me and shrugged her shoulders. "You aren't a genius like me," she said matter-of-factly. And if I hadn't felt so bad, I would have pulled her braids and punched her stomach. But my mother's expression was what devastated me: a quiet, blank look that said she had lost everything. I felt the same way, and everybody seemed now to be coming up, like gawkers at the scene of an accident to see what parts were actually missing. When we got on the bus to go home, my father was humming the busy-bee tune and my mother kept silent. I kept thinking she wanted to wait until we got home before shouting at me. But when my father unlocked the door to our apartment, my mother walked in and went straight to the back, into the bedroom. No accusations, No blame. And in a way, I felt disappointed. I had been waiting for her to start shouting, so that I could shout back and cry and blame her for all my misery.

I had assumed that my talent-show fiasco meant that I would never have to play the piano again. But two days later, after school, my mother came out of the kitchen and saw me watching TV. "Four clock," she reminded me, as if it were any other day. I was stunned, as though she were asking me to go through the talent-show torture again. I planted myself more squarely in front of the TV. "Turn off TV," she called from the kitchen five minutes later. I didn't budge. And then I decided, I didn't have to do what mother said anymore. I wasn't her slave. This wasn't China. I had listened to her before, and look what happened she was the stupid one. She came out of the kitchen and stood in the arched entryway of the living room. "Four clock," she said once again, louder. "I'm not going to play anymore," I said nonchalantly. "Why should I? I'm not a genius." She stood in front of the TV. I saw that her chest was heaving up and down in an angry way. "No!" I said, and I now felt stronger, as if my true self had finally emerged. So this was what had been inside me all along. "No! I won't!" I screamed. She snapped off the TV, yanked me by the arm and pulled me off the floor. She was frighteningly strong, half pulling, half carrying me towards the piano as I kicked the throw rugs under my feet. She lifted me up onto the hard bench. I was sobbing by now, looking at her bitterly. Her chest was heaving even more and her mouth was open, smiling crazily as if she were pleased that I was crying. "You want me to be something that I'm not!" I sobbed. "I'll never be the kind of daughter you want me to be!" "Only two kinds of daughters," she shouted in Chinese. "Those who are obedient and those who follow their own mind! Only one kind of daughter can live in this house. Obedient daughter!" "Then I wish I weren't your daughter, I wish you weren't my mother," I shouted. As I said these things I got scared. It felt like worms and toads and slimy things crawling out of my chest, but it also felt good, that this awful side of me had surfaced, at last. "Too late to change this," my mother said shrilly. And I could sense her anger rising to its breaking point. I wanted see it spill over. And that's when I remembered the babies she had lost in China, the ones we never talked about. "Then I wish I'd never been born!" I shouted. "I wish I were dead! Like them." It was as if I had said magic words. Alakazam!-her face went blank, her mouth closed, her arms went slack, and she backed out of the room, stunned, as if she were blowing away like a small brown leaf, thin, brittle, lifeless.

It was not the only disappointment my mother felt in me. In the years that followed, I failed her many times, each time asserting my will, my right to fall short of expectations. I didn't get straight *As*. I didn't become class president. I didn't get into Stanford. I dropped out of college. Unlike my mother, I did not believe I could be anything I wanted to be, I could only be me. And for all those years we never talked about the disaster at the recital or my terrible declarations afterward at the piano bench. Neither of us talked about it

again, as if it were a betrayal that was now unspeakable. So I never found a way to ask her why she had hoped for something so large that failure was inevitable. And even worse, I never asked her about what frightened me the most: Why had she given up hope? For after our struggle at the piano, she never mentioned my playing again. The lessons stopped. The lid to the piano was closed shutting out the dust, my misery, and her dreams.

So she surprised me. A few years ago she offered to give me the piano, for my thirtieth birthday. I had not played in all those years. I saw the offer as a sign of forgiveness, a tremendous burden removed. "Are you sure?" I asked shyly. "I mean, won't you and Dad miss it?" "No, this your piano," she said firmly. "Always your piano. You only one can play." "Well, I probably can't play anymore," I said. "It's been years." "You pick up fast," my mother said, as if she knew this was certain. "You have natural talent. You could be a genius if you want to." "No, I couldn't." "You just not trying," my mother said. And she was neither angry nor sad. She said it as if announcing a fact that could never be disproved. "Take it," she said. But I didn't at first. It was enough that she had offered it to me. And after that, every time I saw it in my parents' living room, standing in front of the bay window, it made me feel proud, as if it were a shiny trophy that I had won back.

Last week I sent a tuner over to my parent's apartment and had the piano reconditioned, for purely sentimental reasons. My mother had died a few months before and I had been getting things in order for my father a little bit at a time. I put the jewelry in special silk pouches. The sweaters I put in mothproof boxes. I found some old Chinese silk dresses, the kind with little slits up the sides. I rubbed the old silk against my skin, and then wrapped them in tissue and decided to take them home with me. After I had the piano tuned, I opened the lid and touched the keys. It sounded even richer than I remembered. Really, it was a very good piano. Inside the bench were the same exercise notes with handwritten scales, the same secondhand music books with their covers held together with yellow tape. I opened up the Schumann book to the dark little piece I had played at the recital. It was on the left-hand page, "Pleading Child." It looked more difficult than I remembered. I played a few bars, surprised at how easily the notes came back to me. And for the first time, or so it seemed, I noticed the piece on the right-hand side. It was called "Perfectly Contented." I tried to play this one as well. It had a lighter melody but with the same flowing rhythm and turned out to be quite easy. "Pleading Child" was shorter but slower; "Perfectly Contented" was longer but faster. And after I had played them both a few times, I realized they were two halves of the same song.

**Interpreting Symbolism—Two Kinds**

What I think is symbolic (image, event, character, action, object, name, or place)	Thinking of the words in the text and the connections I make with the symbol, what does the symbol mean?	What does the symbol emphasize about Jing-mei as a person? What does it say about the type of person she is?	What does the symbol reveal about Jing-mei's experiences? What does it tell us about the world she lives in?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Period: \_\_\_\_\_

**[1<sup>st</sup> paragraph]**

In the stories, “When I was Puerto Rican,” by Alvarez and “Two Kinds” by Tan, several symbols help us understand the main characters and their experiences. In both stories, the titles emphasize something about each character and their world.

Another important symbol is a major event in each story. The final symbol that is important is

\_\_\_\_\_ in “When I was Puerto Rican” and

\_\_\_\_\_ in “Two Kinds.”

**[2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph]**

The title “When I was Puerto Rican” helps reveal *[something about Esmeralda’s experience]*

\_\_\_\_\_. The title leads the reader to think about

Esmeralda as *[something about the type of person she is]*

\_\_\_\_\_. Therefore, the title is a symbol because in general,

*[reasoning]* \_\_\_\_\_. Similarly, the title “Two Kinds”

emphasizes the idea of Jing-mei’s world as *[something about her experience]*

\_\_\_\_\_. What the title suggests about Jing-mei is  
[something about the type of person she is] \_\_\_\_\_. After  
all, [reasoning] \_\_\_\_\_.

**[3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph]**

**1<sup>st</sup> sentence (Claim):** In both stories, an important event becomes a symbol.

**2<sup>nd</sup> sentence (Evidence):** *What the event in "When I was Puerto Rican" says about Esmeralda or about her experience.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**3<sup>rd</sup> sentence (Reasoning):** *Provide reasoning for your evidence.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**4<sup>th</sup> sentence (Evidence):** *What the event in "Two Kinds" says about Jing-mei or about her experience.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**5<sup>th</sup> sentence (Reasoning):** *Provide reasoning for your evidence.*

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**[Fourth paragraph]**

*Write your last paragraph and conclusion on your own, using the format above as a guide and the symbols you wrote in the introductory paragraph.*