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AP English Lit

Period: 6

10/28/16

Water Names

Rivers flow peacefully, but can also have a dark side that can be dangerous as explained in the short story Water Names, by Lan Samantha Chang. Chang reveals the message of the story by interplaying the current setting with the ancient legend told by the grandmother. The current setting is the grandmother telling her granddaughters a legend about a river; the author uses literary elements such as symbolism, details, and the title to convey the idea. I will explain how she uses them to create an effective story and makes sure the message is clear to all the readers.

To begin with, the author decides to use symbolism to interplay the meaning of the story, by using the river as a symbol for the granddaughters. The legend is about a huge river that took a beautiful girl because a ghost wanted to marry her, Chang interplays with the legend when the story goes back to the little porch. Now that the granddaughters know the ancient legend, the river should symbolize a ghostly river that is capable of doing bad things. Therefore the three sisters should respect it; in the story she says “She had been spoiled by her father, kept protected from the river, so she could not see its danger.”(Chang, line 65) she is trying to say that the river is not like most and that could it can pull you in.

The next element the author uses to interplay the present with the legend is, she provides many details, which also helps the reader visualize what is going on. An example of how the author describes the current setting is “On some nights she sat with us in silence” (Chang, line 17) and the legend is described by “And it is said that the spirits living underneath the water looked up to her as well.”(Chang, line 74) It interplays with the present because the story made them shiver as said in the story “A faint breeze moved through the mosquito screens and we shivered.”(Chang, line79)

The final element Chang uses to interplay the contemporary setting with the legend is the title. It connects to the idea of the story because the granddaughters asked their grandmother “What happened to her?” (Chang, line 110), however no one remembers who she was because of the river. I believe it is called Water Names because no one remembers the name of the girl who was taken by the river that seems to be dangerous. The message the sisters took away from that story is that the river is powerful and to respect it because it can take you if you do not.

Furthermore the use of the literary elements helped the author interplay the setting with the ancient legend in many different ways. Once again the author uses the elements symbolism, details, and the title to connect the story, as well as interpret her message with the river. Without the use of elements, Chang would have had a hard time trying to reveal the idea of the story; rivers can be peaceful but dangerous.