The Joy Luck Club Study Guide

The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

The Joy Luck Club, published by G. P. Putnam's Sons in 1989, presents the stories of four Chinese immigrant women and their American-born daughters. Each of the four Chinese women has her own view of the world based on her experiences in China and wants to share that vision with her daughter. The daughters try to understand and appreciate their mothers' pasts, adapt to the American way of life, and win their mothers' acceptance. The book's name comes from the club formed in China by one of the mothers, Suyuan Woo, in order to lift her friends' spirits and distract them from their problems during the Japanese invasion.

Suyuan continued the club when she came to the United States-hoping to bring luck to her family and friends and finding joy in that hope.

Amy Tan wrote the *Joy Luck Club* to try to understand her own relationship with her mother. Tan's Chinese parents wanted Americanized children but expected them to think like Chinese. Tan found this particularly difficult as an adolescent. While the generational differences were like those experienced by other mothers and daughters, the cultural distinctions added another dimension. Thus, Tan wrote not only to sort out her cultural heritage but to learn how she and her mother could get along better.

Critics appreciate Tan's straightforward manner as well as the skill with which she talks about Chinese culture and mother/daughter relationships. Readers also love *The Joy Luck Club:* women of all ages identify with Tan's characters and their conflicts with their families, while men have an opportunity through this novel to better understand their own behaviors towards women. Any reader can appreciate Tan's humor, fairness, and objectivity.

Author Biography

Amy Tan began writing fiction as a distraction from her work as a technical writer. A self-proclaimed workaholic, Tan wanted to find a way to relax. She soon discovered that not only did she enjoy writing fiction as a hobby, she liked that it provided a way for her to think about and understand her life.

Tan was born in Oakland, California, in 1952. Her first-generation, Chinese-American parents, John and Daisy Tan, settled in Santa Clara, California. As an adolescent, Tan had difficulty accepting her Chinese heritage. She wanted to look like an American-to be an American. At one point, she even slept with a clothespin on her nose, hoping to change its shape. She deliberately chose American over Chinese whenever she had the opportunity and asserted her independence in any way that she could. She dreamed of being a writer, while her parents saw her as a neurosurgeon and concert pianist

The Tans lived in Santa Clara until first her father, then her brother, died of brain tumors. Mrs. Tan took Amy and her other brother to live in Switzerland. Amy became even more rebellious, dating a German who was associated with drug dealers and had serious mental problems. Her mother then took the children back to the United States, where Amy enrolled in a Baptist College in Oregon, majoring in pre-med. After just two semesters there, Amy went with her boyfriend back to California. There she attended San Jose City College as an English and linguistics major. Amy's mother did not speak to her for six months after this final act of rebellion.

The Joy Luck Club contains many autobiographical elements from Tan's life. Tan did not learn until she was fourteen that she has half-sisters from her mother's previous marriage. This sense of loss and her father's and brother's deaths are reflected in *The Joy Luck Club* in Suyuan Woo's loss of her twin daughters and her death. In addition, Tan has always felt that she disappointed her mother by not becoming a doctor. Like Tan, the novel's Jing-mei cannot compare to Waverly Jong, the highly successful daughter of a friend of Jing-mei's mother. These and other examples from Tan's personal life lend a sensibility and sensitivity to her novel that allow the reader to experience vicariously death and solace, loss and reconciliation, disillusionment and hope.

Plot Summary

Feathers from a Thousand Li Away

In 'The Joy Luck Club," Jing-Mei Woo remembers her recently deceased mother, Suyuan Woo, who founded the Joy Luck Club. During World War n, Suyuan Woo escapes from Kweilin on foot before the Japanese invade the city. The difficulty of the escape forces Suyuan to abandon her two twin baby girls. At the first mahjong meeting after Suyuan Woo's funeral, the Joy Luck Club "aunts" inform Jing-Mei that the twin girls are alive in China and suggest that she visit her half-sisters to bring them the news of the death of Suyuan.

The childhood of An-Mei Hsu, one of the older women, is related in "Scar". In the story, An-Mei Hsu's mother leaves her family to become a concubine of Wu TSing, a rich merchant. An-Mei is brought up by her grandmother, Popo. In an attempt to heal Popo on her deathbed, An-Mei's mother returns to cut off a piece of flesh from her own arm to make soup for Popo, but Popo still dies.

Lindo Jong, another of the mothers, explains her own childhood in "The Red Candle," recounting her escape from an unfortunate marriage. Promised in marriage at two and delivered at twelve, Lindo Jong finds herself living with a husband who doesn't love her and a mother-in-law whose only interest is for Lindo to produce grandchildren. Finally, Lindo fabricates a dream vision which predicts the destruction of the family if the family does not annul her marriage. In the end, the family gives her 'enough money to fly to the United States.

In "The Moon Lady," Ying- Ying St. Clair, the third surviving mother, remembers falling into the Tai Lake, one of the largest lakes in China, during a Moon Festival boating event. The four-year-old Ying-Ying is rescued from the water by strangers and left on the shore. She wanders into an outdoor opera which stages the story of the wish-granting Moon Lady. After the opera, Ying-Ying approaches the Moon Lady to make a wish to be found by her family, only to discover that the Moon Lady is played by a man.

The Twenty-Six Malignant Gates

This section relates important childhood stories of the Joy Luck Club's American-born daughters. In "Rules of the Game," Waverly Jong recalls being a national chess champion. When she is nine, Waverly's relationship with her mother becomes tense after she tells her mother not to brag about her in the marketplace. Another difficult relationship is portrayed by Lena St. Clair in "The voice from the Wall,"' as Lena remembers her mother's nervous breakdown and the noise of fights between a neighbor girl and her Italian family. At first Lena is full of pity for the Italian girl, thinking the girl has an unhappy life. Later, Lena learns that the neighbors' fighting and shouting are ways of

expressing their love. However, in Lena's home, her mother lies quietly in bed or babbles to herself on the sofa.

In "Half and Half,"' Rose Hsu Jordan is about to be divorced from her American husband. She recounts how her mother lost faith in God after a failed attempt to revive her youngest son, who drowned during a family beach outing. Despite her loss of religious faith, Rose's mother insists that Rose try to have faith in her marriage. Finally, in "Two Kinds,"' Jing-Mei Woo remembers her mother's high expectations for her to become a prodigy. But the question plaguing her is what kind of prodigy? Her agonizing quest to meet her mother's expectations ends up in an embarrassing piano recital failure.

American Translation

This section follows the Joy Luck children as adult women, all facing various conflicts. In "Rice Husband,"' Lena St. Clair narrates her marital problems. She has often feared that she is inferior to her husband, who is also her boss at work and who makes seven times more than she does. Lena's husband takes advantage of her by making her pay half of all household expenses Waverly Jong is concerned about her mother's opinion of her white fiancé in "Four Directions" Waverly recalls quitting chess after becoming angry at her mother in the marketplace. Believing that her mother still has absolute power over her and will object to her forthcoming marriage with Rich, Waverly confronts her mother after a dinner party and realizes that her mother has known all along about her relationship with Rich ,and has accepted him.

In "Without Wood,"' Rose Hsu Jordan tries to sort out her own marital problems. After her husband reveals that he will be marrying someone else, Rose finally realizes she will have to fight for her rights. In the end, she refuses to sign the conditions set forth by her husband's divorce papers. Jing-Mei Woo's problems are still related to her mother. In "Best Quality," she remembers the Chinese New Year's dinner of the previous year. During the dinner Jing-Mei has an argument with Waverly over an advertisement Jing-Mei has written for Waverly's company. Realizing that Jing-Mei has been humiliated, Suyuan Woo, Jing-Mei's mother, gives her a necklace with a special jade pendant called "life's importance." After her mother dies, Jing-Mei wishes she had found out what "life's importance" meant.

Queen Mother of the Western Skies

This section of the novel returns to the viewpoints of the mothers as adults dealing with difficult choices. In "Magpies,"' An-Mei Hsu recalls moving to Tientsin with her mother, the third concubine of Wu TSing, a rich merchant. In Wu TSing's mansion, An-Mei witnesses her mother's awkward and lowly position. Finally, An-Mei's mother, fed up with her shameful life and abuse from the merchant's powerful second wife, poisons herself two days before Chinese New Year, so her "vengeful spirit" can return to haunt the family.

In "Waiting Between the Trees," Ying-Ying St. Clair remembers being abandoned by her first husband, who was a womanizer. Later, Ying- Ying marries an American whom she does not love. Marriage also figures in "Double Face," in which Lindo Jong recalls arriving in San Francisco and later working in a fortune cookie factory. In the factory, together with An-Mei Hsu, Lindo finds a fortune cookie slip which she uses to put the idea of marriage into her boyfriend's head.

The final story is a pivotal episode, which brings together the experiences of mothers and daughters. In "A Pair of Tickets," Jing-Mei Woo flies to China with her father to visit the twin babies that her mother had been forced to abandon while fleeing the Japanese. Finally, after years of refusing to embrace her heritage, Jing-Mei accepts the Chinese blood in her when she meets her half sisters:

I look at their faces again and I see no trace of my mother in them. Yet they still look familiar. And now I also see what part of me is Chinese. It is so obvious. It is my family .It is in our blood. After all these years, if can finally be let go.

Part 1, Parable

Part 1, Parable Summary

The Joy Luck Club is a multi-generational and multi-cultural story told from the viewpoints of each speaker. It is a complicated and often hard to follow story line because the Chinese families' origins differ by province of birth, language, religion, education, and socio-economic levels. The writer often leaves the reader confused with the given names of grandmothers, mothers, and daughters, and their individual connections with the past and present. One can see watch the women age from childhood to young women, to having good, bad, or arranged marriages, surviving disasters, and then becoming the old women of this book with grown daughters who have their own names, nicknames, married names, stories, and problems.

An old woman buys a swan in Shanghai. It is too beautiful to eat. The old woman and the swan sail to America, where the woman will have a daughter who will speak perfect English and never know sorrow. When the woman arrives in America, immigration officers take away her swan, leaving her with one feather. She fills out many forms and has a daughter who speaks only English and has no sorrows. The woman waits until her own English is perfect to tell her daughter this story, and then it is too late.

Part 1, Parable Analysis

The author uses a parable, or a short narrative making a moral point by comparison, before each section to describe the central theme of all of the stories in that section. This parable starts with an old Chinese woman buying a beautiful swan in Shanghai. The swan represents all the valuable possessions and values the woman had in China. These are taken away when she arrives in America. The woman waits until she learns perfect English to tell her story to her daughter, who is raised in American tradition. The day never comes.

Part 1, Jing-Mei Woo, "The Joy Luck Club"

Part 1, Jing-Mei Woo, "The Joy Luck Club" Summary

After Jing-Mei Woo's mother June dies, her father asks her to be the fourth player at her mother's mah jong club. June Woo starts the San Francisco "Joy Luck Club" in 1949, two years before Jing-Mei is born. Her parents leave China for America in 1949, arriving in San Francisco. Since women from the First Chinese Baptist Church help them, the Woos join that church. There they meet the Hsus, Jongs, and St. Clairs, immigrants from different parts of China. June Woo senses the families' unspeakable past tragedies and forms her women's mah jong club.

June starts her first "Joy Luck Club" in Kweilin, China, during her first marriage, before the Japanese invade. Her husband leaves her and their two babies in the city of Kweilin, where he thinks they will be safe while he fights for the Chinese Army. At this time, the Chinese believe the Japanese are winning the war. Chinese people pour into Kweilin looking for places to live. June can hear the Japanese bombs drop and knows they are near. She creates a weekly mah jong club when life in Kweilin is barely tolerable so four of her women friends can raise their spirits and eat together. She has a beautiful mah jong table of very fragrant red wood called hong mu with a thick pad on it. After sixteen rounds, they eat their meager cooking and talk into the mornings to forget their miseries and not think of the past. Every week they hope to be lucky and win their bets. That hope becomes their only joy. This is why they called their parties "*Joy Luck".* The paper money they use for bets is worth less than toilet paper.

An army officer tells June to pack and flee to her husband in the city of Chungking. She steals a wheelbarrow and put her valuables and her twin babies in it. She begins pushing it to Chungking four days before the Japanese march into Kweilin and slaughter the residents. June pushes until the wheel breaks. She does not have enough feeling left in her body to cry. She abandons her beautiful mah jong table, ties scarves into slings, puts a baby on each side of her shoulder, and carried bags of food and clothing. When deep grooves in her hands began to bleed, she cannot hold on to anything. Many others abandon treasures on the road. All June arrives in Chungking with is three fancy silk dresses worn on top of the other. Jing-Mei is horrified and cannot understand why her mother left the babies by the road.

Jing-Mei Woo joins the "Joy Luck Club" at the Hsus' house. She has not seen the family's friends, whom she calls Auntie and Uncle, since her mother's funeral. The Hsus' house is small, heavy with the fragrant but greasy odor of cooking. The furniture is the same as when the Hsus (An-Mei and Uncle George) moved to their house in the Sunset district twenty-five years ago. Uncle George starts the meeting by reporting on the groups' stock market investments. Auntie An-Mei goes slowly to the kitchen to prepare

the food. Auntie Lin(do), her mother's best friend, sits on the turquoise sofa. The uncles begin to talk about stocks they want to buy.

Jing-Mei asks Auntie An-Mei when the mah jong game starts and when the club began playing the stock market. An-Mei explains that when the same people always won, they invested their money in stocks instead. The mah jong winner now takes home the left-over food. Jing-Mei sees Auntie An-Mei as a "short, bent woman in her seventies, with a heavy bosom and thin legs." She has the flattened soft fingertips of an old woman. Jing-Mei knows nothing of her life in China. Auntie An-Mei takes the food to the table buffet style. All eat as if they are starving. The men leave the table and the women carry the plates and bowls to the kitchen sink.

The Joy Luck uncles play cards. The women go to the back room with a mahogany-colored mah jong table. Jing-Mei's mom always sat in the East chair since the East is where things begin, where the sun rises. Auntie An-Mei spills the tiles onto the green felt tabletop. They all swirl the tiles in a circular motion and stack the tiles into four walls. By the roll of the dice, Auntie Lin plays first and Jing-Mei is last. They begin to play, and the Aunties make small talk.

Three years ago, the Hsus returned to China to see her brother's family. They took junk food and California clothing. June Woo told them to take money instead, but the Hsus ignored her advice. The Hsus discovered June was right. All the relatives and their extended families wanted was money. Auntie An-Mei and Uncle George bought two thousand dollars' of televisions and refrigerators, a night's lodging for twenty-six people at a luxury hotel, three banquet tables at a restaurant, special gifts for each relative, loaned five thousand Yuan to a cousin's uncle for a motorcycle and lost nine thousand dollars total in goodwill. After Christmas at church, June Woo agrees with Auntie An-Mei that it is more blessed to give than to receive and that An-Mei has blessings now for several lifetimes.

Jing-Mei listens to Auntie Lin and remembers that she and her own mother never understood each other. Auntie Lin and June Woo were "best friends and archenemies who spent a lifetime comparing their children." Jing-Mei is a month older than Waverly Jong, Auntie Lin's daughter who won "many trophies playing chess." June Woo tried "to cultivate a hidden talent in [Jing-Mei] through piano lessons."

It is getting late. Jing-Mei rises to leave. Auntie Ying(-Ying) insists she stay because they have something important to tell her from her mother. June Woo found the daughters she left behind. She has an address for Jing-Mei's sisters. Auntie Ying gives her an envelope with a check for $1,200 to visit China. She can go to Hong Kong, take a train to Shanghai, and meet her sisters. Jing-Mei begins to cry, sob, and laugh at the same time, seeing but not understanding their loyalty to her mother. She is to tell her sisters about their mother's death, her family in America, her mother's kindness, intelligence, loyalty to family, hopes and desires, and excellent cooking.

Jing-Mei sees that the other ladies are frightened. Their own daughters are just as ignorant and unmindful of all the history, truths, and hopes they brought to America. "Joy

and luck do not mean the same thing to their daughters," who will bear grandchildren without generational and cultural connections. With the gift, the Aunts become young girls in their own minds, dreaming of good times in the past and future.

Part 1, Jing-Mei Woo, "The Joy Luck Club" Analysis

Jing-Mei's mother's name, June, is not mentioned until the end of the story. While it is appalling and sad that she would abandon her babies by the side of the road, the author does not yet provide enough of June Woo's own perspective of her situation, other than she is fleeing the Japanese, to permit the reader to understand her actions. We cannot comprehend the horror of trying to survive while fleeing an invasion of people who have no respect for their own humanity or the lives of others. From the Aunts we learn that the babies survived and that June Woo found them before she died.

The names of the Aunties are familiar but incomplete as they have adopted shorter names or nicknames in America than those they used in China. The author also includes stories of the Aunties' parents and families, including An-Mei's mother, a nameless woman and a "ghost" in Chinese terms. Several women become as "ghosts" as the book progresses. The author also provides some foreshadowing of stories to come, including Waverly Jong's chess championships and Jin-Mei Woo's piano lessons. We realize the older ladies are frightened for their own daughters' futures without family connections and the deeper understandings of history provided by them, but they do not know what to do about this. It also appears that the Chinese couples have adopted Christianity through membership in the First Chinese Baptist Church, but the depth of their beliefs is not clear. This is called syncretism, or blending of religions.

The Chinese ladies want their daughters to know their own Chinese family history because ancestor worship and special ceremonies have always been a part of Chinese tradition as well as religion. They do not know how to convey how important this to the daughters they have carefully raised as American as possible. There religion is now a mix of old and new, the old religious ways and town gods mixed with the new American universal God. Chinese religious traditions have always involved multi-generation traditions remembering deceased family members.

Part 1, An-Mei Hsu, "Scar"

Part 1, An-Mei Hsu, "Scar" Summary

In China, An-Mei is raised by her grandmother, "Popo", because her natural mother is a "ghost" - a person who has disgraced the family and has no name other than her function as the Fourth Wife of a rich man. An-Mei lives with her aunt and uncle in their big, cold house in Ningpo, along with her little brother and grandmother. Grandmother Popo scares An-Mei all her life with stories about what happens to bad little girls and even tells An-Mei that to say her mother's name is to spit on her father's grave. An-Mei's mother is a widow, and by tradition, widows cannot remarry without disgracing their families. An-Mei knows her father only from a large painting. In 1923, when An-Mei is nine years old, her grandmother Popo gets very sick. Her body swells up and her flesh becomes soft, rotten, and stinky. The summer Popo is so sick, An-Mei's aunt explains that An-Mei's mother married Wu Tsing, who already has a wife, two concubines, and other children, making An-Mei's mother his fourth wife.

An-Mei's mother visits her dying mother. She and An-Mei look alike; both pretty, with white skin, oval faces, and long white necks. Her mother is tall, with short hair, and wears foreign clothes and high-heeled shoes. She dips cool cloths on Popo's bloated face. Her voice confuses An-Mei, who remembers it from her past. That evening, her mother loosens An-Mei's braids and brushes her hair, and tries to talk with her. She touches the scar under An-Mei's chin and cries.

An-Mei remembers the dream with her mother's voice in it. She is four years old and sitting at her grandmother's dining table. Her mother comes in the front door. Popo calls her a "ghost", not an honored widow but a number three concubine. When her mother calls to her, An-Mei knocks over the soup pot. The dark boiling soup spills forward and all over her neck. An-Mei is in terrible pain and has trouble breathing. Popo chases An-Mei's mother out of the house and gives An-Mei the choice between living and dying. If she does not get well soon, her mother will forget her. An-Mei survives, and Popo uses her sharp fingernails to peel off the dead membranes of skin. Two years later, the scar is pale and shiny, and An-Mei does not remember her mother.

The woman by Popo's bed is not the mother from her dream. She knows her mother married Wu Tsing to exchange one unhappiness for another. An-Mei comes to love her mother because of the care and sacrifice she makes trying to save Popo. Her mother cuts a piece off her arm and puts it in cooking herbal soup, trying magic in an ancient tradition to cure her mother this last time. Popo's mouth is tight but she feeds her the soup. That night Popo dies anyway. An-Mei realizes that this is one way a daughter honors her mother.

Part 1, An-Mei Hsu, "Scar" Analysis

Here we encounter An-Mei's unnamed mother, the "ghost" Fourth Wife of a rich man. She has disobeyed traditional Chinese widowhood traditions and has married a man as a concubine in pre-World War II China. This, historically, is a terrible blow to the family system, and one that cannot be forgiven. Her Chinese family has excommunicated her, disinherited her, taken away the family name and prestige of belonging, and she is no one to them. She is not called by name but by function as a Fourth Wife, a description of her duties. It is not known why she became a concubine. The family will do everything possible to keep this disgraceful woman away from her natural family and her children and stop her from interfering or intruding on their established relationships. However, they will not go so far as to stop her from seeing her dying mother.

Since An-Mei's mother is literally a nameless woman, this theoretically makes An-Mei an orphan. Her father is dead, known to her only from a painting, and her mother is a "ghost". The reader is left to consider the effect on the children to be without either natural parent to love and respect even if caring relatives raise them. The reader may also conclude that, under certain circumstances, polygamy is legal in China at this time. The reader also encounters some of the many different Chinese traditions.

Part 1, Lindo Jong, "The Red Candle"

Part 1, Lindo Jong, "The Red Candle" Summary

Lindo Jong sacrifices her own life to keep her parents' promise. The village matchmaker promises her to Huang Taitai's baby son when she is two years old. As soon as she is so promised, her own family treats her as if she belongs to somebody else. Her mother hides her tears so she will not want a child who is no longer hers. When Lindo is twelve, the rains come and the Fen River floods her family's land. Everyone is poor. Her father moves the family to Shanghai, where her uncle owns a small flour mill. Lindo is old enough to live with the Huangs. The Jongs give the Huangs their furniture and bedding as her dowry. Lindo's mother gives her a red jade necklace.

The Huangs are not wealthy, but their house is higher in the valley and escapes the flooding. It is a construction nightmare. Many rooms were added in a jumbled mess. The first level is built from river rocks held together by straw-filled mud. The second and third levels are of smooth bricks with an exposed walkway similar to a palace tower. The top level has gray slab walls topped with a red tile roof. There are two large round pillars holding up a veranda entrance to the front door. Imperial dragonheads are at the roof corners. The only nice room inside is a parlor on the first floor, where the Huangs receive guests. The rest of the house is full of twenty relatives. Each room has been cut in half to make two. Lindo is taken to the second floor and to the kitchen, a place for cooks and service. She learns to chop vegetables and gut fish.

She sees her future husband, Tyan-yu, at the evening meal. He acts like a warlord and makes Lindo cry with his demands. The soup is not hot enough. He waits until she sits and demands another bowl of rice. Huang Taitai, her mother-in-law has the servants teach Lindo to sew sharp corners on pillowcases and to embroider her future family's name. She also has them teach her to wash rice properly and clean the chamber pot. Lindo is so good that Huang Taitai complains that she cannot throw a dirty blouse on the floor before it is cleaned and returned. After a while, Lindo hurts so much nothing makes any difference. She thinks of her future husband as a god and obeys Huang Taitai without question. When she turns sixteen, Huang Taitai announces she wants a grandson by the next spring. Lindo cannot leave because the Japanese are in every corner of China. The wedding is small, even though Huang Taitai invites the entire village and the servants prepare hundreds of dishes. The Japanese invade their province. It begins to rain, with thunder and lightning. The guests confuse the storm noises with the Japanese bombs and stay home.

Lindo looks at herself in the mirror. She is a strong, pure woman wearing a beautiful red dress. At the end of the ceremony, the matchmaker holds up a candle with two ends to be lit. Lindo and Tyan-yu's names are carved in gold at opposite ends. Tyan-yu yanks the scarf off her face, smiles at his family, and never looks at his wife. The matchmaker announces that if the candle burns continuously at both ends through the night, the

marriage will never be broken. That candle means Lindo cannot divorce or remarry, even if Tyan-yu dies.

After the wedding banquet, Lindo and Tyan-yu go to their small third floor bedroom. The family makes them sit side by side and kiss before they will leave. Then Tyan-yu announces it is "his" bed. Lindo sleeps on the sofa. He throws her a pillow and thin blanket. After he falls asleep, she goes outside into the dark courtyard, crying and watching the matchmaker's candle burning, deciding her fate. Lindo stays up all night crying about her marriage. Lindo falls asleep. The rains return with thunder and lightning, scaring the matchmaker's servant, who runs away. Lindo prays to Buddha, the goddess of mercy and the full moon, to make that candle go out. She takes a deep breath and blows out her husband's end of the candle. The next morning, the matchmaker reports that the marriage will be a success and lies, reporting that the candle burned all night.

Lindo learns to love Tyan-yu, even though the thought of having sex with him makes her sick. He never touches her. They continue their sleeping arrangement. Finally, his mother slaps Lindo. Huang Taitai says that if Lindo refuses to sleep with her son, then she will not provide food or clothing. Lindo now knows what Tyan-yu has told his mother. That night she sits on his bed and waits for him to have sex with her. He does not touch her. The next night, she lies down on the bed next to him. He still does not touch her. The next night she takes off her gown. Tyan-yu is scared and turns away. He has no desire for her and possibly not for women. They continue to sleep in the same bed.

More months pass, and Huang Taitai flies into another rage because Lindo is not pregnant. Again Tyan-yu has lied, telling his mother he has planted enough seeds in her for thousands of grandchildren. Huang Taitai confines Lindo to bed so the seeds will not spill out any more. She tells Lindo to concentrate on nothing but having babies. Four times a day a servant girl brings a terrible tasting medicine for Lindo to drink. When two months pass without results, Huang Taitai calls the matchmaker to the house. She studies the horoscopes and announces that a "woman can have sons only if she is deficient in one of the elements. [Lindo] has all she needs of wood, fire, water earth, and metal and is too balanced to have babies." Huang Taitai removes all of the gold from Lindo's body. Lindo now decides to make the Huangs think it is their idea to get rid of her.

On the day of the Festival of Pure Brightness, when thoughts must be clear as one prepares to remember ancestors, and the family goes to clean the family graves, she wakes up Tyan-yu and the entire family with loud crying and wailing. She tells Huang Taitai her dream - that they repeated their wedding for their ancestors. The servant guarding the candle left the room and a big wind came and blew out Tyan-yu's end of the candle. Their ancestors said Tyan-yu would die if he stayed married to Lindo. Huang Taitai says this is nonsense. Lindo replies that the ancestors knew she would not believe her and that they would plant signs to show their marriage is rotting. A man with a long beard and a mole on his cheek told Lindo three signs - there is a black spot on

Tyan-yu's back that will grow and eat away his flesh, Lindo's teeth will fall out one by one, and Tyan-yu has made a servant girl pregnant.

The servant girl is really of imperial blood and Tyan-yu's spiritual wife, and the seed he planted will be his child. Lindo has watched the servant girl with the handsome deliveryman, and the girl is obviously pregnant. The family forces the girl to tell the truth about her imperial ancestry and she quite happily marries Tyan-yu. Huang Taitai gets a grandson and Lindo gets her clothes, a rail ticket to Peking, and enough money to go to America. Lindo loves to wear gold now and loves to buy pure gold bracelets. Every year on the day of the Festival of Pure Brightness, she removes them and remembers being a girl, feeling the lightness of freedom return to her body.

Part 1, Lindo Jong, "The Red Candle" Analysis

This episode from Lindo Jong's early life illustrates the Chinese tradition of marriages arranged through a village matchmaker. Setting up a marriage between two babies hardly permits any consideration of companionability later in life. The reader is shown the realities of village life in China and how difficult it can be. Lindo Jong is very intelligent and clever and finds a way to "annul" her marriage to Tyan-yu, whom she does not like, in exchange for passage to America. She is free to remarry.

Lindo Jong is from a very poor family in a rural, agricultural area of China. Lindo herself is quite bright even though she has no formal education. She cries and expresses emotions, where other women have been taught not to express feelings. Rather than be forever in a loveless marriage, she works an annulment and escapes from her arranged marriage to Tyan-yu.

Part 1, Ying-Ying St. Clair, "The Moon Lady"

Part 1, Ying-Ying St. Clair, "The Moon Lady" Summary

Ying-Ying feels separated from her daughter. She believes she has lost her sense of self through the years with time washing away her pain, just as stone carvings are worn down by water. She remembers being just four years old in 1918, at the time of the Moon Festival in August, the fifteenth day of the eighth moon. The summer is terribly hot, and autumn comes without cool mornings and evenings. She wakes to the stinky smell of the burning "Five Evils"; incense burned to chase away mosquitoes and small flies.

This day Ying-Ying is dressed in new, heavy, hot tiger clothes for the Moon Festival, a ceremony held every year so that the gods do not punish the people. The Chinese light incense, make an offering to the moon, and bow their heads. The servant Amah, who gave up her own baby son when her husband died to come to Ying-Ying's house and serve as her nursemaid, braids her hair for the ceremony. The family is going to Tai Lake, where they have rented a boat with a famous chef. She will see the Moon Lady. She asks Amah who the Moon Lady is. She is "Chang-o", who lives on the moon. Today is the only day Ying-Ying can see her and have a secret wish, one that is not spoken out loud, fulfilled.

In the morning, none of the family hurries to go to the lake. Ying-Ying grows impatient until Amah gives her a rabbit-shaped moon cake to eat in the courtyard with her half-sisters. She shares pieces of the moon cake with the younger children. Ying-Ying and the children begin to chase a dragonfly but are stopped by Amah before they can get their clothes dirty. The children play until Amah calls to them that it is time to go to the lake.

The family members gather outside the house, dressed in important-looking clothes. The servants have packed a rickshaw with a hamper of fine food and sleeping mats for their afternoon nap. They all get into other rickshaws, and Ying-Ying climbs into the one with her real mother, hurting Amah's feelings. It is still hot when they arrive at the lake. There is no wind. The older family members climb on a large rented boat resembling a floating teahouse, with an open-air pavilion larger than their courtyard. It has red columns and a peaked tile roof, and a garden house with round windows. The servant takes Ying-Ying's hand, but she and the other children jump onto the boat and run its length. They check out the garden house, find the kitchen with people cooking, and then return to the front in time to watch the boat leave the dock. Poor people are at the rear of the boat doing the cooking and catching fish.

Tai Lake, one of China's largest, is crowded with all kinds of boats. Ying-Ying and her family eat lunch and nap during the hottest part of the day. Ying-Ying wakes and goes to

the back of the boat again. The boys remove from a cage a squawking, long-necked bird with a metal ring around its neck. One boy holds the bird while the other ties a rope to the metal ring. When they release the bird, it dives into the water to catch fish. It cannot eat the fish because of the ring. One boy jumps into the water and emerges on a small raft. He snatches the fish from the bird's mouth and throws them to the other boy on the deck. The bird continues to dive for fish. When they have enough fish, both boys leave on the raft and leave. Ying-Ying turns to watch a sullen woman gut the fish, scrape off the scales, behead two chickens and a turtle, and take everything plus a bucket of eels into the kitchen. Too late, Ying-Ying sees spots of bloods flecks of fish scales and bits of feather and mud on her clothing. She panics and smears turtle blood on her sleeves, pants and jackets to cover the spots, painting all her clothes red. That is how Amah finds her, a stinky apparition covered with blood.

Amah screams in terror and checks Ying-Ying's body parts. Then she calls her angry names and yanks off her bloody clothing. Amah is afraid Ying-Ying's mother will be angry and get rid of both of them. Amah takes the clothing and leave Ying-Ying crying in the back of the boat, wearing her white cotton undergarments and tiger slippers. Nobody comes to check on her but the half-sisters, who laugh and scamper away. The four-year-old Ying-Ying is otherwise left alone and unsupervised.

Night comes. The water turns dark. Red lantern lights glow from the other boats. Ying-Ying can hear people talking and laughing. She listens to her family eat but stays in the back, dangling her legs over the edge of the boat. She sees the full moon above and wants to find the Moon Lady. Firecrackers explode, and Ying-Ying falls into the water. She begins to choke and thrash about until she is pulled out of the water by a rope net filled with fish. She has been captured by poor people. They ask her which boat she was on, but she cannot see her family's boat. Ying-Ying believes nobody cares she is missing. Her rescuers put Ying-Ying on the dock where her family can find her.

Ying-Ying hides in some bushes and sees a crowd of people with a stage holding up the moon. A young man announces that the Moon Lady will sing her sad song. Moon Lady has a sweet, wailing voice. She "lives on the moon while her husband lives on the sun." They pass each other except on this one evening, the night of the mid-autumn moon. Ying-Ying sees the silhouette of a man appear. Moon Lady calls him Hou Yi, her husband, Master Archer of the Skies. As the sky grows brighter, his mouth opens wide, Mood Lady clutches her throat and falls into a heap. The story continues. Moon Lady's hair is so long it sweeps the floor and wipes up her tears. Moon Lady announces that woman is yin, the darkness within, and man is yang, bright truth lighting our minds.

Ying-Ying cries and shakes with despair over the words of the story. In one moment, both she and Moon Lady have lost the world, and there is no way to get it back. A gong sounds, and Moon Lady bows and looks serenely to the side. The young man returns and says the Moon Lady has consented to grant one secret wish to each person there for a small monetary donation. Ying-Ying runs up to the young man, who ignores her. She runs up to Moon Lady, who has shrunken cheeks, a broad oily nose large glaring teeth and red-stained eyes. Moon Lady is tired and pulls off her hair and takes off her long gown. As Ying-Ying tells her secret wish, Moon Lady becomes a man.

Ying-Ying is so stunned that for years she cannot remember what she wanted or how her family found her. She has been forever changed by what happened. Over the years she forgets the story of that day and remembers only that *it was the day she lost herself*. She remembers her innocence, trust, and restlessness, and the wonder, fear, and loneliness. Finally, she remembers what she asked the Moon Lady. She wished to be found.

Part 1, Ying-Ying St. Clair, "The Moon Lady" Analysis

This story is told through the eyes of a four-year-old child. The reader learns that Ying-Ying's family is wealthy, and that they observe ancient Chinese traditions. Ying-Ying herself has an irresponsible nursemaid who is so afraid for her position that she does not take care of the mischievous child. The reader also senses that children may be considered expendable at this time in China.

In one day, four-year-old Ying-Ying falls off the family boat, which nobody on the boat notices, is rescued by "poor" people and not by her parents, and is totally disillusioned by the enactment of a story about a traditional Chinese god and goddess. The Moon God and Goddess story explains the origins of the sun, moon, stars, and planets. Not one of Ying-Ying's family keeps up with her whereabouts, apparently tries to find her, explains the true meaning of the Moon Goddess story, or rescues her at any time during her traumas of the day until she is left at the dock by her rescuers from another boat. The story the Moon Goddess tells and sings is very sad, and Ying-Ying at age four believes every word. When the Moon Goddess turns out to be a man, she loses what she believes should be true along with a normal child's innocence and trust that her parents will always be there for her. This loss gives the reader a clue about Ying-Ying's future problems and personality as we progress through the stories.

Part 2, Parable

Part 2, Parable Summary

A mother tells her small daughter not to ride her bicycle around the corner. The girl demands to know why. The mother replies that then she cannot see her daughter and she will fall down and cry and the mother will not hear her. It is written in a book, *The Twenty-Six Malignant Gates,* "all the bad things that can happen to a child outside the protection of her house." The daughter demands to know what the twenty-six things are. When the mother does not reply, the daughter says her mother does not know anything. She jumps on her bicycle and falls before she reaches the corner.

Part 2, Parable Analysis

The Twenty-Six Malignant Gates book figures prominently in some of the stories. *Malignant* here means "dangerous". The parable indicates that problems will occur with the children of the four women who are the main characters. The name of the book itself creates suspense, and the reader knows problems will arise between the mothers and their daughters. The number "twenty-six" is never explained.

Part 2, Waverly Jong, "Rules of the Game"

Part 2, Waverly Jong, "Rules of the Game" Summary

The Jong family settles on Waverly Street in San Francisco's Chinatown in a two bedroom flat above a small Chinese bakery. They are poor, but Waverly does not know this. She and her brothers play in the alley and visit local stores. Her mother Lindo names her after the street they live on - Waverly Place Jong, but her family calls her Meimei, "Little Sister". She is the youngest child and the only daughter. Waverly knows little about Chinese history and does not care to learn about it.

Her brother Vincent is given a chess set at the First Chinese Baptist Church's annual Christmas party. The set is missing a black pawn and a white knight. Waverly has learned how to pick the best gifts by weight, and she selects a twelve-pack of Lifesavers. Her brother Winston picks a World War II submarine kit. Lindo tells the kids to throw out the used chess set, but the boys line up the pieces and read the old instruction book.

Waverly learns to play by offering her Lifesavers as the missing pieces. Then she borrows books on chess from the library. She studies each piece to absorb the power it contains. She learns opening moves and styles of play, and how to see the endgame at the beginning. She draws a handmade chessboard and pins it on the wall next to her bed, spending hours at night planning imaginary battles. One spring afternoon, she finds a group of old men playing chess. She gets her chess set and plays with Lau Po, a much better player. He teaches her more secrets of the game and chess etiquette, and she becomes a better chess player. She plays exhibition matches with Chinese people and tourists until one man suggests she play in local tournaments. Her mother gives her the piece of red jade for luck. Waverly's first opponent is a fifteen-year-old boy who first looked down on Waverly. She begins to play and sees only the chess pieces as she hears instructions in her mind. She wins the game.

Her mother places her first trophy next to a new plastic chess set that the neighborhood Tao society gives to Waverly. She wins the next tournament and begins to attend tournaments further from home. She wins all games in all divisions. Then a flower shop, headstone engraver, and funeral parlor offer to sponsor Waverly in national tournaments. Her mother makes her brothers do all the chores so Waverly can practice. When she is nine, Waverly is a national chess champion, 429 points away from grand-master status. *Life* magazine runs a picture of Waverly next to a quote from Bobby Fischer that there will never be a woman grand master. Her next game is in a high school auditorium against a middle-aged man and she wins.

Waverly finds it hard to concentrate at home because her mother stands over her as she plots moves. She begins to make more demands of her family - that her bedroom

shared with her brothers is too noisy; she cannot eat all her rice and think right; and she leaves the dining table with half-finished bowls. When her mother introduces her to other people, she asks her to stop telling everyone she is her daughter. Waverly is embarrassed. Her mother is angry. She jerks her hand out of her mother's, spins around, and knocks into an old woman, causing her to spill her groceries. As Waverly's mother helps the other woman, Waverly flees into an alley. When she returns home, her entire family is hostile and has already eaten dinner. She goes to her bedroom, envisions a chessboard, closes her eyes, and plots her next move.

Part 2, Waverly Jong, "Rules of the Game" Analysis

Waverly Jong, Lindo's daughter, is very intelligent, as was her mother (who obtained the annulment and escaped from her unhappy marriage). The family is poor, but lives well. They receive used Christmas presents at the Chinese Baptist Church. The Jong children have learned how to pick the best gifts.

Waverly learns chess and becomes a gifted player. Her success goes to her head at an early age, and she becomes a spoiled brat. The old customs and her mother's pride in her success are embarrassing to her and she misbehaves. She defies Chinese family traditional behavior and acts badly towards older people, including her own mother. Her conduct towards others at this early age indicates how she will treat her family and friends as she matures.

Part 2, Lena St. Clair, "The Voice from the Wall"

Part 2, Lena St. Clair, "The Voice from the Wall" Summary

Lena's mother, Ying-Ying, tells a gruesome story about how her great-grandfather and a beggar died. Her great-grandfather sentenced the other man to die the death of a thousand cuts. Before the executioner can raise the sharp sword to whittle the man's life away, the beggar's mind has already broken into a thousand pieces. A few days later her great-grandfather sees the same man as a ghost, a smashed vase hastily put back together. The man says he thought death was the worse he would have to endure, but the worst is on the other side. The dead man then embraces her great-grandfather and pulls him through the dividing wall. Lena asks her mother how her great-grandfather really died, and Ying-Ying wants to know why it matters after seventy years.

Even as a child, Lena senses the unspoken terrors surrounding their house, the ones that chase her mother until Ying-Ying hides in a dark corner of her mind while they devour her. The dark side of her mother lives in the basement of their old house in Oakland. Ying-Ying barricades the door to the basement with a chair and secures it with a chain and two types of key locks. Lena pries open the locks and falls into the basement. Ying-Ying tells Lena about the bad man who lives in the basement and why she should never open the door again. Lena begins to imagine terrible things but does not tell anyone.

Lena is only half-Chinese. She looks like her father, English-Irish, big boned, and delicate at the same time, with smooth cheeks, pale skin, and Chinese eyes without eyelids. Lena has a picture of Ying-Ying with the same scared look when she arrived at the Angel Island Immigration Station. There were no rules for the Chinese wife of a Caucasian person, so she was declared a "Displaced Person". Ying-Ying never talks about her life in China, from which her father saved her. He renamed her in the immigration papers as Betty St. Clair, eliminating her given name of Gu Ying-Ying and giving her a different birth year. In the picture she is dressed awkwardly, wearing an ankle-length Chinese dress under a Westernized suit jacket with padded shoulders. This was Ying-Ying's wedding gift from Lena's father. Ying-Ying often looks this way, scared, waiting for something to happen. Later, she loses the battle to keep her eyes open.

Lena and her mother walk through Chinatown. Ying-Ying sees danger in everything, even in other Chinese people. Where they live, the Chinese people speak Cantonese. Her mother is from Shanghai and speaks Mandarin and a little English. Ying-Ying speaks in moods and gestures to her husband. Words cannot come out, so her husband speaks for her. When Ying-Ying is alone with Lena, she speaks in Chinese in sentences that do not go together into paragraphs. Ying-Ying is afraid that a man will

grab Lena off the streets, sell her to someone else, and make her have a baby. She will kill the baby and go to jail. Lena tries to protect Ying-Ying and makes up excuses for her.

Her father is promoted to sales supervisor of a clothing manufacturer. The family moves across the bay to San Francisco and into a house on a hill in an Italian neighborhood. The old apartment building is three stories high with two apartments on each floor. They live on the middle floor, and Lena's bedroom faces the street. Her mother is not happy in the apartment and is scared of the people she meets. She rearranges the cans in the pantry and the furniture because things are not balanced. The kitchen faces the bathroom where all one's worth is flushed away. Lena's father explains that her mother is pregnant. She puts a used crib in Lena's room. Her mother does not talk about the joys of having a baby. She talks about a heaviness around her and about things being out of balance. Lena worries about the baby.

Lena hears voices coming from the wall, from the apartment next door where the Italian Sorcis live. She hears shouting and loud family arguments involving the daughter. When Lena meets the daughter, she is clean, happy, with bouncing brown braids.

One day her parents' friends take Lena from school to the hospital to see her mother, who is half asleep and tossing back and forth. Something bad has happened. Ying-Ying says it is her fault. She did nothing to prevent it. Lena's father tries to soothe Ying-Ying as she begins to mumble in Chinese. Lena translates. When the baby was ready to be born, her mother could hear him screaming inside her womb. He wanted to stay inside. The baby has no brain. His head is just an empty eggshell. She should not have had this baby. After he dies, Ying-Ying falls apart piece by piece. Her father is always running to catch the pieces. Finally, Ying-Ying just lies like a statue on her bed.

The doorbell rings one night after dinner. Ying-Ying is always resting as if she has died and become a living ghost. The girl from next door comes in, and introduces herself as Teresa. Teresa and her mother had a fight, and her mother kicked her out of the house. Teresa comes to their apartment rather than wait outside her door for her mother to open it again. She plans to use their fire escape to climb back into her bedroom. Teresa explains that her mother will be glad to find her. Lena hears them shouting and making up later, laughing and crying together.

Lena always feels the hope from that night, as she watches her own mother lying in bed or babbling to herself on the sofa. Lena has changed the bad things in her minds to different images. Then she sees something else. She sees a girl complaining about not being seen. She sees the girl's mother kill herself in her mind. Then the girl grabs her mother and pulls her through the wall back to the real world.

Part 2, Lena St. Clair, "The Voice from the Wall" Analysis

This is the same Ying-Ying who lost her sense of self in the story about the Moon Lady. The events of this story reveal that Ying-Ying has serious mental problems. We have no clue about the imaginary "bad man" who lives in the basement. Ying-Ying is very fearful about everybody and everything. She has not gotten over the terrors of being lost and losing herself at age four. She will always be scared.

The imagery about the broken vase put hastily back together is very interesting. The beggar shatters and dies, going to some place considered to be "the other side". He returns as a ghost (apparently here a spirit type ghost) to take her grandfather to the other side - meaning perhaps to kill him. The imagery of the shattering vase will return in a later story.

Ying-Ying is renamed "Betty" by her well-intentioned husband, which causes her to lose more of her sense of self. The reader should consider the emotional impact of giving a foreign, American name to an adult immigrant who cannot speak the language or speak to people from her country. Ying-Ying becomes a "renamed" person and later a "ghost". Since she came from Shanghai and speaks Mandarin Chinese and most of the Chinatown residents speak Cantonese, she cannot communicate with other immigrants. This illustrates to the reader that the Chinese immigrants have different backgrounds and languages depending on city and province of birth. When the family moves to an apartment on the side of the hill, Ying-Ying's innate fears surface. She becomes obviously unstable during her pregnancy and increasingly fearful, imagining she hears the baby talking to her from her womb. Finally, she becomes very depressed and catatonic, another "ghost", foreshadowing her own daughter's future obsession with weight to the point of becoming anorexic so that she becomes a shadow of her self.

The Italian family, most likely Catholic immigrant families, contrasts sharply to the Chinese St. Clairs through their stable religion, lack of fatalism, and abundance of love for each other. When the neighbor's daughter visits, Lena's visions of the future change and she sees herself grabbing her mother and somehow pulling her back from wherever dark place she is into the real world. We understand that Lena is very loving and concerned for her mother and is involved with her, trying to help her mother overcome her great sadness, losses, and fears.

Part 2, Rose Hsu Jordan, "Half and Half"

Part 2, Rose Hsu Jordan, "Half and Half" Summary

Rose's mother, An-Mei Hsu, attends the Chinese Baptist Church until she loses her faith in God. She then uses her white leatherette Bible to prop up a table leg for twenty years. Rose waits for the right moment to tell her mother she and her husband Ted are getting divorced. She fears her mother will tell her to keep trying to save her marriage.

Rose and Ted meet at Berkeley. She likes him for all his differences from the Chinese boys she had dated and her brothers - his brashness, assured attitude angular face and lanky body, and thick arms. He is from Tarrytown, New York. Ted invites Rose to a family reunion by the Golden Gate Park where he introduces her to his family as his girlfriend. Rose did not know this until then.

Ted's mother takes Rose aside and says she hopes she will not be offended by what she had to say. Because of his medical school studies, it will be years before he can think of marriage. She has nothing against minorities, but Ted will be in a special profession, and the Vietnam War is so unpopular. Rose replies she is not Vietnamese and has no intention of marrying Ted. As he drives her home, Ted is upset about what his mother said. Rose and Ted cling to each other and become inseparable, two halves creating a whole. That is how they make love to each other - conjoined where her weaknesses need protection. They live together and marry at an Episcopal Church the month before Ted starts medical school. They buy a run-down three story Victorian house with a large garden in Ashbury Heights after he finishes his dermatology residency. Rose sets up her downstairs studio as a graphic artist. Over the years, Ted makes all their decisions until he loses a malpractice lawsuit. Now he pushes Rose to make decisions. Their relationship changes. Ted goes to a dermatology course in Los Angeles, calls Rose, and says he wants a divorce. Rose stops trusting anyone to save her; not her husband, her mother or God.

An-Mei Hsu believed in God's will for many years. Rose remembers the day her mother lost her faith. The family is at the beach near Devil's Slide, where her father catches ocean perch. Both parents believe in nengkan, that they can do anything at which they work. This is why they came to America, "had seven children, and bought a house in the Sunset district with very little money." They believe that their luck will never run out, that God is on their side, that the house gods are benevolent, and their ancestors are pleased. They have a lifetime luck warranty and all the elements are in balance. The nine of them, her father, mother, two sisters, four brothers and Rose, go to the beach.

An-Mei sets up a picnic place to the right, where the beach is clean and the wall of the cove curves around and protects the beach from the surf and the wind. A reef ledge starts at the edge of the beach and continues out past the cove where the waters become rough. The ledge looks as if a person could walk out to see on it, but it is rocky and slippery. On the other side of the cove, the wall is more jagged and full of crevices.

They did not recognize the dangers. An-Mei spreads out the tablecloth and her father assembles his hand-made bamboo fishing pole. He walks to the edge of the beach and onto the reef to the point just before it is wet. Rose's two older sisters rush off to the beach. An-Mei tells Rose to take care of her brothers Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Bing. She must learn responsibility. Bing is only four. He wanders down the beach, picking up driftwood and throwing it into the surf. Rose calls to Bing, reminding him not get his feet wet.

An-Mei Hsu is superstitious, believing that children are predisposed to certain dangers on certain days, depending on their birthday, as explained in a Chinese book, *The Twenty-Six Malignant Gates.* Rose cannot read the book, since it is Chinese, but she looks at the pictures. An-Mei worries about all the dangers because she cannot translate the Chinese dates, based on the lunar calendar, into American dates. She has faith she can prevent every one of the dangers. Her superstitions are engrained from her Chinese past as are the bad stories told to her by Grandmother Popo.

In the afternoon, as the other children play and her father fishes, Bing finds an empty soda bottle and digs sand next to the dark cove wall. Bing starts along the reef towards his father, his back hugging the bumpy cove wall. He calls to his father, who looks over his shoulder towards Bing. Rose thinks her dad will watch Bing, but he catches a fish. The other brothers start fighting, and An-Mei calls to Rose to stop them. Nobody notices Bing but Rose. Bing takes several steps and falls into the sea, disappearing without a trace.

Rose does not know what to do. Her sisters return and ask about Bing. Then everyone rushes past Rose to the water's edge. Rose cannot move. Her mom and dad try to part the waves with their hands. They search for hours assisted by Americans in boats. An-Mei, who has never been swimming, jumps in to find Bing. The rescue people pull her out of the water. Then they call off the search, put the family in their car, and send them home to grieve. Rose knows it is her fault and expects her parents and siblings to beat her to death. Everyone takes a share of the blame. An-Mei says they will go back in the morning and find Bing. The next morning, An-Mei drives the car to the beach without using a map. She has never driven before. There, she walks over to the edge of the reef ledge where Bing disappeared. She holds her Bible and prays in Chinese. She praises God and apologizes for her faults. It is God's turn to give Bing back to her. An-Mei tells God that Rose will teach Bing better manners before he returns to the beach. Rose begins to cry.

An-Mei reverts to ancient Chinese ways. An ancestor once stole water from a sacred well, and now the water is trying to steal Bing. They must offer a treasure to the Coiling Dragon in the sea to replace Bing. Mother throws her ring of watery blue sapphire, a gift from her mother who died many years before, into the sea. Bing does not appear. They think they see him, but he is a stranger walking down the beach. Now An-Mei decides Bing is sitting on a little step above the water in a cave. She goes back to the car for an inner tube, which she ties to fishing line from her husband's bamboo pole. An-Mei is determined to bring Bing back. The tube drifts out toward the other side of the cove and the fishing line breaks. The inner tube goes under a wall and into a cavern. It pops out,

going in and out over and over until it becomes torn and lifeless. An-Mei's face fills with despair and horror. Everything, including God, has failed them.

Rose now knows her mother never expected to find Bing just as Rose cannot save her marriage. An-Mei wants her to try harder. Rose believes that she knew Bing was in danger and she let him drown, just as she saw her marriage was in trouble and let it die. Fate is shaped half by expectation and half by inattention. Rose knows her mother sees the Bible under the table. Rose takes it out. On the page before the New Testament begins, there is a section called "Deaths". An-Mei wrote Bing Hsu in erasable pencil.

Part 2, Rose Hsu Jordan, "Half and Half" Analysis

Considerable time has passed. An-Mei Hsu has a grown daughter, Rose Jordan. This is the same An-Mei Hsu who was raised by her grandmother Popo because her natural mother was a concubine to a rich man. Popo, as the reader recall, tells An-Mei all kinds of stories of what happens to bad children.

An-Mei and her husband come to America to live the American Dream. They have seven children, including sons Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Bing. Bing is perhaps the nickname for the Chinese province of Taiyuan, or he was named after Bing Crosby. This is never explained. The name contrasts vividly with those of his brothers.

The unexpected loss of Bing in the ocean is very sad. An-Mei mingles Christianity and ancient Chinese traditions towards his return. Neither work. An-Mei makes promises to God, similar to those we all make in a crisis. When they fail to work, she loses her faith in God. Then she syncretises or blends Christianity and the superstitions of the ancient Chinese ways to get her baby back, and these methods do not work either. The reader sees her desperation to save the child. This contrasts sharply with June Woo's abandoning her twins on the road in an earlier story. The writing of Bing's name as deceased in pencil indicates that An-Mei hopes he will return and she is not certain of his death. His name can be erased when he returns.

Part 2, Jing-Mei Woo, "Two Kinds"

Part 2, Jing-Mei Woo, "Two Kinds" Summary

Jing-Mei Woo's mother came to America believing one could be anything, including rich and instantly famous. She arrived in 1949 after losing everything in China - her parents, home, first husband, and her twin baby girls. She never looked back because her life could only get better. She tries to implement her own dreams through her daughter Jing-Mei.

First, she tries to turn Jing-Mei into a Chinese Shirley Temple, taking her to a beauty training school for a permanent done by a new student. Instead of big fat curls, Jing-Mei has an uneven mass of crinkly black fuzz. The school's instructor gives her into a Peter Pan type hair cut. Every night after dinner, her mother gives Jing-Mei another aptitude test from a magazine and reads her stories about remarkable children. Jing-Mei fails miserably at geography and memory tests. Some months later, her mother sees a female Chinese child piano prodigy on *The Ed Sullivan Show.* She trades housecleaning services with Mr. Chong, who lives on the first floor, for weekly lessons and a piano for Jing-Mei to practice on every day from four to six. Jing-Mei secretly calls him "Old Chong" and finds out he has retired from teaching piano because he is deaf. He cannot see well enough to watch Jing-Mei hit wrong notes, but he teaches her excellent technique.

Jing-Mei's parents buy her a secondhand spinet piano with a scarred bench that becomes the showpiece of their living room. She is to play in the church talent show. Her mother invites the couples from the Joy Luck Club to the recital. Jing-Mei starts to play and gets caught up in how lovely she looks that she does not pay attention to what she is playing. She starts hitting wrong notes. Old Chong stands up, beams, and shouts, "Bravo". Jing-Mei's mother is stricken. The audience claps weakly. Jing-Mei walks back to her chair, face quivering as she tries not to cry. She feels her parents' shame and they sit through the entire recital. Waverly Jong comes up to Jing-Mei and reminds her that she is not a genius as is Waverly with her chess. The family returns home and Jing-Mei assumes she is through with the piano lessons.

Two days later, her mother tells her to turn off the television. She yanks the child off the floor and throws her on the piano bench. Jing-Mei is sobbing and cries that her mother wants her to be something she is not. Her mother replies in Chinese that there are only two kinds of daughters, "those who are obedient and those who follow their own mind. Only the obedient daughter can live in this house." Jing-Mei shouts that she wishes she were not her daughter. Her mother replies that it is too late to change that. Jing-Mei remembers the babies her mother left in China, the ones they never talk about, and says that she wishes she had not been born and that she were dead, like them. Her mother's face goes blank, and stunned, she backs out of the room, resembling a small brown leaf, thin, brittle, and lifeless.

Jing-Mei believes she fails her mother many times, asserting her own will and not living up to expectations. She even drops out of college. She does not believe she can be anything she wants to be. She can only be herself, a continuing failure.

After her mother dies, she sends a piano tuner over to her parents' apartment and has the piano reconditioned. She puts things in order for her father, finds her mother's old silk dresses, and decides to take them home with her. She tries out the tuned piano, which has a very rich sound. Jing-Mei plays the Schumann tune "Pleading Child" that she butchered at the recital. The right notes come back to her. Then she sees the piece on the right-hand side called, "Perfectly Contented". After she plays them a few times, she realizes they are two halves of the same song.

Part 2, Jing-Mei Woo, "Two Kinds" Analysis

Nothing goes right for the child Jing-Mei. She is a rebellious child who does not understand Chinese or even American traditions and takes advantage of her mother's hard work in trading house-cleaning services for piano lessons with an available teacher. She humiliates the family at the recital. Only after her mother dies does she begin to understand herself or her mother. The piano piece in two parts is symbolic of Jing-Mei and her mother being two parts of a whole. The reader is left to speculate on other meanings of the piano pieces and whether Jing-Mei will learn the spiritual lesson of the second piece completing the whole.

Part 3, Parable

Part 3, Parable Summary

A Chinese mother sees a mirrored armoire in the master suite of her daughter's new condominium and tells her that she cannot put mirrors at the foot of the bed. All her marriage happiness will bounce back and turn the opposite way. The daughter replies that this is the only place the armoire will fit. The mother pulls out a gilt-edge mirror and leans it against the headboard, on top of the two pillows, telling her daughter to hang it above the bed. The reflections will multiply the daughter's peach-blossom luck. The daughter asks what that is. The mother shows her daughter her own reflection, a picture of her future grandchild already sitting on her lap next spring. The daughter looks and there is her own reflection looking at her.

Part 3, Parable Analysis

This story emphasizes Chinese traditions of good luck based on children being the reflections of their mothers. By Chinese tradition, mirrors hung over the headboard of a bed bring good luck and grandchildren.

Part 3, Lena St. Clair, "Rice Husband"

Part 3, Lena St. Clair, "Rice Husband" Summary

Lena thinks her mother Ying-Ying has a mysterious ability to see things before they happen. She sees only *bad things* that affect their family and does not know what causes them. Ying-Ying saw the way their new apartment in San Francisco sat too steeply on the hill. She said that her new baby would fall out dead, and it did. She knew when her husband, Lena's father, would die. He gave her a philodendron plant that died because its roots were damaged so no water could get to it. Her father's autopsy revealed that he had 99% blockage of the arteries before he died of a heart attack at the age of seventy-four. Since he was English-Irish American, he ate five slices of bacon and three eggs sunny-side up every morning. Now Ying-Ying is visiting Lena and her husband in their new house in Woodside. Lena wonders what bad things Ying-Ying will see.

Lena and her husband Harold like their new home, which is a forty-minute drive to Ying-Ying's San Francisco apartment. Lena and Harold are having major marital disagreements over spending whose money for what. Ying-Ying will stay for a week while electricians rewire her apartment building. Lena and Harold's new house is a renovated barn with a pool on four acres of land. As they tour the house, Ying-Ying finds all the flaws. She looked in Lena's rice bowl before marriage and told Lena she would marry a bad man.

Lena and Harold work at the same architectural firm. He is a partner and she is an associate, a project assistant. They both work in restaurant design. When they began to date, they always split the bill. She always feels inadequate and fears exposure as a fake. She sees them as intellectual equals and herself as intuitive, since she told Harold to start his own firm. Lena offered to loan him any money he needs for the venture. He refused and says that they should keep their money separate. That way they can be sure of their love for each other. Then he asks her to move in with him and pay $500 per month in rent. Harold has a nice two bedroom flat with a huge view of the bay that is better than Lena's efficiency, so she agrees.

That year they both quit the firm and start their own. None of the restaurant clients follow Harold. Lena suggests he try theme-eating places. This is very well received and they grow to a firm of twelve people specializing in thematic restaurant design. Harold now makes seven times more than Lena makes. Lately what he says about their being "equals" bothers Lena. She gets into their car to go to work and tells him that she loves him. He asks her if she locked the door. Their prenuptial agreement says that they each pay a percentage of the mortgage based on their earnings and that she owns the same percentage of community property. Since Harold pays more, he decides how the house should look. They argue about Mirugai, the cat he gave her for her last birthday and who should pay for getting rid of her fleas. She tells her mother that they started this form of division of payment before marriage and have never stopped.

Harold returns from the store and barbecues steaks for dinner. As they eat, Harold talks about their plans for the house. He gets out the ice cream for desert, which Lena will not eat. Ying-Ying says Lena is so thin now you cannot see her. She is like a ghost who will disappear. Lena makes up the guest room for her mother. The only decoration is a wobbly end table Harold made in his student days. Ying-Ying wants to know what the table is good for if it does not stand on its legs.

Lena goes downstairs where Harold is opening the windows to let the night air in, as he does every evening. Lena tells him she is cold and wants the windows closed. She starts a fight because she is tired of accounting for everything. He says she wanted the cat and they will both pay for the exterminators. Lena starts to cry, which makes Harold angry. Lena thinks now that nothing is right or makes sense ant more. She wants to think about what their marriage is based on instead of the balance sheet. Harold replies in a hurt voice that their marriage is based on a lot more than that. They hear the sound of glass shattering upstairs and a chair scraping across the wood floor.

Lena goes to her mother's room. The marble end table collapsed. The vase that was on top of it fell, leaving the flowers that were in it in a puddle of water. Ying-Ying is sitting by the open window. She turns around but Lena cannot see her face. Her mother says, "fallen down" and does not apologize. Lena tells her it does not matter and picks up the broken glass shards. Lena says she knew it would happen. Ying-Ying wants to know why Lena did not stop it.

Part 3, Lena St. Clair, "Rice Husband" Analysis

This story should have been included in Part 4 for easier comprehension of the stories. It seems out of place here. This is Ying-Ying again, who sees only bad things that will happen to the family. She is always scared. Lena is much like her mother, believing that she is inadequate and cannot be equal to her husband. Lena and her husband Harold have worked out an elaborate expense sharing division based on their unequal salaries in California, a community property state. Even though Lena starts the new architectural firm with her husband and provides the niche market it will occupy, she considers herself of much lesser value than he and lets herself and her abilities be used by him.

Again we see the analogy that Lena is "like a ghost", reflecting her mother's acute depression after the death of her baby. The imagery of the breaking vase is haunting as symbolic of falling apart. Broken glass shows depression and inadequacy yet again. The reader is left to speculate why Ying-Ying is sitting in the darkness, turned away from Lena.

Part 3, Waverly Jong, "Four Dimensions"

Part 3, Waverly Jong, "Four Dimensions" Summary

Waverly takes her mother Lindo to lunch at Waverly's favorite Chinese restaurant. Lindo immediately dislikes Waverly's new hairstyle, an asymmetrical blunt-line fringe shorter on the left side and tells her to get her money back. Lindo also does not like the menu's choices, the greasy chopsticks, and her dirty rice bowl. The soup is not hot. She disputes a charge of two extra dollars for the wrong tea. Waverly tries to calm her down so she can tell her mother that she and Rich Schields are getting married. Lindo has never met Rich. Every time Waverly tries to talk about him, Lindo changes the subject. Lindo refuses to tip the waiter. Waverly leaves five dollars while her mother uses the bathroom. When she returns, she comments that it stinks in there.

Waverly's friend Marlene reminds her that she and Rich are both tax attorneys. Waverly tells Marlene that her mother never thinks anybody is good enough for her. Marlene suggests they elope. Waverly says that is what she did with her first husband, and her mother threw her shoe at them for openers.

Waverly takes Lindo to her apartment, which has changed radically from the pristine place she maintained after her divorce to a chaos full of life and love, an apartment littered with her daughter Shoshana's toys and Rich's weights and clothing. Waverly takes out of her closet the mink jacket Rich gave her for Christmas. Her mother runs her fingers over the mink and criticizes the cheapness of the fur. Waverly says Rich gave it to her from his heart. Lindo replies that this is why she worries. Lindo adds that if Waverly is busy and wants to live in a mess, what can she say about it? Waverly has always known that her mother knows how to hit her nerves like an electric jolt.

The first time Waverly felt such an emotional attack from her Mother was during her days of playing chess. She knew her ability to play chess was a gift. She could see plays on the chessboard that others could not. This gave Waverly confidence. Lindo liked to show Waverly off, and she discusses her games as if she gives Waverly strategies. Lindo tries to take all the credit for Waverly's successes. Waverly tells her mother off in a crowd of people. Lindo quits talking to her and acts as if Waverly is a rotten fish that has been thrown away, leaving the smell. Waverly has learned to ignore her mother when she behaves like this. She waits for her mother to come to her. After many days go by in silence, Waverly decides to quit playing chess for a few days and goes into the living room to watch television with her brothers.

Waverly does not play in a tournament. Her sponsors call Lindo Jong and beg for Waverly to play again. The tournaments come and go, but still her mother does not come to her. Waverly is crying inside because a boy she had easily defeated on two occasions wins that tournament. Waverly decides to practice for the next tournament, so she tells Lindo that she is ready to play again. Her mother reacts unexpectedly and says that Waverly thinks it is easy to quit and then play again. Everything for Waverly is this

way, smart, easy, and fast. Her mother screams, "No! It is not so easy anymore." Stunned, Waverly goes to her room. That night she develops a high fever. Her mother brings her chicken broth and rice in the morning because Waverly has the chicken pox and chickens know how to fight each other. Lindo sits in Waverly's room knitting a pink sweater.

When Waverly is well, she finds that her mother has changed. She does not hover over her as she practices or polish her trophies. She does not cut out newspaper articles that mention her name. To Waverly, it is as if her mother has erected an invisible wall between them, and Waverly cannot find out how high it is. Waverly loses the next tournament. Her mother says nothing but walks around with a satisfied look. Waverly spends hours thinking about why she lost. She examines every move, every piece, and every square. She can no longer see the secret weapons of each piece and the magic within the intersections of the squares. She can only see her weaknesses. She has lost her magic touch. She keeps trying to play, but the gift is gone. After she loses twice to the boy she defeated so easily a few years before, she stops playing. Nobody protests. Waverly is fourteen years of age.

Now an adult, Waverly talks to her friend Marlene after her mother comments on the mink jacket. Marlene tells Waverly to tell her mother to shut up and stop ruining her life. Waverly laughs. She cannot do that. No Chinese daughter can tell her mother to "shut up". Waverly is afraid her mother will criticize Rich, starting slowly and progressing. That is what Lindo did to her first husband, Marvin Chen. After they separated, on the nights when Shoshana was asleep and Waverly was lonely, she wondered if her mother poisoned her marriage. Waverly resented her pregnancy and almost aborted the baby.

Now she worries for Rich, because her feelings for him are vulnerable to her mother Lindo's suspicions, remarks, and innuendos, even though Rich adores her and his love is unequivocal. Their sexual chemistry is surprising, a treasure. He always says the right things at the right moments. She has never known love so pure. She plans for Rich to meet her mother and win her over. Auntie Suyann, her mother's friend from way back, helps them. Waverly gives Auntie a secret to boast about. They visit Auntie Suyann while she is preparing Sunday dinner, and she invites them to eat, too. Waverly and Rich send Auntie Suyann a thank-you letter, in which Rich says it is the best Chinese food he has ever tasted. The next day, Lindo invites Waverly to a birthday dinner for her father. Waverly's brother Vincent is bringing his girlfriend Lisa, so Waverly takes Rich.

Cooking is how her mother expresses her love, her pride, her power, and her proof that she knows more than Auntie Su. She tells Rich to be sure to say that her cooking is far better than Auntie Su's. That evening, she goes to her mother's kitchen hoping that her mother will say something nice about Rich, who is not Chinese. He is a few years younger than Waverly, short and compactly built, with curly red hair, smooth pale skin, and orange freckles across his nose. Finally, she asks her mother what she thinks of Rich. Lindo replies that he has a lot of spots. Waverly says that they are freckles and mean good luck. Lindo answers that was not true when Waverly had chicken pox.

Rich brings a bottle of French wine to the dinner. Waverly's parents do not own wine glasses. Rick drinks two glasses of wine while everyone else has a "taste". Rich tries to use chopsticks and drops a large piece of eggplant onto his crotch. Shoshana cannot stop laughing. Then he takes a big portion of shrimp and snow peas instead of the traditional spoonful until everyone has a morsel. He declines to eat the expensive sautyed new greens. He tries to be polite by refusing seconds instead of following her father's example of taking many small portions. He criticizes Lindo's cooking, not knowing the Chinese tradition of always making bad comments about one's own cooking. When Lindo says something bad about her cooking, it is the family's cue to eat some and proclaim it the best she has ever made. Rich pours soy sauce on his plate. Waverly knows he has failed miserably in Lindo's eyes. He mispronounces her parents' names.

That night, Waverly lies in bed, tense and in despair. Rich appears blind to it and pathetic. Waverly realizes her mother is doing it again, making her see black where she once saw white. Her mother is always the queen, able to move in all directions, relentlessly able to find Waverly's weakest spots. Waverly is the pawn.

Waverly goes to confront her mother in the morning. Lindo is sleeping on the sofa in the back, strength gone, powerless, and defeated. Waverly thinks she is dead. She calls to her mother, who answers "Mei-Mei"? Lindo sits up and asks why Waverly is there and why she is crying. Waverly says nothing is wrong. She came to tell her that she and Rich are getting married, which Lindo already knows. She asks her mother why she hates Rich. Lindo answers that she just tells the truth and does not mean to hurt.

Waverly sits beside her mother, feeling as if she has lost a battle she did not know she was fighting. She is confused about what she feels. Her mother explains. Half of everything in her is from her father's side, the Jong clan from Canton. They are good, honest people, sometimes bad-tempered and stingy. Her other half is the Sun clan in Taiyuan. She is related to Sun Yat-sen and Sun Wei, who fought Genghis Khan. Waverly confuses Taiwan with Taiyuan. Her mother adds that if you are Chinese you can never let go of China in your mind. The nickname for Taiyuan is Bing. As they talk, Waverly realizes that she has been fighting for herself, a scared child who ran away a long time ago to an imagined safe place. She sees her mother as an old woman with a wok for her armor and a knitting needle for a sword, getting crabby waiting for her daughter to invite her inside.

Waverly and Rich postpone their wedding from July to October, when it is cooler in China. Her mother wants to go to China with them. A part of Waverly thinks the idea makes sense - the three of them, leaving their differences behind, moving West to reach the East.

Part 3, Waverly Jong, "Four Dimensions" Analysis

Lindo Jong grew up poor and had to fight for a place in the world. She is the very intelligent, strong woman who figured out how to obtain the equivalent of an annulment

to escape her unhappy, arranged marriage. She wants only the very best for her daughter. This Waverly does not understand or even want to understand, since she is still acting the spoiled brat as an adult. She can now buy anything she wants. Waverly has had one marriage and a daughter, Shoshana, whom she almost aborted out of hatred for her husband.

Waverly tries to sneak her fiancy into her mother's good graces by wooing Auntie Suyann. The following family dinner is a disaster, as family introductions of fiancys to in-laws often are. Waverly, who has paid little attention to Chinese customs, does not give Rich basic instructions in Chinese dinner etiquette. It is an American custom to take a bottle of wine to the dinner host, but Waverly's parents do not own wine glasses and do not drink wine. He makes many mistakes and even mispronounces Waverly's parents' names. When Waverly returns to make amends with her mother, she begins to understand her and her own Chinese history.

Part 3, Rose Hsu Jordan, "Without Wood"

Part 3, Rose Hsu Jordan, "Without Wood" Summary

When she is a child, she believes everything her mother An-Mei says. Her mother talks to ghosts. She and her sisters sleep in the same bed, but Rose is always the last to go to sleep, or to see "Old Mr. Chou", the guardian of a door that opened into dreams. Her sisters do not dream, but Rose has bad dreams involving Mr. Chou.

Thirty years later An-Mei is still trying to make Rose listen to her. At a friend's funeral, she tells Rose she is getting too thin. Rose recognizes the pastor as Wing, a boy who used to steal baseball cards with her brother Luke. Wing went to seminary but Luke went to jail for selling stolen car stereos. Even though An-Mei's friend has been cremated, An-Mei buys an artificial spray of yellow chrysanthemums and red roses for thirty-four dollars. Rose is expected to chip in as are her brothers and sisters. Rose says her husband Ted has sent her a check. Her mother immediately concludes he is doing monkey business with somebody else. Rose has been seeing a psychiatrist about the pending divorce because she is confused and in a dark fog. It is as if she has fallen headfirst through Old Mr. Chou's door and is trying to find her way back, groping in the dark, listening for voices for directions.

Rose tells her friend Waverly that the divorce is causing her physical pain. Waverly replies that she is better off without him because he is an emotional wimp. Rose tells Lena that she is better off without Ted. She does not miss him but rather the way she felt when she was with him. Lena responds that Rose was depressed and manipulated into thinking she was nothing. She should get a good lawyer and go for everything.

Rose tells her psychiatrist that she is obsessed with revenge and wants to stick a fork in a voodoo doll of Ted at a strategic point. After two weeks of psychotherapy and this admission, Rose is at a big turning point in her thinking. They psychiatrist wants her to return in a week. She inventories everything in the house before she gets a letter from Ted with their divorce papers and a check for ten thousand dollars. He has signed everything with the pen Rose gave him for Christmas, when he kissed her and said he would only use it to sign important things. Since she does not know what to do, she puts everything in a drawer with her store coupons.

An-Mei says her daughter Rose was born without wood. She listens to too many people. An-Mei knows this because once she almost became that way. Rose chooses from the best opinions. The American opinions are best but there are too many of them. She does not know what the check for ten thousand dollars means. She finally decides that ten thousand dollars is nothing to Ted and she is nothing to him, also. She is about to sign the papers when she remembers she loves the house. Rose tries to call a lawyer. She decides she does not know what she wants from the marriage or from the

divorce. Rose takes sleeping pills and stays in bed for three days without dreams. On the fourth day, she has a nightmare about Old Mr. Chou, who promises to find her and squish her into the ground.

The telephone rings and rings. Rose finally answers. It is her mother, An-Mei, who is bringing her leftover dishes of food. An-Mei wants her to talk to her husband - to speak up. Rose's psychiatrist's office calls. She has missed her appointment that morning and the one two days ago. Does she want to reschedule? Five minutes later her husband Ted calls. He wants the papers returned and signed, and he wants the house. He wants the divorce over as soon as possible so he can marry someone else. An-Mei was right about the monkey business with someone else. Rose is humiliated and begins to cry. Then she tells him to come over after work.

When he comes, Rose tells him she will keep the house. She tells Ted that he cannot just pull her out of his life and throw her away. Ted is confused and scared by the strength of Rose's words. That night she dreams she is in the garden when she sees Old Mr. Chou and her mother in the distance. Her mother says she has planted something for Rose. Rose sees weeds spilling out over the edges running wild in every direction.

Part 3, Rose Hsu Jordan, "Without Wood" Analysis

Fearful An-Mei tries to help her daughter as best she can. She predicted Ted was dating someone else. When Rose takes to *her* bed, An-Mei calls and calls and brings food. The imagery of the weeds running wild is interesting and could mean that Rose sees her world as out of control. Rose has overcome enough of her fears to talk back to Ted and claim the house as her share of their marital property.

Part of Chinese tradition is interpretation of physical and mental signs such as dreams and their meanings. The use of imagery such as "Old Mr. Chou" illustrates traditional Chinese ancestor worship.

Part 3, Jing-Mei Woo, "Best Quality"

Part 3, Jing-Mei Woo, "Best Quality" Summary

Jing-Mei's mother gives her a jade pendant on a gold chain, which June Woo calls her daughter's "life's importance". It is not jewelry she would have chosen for herself. The jade is almost the size of her little finger, a mottled green and white color, intricately carved. She puts it away. After her mother dies, she wonders what her mother meant as she wears the pendant every day. She sees other people wearing the same jade pendants - a two-inch oblong of bright apple green. Jing-Mei thinks they all belong to a secret covenant of unknown meaning. She asks a Chinese bartender where he got his pendant. He answers his mother gave it to him after his divorce. He thinks his mother was trying to tell him he was still worth something. Jing-Mei decides he has no idea what the pendant really means either.

June Woo cooks eleven crabs, one for each person plus an extra, for last year's Chinese New Year dinner. The Woo's apartment is the first floor of a six-unit building they own close to where Jing-Mei works. She and her mother walk through Chinatown, and June observes the social status of the other women. June Woo came to America in 1949, after abandoning her babies and finding her first husband dead in Kweilin in 1944. June went north to Chungking, where she met Jing-Mei's father. The two fled to Shanghai, Hong Kong, and then to San Francisco.

As they walk, June Woo complains about some of their tenants, especially the ones who have accused her of poisoning their cat, which has disappeared. They find the liveliest crabs, including one with a lost leg that the seller makes her buy anyway. It will be the extra one. June takes the live crabs home and cooks them. June has actually invited eleven people, since she has invited Waverly Jong and her daughter Shoshana, who, at age ten, will want her own crab. When the platter of steaming crabs is passed around, Waverly picks the best crab for her daughter, the next best for Rich, and the third best for herself.

When the plate returns to Jing-Mei she has two crabs left, and she takes the one with the torn-off leg. June objects and takes it for herself, smells the meat, and throws it out. Auntie Lindo points her crab leg at Rich, her future son-in-law, and comments that he does not know how to eat Chinese food since he is having problems with the crab. Waverly whines that crab is not Chinese. Auntie Lindo tells Rich to eat the orange, spongy, crab brains, which are the best part. Vincent asks when they are getting married. Waverly wants to know when Vincent and Lisa are getting married. Shoshana says she does not like crab. Waverly comments about Jing-Mei's haircut, and her gay hair cutter who could have AIDS. Waverly recommends her own Mr. Rory, who does fabulous work and charges more than Jing-Mei is used to paying. Now Jing-Mei, whose hair is coated with disease, feels insulted, too.

Jing-Mei replies that if Waverly's accounting firm would pay her bill, she could afford Mr. Rory's prices. Waverly is speechless. Vincent tries to change the subject. Jing-Mei persists because Waverly will not talk to her about the bill when she calls her office. Waverly finally says that what Jing-Mei prepared as ad copy was unacceptable to the firm, even though Waverly told her it was great. Jing-Mei offers a rewrite. Waverly says she it trying to get the firm to pay for part of the bill even though the copy is unsophisticated. She works for a big firm and they need a copywriter who understands their style. Then Waverly laughs, and Jing-Mei's mother agrees with her. Jing-Mei tries not to cry and begins to clear the table. She sees the chips on her mother's old plates and wonders why she does not use the new set she bought her five years ago.

Waverly and Rich insensitively light cigarettes and use a crab shell for an ashtray, further insulting June Woo. Shoshana goes to the piano and bangs out notes with a crab claw in each hand. Deaf Mr. Chong applauds. June Woo goes to the kitchen and returns with a plate of orange slices. Auntie Lindo finally speaks. She tells Waverly to let Jing-Mei try again. Good work takes time. That night, in the kitchen, Jing-Mei realizes that she is just a copywriter for a small firm. She is no longer angry at Waverly. She feels tired and foolish. She checks her mother's crab and can find nothing wrong with it. Her mother joins her as she is putting dishes away. Jing-Mei tells her mother it was a good dinner. She asks what was wrong with the crab. June replies that the crab was already dead and not worth cooking. The flesh was not firm. Everybody else wanted best quality crab - except Jing-Mei, who thinks differently. Now Jing-Mei is hurt. Her mother always says things that make no sense that sound good and bad at the same time.

Jing-Mei asks her mother why she does not use the new dishes she bought her. June replies that she is saving them. She gives Jing-Mei the gold necklace with the jade pendant. Jing-Mei refuses to take it. Her mother insists. She wants her daughter to put it on her skin and then she will know her mother's meaning. This is Jing-Mei's life's importance. Jing-Mei asks her mother if she is giving her the necklace to make up for what Waverly and everybody said. Her mother replies that Waverly is like a crab, always walking sideways and moving crooked. She adds that the necklace is made of young jade, a light color. If Jing-Mei wears it every day, it will become more green.

After June dies, Jing-Mei's dad does not eat well. She goes over to cook him dinner. As she is rinsing the tofu in the sink, she sees the cat from upstairs that her mother was accused of poisoning. The cat is not dead. Jing-Mei tries to scare off the cat, but he just narrows his eyes and hisses back at her.

Part 3, Jing-Mei Woo, "Best Quality" Analysis

This chapter further illustrates both the generation gaps and the cultural gaps between mother and daughter. Waverly has learned nothing and has still not coached Rich or her daughter Shoshana in Chinese dinner manners. The animosity between Waverly and Jing-Mei is remains, but Jing-Mei no longer cares about it. Jing-Mei is becoming much more sensitive to her mother's culture and feelings. The generation gap between Jing-

Mei and her mother June is presently closing. She helps her father after her mother dies. The reader is left to imagine the meaning of the green jade necklace.

Part 4, Parable

Part 4, Parable Summary

A woman teases her baby granddaughter, who is laughing. The woman tells the baby that she was once free and innocent and laughed for no reason. Later she threw away her foolish innocence to protect herself and taught her daughter, the baby's mother, to do the same so she will not be hurt. The baby gurgles again. The woman thinks that the baby is the reincarnation of Syi Wang Mu, Queen Mother of the Western Skies, who has come to give her the answer. She thanks the little queen for her advice and asks her to teach her mother, the woman's daughter, how to lose her innocence but not her hope.

Part 4, Parable Analysis

This story illustrates that the generation gap is beginning to close. A grandmother is with her happy, gurgling granddaughter, talking to her as if she is a little queen. The women wants the baby to teach her mother, the woman's daughter, how to lose innocence without losing hope.

Part 4, An-Mei Hsu, "Magpies"

Part 4, An-Mei Hsu, "Magpies" Summary

Rose Hsu tells her mother, An-Mei, that her marriage to Ted is falling apart, and she cannot save it. An-Mei was raised the Chinese way - to desire nothing, to swallow other people's misery, and to eat her own bitterness. She teaches her daughter Rose the opposite, but she comes out the same. Rose can still hear what happened to her more than sixty years ago when her grandmother Popo died and she left to live with her mother.

An-Mei is at her uncle's house in Ningpo, where her grandmother Popo has just died. Her natural mother is there, the woman who dishonored her widowhood by becoming the third concubine to a rich man. The night before An-Mei's mother is to leave, she tells her about the turtle in their courtyard pond. The turtle is old and feeds on their thoughts. When she was An-Mei's age, Popo told her she was no longer a child. She could not shout run or sit on the ground to catch crickets. She could not cry and had to be silent and listen to her elders. If she disobeyed, Popo would send her to be a Buddhist nun. The next night, An-Mei's mother sits by the pond and cries. The turtle swims to the top and eats her tears as they touch the water before it climbs out of the pond, onto a rock, and speaks. It has eaten her tears and knows her misery. If she cries, her life will always be sad. The turtle opens his beak and seven pearly eggs roll out. The eggs hatch into seven birds that begin to chatter and sing. She knows from their snow-white bellies and pretty voices that they are magpies, birds of joy. The birds drink from the pond and fly up into the air, laughing. The turtle said it is useless to cry because your tears do not wash away your sorrows. They feed someone else's joy. That is why you must learn to swallow your own tears.

An-Mei's mother is crying. An-Mei begins to cry. She thinks this is their fate, to live like two turtles seeing the watery world together from the bottom of the pond. An-Mei awakens in the morning to angry sounds. She runs to her window to see her mother kneeling, scratching the stone pathway with her fingers as if she has lost something. Her uncle shouts that if she takes her daughter with her, she will ruin her life as well. Both An-Mei and her mother begin to cry silently. An-Mei dresses and hurries into the front room just as a servant is taking her mother's trunk outside. Her mother sees her crying. She says that she is going back to Tientsin and An-Mei can follow her. Now her aunt tries to stop her and says she will throw her life away. She demonstrates by throwing a vase to the ground. An- Mei hurries to join her mother. She leaves her little brother crying, angry, and scared, with her aunt and uncle.

An-Mei and her mother travel by railroad for seven days and six more by steamer boat. Her mother is very lively and tells her stories of Tientsin. She describes the city where they are going, where foreigners from different countries live. They have houses of all shapes and colors. There will be snow in the winter. They sail into a storm and An-Mei becomes fearful and sick. Her mother's face becomes dark and angry, and An-Mei's

thoughts become cloudy and confused. The day they are to land in Tientsin, her mother changes into her Western style clothing and make-up. Her short hair is tucked into a small brown felt hat adorned with a feather, leaving two perfect curls on her forehead. She wears a long brown dress with a white lace collar down to her waist that is fastened down with a silk rose. She gives An-Mei a new, starch-white dress with ruffles at the collar and along the sleeves and six tiers of ruffles for the skirt. The box contains white stockings, white leather shoes, and an enormous white hair bow.

The clothes are too big, but An-Mei does not mind. Her mother makes quick alterations with pins and thread, stuffs in the loose materials, and adds tissue paper to the shoes. As they near the dock, she tells An-Mei that she is ready to start her new life. She will live in a new house with a new father, many sisters, another little brother, and dresses and good things to eat. Her mother puts on her fox stole and takes An-Mei's hand. A porter takes their two small trunks. Nobody is there to meet them. An-Mei is slow, having problems walking in her too big shoes. Everyone is in a hurry at the port. Her mother shouts for a rickshaw and argues about the cost. Her mother complains about the dust, the street smells, the bumpy road, the late hour, and her stomachache. She complains about how An-Mei looks in her new clothing. An-Mei shows her mother things to cheer her. Her mother tells her to sit still and do not look eager. They are only going home and they arrive exhausted.

Her mother told An-Mei that her new home was not ordinary. They will live in the household of Wu Tsing, a very rich merchant who owns many carpet factories. The mansion is in the British Concession of Tientsin, the best section of the city where Chinese people can live. The front of the house has a Chinese stone gate, rounded at the top with big black lacquer doors and a threshold to step over. The courtyard inside had long row of bushes on both sides of a sidewalk with a lawn area on each side. They walk closer to the house, which is built Western style. It is three stories high of mortar and stone, with long metal balconies on each floor and chimneys at every corner.

A servant girl runs out and greets An-Mei's mother with cries of Joy. This is Yan Chan, her mother's personal maid, who calls her mother Taitai, the simple title of "Wife", as if her mother were the only wife. Yan Chang calls to other servants to take their luggage, bring tea, and draw a hot bath. Second Wife told everyone not to expect them for another week. She and her family and servants have gone to Peking to visit relatives. First Wife and her daughters have gone on a pilgrimage to a Buddhist temple. As they enter the house, An-Mei becomes lost with so many things to see. Yan Chang tries to introduce her to everyone there. They go to the second floor to her mother's room where An-Mei will also sleep. An-Mei sees the magnificent canopied bed with a soft mattress ten times the thickness of her former bed.

The room has a glass door that leads to a balcony. A servant has already put tea and sweet cakes on a table by the door and is lighting a small stove. Her uncle in Ningpo was well-to-do. An-Mei thinks this house is amazing and that there was no shame in her mother's marrying Wu Tsing. A big wooden clock out of which animated characters come on the hour and play music startles her. She cannot sleep for many nights because of the noises from the clock. She is very happy sleeping in the big soft bed with

her mother. She sees hot water pouring out of pipes in the bathrooms on all three floors and commodes that flush clean without servants having to empty them. She sees other rooms as fancy as hers. Yan Chang explains which ones belong to First Wife and the other concubines, Second and Third Wife. Some rooms are empty, for guests. The male servants live on the third floor. There are so many good things she cannot remember all of them.

Her mother regains her pleasant nature. She wears her old clothes again, long Chinese gowns and skirts with white mourning bands sewn at the bottoms. During the day, she teaches An-Mei the names of things. In the evening, they gossip about the servants. At night, her mother tells her stories as she lies in her arms falling asleep. She cannot remember a time when she felt more comfortable, when she had no worries, fears, or desires and life was lovely. She remembers clearly when it ended.

Two weeks after they arrive, two shiny black rickshaws come in front of a large black motorcar. A manservant takes luggage out of one rickshaw. A young maid jumps out of the other. All of the servants crowd around the motorcar. The driver opens the back door and out steps a young girl with short hair and rows of waves. She appears to be only a few years older than An-Mei, but she wears a woman's dress stockings, and high heels. The servants lift Wu Tsing out of the car. He is not a big man, nor tall, but puffed out like a bird. He is much older than her mother with a high shiny forehead and a large black mole on one nostril. He wears a Western style suit. He walks into the house with the young girl following him. She is Fifth Wife. An-Mei sees her mother looking down from her window watching. Wu Tsing has taken his fourth concubine, an afterthought like a bit of decoration for his new motorcar.

An-Mei's mother is not jealous of Fifth Wife. She does not love Wu Tsing. A girl in China does not marry for love. She marries for position. An-Mei later learns that her mother's position is the worst. After Wu Tsing and Fifth Wife return, her mother becomes depressed and silent. She and An-Mei go for long, silent rides in the city, looking for something she cannot name. An-Mei, although only nine years old, remembers feeling uncomfortable and knows something terrible is going to happen. This feeling is almost as bad as how she felt fifteen years later when the Japanese bombs started in the distance. Wu Tsing comes to her mother's room in the middle of the night, and she sends An-Mei to Yan Chang's room. Yan Chang expected her to be crying.

The next morning, An-Mei cannot look at her mother. Fifth Wife has been crying too. She sharply criticizes a servant. Wu Tsing gives her a sharp look. Fifth Wife begins to cry. Later, Fifth Wife is smiling again and wearing a new dress and new shoes. That afternoon, An-Mei's mother speaks of her unhappiness when they are in a rickshaw going to a store for embroidery thread. She has no position. Wu Tsing has brought home a new wife, a low-class girl with no manners. He bought her for a few dollars from a poor village family. At night when he can no longer use her, he comes to An-Mei's mother, smelling of mud. She is crying now and rambling. A Fourth Wife is less than a Fifth Wife. She tells An-Mei not to forget - she was a *first* wife, the wife of a scholar and not always Fourth Wife.

The Cold Dew comes with winter chill. Second Wife and Third Wife, with their children and servants return home to Tientsin. Wu Tsing sends his big motorcar to the railway station, but it is not large enough to carry them all. A dozen rickshaws follow the car home. Women begin to pour out of the motorcar. An-Mei's mother stands behind her, ready to greet women. A woman wearing a plain foreign dress and large, ugly shoes walks toward them followed by three daughters. This is Third Wife and her three daughters. The daughters are plain, with big teeth, thick lips, and bushy eyebrows. Third Wife welcomes An-Mei and lets her carry a package. Her mother then points to Second Wife who will want to be called "Big Mother". An-Mei sees a woman wearing a long black fur coat and dark Western fancy clothes. She is holding a two-year old boy. Her mother says he is Syaudi, An-Mei's youngest brother. An-Mei notices that Second Wife is about forty-five years old and wonders how she had the baby. Second Wife walks to An-Mei smiles and puts her long pearly strand around her neck. Her mother protests that the gift is too much for a small child. Second Wife replies that a pretty girl needs something to put the light on her face. Her mother, obviously angry shrinks back. She does not like Second Wife. An-Mei smiles and thanks Second Wife.

At tea that afternoon, An-Mei's mother tells her that what Second Wife says is not genuine. She is trying to trick her. She asks An-Mei for the necklace and refuses to let Second Wife buy her so cheaply. She crushes one of the glass beads. Her mother's re-knots the necklace so it appears whole and tells An-Mei to wear it the whole week so she will remember how easy it is to lose oneself to something false. She shows An-Mei her real ring of blue sapphire with a star in its center.

Before the second cold month begins, First Wife returns from her house in Peking. First Wife turns out to be a *living ghost*, quite ancient and frail with rounded body, bound feet, old-style jacket and pants, and plain, lined fact. She is perhaps fifty. An-Mei thinks First Wife is blind. She does not see anything but her two spinster daughters and her two dogs. Yan Chang explains that First Wife is blind to faults. She chose to be blind to the unhappiness of her marriage. She and Wu Tsing were joined in a spiritual marriage arranged by a matchmaker, ordered by his parents, and protected by their ancestor's spirits.

During their first year of marriage, First Wife had a girl with a short leg. She prays and burns incense to Buddha to lengthen her daughter's leg. Buddha blesses First Wife with another daughter with two perfect legs but with a brown tea stain splashed over half her face. First Wife begins to make many pilgrimages to the Tsinan temple, so Wu Tsing buys her a house near it. Every year he increases her allowance. Twice a year, she returns to Tientsin to pay her respects and suffer in her husband's bedroom. She sits alone, smoking opium, and talking to herself. She eats vegetarian meals in her room, and Wu Tsing does not bother her at night. An-Mei's mother wants her own house in little Petaiho, a beautiful seaside resort. Wu Tsing has already promised her.

Everyone is bored during the coldest winter months. It is snowing and the families stay inside, thinking of ways to amuse themselves. An-Mei's mother picks out new dress designs for herself from magazines. An-Mei and Yan Chang roast chestnuts. Yan Chang tells her about Second Wife, who was a famous singer in teahouses frequented by

married men. Wu Tsing asked her to become his concubine for the prestige of owning what so many other men want. She agrees and gains control of Wu Tsing's enormous wealth. She learns to pretend suicide by eating opium to get what she wants. Soon her acting is enough and she does not eat the opium. She gets everything but she cannot have children. Before Wu Tsing can complain about his lack of sons, Second Wife finds the ugly Third Wife to bear the children. Third Wife has three daughters.

When Wu Tsing becomes impatient for a son, Second Wife finds An-Mei's beautiful mother to be Fourth Wife, only a year after An-Mei's father died. She invites An-Mei's mother to play mah jong and insists that she spend the night. Second Wife's bed is big enough for two. Wu Tsing enters in the middle of the night and rapes her. She leaves in the morning to Second Wife's story that she enchanted Wu Tsing into bed. Since An-Mei's mother was already low as a prostitute, she agreed to be his third concubine and bear his son, which she did, three years later. Second Wife claimed the child. An-Mei learns that baby Syaudi is her little brother.

After Yan Chang tells An-Mei this story, she understands the relationship between the Wives and Second Wife's control of the family and money. An-Mei also knows why her mother cries in her own room so often. Wu Tsing's promise of a house for having his son disappears one day with another of Second Wife's pretend suicides.

Yan Chang wakes An-Mei in the middle of the night. They go to her mother's room. She sees her mother with her legs walking and then with her body straight and stiff. Her tongue is swollen and she is coughing. Everyone is there, including the doctor. An-Mei's mother has poisoned herself and is dying. An-Mei begins to cry and they take her back to Yan Chang's bed. She has eaten poison two days before, when she whispered to An-Mei that she would rather kill her own weak spirit so she could give her daughter a stronger one. When An-Mei sees her mother for the last time, she throws herself on her body. Wu Tsing promises to raise Syaudi and An-Mei as his honored children and to revere An-Mei's mother as if she has been First Wife. An-Mei shows Second Wife the fake pearl necklace she had given her and crushes it under her foot. Second Wife's hair begins to turn white. On that day, An-Mei learns to shout.

Later, in America, An-Mei finally understands life in China. Her mother suffered and found only greater misery. That was life in China and how people lived. Women could not speak up or run away. Now they can. The people do not have to swallow their tears or suffer from flocks of magpies. She reads in a magazine how Chinese peasants became tired of watching the birds eat their food. They made loud noises and scared off the birds. When the birds became too tired to fly any more, they fluttered to the ground, dead and still. An-Mei shouts for joy when she read this story.

Part 4, An-Mei Hsu, "Magpies" Analysis

An-Mei longs to live with her natural mother, no matter what her family tells her. She has known this woman only briefly. The reader learns the circumstances causing An-Mei's mother to become Wu-Tsing's Fourth Wife and that she bore his only son in addition to

her two children raised by Popo. Her mother, once a first wife and then a widow, is tricked into sleeping with Wu-Tsing and agrees to marry him because she then, at least in her own mind, has nowhere else to go. She cannot return home.

An-Mei's mother remains "nameless" throughout this book. She has no prestige, no distinction, no family name, no distinction, no authority except as Fourth Wife, and no inheritance or wealth except what Wu-Tsing might give to her. She is known only by her duties to be the man's secondary wife, his Fourth Wife. She is not even permitted to be known as the mother of his son. In her eyes and in the thoughts of others, she is an obscure woman, anonymous, not fit to be spoken of, unmentionable, with no known future except as a rich man's Fourth Wife. When the man brings in a Fifth Wife, An-Mei's mother loses what little respect she has for herself. She is now nothing. Wu-Tsing sleeps with the Fifth Wife and then with An-Mei's mother.

An-Mei's mother believes now that she is truly worthless. With the arrival of Fifth Wife, what little position she has in Wu-Tsing's household is gone. The house he promised her is no longer offered. She considers only what she sees as her future and commits suicide, intentionally taking poison in An-Mei's presence to avoid a future she envisions as being and having nothing.

Part 4, Ying-Ying St. Clair, "Waiting Between the Trees"

Part 4, Ying-Ying St. Clair, "Waiting Between the Trees" Summary

Lena puts her visiting mother, Ying-Ying, in the guest bedroom, the smallest room in the house. Because of Ying-Ying's Chinese background, the guest bedroom should be the best room in the house. She does not understand her daughter. Both she and her husband are architects, busy designing houses for other people, too busy to have any babies of their own. Ying-Ying sees signs that the marriage will break into pieces. She has always known things before they happen.

Ying-Ying grew up in Washi as a wild and stubborn child. Her mother named her "Ying-Ying" or Clear Reflection. They were one of the richest families in Wushi and lived in a house with many rooms and valuable things. When she is sixteen, her youngest aunt marries, and a visiting, drunk friend of her new uncle's indicates he wants to have sex with her by cutting open a perfect, ripe watermelon full of seeds. She does not understand what he means until she marries him six months later and he says he is ready to *kai gwa.* She is beautiful when she marries him and comes to both love and hate him. While she is pregnant with their first child, he begins to take business trips and leaves Ying-Ying to live with an opera singer. Ying-Ying has an abortion because she does not want the baby. She tells the nurses to wrap the lifeless baby in a newspaper like a fish and throw it into the lake. Her daughter sees only with her eyes and not her heart, or she would know Ying-Ying is really a tiger lady.

Since she is a still-married woman with no husband, her family sends her to live with relatives in the country outside of Shanghai, where she stayed for ten years during a severe epidemic. Her family sends her money, and she goes to work in the city in a clothing store. She meets Clifford St. Clair, a large, pale American man who buys the store's cheap clothes to send elsewhere. He courts her for four years and brings her cheap gifts. She accepts his gifts graciously, even though she was raised with riches he could not imagine. In 1946 Ying-Ying receives a letter from her youngest aunt that Ying-Ying's husband was killed by his latest woman. She decides to let him marry her, and they go to America and live in houses smaller than the one in the country. She wears American clothes and raises a daughter who has no spirit. Now Ying-Ying is a widow again. Clifford St. Clair is dead. She is sitting in the dark in a small room in her daughter's house. She plans to gather her past and her pain and cut her own spirit loose. Then her tiger fierceness will return. She will use that sharp pain to penetrate her daughter's tough skin and cut her tiger spirit loose. Her daughter will fight, but Ying-Ying will win and give her daughter her own spirit.

She hears her daughter speaking to her husband downstairs, saying words that mean nothing in a room with no life in it. She knows her daughter will hear the vase and table

crash to the floor and come up the stairs into the room. Her daughter will see nothing in the darkness, where Ying-Ying is waiting between the trees.

Part 4, Ying-Ying St. Clair, "Waiting Between the Trees" Analysis

Ying-Ying thinks exactly as An-Mei's mother did - that killing herself will cut her own tiger spirit loose to enter her daughter and give her strength. Ying-Ying is alone in the dark room when the table falls and the vase shatters into shards. Her daughter Lena, who has tried for so long to help her terrified, scared, and depressed mother, picks up all the glass pieces she finds. The reader is left to imagine whether Ying-Ying kills herself or her daughter or just remains in this sad state of existence until she dies.

Between the time of her immigration and now, Ying-Ying has regained part of her identity as Ying-Ying and not Betty, the name her well-intentioned but unknowing husband gave to her. For an immigrant, retaining the natural name is so very important, an essential part of identity in a strange land. America is sufficiently foreign to Ying-Ying without further loss of self.

Part 4, Lindo Jong, "Double Face"

Part 4, Lindo Jong, "Double Face" Summary

Waverly and her husband want to go to China for their second honeymoon. She is afraid she will look and sound too Chinese, even though she does not look or talk Chinese. Lindo regrets raising Waverly to be *so* American. Waverly takes her mother to the beauty parlor she uses, and her famous Mr. Rory, before the wedding. The hair cutter does not know Lindo speaks English and gets Waverly to speak for her mother. Waverly speaks loudly to her mother as if she is hard of hearing. Mr. Rory puts the two side by side so they can see themselves in the mirror. Lindo tells Waverly she can see her future in the mirror as she sees herself and her own mother, back in China, when she was a girl. When she was in China, Lindo's mother told Lindo her fortune based on the shape of her head. That was so many circumstances long ago.

While she was still in Peking, Lindo paid an American-raised Chinese girl to show her how to be American. The girl gave her a list of people in San Francisco with big connections and instructions for finding a husband who was an American citizen. She flew from China to America on a plane that made many stops. After she cleared immigration, she went to the San Francisco address provided by the girl. She walked up the hill and saw a sign written in Chinese that said, "A Chinese Ceremony to Save Ghosts from Spiritual Unrest 7 A.M. and 8:30 A.M." A short Bank of America branch was across the street. Now the church is the same size, but the Bank is fifty stories high and is where her daughter and husband work. She finds the right address and meets an old woman inside apartment 402. The old woman helps her find a place to live, a cheap apartment on top of a little store. Lindo finds a job in a cookie factory paying seventy-five cents an hour, making fortune cookies. Auntie An-Mei Hsu works there also. She helps Lindo find a husband by introducing her to a friend, Tin Jong, a village boy from Canton, who works at the telephone company. They do not speak the same dialects.

They communicate through the writings in the fortune cookies. Tin asks her to marry him. They are married a month later in the First Chinese Baptist Church, where they met. Nine months later, she has proof of citizenship, their oldest son Winston, who dies in a car accident at age sixteen. Vincent is born two years later. Waverly is born next and is named after the street on which they live.

They look at each other in the mirror again. Lindo cannot tell which face is American and which is Chinese. It is like when she returned to China last year after being away for forty years. Everyone knew Lindo was not Chinese any more. She will ask her daughter what changed.

Part 4, Lindo Jong, "Double Face" Analysis

The reader learns that the Jongs have somehow become "Americanized" and no longer appear or act Chinese. Lindo Jong, being the strong and intelligent woman whose marriage was "annulled" Chinese style, comes to America by herself with only a list of contacts provided by an American-raised Chinese girl. By herself, she finds a place to live and a job in a fortune cookie factory where An-Mei Hsu also works. An-Mei introduces Lindo to her future husband, a Cantonese boy who works at the telephone company. They do not speak the same dialect so they communicate through fortune cookies. This is such a charming story.

Part 4, Jing-Mei Woo, "A Pair of Tickets"

Part 4, Jing-Mei Woo, "A Pair of Tickets" Summary

Jing-Mei feels different when her train enters Shenzhen, China, as if she is a werewolf and becoming Chinese. She realizes she has never known what it means to be Chinese. She is thirty-six years old and is traveling with her seventy-two year old father, Canning Woo. Her mother is dead and she is going to China to fulfill her mother's dreams. First, they will visit Guangzhou, where her father's aunt lives. She looks at her father, who appears young and happy and is crying. After Guangzhou, they will fly to Shanghai, where she will meet her two half-sisters, the babies her mother abandoned on a road as she was fleeing Kweilin in 1944. The girls had written to her mother. They called her Mama and said they always revered her as their true mother. They told her about their lives. The letter broke her father's heart. He asked Auntie Lindo to write and tell them that their mother was dead. Instead, the Aunties replies that June is looking forward to meeting them when she comes to China, leaving it to Jing-Mei to tell them.

The landscape becomes gray, filled with cement buildings and factories. They arrive at Guangzhou. She takes out her passport. A woman in the customs booth stamps their documents, and Jing-Mei and her father go to a large area filled with thousands of people. An old woman in a yellow knit beret sees them and yells. Canning Woo recognizes her as his aunt, Syu Yen. They hug and begin crying for joy. Jing-Mei takes a picture of the two together. The aunt has brought her entire family, and the group begins to gossip unrestrained in Mandarin, exchanging news about people from their old village. They take taxis to the hotel. The Aunt will not stop talking long enough for Jing-Mei to ask her the meaning of any of the signs they are passing. The taxi driver is on some sort of freeway, and Jing-Mei sees rows of apartments, each floor cluttered with laundry drying on the balcony. She sees downtown, which looks like a major American city with high rises and construction everywhere.

Auntie announces that her sons have been successful in selling vegetables in the free market. They have built a three-story brick house and make more money every year. When the taxi stops, Jing-Mei is at a grander version of the Hyatt Regency. She thinks it is a mistake and re-checks her travel itinerary. The whole family crowds into one elevator to go to their room on the eighteenth floor. Their rooms are side-by-side and very luxurious. They family decides to stay and visit. They order dinner from room service, hamburgers, French fries, and pie a la mode. Jing-Mei showers and feels forlorn. She has so many questions about her mother's past and no answers.

Someone wakes her at one o'clock in the morning. Her father and his aunt are talking about the abandoned babies. He learns that his wife was warned of the Japanese arrival and fled with her daughters. His aunt does not understand how she could give up the twin babies. She asks their names. Her father replies Chwun Yu and Chwun Hwa, meaning Spring Rain and Spring Flower. Jing-Mei asks what her mother's name, Suyuan, means. Her father replies that it means "Long Cherished Wish" in Chinese. It

can be written to mean "Never Forgotten" or "Long Held Grudge". Jing-Mei means "something special, without impurities" and "pure essence". Jing-Mei decides it means she was her mother's long-cherished wish. She was the younger sister who was supposed to be the essence of the others. Jing-Mei asks her father why her mother abandoned the babies on the road. First, her dad explains that there was no shame in it. Then he begins to talk.

Her mother flees Kwelin and walks for several days to find a main road. She wants to catch a ride to Chungking, where he husband is stationed. She has money and jewelry sewn into her dress lining. The roads are full of people and vehicles, but nobody stops. Her mother begins to have dysentery pains. Her shoulders ache from carrying the babies, and blisters grow on her palms from holding two leather suitcases. The blisters burst and bleed, so she leaves the suitcases behind. She drops her bags of food and walks for many miles, singing to the girls, and becomes delirious with pain and fever. She slumps to the ground and cannot walk another step. She knows she will die of her sickness, from thirst, starvation, or from the Japanese behind her. She takes the babies out of their slings. She tries to get people to take them. No one does. Finally, she stuffs money and jewelry under the babies' shirts and leaves a picture of her family and a note for someone to take care of the babies and bring them to the Li family in Shanghai when it is safe. She walks down the road to find them some food. She is stumbling and crying. She does not remember how far she walks and wakes in the back of a truck with other sick people, all moaning. She sees the face of an American missionary lady talking to her in a language she does not know. Now she cannot go back for the babies.

She arrives in Chungking and learns her husband died two weeks before. Now she is delirious with madness and disease and has nothing. Auntie Syu Yen meets her in a hospital, lying on a cot, thin and unable to move. All she has left are clothes and hope. Her hair begins to fall out. An old peasant woman found the babies, sitting obediently near where their mother left them. The woman, Mei Ching, and her husband, Mei Han, live in a secret stone cave near Kweilin that they leave only to forage for food and valuables on the road. They are religious Muslims and raise the babies as their own children. The husband dies in 1952. Mei Ching decides to find the sisters' true family.

She finds the house in Shanghai mentioned in Jing-Mei's mother's note, but it is a factory. Nobody there knows what happened to the family whose house was there but burned down. June and Auntie Syu Yen search for the babies until 1947, when they leave for the United States. June Woo continues to write old friends in Shanghai and Kweilin, looking for the babies. The street names change, people die, and others move away. Finally, one of her friends sees the sisters shopping. They were two girls about the right age who look like June. She asks them their names, and they remember the names written on the back of the old photos.

Jing-Mei, now at the airport with her father and his family, is exhausted. They land in Shanghai, and her two sisters meet them at the airport. They look so very much like her mother. Jing-Mei realizes her family is Chinese, her blood. She finally understands. She and her sisters stand together crying. Her father takes a picture of the three of them

together. Together they all look like their mother, with her eyes and her mouth, open in surprise to see, at last, her long-cherished wish come true.

Part 4, Jing-Mei Woo, "A Pair of Tickets" Analysis

The reader learns much of June Woo's missing past as Jing-Mei and her seventy-two year old father, Canning Woo, visit surviving relatives in China and meet the grown abandoned babies, who did not have a bad a life after all. Jing-Mei learns that the babies were not exactly "abandoned" by June Wu, who would have returned for them had there been no intervening events. Physical places in China have changed. Relatives have aged. Street names have changed. After much talking and traveling together, the three sisters finally meet and are reunited, fulfilling June Woo's dream. Jing-Mei is beginning to understand the importance of her family's Chinese history and her ancestry. At least in one family, there is hope for a brighter future with increased family history and cultural understanding.

Characters

An-Mei Hsu

An-Mei empowers her daughter, Rose, to stand up for her rights. Having grown up fearful of the people around her and being accustomed to self-denial, An-Mei refuses to see her own daughter endure the same unhappiness. She turns her back on her own pain and experiences, and vows to raise her daughter differently than she was raised.

An-Mei's grandparents cared for her after banning her mother for becoming another man's concubine following the death of her husband. The grandparents warned An-Mei never to speak of her mother. To them, An-Mei's mother was a ghost-someone to be forgotten entirely. An-Mei obeyed and never asked about her. An-Mei came to know her mother, however, when she returned to be with An-Mei's grandmother as she was dying. An-Mei learned from her that honor for one's mother goes much deeper than the flesh and that when you Jose something you love, faith takes over.

An-Mei teaches her daughter the lessons she has learned from her own mother and from the loss of her son, Rose's brother. Rather than ignore Joss, one must pay attention to it and undo the expectation. When Rose complains to An-Mei that her marriage is falling apart and she can't do anything about it, An-Mei reminds Rose of her upbringing and tells her to speak up for her rights. Rose passes An-Mei's test by advising her husband that she will not sign the divorce papers and that her lawyer will contact him about her keeping the house.

Lindo Jong

Lindo Jong tries to instill in her daughter, Waverly, a sense of both obedience and self-worth She wants her daughter to have "American circumstances and Chinese character."

Lindo's parents promise her to her future husband, Tyan-Hu, when she is only two years old. While she sees him at various functions over the years, she does not actually go to live with him and his family until she is twelve. Always the obedient daughter, she does not question this arrangement. She recognizes immediately, however, the kind of husband Tyan-Hu will be and feels discouraged.

Lindo and Tyan-Hu marry when she turns sixteen. While they are unhappy with each other, they do not let his family know. In the meantime, Lindo devises a plan that will allow Tyan-Hu's family to release her without their losing face. Lindo pretends that she has a dream in which Tyan-Hu's ancestors tell her that their marriage is doomed; she uses existing facts to back up her story.

When she is free of the marriage, Lindo leaves for America, where she remarries and has three children. She decides that her children should live like Americans and should

not have to keep the Circumstances someone else gives them. While she believes that she has succeeded in teaching this idea to her daughter, Lindo thinks she has failed to teach her Chinese character She is surprised and satisfied, however, when Waverly demonstrates Chinese character that Lindo did not know she possessed.

Waverly Jong

Waverly Jong is the figure to whom Jing-Mei is always compared by her mother, Suyuan Woo. Waverly's mother, Lindo, and Suyuan were best friends when the girls were growing up but also tried to outdo each other when comparing their children's accomplishments Waverly continually gave her mother something to brag about. As a child, she was a national chess champion; as an adult, she is a successful tax attorney.

When Waverly was very young, her brother received a chess set as a Christmas gift. She quickly caught on to the game and was soon winning matches against everyone she played. Her mother taught her how to "bite back her tongue," a strategy for winning arguments that also helped her win chess games. By the time she was nine, Waverly was a national chess champion Her mother was so proud of her that she constantly boasted of her daughter's abilities, wanting people to know that she was Waverly's mother. Waverly hated her mother's bragging, and it soon became a point of contention between them.

Not only did Waverly despise her mother's bragging, she also hated that her mother tried to take credit for Waverly's talent. Lindo would tell people that she advised Waverly on the moves she made and that Waverly wasn't really smart, she just knew the tricks of the game. Finally, Waverly told her off-in public-saying that she knew nothing, that she should shut up. After that, it was a long time before Lindo spoke to Waverly, and she no longer encouraged her to play chess. When she and her mother did start talking, Waverly found that she could no longer play chess.

Remembering her mother's reaction to her public embarrassment, Waverly was afraid to let her meet her Caucasian fiancé, Rich. She did not want Rich to have to suffer the criticism she knew her mother was capable of giving without thought to his feelings. She knew the silent attacks her mother would make on Rich's character; she knew that her mother could put on a front while hiding her true emotions. She knew too well how her mother could hurt her by stabbing her in her weakest parts.

Waverly finally allows her mother to meet Rich and is not surprised by her reactions. What does surprise Waverly is that when she confronts her mother about the meeting, she learns something about herself. Not only has Waverly learned the art of invisible strength from her mother, but also she has inherited her "double-faced" approach to meeting new challenges, probably the secret to her success as an adult.

Rose Hsu Jordan

Rose Hsu Jordan, the daughter of An-Mei Hsu, marries Ted Jordan in defiance of their parents. Typically passive by nature, Rose takes charge by choosing to marry Ted, a non-Chinese. It is probably the most decisive action she has ever taken.

Ted balances her personality. Where she is weak, he bears the burden; where she is indecisive, he takes charge. Ted makes all the decisions in their married life until a professional mistake changes him. He then expects Rose to help him make the choices in their life together. When she can't change, he wants a divorce.

Rose begins to think about her mother's beliefs. Her mother had always had a firm belief in God until a family tragedy made her question God's wisdom. Her mother continues to believe, though, that a voice from above guides all people and that Rose needs to listen to that voice. When Rose had nightmares as a child, with an angry Mr. Chou telling her bad things, Rose's mother told her not to listen to him, to listen only to that voice above. She told Rose that listening to too many voices would cause her to bend when she should stand strong.

Rose remembers her mother's past advice and continues to listen to her now. Her mother tells her that she must speak up for her own rights when Ted asks for the divorce. Rose finally makes a decision on her own. When she does, she dreams of her mother and Mr. Chou smiling at her.

Lena St. Clair

Lena St. Clair grew up worrying about the mental health of her mother, Ying-Ying, who constantly battles paranoia and depression. While her father is English-Irish, Lena is more Chinese, having inherited many of her mother's Chinese traits-particularly her ability to see "with Chinese eyes." Lena could "see" the things her mother feared, but she kept them from her father by changing her mother's meanings in their translation to English.

Lena continually hoped that her mother would someday be well and that she and her mother could have the close relationship she saw in her dreams. Lena felt invisible and alone.

As an adult, Lena believes that her mother has always been able to see the terrible things that were going to happen to their family. Lena remembers that when she was eight, her mother had told her that she would marry a bad man. Now, she sees that her husband, Harold, might be the bad man her mother had envisioned.

While Lena and Harold had started out as equals in their relationship, Lena has discovered that their life together has become unbalanced. Harold has taken her business ideas and her money, yet has given little in return. He keeps a detailed accounting sheet and claims that they share everything equally. Lena, however, detects

an unfairness. Where is Harold's love? Why must their relationship be reduced to columns on a ledger? Feeling invisible again, Lena yearns for something that she cannot put into words.

Ying- Ying St. Clair

Ying- Ying, mother of Lena, experiences periods of depression and paranoia. She considers herself "lost" and attributes the cause of her mental illness to a ceremony she remembers attending as a four - year-old.

The Moon Festival ceremony gives people the opportunity to see the Moon Lady and secretly ask for a wish to be granted. Four-year-old Ying-Ying is being allowed to attend the event for the first time. She is warned, however, to behave and not to speak of her wish or it will be considered a selfish desire and will not be granted.

In the excitement of the celebration, Ying- Ying falls off the boat unnoticed and is lost. She encounters a dramatic production of the Moon Lady's arrival and believes the Moon Lady can grant her wish. When she hears the Moon Lady's sad story, she loses hope. Her despair deepens when she asks the Moon Lady that she be found, then sees that the Moon Lady is really only a man in disguise. YingYing's parents find her, but she feels such a sense of loss, she never believes that she is really their daughter. This sense of loss, loneliness, and despair stay with her for the rest of her life.

Ying-Ying marries a man whom she loves very much but who turns out to be abusive. In her pain, she aborts the son she is carrying. Ying-Ying later remarries but is never able to recover from the losses she has endured. She feels she has lost her chi, or spirit.

Only when Ying-Ying sees the pain in Lena's marriage does she decide to face her past and try to recover her chi. She symbolically breaks a table in her daughter's house to summon her spirit so that she can give it to her daughter.

Jing-Mei Woo

Jing-Mei, daughter of Suyuan Woo, takes her mother's place in the Joy Luck Club when her mother dies. Jing-Mei searches for her own identity, lacks confidence, and wonders how she will fill her mother's shoes.

From the time she was a child, Jing-Mei has always lived in someone else's shadow. Her mother continually compared her to other people's children, particularly Lindo Jong's daughter, Waverly. Suyuan felt that Jing-Mei could do anything that she wanted to. She gave Jing-Mei intelligence tests and piano lessons, but Jing-Mei never measured up to her mother's expectations. Jing-Mei always felt that she was disappointing her mother.

As she got older, Jing-Mei still failed to succeed at the things her mother wanted her to do. She was less than a straight-A student. She was accepted at only an average

college, from which she dropped out Jing-Mei eventually became a freelance writer, even though her mother wanted her to earn a doctorate Jing-Mei suffers one final insult when Waverly informs her that the freelance work Jing-Mei submitted to Waverly's tax firm was not accepted.

Jing-Mei had always felt uncomfortable with her mother's Chinese ways. When Suyuan attended the Joy Luck Club in her Chinese dresses, Jing-Mei was embarrassed. She viewed the Joy Luck Club itself as a "shameful Chinese custom." Jing-Mei's view changes, however, when she joins the Joy Luck Club. The realization that these Chinese women are depending on their daughters to keep their customs alive motivates her to reawaken her sleeping Chinese heritage. At last she has a purpose. She finds a new self-respect, confidence, and peace when she returns to China to meet with her half-sisters.

June Woo

See Jing-Mei Woo

Suyuan Woo

Suyuan Woo does not tell her own story in *The Joy Luck Club* Recently deceased when the story begins, Suyuan speaks through her daughter, Jing-Mei Because Suyuan started the Joy Luck Club, her story provides the foundation for the novel.

Suyuan started the original Joy Luck Club in Kweilin, China, during the second Japanese invasion (the Second Sino-Japanese War) right before World War II. She and other refugees had come to Kweilin seeking safety from the Japanese troops. The crowding, constant bombing, and fear immobilized everyone. Suyuan needed something to help her keep her faith. She decided to invite a group of women to play mahjong. They met weekly to play, raise money, and eat special foods. While other people criticized their extravagance, the women forgot their troubles for a short time and enjoyed one another's company. They met to share their desire to be lucky in life. Their hope for luck was their joy. Thus, the weekly meetings became known as the Joy Luck Club.

Suyuan, however, experienced great tragedy when news of the approaching troops forced her to leave for Chungking. Having no other way to travel, she fled on foot, pushing a wheelbarrow and carrying her infant twin daughters in slings on her shoulders Suyuan grew more weary the farther she traveled. She had to start leaving her possessions along the way. Finally, when she could go no further, she left the babies along the road, too, with a note telling their names and asking that they be cared for. When she arrived in Chungking, delirious with dysentery and grief, she found that her husband had died two weeks before

The San Francisco version of the Joy Luck Club originated in 1949, when Suyuan and her second husband arrived from China. The couple met other Chinese couples at

church functions they attended to help get acclimated to their new culture. Knowing the situations from which they had all come, Suyuan felt she and her recent acquaintances needed each others' understanding and companionship. She started the Joy Luck Club so that the new friends could have joy in their hope to be lucky in this unfamiliar land.

Suyuan's friends in the Joy Luck Club honor her by telling her daughter the complete story. They offer Jing-Mei money to travel to China to meet her half-sisters, who were located just after Suyuan's death Suyuan's life, therefore, comes full circle.

Themes

Choices and Consequences

The Joy Luck Club presents the stories of four Chinese immigrant women and their American born daughters. All of their lives, the Chinese mothers in *The Joy Luck Club* have struggled to make their own decisions and establish their own identities in a culture where obedience and conformity are expected. For example, when Suyuan Woo is a refugee during the Japanese invasion, she decides that she will not be a passive victim and will choose her own happiness. She forms the Joy Luck Club to provide a distraction for herself and her friends. Thus, in a situation where there appears to be no room for disobedience, Suyuan creates an identity that she and her friends assume in order to survive. The continuation of the club in the United States helps Suyuan and her friends redefine themselves in a new culture.

The mothers want their daughters to take charge of their own lives, too. Yet the mothers find it difficult to voice their concerns and be open enough about their personal experiences to make their advice valid with their daughters Ying-Ying St. Clair, however, sees her daughter Lena's unhappiness in her marriage and courageously faces her own bad memories to help Lena make the decisions she needs to make to be free.

Identity

The American-born daughters have their own choices to make and their own identities to establish. While their mothers want Chinese obedience from their daughters, they do not want their daughters to be too passive. The Chinese mothers want their daughters to have American-like strength. The daughters work to find compromises their mothers can accept. Rose Hsu Jordan, for example, overcomes her passivity with the help of her grandmother's story and stands up to a husband who is trying to take everything from her.

Throughout the stories presented in *The Joy Luck Club* runs the common thread of mother-daughter connectedness and its influence on a daughter's identity formation. Tan's portrayal of the intense relationships between and among her characters shows the strength of the ties that bind culture and generation. These firmly undergird the choices the characters make and the identities they shape as a result of their decisions.

Culture Clash

The American-born daughters are ambivalent about their Chinese background. While they eat Chinese foods and celebrate Chinese traditions, they want their Chinese heritage to remain at home. They make American choices when they are in public and cringe in embarrassment when their mothers speak in their broken English. Worst of all,

the American daughters do not see the importance of "joy luck"; to them, it is not even a word. They regard the Joy Luck Club as a "shameful Chinese custom".

The Chinese mothers fear the end of Chinese tradition in their families Their American-born daughters hide their Chinese heritage and think like Americans. While the Chinese mothers want their daughters to enjoy the benefits of being Americans, they do not want them to forget their roots. They hope that their daughters will develop strong American characters yet keep positive Chinese beliefs alive. The mothers need the daughters to understand the significance of the Joy Luck Club and all that it represents.

The clash of adolescence with the American and Chinese cultures leaves the Chinese mothers without hope for their daughters' Chinese futures. Yet, time works its magic; the daughters grow up, and the mothers' dreams prevail. The Joy Luck Club survives with a daughter, Jing-Mei, continuing the tradition in place of her deceased mother, Suyuan Woo. Broken ties mend, and hope for happiness despite misfortune (what the Chinese call "Joy luck") lives.

Style

Structure

In presenting the stories of four Chinese immigrant women and their American-born daughters in *The Joy Luck Club,* Tan uses "cradling," a for mal literary device that can be thought of as telling a story within a story, or nesting. In other words, Tan embeds the daughters' stories within the mothers' narratives. *The Joy Luck Club* is divided into four main segments that contain sixteen stories. The first and last sections tell eight stories-two for each mother-while the middle two sections each tell a story for each of the four daughters. The entire novel revolves primarily around the stories of Suyuan Woo and her daughter, Jing-Mei ("June"). Jing-Mei takes her mother's place in the Joy Luck Club, a club her mother created when she was in China and that she continued for her Chinese friends in America Jing-Mei learns from her "aunties," the women who are members of the club, that they will fund her trip to China to meet with her "lost" sisters.

Setting

The Joy Luck Club is set in two places. The mothers' stories take place mostly in pre-World War II China, Just before and during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945). The daughters' stories occur primarily in contemporary San Francisco, although June does visit contemporary China in the final section. These differing settings help emphasize the culture clash experienced by many of the novel's characters.

Point of View and Narration

Tan uses several first-person narrators in the novel, narrators who directly speak to the reader by using "I said" /"I did" to express events. Because three of the mothers and all of the daughters tell their own stories, the narrative shifts from a mother's point of view to a daughter's point of view. Except for Suyuan Woo, each mother speaks for herself in the first and final sections of the book; the daughters each speak for themselves in the second and third sections of the book. Since Suyuan has already died when the story opens, Jing-Mei speaks for her

Conflict

Conflicts arise between each mother and her daughter as the result of generational and cultural differences. The mothers and daughters experience the typical difficulties in understanding each others' viewpoints. Daughters try to establish their personal identities by being like their mothers, yet different in response to contemporary pressures. These generational differences are compounded by the mothers' culture-driven views of tradition The mothers want their daughters to be Americanized, yet they also want their daughters to honor the Chinese way of life. In Asian culture, women's

identities are more often defined by their relationships to others than by their occupational success, as scholar Tracy Robinson has observed. For example, while Waverly Jong is different enough from her mother to have established herself as a successful tax attorney, she is enough like her mother that she worries that her mother will not accept her Caucasian fiancé. The mothers' basic concern is that their daughters will turn their backs on their culture and their Chinese heritage will be forgotten.

Symbols

Suyuan Woo's stories tell about a woman whose allegiances were divided between her American daughter and the Chinese daughters she had lost. Suyuan's Chinese and American souls are resurrected and reunited when the daughters meet at the end of the novel. The daughters' names symbolize this rebirth and reunion. Chwun Yu (Spring Rain), Chwun Hwa (Spring Flower), and Jing-Mei (June) represent the renewing force that is connected to the seasons of spring and summer. Even Suyuan's name, meaning Long-Cherished Wish, alludes to the resolution of the conflicts she and Jing-Mei shared. Finally, the Chinese interpretation of Jing-Mei's name, "pure essence and best quality," represents Jing-Mei's learning to appreciate and coming to terms with her Chinese heritage.

Historical Context

Historical China

While *The Jay Luck Club* was published in 1989, it is set in pre-World War II China and con temporary San Francisco. The two settings strengthen the contrast between the cultures that Tan depicts through her characters and their relationships. Pre-World War II China was a country heavily embroiled in conflict San Francisco, however, offered freedom and peace. In writing the novel, Tan wanted to portray not only the importance of mother/daughter relationships but also the ' dignity of the Chinese people.

China's history covers years of tradition, yet also decades of change. While the Chinese people consistently honor the personal qualities of dignity, respect, self-control, and obedience, they have not so continually pledged allegiance to their leaders. The first documented Chinese civilization was the Shang dynasty (c. 1523-c. 1027 BC). Various dynasties ruled over the years, ending with the Manchu dynasty in 1912. The dynasties saw peace, expansion, and technological and artistic achievement as well as warfare and chaos. Foreign intervention, particularly by Japan. created instability in the country, and internal struggles often prevented the Chinese from uniting. The area of Manchuria in northeast China, while legally belonging to China, had many Japanese investments such as railways and as such was under the control of the Japanese. This led to anti-Manchu sentiment and an eventual revolution. After civil war and additional strife, the Nationalists and Communists fought the Japanese in the second Sino-Japanese War and won when Japan was defeated by the Allies of World War II in 1945.

It is just before this victory that the mothers' stories start. Japanese aggression led to a foreign military presence on Chinese soil, and Suyuan's story in particular details the flight from the invading Japanese that was made by many Chinese. After World War II, with Japan preoccupied in recovering from their defeat, China once again became embroiled in a civil war between the Nationalists, who had been in power for several years, and the Communists, who wished to establish a new form of government. The civil war ended in 1949 with the formation of the People's Republic of China, and the Communists have held power in China since then.

Chinese Immigration to America

After the United States abolished slavery after the Civil War, freeing many of the African Americans who had worked in fields and farms, there arose a great need for manual laborers migrants from China filled a large part of this need, especially in the West, where rapid expansion required people to build railroads and towns Although greatly outnumbered by white immigrants from European nations, the number of Chinese arriving in America alarmed white settlers in the West. In 1882 Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which prohibited the immigration of Chinese laborers to the United States. Although there were less than 300,000 total Asian Immigrants to the U S.

in the years between 1880 and 1909, immigration restrictions on Chinese and other Asians were tightened in 1902 and again in 1917. These laws were repealed in 1943, and in 1965 Congress passed a law which abolished immigration quotas based on national origin. In the 1980s and 1990s, China has placed in the top ten countries sending legal immigrants to the U.S. (illegal immigration is a growing problem), with almost 39,000 immigrants admitted in 1992.

Chinese immigrants often faced considerable prejudice in their new country. In the early part of the century, Chinese immigrant children attended segregated schools in the "Chinatowns" where they lived. During World War II, when Japanese Americans faced hostility and internment because of Japan's involvement in the war, Chinese Americans also encountered prejudice from people who mistook them for Japanese, although they were not deprived of property by the government. This struggle for acceptance is reflected in the novel as both mothers and daughters wish to excel in "American" society. Just as the United States has learned to value contributions of Americans of various backgrounds, the daughters in *The Joy Luck Club* learn to value their own Chinese heritage.

Critical Overview

Both critics and the reading public loved *The Joy Luck Club* from the minute it came off the press in 1989. The book successfully crosses cultures and joins separate generations. An indication of the book's appeal is its translation into seventeen languages and its place on the *New York Times* bestseller list for nine months.

Literary experts appreciate Tan's skill in storytelling. They feel that she knows what makes a good story and that she handles dialogue well. In addition, they have commented that she aptly portrays the universal life cycles of life and death, separation and reunion, uncertainty and assurance. Her ability to empathize with her characters and her subject matter, observers note, makes her stories real. Readers of all ages, genders, and cultures can appreciate her insight and honesty.

Reviewers have referred to the common sense with which Tan writes about Chinese culture. Tan explores areas of Chinese life that most other writers have not attempted. Many critics note that this " novel, as well as others Tan has written, stimulates cross-culture appreciation. Readers of all cultures are able to be objective about their own predicaments while at the same time making connections between themselves and Tan's Chinese characters.

In general, Tan's treatment of the mother/ daughter relationship and her understanding of her characters' ambivalence about their Chinese backgrounds provide an "intricate tapestry" that "alters the way we understand the world and ourselves, that transcends topicality," according to Michael Dorris in the *Detroit News.* Experts recognized Tan's talent, selecting her as a finalist in 1989 for the National Book Award for Fiction and nominating her for the National Book Critics Circle Award. She received not only the Bay Area Book

Reviewers Award and the Commonwealth Club Gold Award, but also $1.23 million from Vintage for paperback rights, the book was also made into a popular film in 1993.

It is no wonder that Tan has sold over three million copies of *The Joy Luck Club.* As Dorris concluded, it is "the real thing."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

Henrickson is an instructor of English at Rock Valley College in Rockford, Illinois. In the following essay, the critic examines the popularity of The Joy Luck Club *and explores how Tan uses various narrative techniques to demonstrate the mother-daughter differences and tensions in the novel.*

Published in 1989, Amy Tan's first novel, *The Joy Luck Club,* remained nine months on the *New York Times* best-seller list. The book was considered a sensation and its success has not yet been duplicated by any other work of Asian American literature. The film adaptation of *The Joy Luck Club,* directed by Chinese American director Wayne Wang, was enthusiastically received as well. Though highly lauded, even Tan's later works *The Kitchen God's Wife* (1991), *The Moon Lady* (1992)-a children's story based on an episode from *The Joy Luck Club,* and most recently, *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), have not matched the legendary stature of Tan's first novel.

The success of *The Joy Luck Club,* according to Sao-Ling Cynthia Wong, is due in part to its "persistent allure of Orientalism." Other literary critics have attributed the author's achievements to Tan's excellent treatment of a prevalent theme in ethnic American literature: mother/daughter relationships. While most mother/daughter texts portray the daughter's struggles for identity, what distinguishes Tan's text from other ethnic novels, as Maria Heung points out, is the "foregrounding of the voices of mothers as well as of daughters." An analysis of Amy Tan's narrative techniques will explain how Tan brings the mothers' voices to the foreground.

The first narrative technique readers will notice is Tan's use of multiple points of View to narrate the stories, sixteen interlocking tales told from the viewpoints of four Chinese immigrant women and their four American-born daughters. (One of the mothers, Suyuan Woo, is recently deceased, so her story is told through her daughter, Jing-Mei (June) Woo.

Tan's technique is relatively rare in literature. What is even more unusual is the portion of stories told from the mothers' points of view. The novel is divided into four parts. The mothers' stories constitute the first and fourth parts of the novel with the second and third parts told by their daughters. In other words, the mothers tell half of the stones in the novel.

Furthermore, the mothers are all depicted as strong and determined women who play significant roles in the daughters' stories. For example, Waverly Jong's stones portray her mother's power over her, a power so great that Waverly loses her ability to win chess tournaments after she becomes angry at her mother in the marketplace. Lena St. Clair remembers her mother's "mysterious ability to see things before they happen." Rose Hsu Jordan's mother wants her to fight her divorce And Jing-Mei Woo remembers her mother's high expectations of .her becoming a child prodigy on the piano The presence of such significant mothers is one way *The Joy Luck Club* distinguishes itself from other mother/daughter texts.

Because of their significant presences, the mothers reinforce Tan's portrayal of tension existing in the intricate relationships between mothers and daughters. Gloria Shen notes that the Joy Luck Club "mothers are possessively trying to hold onto their daughters, and the daughters are battling to get away from their mothers." Lindo Jong may be the most possessive and powerful of the mothers. In both stones narrated by her daughter, Lindo often hovers over Waverly's shoulders as she practices chess; gives Waverly instructions such as "Next time win more, lose less"; takes credit for Waverly's victories; and brags about Waverly in the marketplace. Finally, Waverly, not able to bear her mother's boasts, says, "I wish you wouldn't do that, telling everybody I'm your daughter." The tension between mother and daughter then erupts into Lindo's prophecy of Waverly's future failures at chess. Lindo's prophecy is fulfilled; Waverly eventually gives up chess at fourteen. Twenty years later, Lindo Jong's power over Waverly nearly inhibits Waverly from reporting her forthcoming second marriage for fear of Lindo's disapproval However, the daughter's battle song about getting away from her mother has a positive finale. Waverly's narrative about the conflict between her and Lindo end with Lindo's acceptance of Waverly's fiancé.

The mothers' overbearing presences in their daughters' stones are not meant to portray the mothers negatively. Almost all of the mothers' stories, in the first and fourth parts of the novel, begin with the mothers' concerns about the well-being of their daughters. In "The Red Candle," Lindo Jong addresses her story to Waverly: "It's too late to change you, but I'm telling you this because I worry about your baby." Ying-Ying St. Clair explains why she must tell her story to her daughter Lena: "All her life, I have watched her as though from another shore. And now I must tell her everything about my past. It is the only way to penetrate her skin and pull her to where she can be saved." The telling and the stories themselves demonstrate the mothers' efforts to ensure better understanding between their daughters and themselves.

Both mothers and daughters try hard to communicate with each other, but sometimes misunderstandings result from linguistic differences. As Victoria Chen points out, "The lack of shared languages and cultural logic remains a central theme throughout all the narratives in Tan's book." For example, Jing-Mei Woo laments, "My mother and I never really understood one another. We translate each other's meanings and I seemed to hear less than what she said, while my mother heard more [than what I said]."

Tan's shrewd ear for dialogue captures the linguistic differences well. The mothers' English is undoubtedly imperfect. Subjects, articles, and prepositions are often missing. Verbs often do not agree with nouns. After, for instance, Waverly becomes angry at Lindo Jong for bragging about her at the marketplace, Lindo says, "So shame be with mother? Embarrass you be my daughter?" Waverly desperately tries to explain, "That's not what I meant. That's not what I say." Lindo persists, "What you say?" Further communication at this point is impossible. Mother and daughter do not talk to each other for several days after the incident. In another example, Ying- Ying St. Clair's uneasiness with the American way of life manifests itself in the way she pronounces the profession of her daughter and son-in-law: "It is an ugly word. Arty-tecky." Similarly, An-Mei Hsu cannot pronounce "psychiatrist" correctly: "Why can you talk about this with a psycheatric and not with mother?"

As we have seen, the linguistic differences between mother and daughter are a feature of Tan's narrative technique. This language difference not only explains communication problems but also marks the cultural identity of these two generations of women. The American daughters are adapted to the customs and language of the new country; the mothers still dwell in those of China. Tan gives readers an allegory of the cultural differences between mother and daughter in the prologue to the first part of the novel, "Feather from a Thousand Li Away." The old woman in the prologue dreamt that in America she would make her daughter "speak only perfect American English." But now that the old woman's wish is fulfilled -the daughter "grew up speaking only English and swallowing more Coca-Cola than sorrow"-the old woman cannot communicate with her daughter. She waits, "year after year," for the day she can tell her daughter "in perfect American English" about a swan she brought from China with her and her good intentions. None of the Joy Luck Club mothers speaks perfect English, so they are not able to communicate their good intentions in a way that the daughters will understand.

. Despite linguistic and cultural differences, the mothers are eventually able to help their daughters embrace their racial identity. Before Jing-Mei's trip to China, she denies her Chinese heritage. She remembers Suyuan Woo telling her, "Once you are born Chinese, you cannot help but feel and think Chinese." Whenever her mother says this, Jing-Mei sees herself "transforming like a werewolf" But after Suyuan's death, the rest of the Joy Luck Club mothers insist that Jing- Mei visit her half sisters in China. It is during this visit that Jing-Mel comes to terms with her true identity: "[M]y mother was right. I am becoming Chinese." Moreover, Jing Mei has become her mother by taking over her mother's place at the mahjong table, "on the East [side of the table], where things begin." Her trip to China culminates in her realization that both her mother and China are in her blood.

'In sum, through first-person narratives and linguistic differences, Tan brings the mothers to the foreground. In other words, the heroines of *The Joy Luck Club* are the mothers. While most mothers in ethnic American literature sit silently in the background, Tan's Joy Luck Club mothers speak assertively. Disagreeing with popular assumptions that the Chinese are "discreet and modest," Amy Tan, in her article, "The Language of Discretion,"_ urges us to reject such stereotypical views. Tan observes that "the more emphatic outbursts always spilled over into Chinese." Indeed, when asked why Chinese people commit torture, Lindo Jong, a strong, assertive Joy Luck Club mother, replies simply and emphatically, "Chinese people do many things. Chinese people do business, do medicine, do painting. Not lazy like American people We do torture Best torture."

Source: Shu-Huei Henrickson, in an essay for *Novels for Students,* Gale, 1997

Critical Essay #2

In her assessment of The Joy Luck Club, *which she calls a "stunningly devotional tour de force,* " *American fiction and nonfiction writer Carolyn See determines that the novel "is about the way the past distances itself away from the present." Its protagonists, See notes, are looking for their pasts- the older women for the pasts they have lost, the younger starving "for a past they can never fully understand.* "

The only negative thing I could ever say about this book is that I'll never again be able to read it for the first time. *The Joy Luck Club* is so powerful, so full of magic, that by the end of the second paragraph, your heart catches; by the end of the first page, tears blur your vision, and one-third of the way down on Page 26, you know you won't be doing anything of importance until you have finished this novel.

The main narrative here is taken up by Jing-Mei Woo, a first-generation American-Chinese woman whose whole tone is tuned to the fact that she is, essentially, lost. She's swimming upstream in American culture, doing the best she can, but she's gone through several jobs, she's gotten into the habit of settling for less than she should, and her own Chinese mother appears to be bitterly disappointed in her. Then, her mother dies, and Jing-Mei is asked by three old family friends to take her mother's place at their mah-jongg table, at a social club they've been carrying on in San Francisco for the last 40 years.

Here is Jing-Mei (who goes by the name of June, now), recording her first night as a bona-fide member: "The Joy Luck Aunties are all wearing slacks, bright print blouses, and different versions of sturdy walking shoes. We are all seated around the dining room table under a lamp that looks like a Spanish candelabra. Uncle George puts on his bifocals and starts the meeting by reading the minutes. Our capital account is $24,825, or about $6,206 a couple, $3,103 a person. We sold Subaru for a loss at six and three quarters. We bought a hundred shares of Smith International at seven. Our thanks to Lindo and Tinn Jong for the goodies. The red bean soup was especially delicious ...."'

Not the stuff of high adventure. But the original Joy Luck Club was started in Chungking during the last of World War II by Jing-Mei's mother when she was a young widow, literally setting herself and her friends the task of creating joy and luck out of unimaginable catastrophe: "What was worse, we asked among ourselves, to sit and wait for our own deaths With proper somber faces? or to choose our own happiness? We decided to hold parties and pretend each week had become the new year. Each week we could forget past wrongs done to us. We weren't allowed to dunk a bad thought. We feasted, we laughed, we played games, lost and won, we told the best stories., And each week, we could hope to be lucky."

The reason that the men in the present Joy Luck Club buy stock now is so that every member can feel lucky and have some joy, because by this time it has become unacceptable to lose anything more. The four women who have consoled themselves in America for 40 years with friendship, mah-jongg and stories, have already lived lives

that are, again, unimaginable. On top of all their other terrors and adversities, their pasts have been *lost,* as if these horrors have taken place not just in another country but on another planet. Their deepest wish is to pass their knowledge, their tales, on to their children, especially to their daughters, but those young women are undergoing a slow death of their own; drowning in American culture at the same time they starve for a past they can never fully understand.

The author leavens this *Angst* with Marx brothers humor, making you laugh, literally, even as you cry. What can you *do* with a Chinese couple who name their four boys Matthew, Mark, Luke *and* Bing? What can you tell a mother who thinks she's getting "so-so security" from the government, or (as Jing-Mei remembers her own mother deep in

indignation about an irate neighbor who believes that she's killed his cat) "'... That man, he raise his hand like this, show me his ugly fist and call me worst Fukien landlady. I not from Fukien. Hunh! He know nothing!"'

But the understandings don't come merely from vagaries of language. *The Joy Luck Club* is about the way the past distances itself from the present as speedily as a disappearing star on a *Star Trek* rerun. It's gone, gone, and yet the past holds the only keys to meaning in every life examined here. On her first night at the mah-jongg table, her mother's friends revealed to Jing-Mei that she has two half-sisters still in China, and that the Joy Luck ladies have saved money so that she, Jing-Mei, can go home to tell them about their mother. "'What can I tell them about my mother?' " Jing-Mei blurts. "'I don't know anything "' But the book is dedicated by the author: *"To my mother and the memory of her mother. You asked me once what I would remember. This, and much more."* What results from this stunningly devotional tour de force is an entrance into eight separate lives: four women whose "real" life occurred in China, in another world in another *mind;* and four of their daughters, themselves grown women now. To say they are all products of conflicting value systems is heavy-handed inaccuracy, wimpy paraphrase.

Here, for instance, is Eurasian Lena St. Clair, Ying-ying's daughter, translating her mother's Chinese to her Caucasian father, after Ying-ying has given birth to her stillborn baby brother. Lena's mother cries out "...Then this baby, maybe he heard us, his large head seemed to fill with hot air and rise up from the table. The head turned to one side it looked right through me. I knew he could see everything inside me. How I had given no thought to killing my other son!" Lena translates to her sad, ignorant father: "...She thinks we must all think very hard about having another baby... And she thinks we should leave now and go have dinner."

And, 15 or so years later, it seems inevitable that Lena should end up With a Hungarian "rice husband" (so named for all those Chinese "rice Christians" who hung around missionaries in China simply so they could get a square meal). In the name of feminism and right thinking, this husband is taking Lena for every cent she's got, but she's so demoralized, so "out of balance" in the Chinese sense, that she can't do a thing about it.

If, so far, I haven't done justice to this book, that's because you can't turn a poem into prose, or explain magic, without destroying the magic, destroying the poem One can only mention scraps' The four mothers come from different parts of (and times in) China, so for instance, the author allows us to see one peasant mother, Lindo Jong, who remembers she was *not* worthless: "I looked and smelled like a precious bun cake, sweet with a good clean color." Lindo, betrothed at 2, wangles her way out of a horrible marriage with courage and wit. But another mah-jongg lady, An-mei, has watched her own mother lose her honor and "face" by becoming third concubine to a hideous merchant in Tiensing. An-mei's mother times her suicide in such a way that her ghost can come back to haunt the house on New Year's Day, thus insuring a good future for her child, who, in turn, comes to America, has a daughter, Rose, who somehow rustles up the courage to defy an American husband who's trying to swindle her....

But the stories of the four mothers, the four daughters, are not really the point here. *The Joy Luck Club* is dazzling because of the *worlds* it gives us: When Lindo, old now, says, "'Feel my bracelets. They must be 24 carats, pure inside and out,' " if you have any sense at all, you let yourself be led down a garden path into a whole other place, where a little girl in San Francisco becomes chess champion at age 6 by using her mother's "invisible strength," where a woman who comes from the richest family in Wushi (with boxes of jade in every room holding Just the right amount of cigarettes) is given the name of Betty by her dopey American husband, who doesn't know she's already "dead," a "ghost ..."

At the perimeters of all these stories are all the men, buying and trading in this Mountain of Gold, selling Subaru at a loss, each one of them with his own story that has yet to be told. *The Joy Luck Club* has the disconcerting effect of making you look at everyone in your own life with the-however fleeting-knowledge that they are locked in the spaceships of their own amazing stories. Only magicians of language like Amy Tan hold the imaginative keys to the isolating capsules. Which is why we have novels and novelists in the first place.

Source: Carolyn See, "Drowning in America, Starving for China," in *Los Angeles Times Book Review,* March 12, 1989, pp. 1, 11.

Critical Essay #3

Critic Orville Schell is recognized as an authority on China In his review of The Joy Luck Club, *he provides some background on both the Chinese emigrants who came to America in what he calls the "great Chinese diaspora" and their children who were raised in the United States. In addition, he notes that "it is out of [the] experience of being caught between countries and cultures that writers such as ... Amy Tan have begun to create what is, in effect, a new genre of American fiction"*

In 1949, when the Red Army marched into Beijing, America's "special relationship" with China abruptly ended, and so hostile did our two countries become toward each other that people on both sides of the widening divide seemed to lose the ability even to Imagine reconciliation.

Apart from the international crises, and even wars, there was another consequence, which, although more subtle, was equally tragic. Those millions of emigrants who were part of the great Chinese diaspora-beginning in the middle of the 19th century when indentured laborers went to California, and ending in the 1950's when millions of refugees fled Communism-were left almost completely cut off from their homeland. While the members of the older generation who had grown up in China before Mao Zedong were at least able to bring a sustaining fund of memory with them into exile, the younger generation was denied even this slender means of connection to the ancestral homeland. Seeing old China as hopelessly backward, and contemporary China as besmirched by Communism, many in this new generation of Chinese-Americans wanted nothing more than to distance themselves as far as possible from the *zuguo,* or motherland.

But, unlike the children of European emigrants, they had obviously Oriental features, which made it difficult for them to lose themselves in the American melting pot. Living in the confinement of Chinatowns with parents who spoke broken English ("tear and wear on car," "college drop-off') and who clung to the old Chinese way, they felt an indelible sense of otherness that weighed heavily on them as they tried to make their way into middle-class American life.

When political barriers began to fall in the 1970's, older emigrants welcomed the chance to end their long and agonizing exiles. But their sons and daughters looked with a deep ambivalence on the idea of having to awaken a dormant Chinese side in themselves. And so, as the exterior world went about recognizing China, re-establishing diplomatic relations and initiating trade and cultural exchanges, these young Chinese-Americans found themselves wrestling with a very different and infinitely more complicated interior problem: how to recognize a country to which they were inextricably bound by heritage, but to which they had never been. It is out of this experience of being caught between countries and cultures that writers such as Maxine Hong Kingston and now Amy Tan have begun to create what is, in effect, a new genre of American fiction.

Born in Oakland, Calif, in 1952 to a father educated as an engineer in Beijing and a mother raised in a well-to-do Shanghai family, Amy Tan grew up in an American world that was utterly remote from the childhood world of her parents. In *The Joy Luck Club,* her first novel, short-story-like vignettes alternate back and forth between the lives of four Chinese women in pre-1949 China and the lives of their American-born daughters in California. The book is a meditation on the divided nature of this emigrant life.

The members of the Joy Luck Club are four aging "aunties" who gather regularly in San Francisco to play mah-jongg, eat Chinese food and gossip about their children. When one of the women dies, her daughter, Jing-Mei (June) Woo, is drafted to sit in for her at the game. But she feels uncomfortably out of place in this unassimilated environment among older women who still wear "funny Chinese dresses with stiff stand-up collars and blooming branches of embroidered silk sewn over their breasts,'" and who meet in one another's houses, where "too many once fragrant smells" from Chinese cooking have been "compressed onto a thin layer of invisible grease" The all-too-Chinese ritual of the Joy Luck Club has always impressed her as little more than a "shameful Chinese custom, like the secret gathering of the Ku Klux Klan or the tom-tom dances of TV Indians preparing for war."

She is made uncomfortable by the older generation's insistence on maintaining old customs and parochial habits, which she views as an impediment to breaking loose from her parents' cultural gravity. What she yearns for is to lead an independent, modem and American life free of the burden of her parents' Chineseness and the overweening hopes for their children that they can't even "begin to express in their fragile English.'"

"At first my mother tried to cultivate some hid den genius in me,'" recalls June "She did house work for an old retired piano teacher down the hall who gave me lessons and free use of a piano to practice on in exchange. When I failed to become a concert pianist, or even an accompanist for the church youth choir, she finally explained that I was late-blooming, like Einstein, who everyone thought was retarded until he discovered a bomb."

What she fears most of all is being dragged under by all that the Joy Luck Club symbolizes and transformed "like a werewolf, a mutant tag of DNA suddenly triggered, replicating itself insidiously into a *syndrome,* a cluster of telltale Chinese behaviors, all those things my mother did to embarrass me-haggling with store owners, pecking her mouth with a toothpick in public, being color-blind to the fact that lemon yellow and pale pink are not good combinations for winter clothes."

Part of June's struggle is to distance herself from the kind of helpless obedience that she recognizes in traditional Chinese women, and that she fears is manifesting itself in passivity in her own, American life. "I was raised the Chinese way: I was taught to desire nothing, to swallow other people's misery, to eat my own bitterness," says June's mother, spelling out the dangerously congenital nature of this Chinese female submissiveness. "And even though I taught my daughter the opposite, still she came out the same way! Maybe it is because she was born to me and she was born a girl. And I

was born to my mother and I was born a girl. All of us are like stairs, one step after another, going up and down, but all going the same way." With a weary fatalism that speaks for June as well, her sister Lena confesses her propensity .for "surrendering everything" to her American husband "without caring what I got in return."

However, after the death of June's mother a mixture of grief, guilt and curiosity, coupled with the relentless goading of the aunties of the Joy Luck Club, conspire to draw her into the very world from which she had so assiduously sought to distance herself. As the aunties talk over their mah-jongg game, even scolding June at one point for her evident lack of interest in her parents-"Not know your own mother?" asks one of them. "How can you say? Your mother is in your bones!"-June begins to see her mother's generation in a different light. Rather than viewing the aunties as expressionless aliens from an opaque and distant land who hound and embarrass their children, bit by bit she begins to understand the real dimensions of the "unspeakable tragedies they had left behind in China," and to sense how vulnerable they actually are in America. Slowly she begins to comprehend how, after all they have endured, they might well be anxious and concerned lest all cultural continuity between their pasts and their children's futures be lost.

"Because I remained quiet for so long now my daughter does not hear me," laments one auntie. "She sits by her fancy swimming pool and hears only her Sony Walkman, her cordless phone, her big, important husband asking her why they have charcoal and no lighter fluid." It comes as a revelation to June that "they are frightened. In me, they see their own daughters, just as ignorant, just as unmindful of all the truths and hopes they have brought to America. They see daughters who grow impatient when their mothers talk in Chinese, who think they are stupid when they explain things in fractured English. They see that joy and luck do not mean the same to their daughters, that to these closed American-born minds 'joy luck' is not a word, it does not exist. They see daughters who will bear grandchildren born without any connecting hope passed from generation to generation."

When the aunties finally inform June that the two half sisters her mother had been forced to abandon during the war miraculously survived and are now living in Shanghai, she is finally jolted into feeling the ways in which her mother is, in fact, still "in her bones." But it is not until she actually leaves with her aging father for a pilgrimage to China and a rendezvous with these half sisters that the reader feels the intensity of heat building up, heat we know will finally fuse her to her hitherto elusive ancestral home. And when at last she steps off the plane to embrace these errant relatives who have grown up on the other side of the divide that once separated China from the United States so absolutely, we feel as if a deep wound in the Chinese-American experience is finally being sutured back together again:

"'Mama, Mama,' we all murmur, as if she is among us."

"My sisters look at me proudly. . .. And now I also see what part of me is Chinese. It is so obvious. It is my family. It is in our blood. After all these years, it can finally be let go."

As Amy Tan tells us of her own homecoming on the jacket of *The Joy Luck Club,* it was just as her mother had told her it would be. "As soon as my feet touched China, I became Chinese."

Woven into the narrative of the lives of June and her mother are the stories of the three other Joy Luck aunties and their California-born daughters. Moving back and forth across the divide between the two generations, the two continents and the two cultures, we find ourselves transported across the Pacific Ocean from the upwardly mobile, design conscious, divorce-prone and Americanized world of the daughters in San Francisco to the World of China in the 20's and 30's, which seems more fantastic and dreamlike than real.

We come to see how the idea of China-nourished in America by nothing more than the memories of this vanished reality-has slowly metamorphosed in the minds of the aunties until their imaginations have so overtaken actual memory that reverie is all that is left to keep them in contact with the past. When we are suddenly Jerked by these sequences from the comforting familiarity of the United States into a scared child's memory of a dying grandmother in remote Ningbo, to remembrances of an arranged marriage with a murderous ending in Shansi or to recollections of a distraught woman abandoning her babies during wartime in Guizhou, we may readily feel bewildered and lost. Such abrupt transitions in time and space make it difficult to know who is who and what the complex web of generational Joy Luck Club relationships actually is.

But these *recherches* to old China are so beautifully Written that one should Just allow oneself to be borne along as if in a dream. In fact, as the story progresses, the reader begins to appreciate Just how these disjunctions work for, rather than against, the novel. While we as readers grope to know whose mother or grandmother is getting married in an unfamiliar ceremony, or why a concubine is committing suicide, we are ironically being reminded not just of the nightmarishness of being a woman in traditional China, but of the enormity of the confusing mental journey Chinese emigrants had to make. And most ironic, we are also reminded by these literary disjunctions that it is precisely this mental chasm that members of the younger generation must now recross in reverse in order to resolve themselves as whole Chinese-Americans; in *The Joy Luck Club* we get a suggestion of the attendant confusion they must expect to endure in order to get to the other side.

In the hands of a less talented writer such thematic material might easily have become overly didactic, and the characters might have seemed like cutouts from a Chinese-American knockoff of *Roots.* But in the hands of Amy Tan, who has a wonderful eye for what is telling, a fine ear for dialogue, a deep empathy for her subject matter and a guilelessly straightforward way of writing, they sing with a rare fidelity and beauty. She has written a jewel of a book.

Source: Orville Schell, "'Your Mother is in Your Bones'," in *The New York Times Book Review,* March 19, 1989, pp 3, 28,

Adaptations

An abridged sound recording of *The Joy Luck Club* is three hours long, available on 2 cassette tapes. Published in 1989 by Dove Audio, the book is read by its author, Amy Tan.

The movie version of *The Joy Luck Club* was released by Hollywood Pictures in 1993. While it does not include all the novel's stories, the film does a good job of presenting the most important scenes. The adaptation was written by Amy Tan and Ronald Bass and directed by Wayne Wang. Produced by noted filmmaker Oliver Stone, the film starred such actresses as Frances Nuyen, Rosalind Chao, Ming-Na Wen, and Lauren Tom It is rated R, available from Buena Vista Home Video.

Topics for Further Study

In an interview with Elaine Woo for the *Los Angeles Times* (March 12, 1989), Amy Tan said that her parents wanted their children "to have American circumstances and Chinese character." Write an essay that explains what her parents may have meant. Give specific examples to illustrate the "circumstances" and "character."

Trace the history of Chinese immigration into our country. When did the Chinese begin arriving in our country? For what reasons do the Chinese come here? Where do they choose to settle? Why do they settle there?

The Joy Luck Club was published in 1989. That same year saw a major uprising by Chinese university students in Beijing's Tiananmen Square. Investigate these 1989 demonstrations. Why were these students demonstrating? How did their country react? How did our country react? What were the effects on the Chinese who were studying in the United States at the time?

What was the history of the "Joy Luck Club?" How did it get its name? What was its significance? Why did the Chinese-American women feel the need to have a Joy Luck Club in America?

Compare and contrast pre-World War II China with China today. Discuss such aspects as living conditions, government, cultural aspects, education, etc.

Investigate the psychological aspects of either generational conflict or mother/daughter relationships. Write an essay that describes your own experiences in relation to what you've learned from your research.

Compare and Contrast

1930s and 1940s: The Japanese occupied China Full war erupted in 1945 in Beijing between the Chinese and Japanese. After the war, civil war breaks out and Communists take over the government in 1949, led by Mao Zedong.

Today: In 1989, a pro-democracy demonstration by Chinese university students IN Beijing's Tiananmen Square is put down by the Communist government While a 1993 constitutional revision does not reform the political system, it does call for the development of a socialist market economy.

1930s and 1940s: Various religions thrived IN China, particularly Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism.

Today: Once discouraged by Mao Zedong, religious practice has been revived to some degree In addition to the traditional religions-Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism-there are also smaller groups of Muslims, Catholics, and Protestants.

1930s and 1940s: After a period from 1882 to 1943 that restricted Chinese imm1gration to the U.S., a new 1943 law extends citizenship rights and permits an annual immigration of 105 Chinese. Many refugees from the Sino-Japanese war flee to the United States.

Today: National origin quotas were abolished in 1965, and the 1990 Immigration Act raised the immigrant quota and reorganized the preference system for entrance. Nearly 39,000 Chinese immigrants enter the US in 1992, while almost 30,000 obtain visas to study at American universities.

What Do I Read Next?

The Kitchen God's Wife, published in 1991 by Putnam of New York, was Tan's second novel. While many predicted that Tan would not be able to achieve the success of her first novel, this work received many accolades. It, too, deals with mother/daughter themes but also hints that male-centered social traditions hinder women's relationships with each other. Set in pre- and post-World War II China, the story portrays a woman's struggles in an abusive relationship. In writing this book, Tan tells a story that is very similar to her mother's.

In a children's picture book entitled *The Moon Lady,* Amy Tan extends the story from the chapter of the same title in her first novel Published in 1992 by Macmillan, *The Moon Lady* appeals to preteens as an introduction to Tan's themes and style *The Moon Lady* is about a seven-year-old girl who attends the autumn moon festival and encounters the lady who lives on the moon and grants secret wishes

Published in 1995, *The Hundred Secret Senses* by Amy Tan is a story about American-born Olivia and her Chinese half-sister, Kwan. When she comes to America to live with three-year-old Olivia, Kwan is eighteen and full of stories about having "yin eyes." She convinces Olivia that she can see and communicate with the dead. The story follows the girls through adulthood and tells of the strong bond that forms between them.

In her 1976 memoir *The Woman Warrior- Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts,* Maxine Hong Kingston, an American writer born of Chinese immigrant parents, blends myth and legend with history and autobiography growing out of stories that Kingston's mother told her as "lessons to grow up on," the book has several parallels with Tan's most famous novel, such as profiling Kingston's mother Brave Orchid and the author's description of the difficulties she encountered as a second-generation Chinese American.

The Intersections of Gender, Class, Race, and Culture' On Seeing Clients Whole is an article that discusses identity formation in terms of race, culture, and class. The article can be found in the *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development,* Vol. 21, No.1, January, 1993, pp. 50-58.

Further Study

Victoria Chen, "Chinese American Women, Language, and Moving Subjectivity,"' in *Women and Language,* Vol 18, no 1, 1995, pp. 3-7.

. Chen argues that Amy Tan and Maxme Hong Kingston use language differences between Chinese immigrants and their daughters to suggest "multiplicity and instability of cultural Identity for Chinese American women."

Manna Heung, "Daughter-Text-Mother-Text. Matrilineage in Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club,"* in *Feminist Studies,* Vol 19, no. 3, 1993, pp. 597-616.

Manna Heung argues that Tan's mother-daughter text is unique in its foregrounding of the mothers' voices.

A review of *The Hundred Secret Senses* in *Kirkus Reviews,* Volume 63, September 1, 1995, p. 1217.

The author again relies on female relationships in this story of a Chinese-American, her Chinese half-sister, and the girls' belief in ghosts and communication with the dead The reviewer feels that Tan spends too much time telling the story of Miss Banner but has positive words for the depiction of the Chinese sister's eccentricities and the bond between the two girls.

Gloria Shen, "Born of a Stranger- Mother-Daughter Relationships and Storytelling in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club,"* in *International Women's Writing. New Landscapes of Identity,* edited by Anne E Brown and Maryanne E. Gooze, Greenwood, 1995, pp. 233-44.

Gloria Shen explores "the narrative strategy employed in *The Joy Luck Club* and the relationships between the Chinese mothers and their American born daughters."

Amy Tan, "The Language of Discretion,"' in *The State of the Language,* edited by Christopher Ricks and Leonard Michaels, University of California Press, 1990, pp. 25-32.

Amy Tan argues that the Chinese are not as "discreet and modest" as most people believe and that the Chinese use their language emphatically and assertively.

Sao-Ling Cynthia Wong, "'Sugar Sisterhood'. Situating the Amy Tan Phenomenon,"' in *The Ethnic Canon: Histories, Institutions, and Interventions,* edited by David Liu Palumbo, University of Minnesota Press, 1995, pp 174-210 Sao-Ling Cynthia Wong puts *The Joy Luck Club* in its "sociohistorical" context to explain the novel's success in the book market.

Bibliography

Michael Dorris, "'Joy Luck Club' Hits the Literary Jackpot,"_ in *the Detroit News,* March 26, 1989, p. 2D.

Tracy Robinson, "The Intersections of Gender, Class, Race, and Culture On Seeing Clients Whole,"' in *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development,* Vol. 21, No.1, January, 1993, pp. 50-8.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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