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UNIT 2

Two Kinds

Amy Tan

1 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.

2 "Of course you can be 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."

3 America was where all my mother's hopes lay. She had come here in 1949 after losing everything in China: her mother and father, her family home, her first husband, and two daughters, twin baby girls. But she never looked back with regret. There were so many ways for things to get better.

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4 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."

5 "*Ni kan*," said my mother as Shirley's eyes flooded with tears. "You already know how. Don't need talent for crying!"

6 Soon after my mother got this idea about Shirley Temple, she took me to a 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.

7 "You look like Negro Chinese," she lamented, as if I had done this on purpose.

8 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 hair the length of a boy's, with straight-across bangs that hung at a slant two inches above my eyebrows. I liked the haircut and it made me actually look forward to my future fame.

9 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, trying each one on for size. I was a dainty ballerina girl standing by the curtains, waiting to hear the right 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.

10 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, for anything.

11 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."

12 Every night after dinner, my mother and I would sit at the Formica kitchen table. She would present new tests, taking her examples from stories of amazing children she had read in Ripley's *Believe It or Not,* or *Good Housekeeping*, *Reader's Digest*, and 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.

13 The first night she brought out a story about a three-year-old boy who knew the capitals of all the states and even most of the European countries. A teacher was quoted as saying the little boy could also pronounce the names of the foreign cities correctly.

14 "What's the capital of Finland?" my mother asked me, looking at the magazine story.

15 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 was possibly one way to pronounce "Helsinki" before showing me the answer.

16 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.

17 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.

18 And after seeing my mother's disappointed face once again, something inside of 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 when I saw only my face staring back—and 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.

19 And then I saw what seemed to be the prodigy side of me—because I had never seen that face before. I looked at my reflection, blinking so I could see more clearly. The girl staring back at me was angry, powerful. This girl 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.

20 So now on nights 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, maybe two bellows at most. At last she was beginning to give up hope.

21 Two or three months had gone by without any mention of my being a prodigy again. 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 go back on and Ed would be talking. As soon as she sat down, Ed 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.

22 She seemed entranced by the music, a little frenzied piano piece with this mesmerizing quality, sort of quick passages and then teasing lilting ones before it returned to the quick playful parts.

23 "*Ni kan*," my mother said, calling me over with hurried hand gestures, "Look here."

24 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 this fancy sweep of a curtsy, so that the fluffy skirt of her white dress cascaded slowly to the

floor like the petals of a large carnation.

25 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 bad-mouthed the little girl on TV. "Play note right, but doesn't sound good! No singing sound," complained my mother.

26 "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 I would be sorry I said that.

27 "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.

28 The little Chinese girl sat down also to play an encore of "Anitra's Dance" by Grieg. I remember the song, because later on I had to learn how to play it.

29 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.

30 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.

31 "Why don't you like me the way I am? 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!" I cried.

32 My mother slapped me. "Who ask you be genius?" she shouted. "Only ask you be your best. For you sake. You think I want you be genius? Hnnh! What for! Who ask you!"

33 "So ungrateful," I heard her mutter in Chinese. "If she had as much talent as she has temper, she would be famous now."

34 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 top of his

head and he wore thick glasses and had eyes that always looked tired and sleepy. But he must have been younger than I thought, since he lived with his mother and was not yet married.

35 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.

36 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!"

37 And then he would play the C scale a few times, a simple chord, and then, as if inspired by an old, unreachable itch, he gradually added more notes and running trills and a pounding bass until the music was really something quite grand.

38 I would play after him, the simple scale, the simple chord, and then I just played some nonsense that sounded like a cat running up and down on top of garbage cans. Old Chong smiled and applauded and then said, "Very good! But now you must learn to keep time!"

39 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, pushing down on my right shoulder for every beat. He balanced pennies on top of my wrists so 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.

40 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.

41 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 that young age. But I was so determined not to try, not to be anybody different that I learned to play only the most ear-splitting preludes, the most discordant hymns.

42 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 talking in a loud bragging tone of voice so others could hear. It was after church, and I was leaning against the brick wall wearing a dress with stiff white petticoats. Auntie Lindo's daughter, Waverly, who was about 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."

43 "She bring home too many trophy," lamented Auntie Lindo 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.

44 "You lucky you don't have this problem," said Auntie Lindo with a sigh to my mother.

45 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."

46 And right then, I was determined to put a stop to her foolish pride.

47 A few weeks later, Old Chong and my mother conspired to have me play in a talent show which would be held in the church hall. By 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.

48 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, playing the repeat parts twice to make the piece sound longer. 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.

49 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, left leg bends, look up and smile.

50 My parents invited all the couples from the Joy Luck 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 both younger and older than I was. The littlest ones got to go first. They recited simple nursery rhymes, squawked out tunes on miniature violins, twirled Hula Hoops, pranced in pink ballet tutus, and when they bowed or curtsied, the audience would sigh in unison, "Awww," and then clap enthusiastically.

51 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 to myself, 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.

52 And I started to play. It was so beautiful. I was so caught up in how lovely I looked that at first I didn't worry how I would sound. So it was a surprise to me when I hit the first wrong note and I realized something didn't sound quite right. And then I hit another and another followed that. 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 two repeats, the sour notes staying with me all the way to the end.

53 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!" But then I saw my mother's face, her stricken face. The audience clapped weakly, and as 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 the mother whispered back, "Well, she certainly tried."

54 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 throughout the rest of the show.

55 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 mustache who did a magic show and juggled flaming hoops while riding a unicycle. The breasted girl with white makeup who sang from *Madama Butterfly* and got honorable mention. And the eleven-year-old boy who won first prize playing a tricky violin song that sounded like a busy bee.

56 After the show, the Hsus, the Jongs, and the St. Clairs from the Joy Luck Club came up to my mother and father.

57 "Lots of talented kids," Auntie Lindo said vaguely, smiling broadly.

58 "That was somethin' else," said my father, and I wondered if he was referring to me in a humorous way, or whether he even remembered what I had done.

59 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.

60 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 it seemed as if everybody were now 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 was 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 then went 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 I could shout back and cry and blame her for all my misery.

61 I assumed my talent-show fiasco meant I never had to play the piano again. But two days later, after school, my mother came out of the kitchen and saw me watching TV.

62 "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 wedged myself more tightly in front of the TV.

63 "Turn off TV," she called from the kitchen five minutes later.

64 I didn't budge. And then I decided. I didn't have to do what my 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.

65 She came out from the kitchen and stood in the arched entryway of the living room. "Four clock," she said once again, louder.

66 "I'm not going to play anymore," I said nonchalantly. "Why should I? I'm not a genius."

67 She walked over and stood in front of the TV. I saw her chest was heaving up and down in an angry way.

68 "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.

69 "No! I won't!" I screamed.

70 She yanked me by the arm, pulled me off the floor, snapped off the TV. She was frighteningly strong, half pulling, half carrying me toward the piano as I kicked the throw rugs under my feet. She lifted me up and 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 I was crying.

71 "You want me to be someone that I'm not!" I sobbed. "I'll never be the kind of daughter you want me to be!"

72 "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!"

73 "Then I wish I wasn'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, as if this awful side of me had surfaced, at last.

74 "Too late change this," said my mother shrilly.

75 And I could sense her anger rising to its breaking point. I wanted to 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."

76 It was as if I had said the magic words. Alakazam! — and 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.

* * *

77 It was not the only disappointment my mother felt in me. In the years that followed, I failed her so many times, each time asserting my own 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.

78 For unlike my mother, I did not believe I could be anything I wanted to be. I could only be me.

79 And for all those years, we never talked about the disaster at the recital or my terrible accusations afterward at the piano bench. All that remained unchecked, like 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.

80 And even worse, I never asked her what frightened me the most: Why had she given up hope?

81 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.

82 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.

83 "Are you sure?" I asked shyly. "I mean, won't you and Dad miss it?"

84 "No, this your piano," she said firmly. "Always your piano. You only one can play."

85 "Well, I probably can't play anymore," I said. "It's been years."

86 "You pick up fast," said my mother, as if she knew this was certain. "You have natural talent. You could been genius if you want to."

87 "No, I couldn't."

88 "You just not trying," said my mother. And she was neither angry nor sad. She said it as if to announce a fact that could never be disproved. "Take it," she said.

89 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 windows, it made me feel proud, as if it were a shiny trophy I had won back.

90 Last week I sent a tuner over to my parents' 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 she had knitted in yellow, pink, bright orange—all the colors I hated—I put those 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, then wrapped them in tissue and decided to take them home with me.

91 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.

92 I opened up the Schumann book to the dark little piece I had played at the recital. It was on the left-hand side of the 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.

93 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 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 played them both a few times, I realized they were two halves of the same song.

Introduction

The author

Amy Tan (1952-) is one of a group of prominent Chinese American writers that has emerged since the 1980s. She was born in Oakland, California two-and-a half years after her parents immigrated to the United States from China. She received a master's degree in linguistics from San Jose State University. Though her parents anticipated that she would become a neurosurgeon by profession and a concert pianist as a hobby, she instead became a consultant to programs for disabled children, and later a freelance writer. In 1989 she published her first novel *The Joy Luck Club* in which she explores mother-daughter relationships. The book was an instant success, translated into 35 languages and adapted into a successful film. Tan has written several other best-selling novels, including *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), and *Saving Fish from Drowning* (2005). Besides continuing to explore mother-daughter relationships and telling stories about old China, the author has recently extended her subject matters to include non-fiction. In 2003 she also published *The Opposite of Fate: A Book of Musings*, a collection of essays dealing partly with her thoughts on writing.

The text

The novel *The Joy Luck Club*, from which "Two Kinds" is taken, explores conflicts between two generations and two different cultures. Set in China and the United States, the novel interweaves the stories of four Chinese mothers and their four daughters. The four Chinese women, who have just arrived in the United States and who are drawn together by the shadow of their past—meet in San Francisco to play mahjong, eat dim sum and tell stories. They call their gatherings the "Joy Luck Club." While they place high hopes on their daughters, the younger women think of themselves as independent Americans and

resist their mothers' attempts to change them into obedient Chinese daughters. Only after they have grown up and become more mature do they realize that the legacy left by their mothers is an important part of their lives, too. The novel stayed on *The New York Times* best-selling book list for nine months and was a finalist for the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award.

"Two Kinds" is one of the many tales in the book, vividly revealing the bittersweet relationship between mother and daughter. Although such relationships are frequently explored in American literature, Amy Tan avoids cliché by placing and intensifying the generational conflict in a context of cultural clashes. The narrator Jing-mei Woo is one of the four daughters. Her mother Suyuan Woo lost her husband in China during the Anti-Japanese War. Driven by hunger, disease and despair, she was forced to abandon her twin baby girls. Later, she immigrated to the United States, not knowing whether her daughters were dead or alive. The fact that she deserted her own children remains her secret. Understandably, she has high hopes for the child born after her arrival in the United States. Her newly acquired conception of the American Dream co-existing with her traditional Chinese values imposes exceptionally great demands on her daughter. So in growing up, Jing-mei has a hard time dealing with her mother's high hopes and unfulfilled expectations.

Some book reviews call Amy Tan a dazzling storyteller. From "Two Kinds," which is only one of the many interesting moving stories in *The Joy Luck Club*, we can see that she deserves such a compliment. She knows how to tell a compelling story by building up tension around conflicts. She moves easily between pathos, humor and joy. Her language seems simple, but that proves that she need not show off—the technique is so good that it is almost invisible. Another of Tan's gifts is her remarkable ear for dialogue and dialect that bring her characters to life. Jing-mei's mother is a fine example. She speaks ungrammatical, broken English, but her strange-sounding Chinglish is essential to the creation of one of Tan's unforgettable characters.

Many of the stories in the book are based on Amy Tan's personal experiences. As a teenager, she tried painfully to make sense of the tension between her and her mother. Out of a strong desire to come to terms with this stormy relationship and communicate with her mother, she began to write, not for a public audience, but for herself and for her mother. It is this sincerity and honesty that makes Amy Tan's first work so heart-rending and so appealing to its readers.

Notes

1. **Shirley Temple** (Para. 4): Shirley Temple (1928-2014) was a beloved American child film star. Propelled by an ambitious mother, Temple made her film debut at the age of three. Known for her blond ringlets and recognized for her ability to sing and tap-dance, Temple became a celebrity in the 1930s, appearing in a great number of movies. Her film career ended in the late 1940s. In the 1960s, Temple began a long and successful career with the United Nations and the U.S. State Department.

2. **Negro Chinese** (Para. 7): The word "Negro" was adopted from Spanish and Portuguese. It remained the standard term throughout the 17th-19th centuries and was used by prominent black American campaigners such as W. E. B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington in the early 20th century. Since the Black Power movement of the 1960s, however, when the term "black" was favored as the term to express racial pride, "Negro" (together with related words such as "Negress") has dropped out of favor and now seems out of date or even offensive in both British and U.S. English.

3. **Peter Pan** (Para. 8): *Peter Pan, or the Boy Who Wouldn't Grow Up* (1904) is a dramatic fantasy by J. M. Barrie. The boy-hero, Peter Pan, has run away to Neverland to escape growing up, living there as the leader of a group of lost children. While in search of his lost shadow, he encounters Wendy, Michael, and John, whom he instantly befriends. They have many adventures. This extremely popular book was made into a play, and Peter Pan eventually became a well-known Disneyland figure with his short hair and bangs above his eyebrows.

4. **the Christ child lifted out of the straw manger** (Para. 9): This is a biblical allusion referring to the birth of Jesus Christ. His mother Mary, married to Joseph—a marriage not yet consummated—conceived a baby by the Holy Spirit. An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him not to be afraid. As Mary was about to give birth, the Roman Emperor ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. Everyone had to register, each in his own town. Joseph and Mary traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem for this registration. While they were in Bethlehem, Mary gave birth to her son, wrapped him in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger—there was

no room for them to stay in the inn. This scene is often dramatized by Christians as part of Christmas celebrations.

5. **Ripley's *Believe It or Not*** (Para. 12): Robert L. Ripley (1890-1949) was a famous American cartoonist. In 1918 he created his first collection entitled *Champs and Chumps*, and later changed to *Believe It or Not.* All his life he was interested in the odd and the outlandish. His *Believe It or Not* syndication was carried by over 300 newspapers in 33 countries with an estimated readership of 80 million. He gave lectures and also ran radio and TV shows.

6. ***Good Housekeeping*** (Para. 12): The magazine first appeared on May 2, 1885, offering readers tips on running a home as well as stories and articles. It became extraordinarily popular. In 1966 its readers numbered 5.5 million. Today *Good Housekeeping* contains articles about the home, the family, food, fitness, health and beauty.

7. ***Reader's Digest*** (Para. 12): A best-selling general interest magazine with a large circulation published in a dozen of languages, it contains articles, short stories and sections from books on a variety of topics.

8. **the cow jumping over the moon** (Para. 20): a famous line from an old nursery rhyme

9. **Ed Sullivan** (Para. 21): Ed Sullivan (1901-1974), a newspaper columnist, ran a popular variety series on CBS television from 1948 to 1971. Every Sunday night for more than two decades Sullivan brought an incredible variety of entertainment into American homes, from classical opera and ballet to comedy and the latest rock music.

10. **Grieg** (Para. 28): Edvard Hagerup Grieg (1843-1907), a Norwegian composer, combined natural romanticism with a strong feeling for Norwegian folk music in his instrumental music and songs. "Anitra's Dance" forms part of the incidental music to Henrik Ibsen's 1867 drama *Peer Gynt*. The play's fourth act, in which Peer Gynt falls in love with Anitra (the daughter of a Bedouin chief), is set in a desert on the north coast of Africa. Anitra dances enticingly for him.

11. **Beethoven** (Para. 35): Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) was born in Bonn, Germany. Through much of his lifetime, he was universally regarded as the greatest of living composers. He composed 32 sonatas and five concertos for his favorite musical instrument, the piano; his nine symphonies continue to be central to the orchestral repertoire. Beethoven began to lose his hearing when he was only 28 years old, with his 2nd symphony not yet finished. This was a tragedy for the young musician, eventually making it impossible for him to perform publicly. Fortunately, however, he never stopped composing.

12. **Schumann** (Para. 48): Robert Alexander Schumann (1810-1856) was a German composer, pianist, and music critic, a representative and leader of the Romantic School. Among Schumann's works are highly imaginative song cycles based on poems by Heine, Goethe, and others, four symphonies, one piano concerto, and many suites of piano pieces with titles such as *Papillons* (*Butterflies*), *Carnaval* (*Carnival*), *Kinderszenen* (*Scenes from Childhood*), and *Nachtstucke* (*Nightpieces*). His best compositions exemplify his infusion of classical forms with intense personal emotion.

13. ***Madama Butterfly*** (Para. 55): an opera composed in 1904 by Italian operatic composer Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)

Vocabulary

manger (Para. 9) — a long open container that horses, cattle, etc. eat from（马、牛等的）食槽

Formica (Para. 12) — a trademark for a laminated, heat-resistant thermosetting plastic used for table and sink tops, etc. 福米卡家具塑料贴面（商标名称）

sauciness (Para. 24) — the quality of being full of energy and spirit, lively and brisk 活泼可爱

sheet music (Para. 25) — music that is printed on single sheets and not fastened together inside a cover（活页）乐谱

encore (Para. 28) — an additional or repeated part of a performance, especially a musical one 加演的节目

sonata (Para. 35) — a composition for one or two instruments, usually consisting of several movements. Sonata form is a type of musical composition in three sections (exposition, development, and recapitulation) 奏鸣曲

treble (Para. 36) — the higher part in musical harmony 高音

bass (Para. 36) — a part for the lower register of an instrument (left hand) 低音

C major (Para. 36) — The C-major scale is the only scale which does not require sharps (升半音) or flats (降半音). C大调

scale (Para. 37) — a series of tones arranged in a sequence of rising or falling pitches in accordance with any of various systems of intervals 音阶

chord (Para. 37) — a combination of three or more tones sounded together in harmony 和弦，和音

trill (Para. 37) — a musical sound made by quickly going up and down several times between two notes 颤音

arpeggio (Para. 39) the playing of the notes of a chord in quick succession, either ascending or descending 琶音

staccato (Para. 39) with each note played separately in order to produce short, sharp sounds 以断奏方式

prelude (Para. 41) a short piece of music, especially an introduction to a longer piece 序曲，前奏曲

discordant (Para. 41) not in harmony 不和谐的

hymn (Para. 41) a song in praise or honor of God, a god, or gods; any song of praise or glorification 赞美诗；圣歌

spinet (Para. 47) a small upright piano 小型立式钢琴

tutu (Para. 50) a very short, full, projecting skirt worn by ballet dancers 芭蕾舞裙

nonchalantly (Para. 66) seeming to be coolly unconcerned or indifferent 满不在乎地

Exercises

I Look up the following words and phrases and select the meaning that suits the context.

1. dial (Para. 21)
2. entrance (Para. 22)
3. to mesmerize (Para. 22)
4. to keep time (Para. 38)
5. debut (Para. 50)
6. jumble (Para. 52)
7. repeat (Para. 52)
8. to anchor (Para. 55)
9. fiasco (Para. 61)
10. recital (Para. 79)
11. tuner (Para. 90)
12. mothproof (Para. 90)

II Consider the following questions when doing initial pre-class preparation.

1. What was the mother's hope for her daughter?
2. How did the daughter react to her mother's expectations?
3. Did the daughter practice the piano seriously? Why or why not?
4. How was the daughter's performance at the talent show in the church?
5. What happened two days after the daughter's failure at the church talent show? Why was she surprised when her mother reminded her that it was time for piano practice?
6. Why is the story titled "Two Kinds"?

III Respond to the following questions after a close reading of the text.

On content

1. How did the mother hit upon the idea of making her daughter learn to play the piano? Could the family afford piano lessons? How did the mother solve the problem? Was the family well-off? Give evidence to support your conclusion.
2. Who was Auntie Lindo? What was her daughter Waverly like? How did the two mothers compare their daughters?

3. What is a talent show? What musical piece was the daughter to play at the show? Did she give a satisfactory performance?
4. Why was the daughter disappointed when they came back home from the show and her mother was silent about her performance?
5. What did the daughter say in her rebellion when her mother ordered her to play the piano again? How did she feel when she said those words? Did the mother fly into a great rage as one would expect her to do? Can you figure out why she backed out of the room silently?
6. Was the recital the only disappointment the daughter caused her mother? The daughter said she had failed her mother several times. Did the mother see her daughter as a failure? How do we know?
7. What did the mother offer to give her daughter for her thirtieth birthday? Why did she do that? How did the daughter feel about this present?
8. Why did the daughter send a piano tuner over to her parents' apartment? What did she do with the things her mother had left behind?
9. Could she still play Schumann's "Pleading Child"? What was the title of the piece on the opposite page? What did she mean when she said she realized they were two halves of the same song?
10. Having read the whole story, how would you describe the relationship between the mother and the daughter?

On structure and style

1. In telling this story, would you say the first-person narration is more effective than the third-person narration? Why or why not?
2. Do you find Amy Tan a skillful story-teller? If you think so, give examples to illustrate her narrative skills. If your answer is negative, show why.
3. The narrator uses certain words to pave the way for what is going to follow next, thus making the narration very smooth. Can you point out a few places where such devices are used?
4. Toward the end of the story, we realize that the account was written many years after the events took place. How does the different perspective from which the daughter remembers the situation enable her to have a better understanding of and compassion for her mother?
5. How does the story end? How does the author make the theme of the story clear to us as readers?
6. The author uses specific words to show rather than tell the readers about the characters. For instance, in Paragraph 51, the author vividly shows the different feelings of several characters in the audience by describing their

facial expressions with simple but carefully chosen specific words. Can you comment on the use of those words?

7. In telling the story, the author's tone is sometimes ironical, sarcastic or humorous. Can you identify a few places where irony, sarcasm or a touch of humor occur?
8. Do you think the characterization of the mother is successful? How does the mother's language reveal her identity as a Chinese immigrant? Illustrate your point with at least five examples from the text.

IV Discuss the following or any other related questions you would like to propose.

1. How did traditional Chinese values influence the mother? Did American values play a part in making the daughter rebel so strongly against her mother? How did cultural differences complicate matters and thus intensify the conflicts between the mother and the daughter?
2. Does the mother remind you of some parents in China who are doing everything possible to transform their children into prodigies? If conflicts arise on account of such ambitious plans, who do you sympathize with, the children or the parents?

V Explain the following in your own words, bringing out any implied meaning.

1. I pictured this prodigy part of me as many different images, trying each one on for size. (Para. 9)
2. I hated the tests, the raised hopes and failed expectations. (Para. 18)
3. I had new thoughts, willful thoughts, or rather thoughts filled with lots of won'ts. (Para. 19)
4. The girl had the sauciness of a Shirley Temple. (Para. 24)
5. In spite of these warning signs, I wasn't worried. (Para. 25)
6. And Old Chong kept conducting his own private reverie. (Para. 40)
7. Over the next year, I practiced like this, dutifully in my own way. (Para. 42)
8. It felt like worms and toads and slimy things crawling out of my chest, but it also felt good, as if this awful side of me had surfaced, at last. (Para. 73)
9. And I could sense her anger rising to its breaking point. I wanted to see it spill over. (Para. 75)
10. The lid to the piano was closed, shutting out the dust, my misery, and her dreams. (Para. 81)

VI Translate the following into Chinese.

Phrases

1. with almost no money down (Para. 1)
2. the raised hopes and failed expectations (Para. 18)
3. to short out (Para. 21)
4. the showpiece of our living room (Para. 47)
5. frighteningly strong (Para. 70)
6. to follow their own mind (Para. 72)

Sentences

1. Instead of getting big fat curls, I emerged with an uneven mass of crinkly black fuzz. (Para. 6)
2. She checked to see if that was possibly one way to pronounce "Helsinki" before showing me the answer. (Para. 15)
3. She seemed entranced by the music, a little frenzied piano piece with this mesmerizing quality, sort of quick passages and then teasing lilting ones before it returned to the quick playful parts. (Para. 22)
4. If she had as much talent as she has temper, she would be famous now. (Para. 33)
5. 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." (Para. 45)
6. 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, left leg bends, look up and smile. (Para. 49)
7. 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. (Para. 51)
8. 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. (Para. 52)
9. ... and 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. (Para. 76)
10. 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 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 played them both a few times, I realized they were two halves of the same song. (Para. 93)