Rules of the Game Study Guide

Rules of the Game by Amy Tan

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Introduction

In 1989, Amy Tan's first book, *The Joy Luck Club*, sold 275,000 hardcover copies in its first Putnam publication, paving the way for other first-time Asian-American writers. Although Tan has since written other critically acclaimed books, such as *The Kitchen God's Wife* and *The Hundred Secret Senses*, many still feel that Tan's first effort was her most important. *The Joy Luck Club* is hailed for its discussion of both Chinese Americans and mother-daughter relationships. Set in San Francisco in the 1980s, the majority of the book is told in flashback, and is organized into sixteen separate tales, all narrated by either a Chinese-born mother or her American-born daughter. "Rules of the Game," narrated by one of the daughters, Waverly Jong, details Waverly's rise and fall as an American chess champion when she is a child.

Tan had many inspirations for writing the book. The most direct influence was her first trip to China in 1987, where she met her two Chinese half-sisters for the first time. In the book, the very similar story of Jing-Mei Woo, who is preparing to go see her two half-sisters in China shortly after her mother's death, provides the narrative structure upon which the other stories are hung. Tan was also inspired by Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984)—a multiple-narrator novel that details the experiences of Native Americans in the United States. *The Joy Luck Club* was adapted as a critically acclaimed film in 1993, where Tan served as both co-producer and co-screenwriter. As one of the linked stories in *The Joy Luck Club*, "Rules of the Game" can be found in any edition of Tan's book. The most widely available version is the current paperback edition, published by Ivy Books in 1995.

Author Biography

Tan was born on February 19, 1952, in Oakland, California, two and a half years after her parents emigrated from China. Her father was educated as an engineer in Beijing, but eventually chose to become a Baptist minister. Tan's mother was the daughter of an upper class family in Shanghai, forced to leave three children behind in China while fleeing an unhappy arranged marriage. During Tan's teenage years, she lost both her father and brother to brain tumors.

After the passing of her brother and father, Tan's mother confessed to her that she had two surviving half-sisters who still resided in China. This information would come to be one of many autobiographical elements she would use in her works. Finally receiving the opportunity to meet her sisters in 1987, this became inspiration for the framework of her first novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, published in 1989.

The book received the Commonwealth Club gold award for fiction and the American Library Association's best book for young adults that same year. In 1990, she received the Bay Area Reviewers Award for fiction and was also a finalist for the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award. The film version of *The Joy Luck Club* premiered in 1993 and became a critically acclaimed film. Tan co-wrote the script and coproduced the film.

In 1991, Tan published her second novel, *The Kitchen God's Wife*, which used two heroines (as opposed to the eight in *The Joy Luck Club*) to continue exploring the generation gap between Chinese-born mothers and their American-born daughters. Other publications by Tan include *The Moon Lady* (1992), *The Chinese Siamese Cat* (1994), *The Hundred Secret Senses* (1995), and *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001).

In addition to her writing, Tan has one other interesting "literary" pursuit: she plays the tambourine in a rock band, "The Rock Bottom Remainders," with other famous writers: Stephen King, Matt Groening, Robert Fulghum, and Dave Barry. Tan lives and works in Del Mar, California.

Plot Summary

The Art of Invisible Strength

"Rules of the Game" is one of the interconnected stories in Tan's book, *The Joy Luck Club*. At the beginning of this story, the narrator, Waverly Jong, explains how her mother taught her the art of invisible strength when she was six years old, saying that it is a strategy for winning arguments, respect, and chess games, although she was unaware of the last one at the time she learned the art.

Waverly Place

Waverly describes her home in San Francisco's Chinatown, on a street called Waverly Place. She lives over a Chinese bakery, and as a result, her family's flat always smells good. Although Waverly and her two brothers like to play on the sandlot playground at the end of their alley, they are most fascinated by the alley itself, which contains a number of traditional Chinese businesses like a medicinal herb shop, a fish market, and a Chinese café. The Chinese and American worlds collide on occasion, as when a Caucasian man with a camera takes a picture of Waverly and her friends in front of Hong Sing's, the Chinese café. Waverly's official name is Waverly Place Jong (named after her street), but her family calls her Meimei, meaning "Little Sister," since she is the youngest and the only daughter.

The Chess Set

When Waverly and her family go to the annual Christmas party at the First Chinese Baptist Church the next year, the children get to pick out gifts that have been donated by another church, which are given out by a Chinese Santa Claus. One little boy gets a globe-shaped coin bank, but he is distressed when he finds only pennies inside. The boy's mother slaps him for his lack of humility, which is a very un-Chinese way to react to a gift. Waverly notes from the other gifts that size does not necessarily equal quality, and when it is her turn, she picks a heavy, compact gift that turns out to be a twelvepack of Life Savers candies. Her brother Winston gets a model of a World War II submarine, while Vincent, Waverly's other brother, gets a used chess set that is missing a couple of pieces. Although their mother makes a point of declaring in public that the chess set is too nice of a gift, when they get home, she instructs Vincent to throw it out, saying that if it was not good enough for the woman who donated it, then Vincent does not need it either. Vincent does not listen, and he and Winston read the rule book and begin playing chess.

Waverly Begins to Play Chess

Waverly pesters her brothers to let her play the winner, but they do not want her to. Finally, when she offers to use her Life Savers as replacements for the buttons that her brothers are using in place of the missing pieces, they relent and let her play. Waverly does not understand why the rules are the way they are, and asks this, annoying her brothers in the process. Waverly's mother pipes in, talking about American rules, and how when she came over to America, she had to know the rules to get into the country. She tells Waverly that it is better to follow the rules without asking questions, and learn them on your own later. Waverly does this, reading the rule book and even consulting other chess books in the Chinatown library. She learns the strategies of chess, and learns that it is better not to reveal one's knowledge, because chess is a game of secrets where a piece of knowledge unknown to one's opponent can provide the advantage necessary to win the game.

Waverly becomes so good at chess that her brothers get tired of losing to her, and move on to their next diversion—playing cowboys. In the meantime, Waverly sees a bunch of old men playing chess in the park, and approaches one to see if he wants to play chess with her. The man, Lau Po, plays many games with Waverly over the next several weeks, helping her to develop new tactics and at the same time, teaching her the mystical names of these strategies. He also teaches her chess etiquette. Waverly starts to gather a crowd on weekends, and one man encourages Waverly and her mother to have Waverly compete in chess tournaments. Waverly is unsure, and tells her mother that she does not want to shame her family by losing. Her mother replies that this is not shame, shame is doing something stupid like falling down when you have not been pushed.

Chess Tournaments

In her first chess tournament, Waverly earns a trophy. Her first opponent is a fifteen-year-old boy from Oakland. While she plays, she gets into the zone, letting her surroundings drop away and concentrating only on the chess board and pieces, which seem to be full of life in her mind. This ability to use the invisible strength that her mother had taught her leads to many more tournaments, and she wins every time. After winning a regional tournament, she picks up sponsorships from three businesses for her national tournaments, and by the time she turns nine, Waverly is a national chess champion.

The Argument

Waverly's life becomes centered around chess, which is all she concentrates on besides school. Although her parents make concessions for Waverly's chess practice—such as giving her a room separate from her brothers and allowing her to leave the table before she's finished eating—the relationship between Waverly and her mother is strained, as her mother insists on peering over her shoulder and making critical noises

at every move. The ultimate falling out between mother and daughter occurs during an otherwise normal trip to the store that Waverly takes with her mother one nontournament weekend.

Waverly's mother insists on pointing her daughter out to passers-by. This embarrasses Waverly, and she tells her mother that, if she wants to brag, she should learn to play chess herself. Her mother is shocked and angry, and Waverly becomes frightened and runs away. Waverly returns home later that evening, at which time Waverly's mother tells Waverly that she is no longer concerned with her daughter. Waverly goes to her room, where she envisions an imaginary chessboard, upon which her white pieces are annihilated by her mother's black pieces.

Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

Waverly Jong narrates her own story, beginning the tale when she is six years old and living in San Francisco's Chinatown with her parents and two brothers, Vincent and Winston. The family lives on Waverly Place, the street after which Waverly Jong is named, in a small apartment above a Chinese bakery. Though they are poor, the children do not realize it because they eat regularly and have plenty of fun playing in and out of the alleys and shops in the neighborhood.

Through the years, Waverly's mother consistently gives her and her brothers nuggets of wisdom so that they can improve themselves and their situation, instead of allowing them to simply accept the poor confines of Chinatown. Among these nuggets of wisdom, Mrs. Jong teaches her daughter the "secret of invisible strength" (1) that Waverly later uses to win arguments, respect and, later, chess games. This secret is to not go against the wind but, rather, bring strength from the same direction as the prevailing wind so that nobody notices the strength being applied.

As the Jong children grow a little older, they spend their days playing games and often making harmless trouble like normal children. However, when Vincent receives a chess set at the First Chinese Baptist Church's Christmas party, Vincent and Winston immediately sit down and study the intricacies of the game and they play each other often. At first, the two boys will not allow Waverly to play, but when she offers to let them use Life Savers -- her present at the Christmas party -- as substitutes for the two chess men missing from the set, the brothers agree to let their kid sister join in.

Though Waverly starts slow and loses badly to her brothers, who had been playing each other frequently, Waverly's fascination with the game quickly takes over. By studying chess books at the library, learning about how to control the center of the board, and even studying the pieces themselves, as though they will actually tell her their mysteries, Waverly quickly surpasses her brothers and, as a result, the boys stop playing chess.

With no one to play at home, Waverly finds some old men who play chess against each other down at the park and, one day, she hauls Vincent's chess set over there and asks for a game. An older man, who Waverly calls Lau Po, takes up the challenge from this little girl and he beats her handily. However, Waverly is persistent and, as the weeks pass, she keeps coming to the park and, with each new defeat, she learns new secrets of the game. In fact, Lau Po proves to be an excellent teacher and he instructs her in both chess strategies and proper etiquette, allowing her to become a much more proficient and enjoyable opponent. Then, as Waverly's skills continue to improve, crowds gather to watch this small Chinese girl besting all her opponents in the park. In fact, word spreads enough that even Mrs. Jong joins the spectators around Waverly's games.

One day, a man in the crowd comments to Mrs. Jong that Waverly should enter local chess competitions, but Mrs. Jong only offers a smile as a meaningless answer. However, Waverly desperately wants to enter these competitions and play against better players, so she convinces her mother to allow her to play in competitions by pretending that she does not want to play in them. She does this by phrasing her statement so that it sounds like she is afraid of bringing shame on her family by losing to Americans. Hearing her daughter's reasoning, Mrs. Jong is immediately convinced that Waverly should enter a tournament. After all, Mrs. Jong does not want her daughter to quit before she even tries, since that is losing without ever trying to win.

Waverly is nervous before her first tournament game but, as soon as she sits down in front of the board, the world disappears and the only thing that exists is one chessboard and the 16 pieces on each side. However, there is a voice in her mind reminding Waverly to blow with the wind so her opponent will not notice where she is coming from. Waverly heeds this little voice and she takes the game handily.

As Waverly continues to enter chess tournaments and she takes home more and more first place trophies, Mrs. Jong feels a keen pride in her young daughter. In fact, the entire neighborhood is very proud of her and local businesses offer to sponsor Waverly so that she can travel to the various competitions. As well, the bakery downstairs displays Waverly's trophies for all to see and, when Waverly wins a regional championship, the bakery lays out a large cake in the window congratulating Waverly on her accomplishment. Thus, chess has given Waverly a very lofty place in this rather poor neighborhood.

By the time Waverly is nine years old, she is 429 points away from grand master status and a national champion, which is, in most people's minds, incredible considering that she is a girl. In fact, her accomplishment is so impressive that Newsweek puts a picture of Waverly on their cover next to Bobby Fisher's quote, "There will never be a woman grand master." (11). This is a result of the fact that, the day the picture is taken, Waverly beats a very confident, older man who suddenly finds himself at the will of a small girl in a frilly pink dress who effectively pretends to be very unsure of herself. Thus, Waverly proves herself on the national stage against the best competition that America has to offer and she is named the Great American Hope.

As Waverly's chess career continues on, she finds herself unable to concentrate on chess at home through all the distractions. With her mother hovering over her while she practices, her brothers making too much noise at night, and her dinner robbing her of the ability to focus, she withdraws from her normal home life and becomes a sort of chess machine. She practices regularly, thinks about chess constantly, and she is actually happy with the fact that chess has taken over her life.

Unfortunately, when Waverly does not have a tournament, she cannot get out of going to the market on Saturdays with her mother. The market is itself is not bad but, while they are there, Mrs. Jong shows off Waverly to everyone there and Waverly does not enjoy the attention. Finally, Waverly tells her mother that she is fed up with these constant introductions to absolute strangers. However, Mrs. Jong is angry at Waverly for

her impudence and, in response, she tells Waverly that she should not be embarrassed by her own mother.

Waverly, frustrated and angry, runs off and hides in a blind alley. However, when she returns home, Mrs. Jong refuses to punish her daughter. Instead, she simply says that Waverly is not concerned about the family, so the family is not concerned about her.

Hearing this, Waverly goes off to her room without eating dinner and, once again, thinks about chess. However, the image of her mother's angry eyes comes back to haunt her and, as she thinks about her mother and chess, she imagines her mother's angry eyes behind a row of 16 black chess pieces storming toward her. As her white pieces shriek and flee from the attack, Waverly imagines herself flying up into the clouds as she ponders about her next move.

Analysis

In this story, the wind is used as a symbol of strength being used. Its first application is in Mrs. Jong's instruction to blow with the wind in order to apply strength effectively. As well, it is used in conjunction with Waverly's chess games, in which hides her intentions within the flow of the game. Finally, it is used in the dream that ends the story, in which Waverly is blown away on the wind that arises from her mother's strength.

The strategy that Waverly learns from her mother, "blow with wind," shows up frequently in the story. First, it shows up when Waverly wants some salted plums, but her mother only buys them for her when she does not scream and cry for them. Next, it shows up in Waverly's chess games, in which she learns to hide her intentions by playing within the flow of the game instead of against it, allows her to manipulate her opponent into bad positions. After that, it appears when Waverly wants to play in local chess tournaments, and, instead of begging her mother to allow her to play, Waverly pretends to be afraid to play, lest she risk dishonoring herself and her family. Finally, Mrs. Jong uses it against Waverly when she tells says that she is done with Waverly because Waverly is done with her. Thus, strength in this story is not the strength of aggression. Instead, hidden strength uses an opponent's aggression against its self.

The dream at the end of the story symbolizes Waverly's inability to resist the strength of her mother. When Waverly pushes away from her mother, her mother pushes back by pushing her daughter farther away, sending Waverly running in retreat. This is also symbolized by the fact that, in the dream, Mrs. Jong is pushing the black pieces. In chess, white always moves first; so, black generally plays a defensive game. However, Mrs. Jong is on the offense in the dream. This is similar to the way that Waverly moved first by insulting her mother's pride in Waverly and Mrs. Jong has turned Waverly's move into a weakness.

Additionally, Waverly's dream symbolizes the way that Mrs. Jong is pushing Waverly away in much the same way that Waverly is already pushing herself away from Chinatown. As Waverly plays in more and more tournaments, she stops playing chess

in the park and she spends less and less time at home. Thus, Waverly is already leaving Chinatown behind. Thus, Mrs. Jong is merely pushing in the same direction that Waverly is going, much as the black pieces in the dream push Waverly off the board and the wind takes her far away from her family, her home, her neighborhood, and everything that she knows.

Characters

A Caucasian Man

Earlier in her childhood, a caucasian man poses Waverly and her friends in front of Hong Sing's Chinese café and then takes their picture.

The Fifteen-Year-Old Boy

In Waverly's first chess tournament, she squares off against a fifteen-year-old boy, who wrinkles his nose at her, obviously not impressed by the eight-year-old.

Bobby Fischer

In the story, Bobby Fischer—who in real life is the youngest chess player ever to be awarded the rank of grand master—shows up in a *Life* article next to Waverly Jong's picture, where he is quoted as saying that there will never be a woman grand master.

Lindo Jong

Lindo Jong, Waverly's mother, teaches her daughter and two sons the art of invisible strength, a number of Chinese wisdoms that can be used when developing strategies for winning arguments, respect, and in Waverly's case, the game of chess. Lindo's English is stilted, and she speaks in short, clipped phrases, which Waverly often views as criticism, especially when her mother is hanging over her shoulder giving advice while she practices her chess games. Lindo is very vigilant over what her children say and do, and is a very proud woman who generally exhibits proper Chinese humility in public. A good example is when her son, Vincent, receives a used and broken chess set at the church Christmas party. She acts gracious in public, but when they get home, she tells Vincent to throw the game out, saying that they do not need other people's trash. Vincent does not listen, and when he is reading the chess rulebook, Lindo speaks up, saying that the rules of chess are just another set of American rules, and that she, too, had to learn American rules before they would let her into the country.

She cautions Waverly that it is not wise to ask why a rule is the way it is—instead, it is better to find out for yourself. This piece of advice helps Waverly to develop her chess technique. Lindo is supportive of Waverly's chess playing, watching from the crowd when Waverly plays in the park on weekends. At these times, she is properly humble according to Chinese custom, saying that Waverly's winning is just luck. However, after Waverly starts to win more tournaments and becomes a national chess champion, Lindo starts to show Waverly off to others in public. Waverly is embarrassed by her mother's behavior and says so one day, which sparks an argument. Waverly runs away, and

when she returns home later that evening, Lindo tells her she is no longer a concern of hers. Waverly goes to her room and tries to figure out what to do next.

Vincent Jong

Vincent Jong, one of Waverly's two older brothers, introduces her to the game of chess. At the annual church Christmas party, he receives a used chess set that is missing a couple of pieces. When Waverly offers to give him Life Savers to use in place of the missing chess pieces, Vincent allows her to play with him and Winston, Waverly's other brother. Vincent tries to explain the rules of the game to Waverly, but she is confused at first. Like Winston, Vincent tires of playing chess after Waverly repeatedly beats him at the game, and the two brothers start to play cowboys instead, prompting Waverly to seek out Lau Po as a chess opponent.

Waverly Place Jong

Waverly Place Jong, the narrator and protagonist of the story, uses her mother's art of "invisible strength" to achieve national fame as a chess champion. The novel begins with Jong recalling when she was six years old and her mother taught her the art of invisible strength—a collection of Chinese wisdoms that can be adapted to many life situations and, in the case of the Jongs, help them to rise above their circumstances. Waverly is fascinated by the Chinatown alley in which she lives, where she and her brothers, Vincent and Winston, peer into Chinese shops like Li's medicinal herb store or Hong Sing's, a Chinese café. Waverly's mother has named her after the street they live on, Waverly Place— also a formal name for official American documents. However, Lindo and the rest of the family usually call Waverly "Meimei," meaning "Little Sister," because she is the youngest child and the only daughter.

When her brother, Vincent, gets a chess set at their church Christmas party, Waverly is the one who turns out to be most adept at the game. After researching the rules of the game and learning the basic moves, she is able to beat both of her brothers, who promptly stop playing the game with her. Instead, Waverly plays with Lau Po, an old man in the park who teaches her chess technique and etiquette. An observer at one of these casual matches encourages Waverly's mom to enter her in a chess tournament, and Waverly takes home a trophy. She moves on to regional, and then national tournaments, picking up sponsorships from local businesses to support her efforts.

Although her mother supports her, Waverly feels pressured, as when her mother tells Waverly after her first win that she should concentrate on losing less pieces. Still, Waverly's mother is supportive of her daughter's chess playing, and even exempts her from certain chores or family customs when she is practicing her chess games. However, mother and daughter get in an argument when Waverly draws attention to the fact that her mother is using her to show off to others. Waverly runs away, and when she returns home later that evening, Waverly's mother tells her that she is no longer a

concern of hers. Waverly retires to her bedroom, where she imagines her mother destroying her in a game of chess, and tries to figure out her next move.

Winston Jong

Winston is one of Waverly's two older brothers, who gets a model of a World War II submarine at the annual church Christmas party. Winston plays chess against his brother Vincent and Waverly, until Waverly starts to beat them both repeatedly and the brothers lose interest in chess, turning to playing cowboys instead.

Lau Po

Lau Po is the old man in the park whom Waverly challenges to a game of chess; one game leads to several weeks' worth of games, during which Lau Po helps Waverly expand her knowledge of chess strategies and etiquette. Waverly says that Lau Po is what the man allows her to call him, so it is unclear whether this is the man's real name or a nickname.

Li

Li is the old man who owns a medicinal herb shop in the alley where Waverly Jong plays; she and her brothers are fascinated by the cures that Li provides to his customers.

A Man

A man who watched Waverly play chess in the park encourages her mother to let Waverly play in local chess tournaments.

Meimei

See Waverly Place Jong

An Old Woman

When Waverly turns to run away from her mother after they have a fight, she bumps into an old woman, knocking her and her bag of groceries to the ground. As Waverly's mother helps the old woman up, Waverly runs away. Both women scream at the fleeing girl.

Waverly's Father

Although it is not mentioned in this story, other stories in *The Joy Luck Club* note how this is Lindo Jong's second husband, although he is Waverly's birth father. Waverly's father works during the days and so is not around as much as her mother, who is the strongest influence in her life.

Waverly's Mother

See Lindo Jong

Themes

Chinese Americans

Most of the characters in "Rules of the Game" are Chinese Americans, and much of the conflict is derived from Waverly's attempt to navigate both the traditional Chinese culture and the divergent melding culture of Chineses Americans. When she is younger, Waverly is mainly in touch with her Chinese side. She lives over a small Chinese bakery in Chinatown, where "by daybreak, our flat was heavy with the odor of fried sesame balls and sweet curried chicken crescents." Outside her home, Waverly is drawn to other Chinese establishments, like the Ping Yuen Fish Market, with its "doomed fish and turtles" and a sign that informs tourists, "Within this store, is all for food, not for pet." Most importantly, however, is the Chinese philosophy that Waverly's mother teaches her when she is six years old. "The art of invisible strength," a collection of Chinese "daily truths," is a "strategy for winning arguments [and] respect from others."

As she gets older, however, Waverly becomes more influenced by American culture, becoming so overjoyed when she receives "a twelve-pack of Life Savers" at her church's annual Christmas party that she spends "the rest of the party arranging and rearranging the candy tubes in the order of my favorites." The biggest American influence on Waverly is the chess set her brother, Vincent, receives as a gift at the same Christmas party. Waverly learns to play chess on her brother's board, quickly becoming very good at the American game, but relying on her Chinese "invisible strength" to do so: "A light wind began blowing past my ears. It whispered secrets only I could hear. . . . I saw a clear path, the traps to avoid."

Throughout Waverly's short career as a chess player, both she and her mother exhibit distinctly Chinese and American behaviors. When Waverly first starts playing chess, her mother sits "proudly on the bench, telling my admirers with proper Chinese humility, 'Is Luck.'" However, later, when Waverly is becoming a famous chess player, her mother teaches her to sit "in the manner my mother had shown me for posing for the press." This combination of Chinese humility and American publicity is one of many cross-cultural occurrences in the story.

Mothers and Daughters

Waverly's relationship with her mother in the beginning of the story is good, but it deteriorates over time as Waverly becomes more Americanized. When Waverly is six years old, she throws a fit when her mother tells her not to beg for the candy that she wants. "Wise guy, he not go against wind," says her mother, imparting her first lesson on the art of invisible strength to Waverly, who learns to be patient and happily receives candy on the next shopping trip.

Waverly's mother is supportive of her daughter's chess playing, and goes with Waverly to her tournaments. At Waverly's first tournament, "my mother sat with me in the front row as I waited for my turn." Waverly's mother shows her affection for her daughter right before Waverly starts to play. "My mother unwrapped something in her lap. It was her *chang*, a small tablet of red jade which held the sun's fire. 'Is luck,' she whispered, and tucked it into my dress pocket." Waverly's mother is proud of her daughter, but when she tells Waverly at home that she should concentrate on losing less pieces during the game—"Next time win more, lose less."—Waverly is annoyed. However, she notes that "I couldn't say anything," since Waverly follows her mother's advice in the next tournament and does in fact win the match while losing fewer pieces. Waverly's mother also hovers over her daughter's shoulder during practices at home. Says Waverly, "I think she thought of herself as my protective ally. Her lips would be sealed tight, and after each move I made, a soft 'Hmmmmph' would escape from her nose." When Waverly tells her mother that this bugs her, it hurts her mother, who makes the same noise from across the room, although this time it comes "out of her tight throat."

The final insult by Waverly comes after her mother is telling people about Waverly's chess abilities in public. Waverly tells her mother off in public, saying that "I wish you wouldn't do that, telling everybody I'm your daughter." Waverly's mother is shocked and hurt at this statement, especially when she pushes Waverly to explain what she means, and Waverly says, "Why do you have to use me to show off? If you want to show off, then why do not you learn to play chess?" From this point until the end of the story, relations between Waverly and her mother are strained.

Poverty

Waverly and her family do not have a lot of money, but as she notes in the beginning of the story, "Like most of the other Chinese children who played in the back alleys of restaurants and curio shops, I didn't think we were poor." Tan includes some examples that demonstrate the family's poverty, however, as when Waverly is one of many Chinese children who receive donated gifts at their church: "The missionary ladies had put together a Santa bag of gifts donated by members of another church." When Waverly's brother, Vincent, receives a used chess set from this Christmas party, his mother is too proud to accept a used gift, and tells Vincent to get rid of it. Vincent does not want to, even after he finds out that it is "missing a black pawn and a white knight." Vincent and Waverly do not have money to buy replacement pieces, so they improvise, as Waverly notes: "Vincent at first refused to let me play, but when I offered my Life Savers as replacements for the buttons that filled in for the missing pieces, he relented."

Chess

The game of chess is explored in two distinct ways in the story. The first way is in a rules sense, where Waverly discusses the actual strategies of the game, such as "opening moves and why it is important to control the center early on," "the middle

game," and "why it is essential in the endgame to have foresight." These are classic chess strategies, and read almost like an instruction manual.

However, the game of chess also takes on a mythical quality reminiscent of Waverly's Chinese heritage. Says Waverly, "That is the power of chess. It is a game of secrets in which one must show and never tell." Waverly explores this idea more when she starts playing chess with Lau Po, the Chinese man who helps her improve her technique. "I added new secrets. Lau Po gave me the names. The Double Attack from the East and West Shores. Throwing Stones on the Drowning Man. The Sudden Meeting of the Clan." All of these names are Chinese in flavor, and when used along with Waverly's invisible strength, where Waverly seems to actually hear the right moves in the wind, they take on a mythical quality.

This mythical feeling reaches its height after Waverly has gotten angry with her mother on a public street. Back home, Waverly envisions playing an imaginary chess game against her mother: "In my head, I saw a chessboard with sixty-four black and white squares. Opposite me was my opponent, two angry black slits. She wore a triumphant smile." In this struggle, Waverly becomes the loser, and her "white pieces screamed as they scurried and fell off the board one by one."

Style

Point of View

As with the other stories in *The Joy Luck Club*, "Rules of the Game" is narrated from the perspective of one of the main characters. In this case, Waverly Jong gives her point of view about the part of her childhood where she became a chess champion. Waverly narrates the story from her childhood perspective, and does not refer to anything that happened to her as an adult as a result of the events in the story, or give her adult perspective about the events—as some adult narrators do when talking about their childhoods.

Waverly recalls exactly how she felt at each stage of the story. In the beginning, when she is more in touch with her Chinese heritage, she notes that her "bowl was always full," and that her meals began "with a soup full of mysterious things that I didn't want to know the names of." However, after she begins to take an interest in chess, she recalls how "the chessmen were more powerful than old Li's magic herbs that cured ancestral curses," referencing one of the other mysteries that enraptured her as a child. And when Waverly explains the transformation she goes through after she loses the imaginary chess game with her mother. Waverly says, "I rose up into the air and flew out the window. Higher and higher. . . . up toward the night sky until everything disappeared and I was alone." By telling the reader exactly how she felt at the various points in her childhood and not tainting the narrative with her adult perspective, Waverly's child point of view walks the reader through her transformation, step by step, which leads to a more powerful ending.

Setting

For many of Tan's readers, Chinese culture is unfamiliar, so the vivid descriptions of everyday life in San Francisco's Chinatown help to educate readers at the same time as it entertains. In the medicinal herb store, Waverly and her brothers watch "old Li dole out onto a stiff sheet of white paper the right amount of insect shells, saffroncolored seeds, and pungent leaves for his ailing customers." This description evokes some strong images in the reader's mind, while giving some background information on the traditional Chinese belief in holistic healing. The same is true with the description of Ping Yuen Fish Market, where "the butchers with their bloodstained white smocks deftly gutted the fish while customers cried out their orders," and where Waverly and her brothers "inspect the crates of live frogs and crabs which we were warned not to poke, boxes of dried cuttlefish, and row upon row of iced prawns, squid, and slippery fish." These candid descriptions highlight the fact that seafood is one of the staples of the Chinese diet. They also show how, in Chinese culture, food is prepared fresh for customers, with no attempt to hide the sometimes messy method of preparation. This is a stark contrast to the sterile environments found in most American butcher shops or fish markets, where much of the preparation is done out of the customer's sight.

Language

Tan's accurate portrayal of Chinese Americans, including the stilted English that many Chinese-born Americans speak, was one of the reasons why *The Joy Luck Club* became such a popular and critical success. In "Rules of the Game," this stilted English is demonstrated through Waverly's mother. Waverly remembers one of her mother's stories, in which a girl runs out into the street and gets crushed by a car. "Was smash flat," says Waverly's mother. This short sentence, which is a truncated version of the grammatically correct phrase, "She was smashed flat," is still understandable. Likewise, when Waverly asks her mother about Chinese torture, her mother asks "Who say this word?" instead of "Who said this word?" In this case, only one word is grammatically incorrect. However, by changing this one word, "said" to "say," the feeling of the phrase changes, and gives it the traditional Chinese character that Tan wanted to demonstrate in Waverly's mother. This pattern is repeated throughout the story, and shows up in longer sections of dialogue with Waverly's mother, such as when Waverly wins her chess match while losing less of her pieces. Waverly's mother says, "Lost eight piece this time. Last time was eleven. What I tell you? Better off lose less!"

Personification

The story relies on the technique of personification—attributing human qualities to inanimate objects—to give it more life. Tan personifies many items in the story, most notably after Waverly begins to play chess. When Waverly plays in her first tournament, her invisible strength manifests itself as a wind that "whispered secrets only I could hear." In real life, a wind can't whisper, only humans can. However, by describing the wind in this way, it becomes more animated and helps to reinforce the idea of Waverly's magical ability to see things differently from others. Likewise, in the same chess match, Waverly says that "The knight came forward ready for the sacrifice." Chess pieces can't move of their own power, and certainly do not commit hari kari. However, by using this kind of elaborate language, it paints a vivid picture in the reader's mind. Waverly could have said that she is moving her knight in a position where he will be taken by her opponent, but by personifying the knight, she once again helps to reinforce the idea that her invisible strength is a magical ability.

In addition to personifying Waverly's invisible strength and her chess playing, Tan uses personification in other ways, such as expressing Waverly's mood. Near the end of the story, after Waverly runs away from her mother, her breath comes out "like angry smoke," reflecting Waverly's anger towards her mother. Likewise, when Waverly comes home, she finds her parents at dinner. While waiting for her punishment, Waverly notices the remains of dinner: "a large fish, its fleshy head still connected to bones swimming upstream in vain escape." Waverly is feeling like she needs to escape but, like the fish, knows she has nowhere to run to.

Historical Context

People's Republic of China

On January 21, 1949, China's civil war— between Communists and Chinese nationalists— came to an end when Communist forces, led by Mao Zedong, defeated China's Nationalist government, which had stopped receiving aid from the United States. The Chinese president, Chiang Kai-Shek, resigned, and shortly thereafter, Mao's forces took over Beijing. During the next several months, those peasants who didn't support Communism—like Waverly's mother and the other mothers in *The Joy Luck Club*, fled mainland China for American soil, settling in Asian hot spots like San Francisco's Chinatown. Critic Walter Shear, in his *Critique* review, references this historical situation, saying "those millions of Chinese who were part of the diaspora [migration] of World War II and the fighting that resulted in the triumph of the Communists," were unfortunately left without a home when they were "cut off from the mainland and after 1949 left to fend for themselves culturally." Although this is not discussed at length in the story, "Rules of the Game," Waverly's mother hints at this when she notes her own experience trying to emigrate to America when she says: "Every time people come out from foreign country, must know rules. You not know, judge say, Too bad, go back."

However, it would have been difficult for Waverly's mother, or any other Chinese person settling in America, to consider going back to China. On October 1, 1949, seven months after Mao and his Communist forces took over Beijing, Mao announced the formation of the People's Republic of China, in which he would serve as chairman. Mao, who had been a peasant himself, promised a Communist utopia. But when he gave preference to wealthy landowners, and attempted to instill new land reforms, landlords and tenants staged bloody battles. Mao, who had come in only as a chairman for the "people's" republic, turned quickly into a dictator. During his first years as ruler, Mao's reforms plunged China into turmoil and famine, and nobody who had escaped the mainland would willingly choose to go back.

McCarthyism

Mao's Communist victory in China added to the United States's fear of the spread of Communism, which also reigned in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. In 1950, a little-known senator, Joseph McCarthy, capitalized on this fear when he instigated a national inquiry, attempting to root out potential Communist sympathizers. McCarthy, who used many props but provided very little evidence, turned Americans against themselves, and as a result many innocent people—including hordes of Chinese Americans—were persecuted or harassed. As Martin Gilbert notes in his *A History of the Twentieth Century*, "It was a witch-hunt of the most virulent sort, nationwide and relentless." Although "Rules of the Game" takes place in the late 1950s, long after McCarthy had been censured for his actions, Americans were still anxious about the

possibility of Communists living in their area. This is hinted at in the story when Waverly goes to the Christmas party, and the Chinese Santa Claus "solemnly asked if I had been a very, very good girl this year and did I believe in Jesus Christ and obey my parents." Waverly, who was born in 1951, and who grew up in the pro-religion and anti-Communist atmosphere of the 1950s, "knew the only answer to that. I nodded back with equal solemnity."

Bobby Fischer

Bobby Fischer was a chess prodigy, like Waverly Jong in "Rules of the Game." Fischer learned how to play chess when he was only six years old, became the world's youngest person to reach the rank of grand master (at age fifteen in 1958), and dropped out of school at sixteen to play chess fulltime. Fischer became a legend in the chess world, as much for his attitude as for his masterful playing. Fischer's skill reached its peak in 1972, when he defeated Soviet player and world champion, Boris Spassky, to become the first American player to win the world Chess Champion of the World title. Three years later, however, Fischer refused to defend his title against another Soviet opponent, Anatolly Karpov, an act that prompted the International Chess Federation to strip Fischer of his title and give it to Karpov by default. Fischer didn't return to the competitive chess scene until almost two decades later, when he defeated Spassky again in a rematch.

Increase in Asian-American Population

It was not until the 1940s, when Japan became the enemy during World War II, that Congress began to repeal the Chinese immigration restriction laws that had been put in place in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As the laws were changed, more Chinese Americans were allowed to attend American universities and enter professional fields like medicine, corporate business, and engineering, giving them the means to move out of urban areas like San Francisco's Chinatown and into suburbs. In 1990, a year after Tan wrote *The Joy Luck Club*, the number of Asians living in the United States had increased from about 875,000 in 1960 to about seven million. Of these, more than 1.6 million were of Chinese descent, and more than 700,000 Chinese Americans lived in California— many in San Francisco's Chinatown, which even today continues to host one of the world's largest Chinese communities outside of Asia.

Critical Overview

Tan's first novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, which includes Waverly Jong's childhood story in "Rules of the Game," was a smash success with both popular and critical readers. In her review in the *The Nation*, Valerie Miner called the book "a stunningly auspicious debut," and called Tan "a gifted storyteller who reaches across cultures and generations." Orville Schell of *The New York Times Review of Books* called it "a jewel of a book," while Scarlet Cheng, in *Belles Lettres*, commended it for its "clarity of voice and lucidity of vision."

Of course, it is rare to find a book that is wholly and universally loved by all, and *The Joy Luck Club* is no exception. The majority of the negative criticism has been about the book's structure. As David Gates noted in his *Newsweek* review, "Waverly is just one of eight main characters—four Chineseborn mothers and their American-born daughters—in *The Joy Luck Club*." In total, the book contains sixteen individual stories from these characters. Said Charlotte Painter, in the *San Francisco Review of Books*, "The book holds technical difficulties Tan has not overcome. The voices, in unrelieved first person, resemble one another too closely." As Gates said, "such an ambitious narrative scheme would be a handful for any writer; inevitably the voices sound alike." And in *Melus*, Ben Xu characterized the book as "neither a novel nor a group of short stories. It consists of isolated acts and events, which remain scattered and disbanded."

To Gates, however, "Tan is so gifted that none of this matters much." Likewise, in the *Christian Science Monitor*, Merle Rubin called each story "a gem, complete in itself," and said that "In Tan's hands, these linked stories—diverse as they are—fit almost magically into a powerfully coherent novel."

Several critics remarked on the themes inherent in all of the stories, most notably the experience of Chinese Americans. In fact, as Dorothy Wang noted of Tan after an interview with the author, "her insights into the complexities of being a hyphenated American, connected by blood and bonds to another culture and country, have found a much wider audience than Tan had ever imagined." Schell cited *The Joy Luck Club* as part of "a new genre of American fiction," which began with the works of writers like Maxine Hong Kingston. Walter Shear was another critic who noted the similarity of Tan's works to Hong Kingston's, saying in his review in *Critique* that the two authors' abilities "to render the experience of a culture through vividly dramatic individual narratives," is helping to develop a "tradition of Chinese-American women's writing." In *The Women's Review of Books*, Helen Yglesias praised Tan for veering away from traditional stereotypes of Chinese women, saying that "there isn't a single Chinese laundry . . . and no Dragon Ladies. Tan rescued the Chinese-American woman from numbing distortion in *The Joy Luck Club.*"

Critics have also noted the second major theme in the book, the relationships between mothers and daughters. In her review in *Quill and Quire*, Denise Chong called the stories "moving and powerful," saying that they "share the irony, pain, and sorrow of the imperfect ways in which mothers and daughters love each other." Other critics, like

Miner, noted Tan's "remarkable ear for dialogue and dialect," saying that the author represented both "the choppy English of the mothers and the sloppy California vernacular of the daughters with sensitive authenticity."

In addition to the novel as a whole, some critics have remarked upon the individual stories, such as "Rules of the Game." Gates noted that Tan seemed to take the advice that she put in Waverly Jong's mouth, about withholding knowledge to be used later. Said Gates, "Tan is so cagey it takes a while to discern that fetching little Waverly . . . has become a disagreeable young woman." And Cheng noted the author's use of "invisible strength," in the story saying that this "fundamental faith in invisible forces pervades traditional Chinese culture."

Perhaps the best praise of all came from Carolyn See, of the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, who said, "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."

Criticism

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

Critical Essay #1

Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette discusses Waverly Jong's struggles with her cultural identity during her coming of age as a Chinese American in Amy Tan's "Rules of the Game."

One of the primary themes in Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* is the conflict in identity that Chinese Americans face when growing up with influences from both cultures. In a review in *Newsweek*, Dorothy Wang writes that Tan's "insights into the complexities of being a hyphenated American, connected by blood and bonds to another culture and country, have found a much wider audience than Tan had ever imagined." The other major theme in the novel is the conflict between mothers and daughters. As Denise Chong notes, "These moving and powerful stories share the irony, pain, and sorrow of the imperfect ways in which mothers and daughters love each other." While each of the stories in *The Joy Luck Club* reflects these themes to some extent, nowhere is this dual struggle more apparent than in the story, "Rules of the Game," where the game of chess is used to illustrate both conflicts. In the story, Waverly Jong embraces both the Chinese and American ways of life, but it is her complete adoption of the latter that generates the conflict between Waverly and her mother and which renders Waverly powerless by the end of the story.

At the beginning of "Rules of the Game," Waverly Jong is both Chinese and American, although her preferences lean towards her Chinese heritage. Young Waverly believes in magic and mystery, which she finds in everyday items around the house. For example, when speaking about her life at home, she says that she was always fed well. "My bowl was always full, three five-course meals every day, beginning with a soup full of mysterious things I didn't want to know the names of." Waverly is content to experience the mystery, without trying to solve it.

The same is true for Waverly's playing. Although she and her brothers live in Chinatown, a couple of blocks away from a playground, they rarely play there. Says Waverly, "The best playground . . . was the dark alley itself. It was crammed with daily mysteries and adventures." Some of these mysteries concern individual businesses, such as Li's medicinal herb shop, which Waverly and her brothers "peer into." As Waverly notes of Li, "It was said that he once cured a woman dying of an ancestral curse that had eluded the best of American doctors." Finally, at one corner of the alley, the children pass by Hong Sing's, a Chinese café that they stay away from at certain times of the day. "My brothers and I believed the bad people emerged from this door at night," says Waverly.

In addition to her mysteries and superstitions, Waverly is also in touch with her Chinese side through the philosophy that her mother imparts to her. "I was six when my mother taught me the art of invisible strength," says Waverly, describing the strategy that she eventually uses to win her chess games. Waverly's mother teaches this invisible strength, a collection of Chinese "daily truths," to her children, in an effort to help them "rise above our circumstances," as Waverly notes. Waverly cites the first example of

invisible strength that her mother teaches her. Waverly is six years old, and cries for a bag of salted plums. Her mother tells her, "Wise guy, he not go against wind," and the next time they are in the store, Waverly is silent. As a result, "When my mother finished her shopping, she quietly plucked a small bag of plums from the rack." By keeping her peace, and proving that she is strong enough not to beg for the candy, Waverly earns it in the end.

Waverly's mother knows that, as Chinese Americans, her children will need to learn the art of invisible strength if they are to survive in American society, which has its own set of rules. Waverly's mother herself had to employ her invisible strength to make her way to America. As she notes to her children when examining the chess rule book, "This American rules . . . Every time people come out from foreign country, must know rules. You not know, judge say, Too bad, go back." Although it is only hinted at with this passage in the story, Waverly's mother is speaking about her own experience when trying to immigrate to the United States in 1949. Just like her daughter, Waverly, who is confused about the rules of chess and asks her brother "why" they are what they are, Waverly's mother learns that it's better not to ask questions. Instead, it's better to "find out why yourself."

However, even though Waverly is very much in touch with her Chinese side, she is Americanized as well. For starters, there is her symbolically American name. Says Waverly, "My mother named me after the street that we lived on: Waverly Place Jong, my official name for important American documents." And when she goes to a Christmas party held by some of the local missionary ladies, the Chinese man dressed up as Santa Claus solemnly asks her if she's been "a very good girl this year and did I believe in Jesus Christ." As Waverly notes, "I knew the only answer to that. I nodded back with equal solemnity." In 1950s America, anybody who did not want to be considered an outsider embraced Christianity, and even young Waverly is aware that this is one of the "rules" of the American system. In addition, Waverly and the other Chinese-American children at the Christmas party yearn for American gifts. Waverly notes that her gift, "a twelve-pack of Life Savers," is a good gift, as is her brother Winston's "authentic miniature replica of a World War II submarine."

It is the chess set her brother Vincent receives from the Christmas party that has the greatest impact on Waverly. From this point on in the story, the game of chess symbolizes the conflict between Chinese and American cultures, and between mother and daughter. The conflict between cultures starts shortly after Vincent receives the "obviously used" chess set from an old lady. Waverly's mother is offended that Vincent has gotten the lady's junk, and tells Vincent to throw it away, saying with pride, "She not want it. We not want it." However, Vincent ignores her. He and his brother are "already lining up the chess pieces and reading from the dog-eared instruction book." David Gates notes in his review in *Newsweek* that this passage illustrates Tan's "best device," something that Vladimir Nabokov, "another chess-obsessed novelist," called a "'knight's move': an oblique change of direction at the end of a passage that suddenly throws everything before it into ironic context." As Gates says, other writers would simply end the description after saying that Waverly's mother wanted Vincent to throw the chess set away. Instead, Tan takes it a step further by having Vincent and his brother quietly set

up the chess set, an act that shows "the tragi-comic conflicts of cultures and of generations, and never telling a word."

It is through the game of chess that Waverly's identity struggle—Chinese versus American—becomes most prominent. When Waverly first sees the American chess set, it is more attractive than the Chinese mysteries that she used to be drawn to. Says Waverly, "The chessboard seemed to hold elaborate secrets waiting to be untangled. The chessmen were more powerful than old Li's magic herbs that cured ancestral curses." Waverly takes her mother's advice, reads the rulebook, and further researches the game. "I found out about all the whys later. . . . I borrowed books from the Chinatown library. I studied each chess piece, trying to absorb the power each contained."

Waverly also learns proper chess manners from Lau Po, a Chinese man she meets in the park. It is no mistake that Tan chose a Chinese man to teach Waverly these "fine points of chess etiquette," such as keeping "captured men in neat rows," never announcing check "with vanity, lest someone with an unseen sword slit your throat," and never hurling "pieces into the sandbox after you have lost a game." In this story, etiquette becomes a very Chinese quality, as when Waverly's mother comes to her games and sits "proudly on the bench, telling my admirers with proper Chinese humility, 'Is luck,'" as Waverly wins. The opposite of this, American cockiness, is demonstrated at several points throughout the story, as when Waverly is playing her first match in her first chess tournament, and she sits across from "a fifteen-year-old boy from Oakland. He looked at me, wrinkling his nose." The boy sees Waverly, an eight-year-old girl, and assumes that he will have no problem beating her.

Waverly is tough to beat in her early games, however, because she has her Chinese invisible strength at her side. Says Waverly, "As I began to play, the boy disappeared, the color ran out of the room, and I saw only my white pieces and his black ones waiting on the other side." This clearness of mind that Waverly gets from relying on the old Chinese wisdoms her mother has taught her, manifests itself in "a light wind" that she feels "blowing past my ears," and which whispers "secrets only I could hear." This "wind" helps Waverly to see "a clear path, the traps to avoid." As a result, Waverly wins "all games, in all divisions." It is these American successes that lead to more conflict between Waverly and her mother. Waverly's mother tries to give her daughter more advice, telling her that the next time she plays, she should concentrate on losing less pieces. Waverly protests, saying that does not always matter when you're trying to win a chess match. But in her next tournament, Waverly does lose less pieces. Says her mother, "Lost eight piece this time. Last time was eleven. What I tell you? Better off lose less!" Waverly is "annoyed, but I couldn't say anything."

As Waverly wins more and more chess matches, travels "farther away from home," and is sponsored by three local businesses in national tournaments, she becomes more Americanized. Waverly notes that by her ninth birthday, she "was a national chess champion," and that she "was touted as the Great American Hope." Not everybody is so supportive of Waverly's success, however. In the story, Bobby Fischer, the real-life boy who was the youngest-ever grand master in chess, says in a magazine quote, "'There

will never be a woman grand master.'" Once again, Americans like Bobby Fischer, an icon in the American chess scene at the time, are shown as cocky. As the story progresses, however, Waverly scraps Lau Po's Chinese rules of etiquette, and starts to show the signs of her American influence in her own playing. Although she still relies on her invisible strength when playing, she starts to show off more, pausing with her "chosen piece in midair as if undecided," before she plants it "in its new threatening place, with a triumphant smile thrown back at my opponent for good measure."

This highly American behavior flows over into Waverly's home life. After she gets sponsored, Waverly's mother decides that she "no longer had to do the dishes. Winston and Vincent had to do my chores." In addition, when Waverly asks, her parents overlook other transgressions against their Chinese culture, so that she can practice her chess games. For example, Waverly complains about the noise in her bedroom, which kicks her brothers out, forcing them to sleep "in a bed in the living room facing the street." And when Waverly tells her parents that "my head didn't work right when my stomach was too full," she is allowed to leave dinner "with half-finished bowls and nobody complained." Gates notes the subtle nature of the transformation that Waverly undergoes, saying that "Tan is so cagey it takes a while to discern that fetching little Waverly. . . . has become a disagreeable young woman."

Up until the end of the story, Waverly's disagreeable nature is tolerated by her mother. But when Waverly tells her mother off in the street, saying that she wishes her mother would not use her and her chess prowess to show off to others in public, Waverly goes too far. Her American ways of thinking cloud her judgment, and she cannot see her mother's true intentions. From the moment that Waverly starts playing chess, her mother stays true to her Chinese heritage, showing proper "Chinese humility" when she is in the stands. In private, however, she gives Waverly a good luck charm before her first tournament, showing her support. As Ben Xu noted in *Melus*, Waverly's mother gives Waverly her own "talisman of luck . . . in order to add to the latter's 'invisible strength.'" Xu sees Waverly's chess battle as her mother's battle, as an attempt to try to triumph against the American system that has threatened to repel her before. "But the worry and concern of her subtle survivalism is not appreciated by her daughter, who accuses her mother of using her to show off and trying to take all the credit," says Xu. Scarlet Cheng agrees in *Belles Lettres*, writing that when Waverly becomes a chess champion, "her mother proudly shepherds her around . . . but being modern and increasingly cocky with her success, Waverly resents what she feels to be her mother's misplaced credit taking."

When Waverly tells her mother off, however, she renounces her Chinese heritage totally, because this is something that a traditional Chinese girl would never do. When she makes these accusations, Waverly notices that "My mother's eyes turned into dangerous black slits," and soon after, Waverly feels "the wind rushing around my hot ears." Something big is happening, but Waverly does not understand what. She runs away, and when she comes home, her mother does not want anything to do with her. After going to her room, Waverly sees an imaginary chessboard in her head, upon which she plays her mother. "Opposite me was my opponent, two angry black slits. She wore a triumphant smile. 'Strongest wind cannot be seen,' she said." Her mother, still

possessing the Chinese invisible strength, obliterates Waverly's pieces, which "screamed as they scurried and fell off the board one by one." At the end of the story, Waverly says she "was alone."

From this point on, Waverly will play like other Americans, without the benefit of her invisible Chinese strength, which she has experienced in the past as a "wind." When she felt "the wind rushing around my hot ears," after telling off her mother, this was a sign that her invisible strength was leaving her. This is only hinted at in this story, but in Waverly's other story in *The Joy Luck Club*, entitled "Four Directions"—which looks back on the days after the fight with her mother—Waverly narrates her dismay, when she plays in her first chess tournament after the fight with her mother, and loses:

I was horrified. I spent many hours every day going over in my mind what I had lost. I knew it was not just the last tournament. I examined every move, every piece, every square. And I could no longer see the secret weapons of each piece, the magic within the intersection of each square. I could see only my mistakes, my weaknesses. It was as though I had lost my magic armor. And everybody could see this, where it was easy to attack me. . . . I had lost the gift and had turned into someone quite ordinary.

If one equates ordinary, or non-magical feelings, with the American experience, and magical feelings with the Chinese experience, then Waverly, when she has the fight with her mother and feels herself lose her "magic" invisible strength— becomes a true American. Walter Shear noted the danger Tan sees in becoming too Americanized, saying of *The Joy Luck Club* that the author "seems to place more emphasis on the Chinese identity as the healing factor."

Source: Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on "Rules of the Game," in *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #2

Covintree is a graduate of Randolph-Macon Women's College with a degree in English. In this essay, Covintree discusses the impact of cultural and personal silence, in addition to the secrets held within the silence, on the main character in Tan's short story.

Tan's title for this short story, "Rules of the Game," is most apt to the themes and ideas central to this story. Tan's narrator, Waverly Jong, is forced throughout the story to discover exactly what game she is playing, and what rules she must follow in order to succeed. Her chess playing becomes a metaphor for her struggle with her greatest opponent, her own Chinese mother. It is this real game of life that Waverly must truly begin to learn and discover. What evolves as an essential component to Waverly's learning process is the influential role that silence can play in the success or failure of life's battles. Through Waverly, Tan shows the various uses of silence, first as a vehicle used in cultures, then as a special practice to hold valuable secrets, and finally as a destructive force that can isolate a mother and daughter.

From the very first line of the story, the reader is introduced to the power of silence, or "the art of invisible strength." At six, Waverly learns that when she remains silent, and acts as the South wind instead of the North wind, she is rewarded with the salted plums she desires. This silence could be perceived as a very passive act, but her mother teaches her that silence can still be very intentional and in fact enact positive change. "In other words," Amy Ling clarifies in her book, *Between Worlds*, "victory over hostile forces (the North Wind) may be achieved not through direct confrontation but by apparent accommodation and giving in (warm South wind)." Because women are usually withheld from visible roles of power, the encouragement of subtle maneuvering is a very feminine perspective of change making. Waverly understands that her "mother imparted her daily truths so she could help [Waverly's] older brothers and [Waverly] rise above our circumstances." With this silence and supplication, Waverly becomes a keen observer, paying close attention to the silent secrets held within the Chinatown and American cultures to learn how to bend them to her will.

Both of these communities use secrets to maintain a life with which they are comfortable. These secrets are silent shields that help maintain their understanding of life. Hong Sing's restaurant has a "menu printed in only Chinese," thus limiting the clientele to those who can understand the language. When a Caucasian photographer asks Waverly what type of food is served in the restaurant, her answer of "[g]uts and duck's feet and octopus gizzards" is so extreme it neither reveals nor renounces the secrets that are held inside the walls. When Waverly attends a church Christmas party with her family, her silent observations of those before her help her carefully choose a donated gift. These cheap or hand me down gifts from another church hold secrets to a world outside of Chinatown, the other part of America, and this is when Waverly is introduced to chess. Though both American and Chinese cultures are invited to view aspects of the mysterious other, the rules for appropriate behavior remain hidden behind menus, wrapping paper, and chess rules.

Waverly's mother encourages her children to embrace American culture—Waverly is even named for the street on which her family lives—while simultaneously maintaining her Chinese perspective. Lindo is keenly aware of the dismissive attitude Americans have towards those born outside of the American system:

Every time people come out from foreign country, must know rules. You not know, judge say, Too bad, go back. They not telling you why so you can use their way go forward. They say, Don't know why, you find out yourself. But they knowing all the time.

Waverly's mother understands that America remains silent and secretive about its cultural framework, and that coming from another culture disadvantages her family. She also recognizes the opportunity her children have in learning these rules. She sees the rules for chess that her son Vincent receives as a key for her children's survival. Waverly has a difficult time understanding why some of the chess rules exist, but like her mother did with the rules of American culture, Lindo Jong admonishes Waverly about the rules by saying: "Better you take it, find out why yourself."

Waverly thrives in her chess discoveries, carefully studying the motions of the pieces and the "fine points of chess etiquette." She also gains access to chess secrets that are not known to everyone. When Waverly begins to understand the "whys" behind chess moves, she understands that she holds very powerful secrets, and she will not share her secrets with anyone. Waverly recognizes that she is gifted, in knowing both American chess strategy and her mother's Chinese strategy of "invisible strength." This combination allows her to be a strong chess opponent. Chess is something Waverly can see clearly, with a vision that combines some of the secrets of both cultures.

By letting her play chess, Waverly's mother opens the door for Waverly to move outside of the realm of Chinatown. Waverly's mother knowingly allows her to enter this world, and gives her "her *chang*" for luck in this new environment. Chess gives Waverly access to a world dominated primarily by white male Americans, and in this environment her secret Chinese winds speak to her "Blow from the South, . . . Throw sand from the East," while she remains silent. These winds are loud and strong, while she remains small with "little puffs, my own breath." As a nine-year-old chess player, Waverly is a success. She is demure in her delicate dresses and patent leather shoes, and a formidable enough player to make fifty-year-old men sweat. Tan shows that Waverly's silent and careful poise is powerful.

Her chess achievements blur her understanding of family roles and expectations. Her success changes her home dynamics, and she does not have to do chores or finish her meals and gets a room all to herself. However, she must allow her mother careful oversight of practice sessions, which proves difficult for her. Waverly believes her mother simplifies the game to the number of lost pieces, and takes credit for a gift that is not hers. Waverly works hard to "bite back [her] tongue," part of the strategy her mother taught her at six.

Though Waverly excels at applying her Chinese and American secrets to her chess games, she is unable to recognize their significance in her everyday life. When the

actual chessboard is removed, she cannot see the roles and strictures others place on her or how to work them to her own advantage. Though she is national chess champion; she is still only nine. Her young age and national success make her cocky. In addition, she miscalculates the skill level of her most important opponent, her mother, the woman who taught her much of how to incorporate Chinese ideas to this Western game. With this misstep, she does not follow her own chess instructions. When Waverly opens her mouth and talks back to her mother, she begins to see the ultimate game she is playing is really with her mother.

It could be argued that Waverly's mother begins this game and also contradicts her own instructions of remaining silent by walking her daughter through the market and speaking to everyone of Waverly's accomplishments. Waverly's mother takes obvious pride and credit for her daughter, and Waverly sees this boastfulness as undeserved. Waverly sees her mother's comments as an aggressive claim to her own gift, and she believes her mother does not have this right. This perceived usurping of her hard-earned success causes Waverly to fight back. However, as stated earlier, Waverly is too young to fully grasp the battle she has begun and what is at stake.

As Waverly discovers early on, chess "is a game of secrets in which one must show and never tell." Yet, when Waverly asks her mother to stop showing her off, she has, in fact, told. What her mother hears is that Waverly is, as Amy Ling states in her book, *Between Worlds* "resentful of [her] mother's intrusions on [her life] . . . and . . . humiliated and ashamed of [her mother's] stubborn, superstitious, out-of-place Old World ways." With her small plea for her mother to stop bragging, Waverly has exposed her own weakness.

Though she thrives on foresight and patience in her chess games because "all weaknesses and advantages become evident to a strong adversary and obscured to a tiring opponent," she shows herself in the market to be impulsive, impatient, and exhausted. In this moment, she cannot hear her chess secrets, and she moves poorly, first talking back and then running away from her mother. In this real world, Waverly cannot easily plan out her next move, and her chess secrets hide under her anger, "[m]y breath came out like angry smoke." By changing her previously quiet, calculated winds of breath to visible, burning breaths, Tan shows the shift Waverly experiences through this single experience. Though she is angry, she is also now vocal and, therefore, powerless and defenseless, unable to fully see her mother's next move.

What she finds when she finally returns home is a family that, at least for this evening, discounts her existence. She is not a chess champion; she is barely their daughter. Again, Waverly's mother is a fierce opponent and fights Waverly with more than luck—she fights with silence. Waverly's mother has turned the game, using strategy Waverly herself uses against others. In his article in *Critique* called "Generational Differences and the Diaspora," Walter Shear states this clearly. Shear notes that Waverly "herself is finally a victim of her mother's more authoritarian deployment of the tactic [of biting back your tongue], as it suddenly takes the form of simply ignoring her."

This silent power is new to Waverly, and she becomes increasingly aware of her own vulnerability, especially with respect to her mother. Her mother, with her strict Chinese cultural framework and identity, is a strong and powerful wind that Waverly can literally see pushing her out of her own home, and even out of her own family. The silence, in the form of the imagined wind, becomes so powerful, that she can do nothing. She is floating, immobilized and alone. To her advantage, however, Waverly has become aware of her most dangerous opponent, and has entered a championship game that is more volatile than any other she has encountered.

Perhaps this was her mother's intention. Perhaps, with this new battle, Waverly is forced to move out of the realm of sixty-four black and white squares to see if any of her secret answers can be applied to real life. According to Ben Xu's article "Memory and the Ethnic Self: Reading Amy Tan's 'The Joy Luck Club '" in MELUS, what Waverly's mother has actually done is "prepare[d] her for dealing with the unpredictable, in which she will constantly find herself faced with unstructured situations and the need to survive on her own." This is what Waverly and the reader are left with, the silent anticipation of what will come next. Waverly's mother has introduced the idea, albeit forcefully, that rules to the game of life can change and shift quickly, and one must always be prepared.

Source: Kate Covintree, Critical Essay on "Rules of the Game," in *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Critical Essay #3

Kelly is an instructor of creative writing and literature at Oakton Community College in Illinois. In this essay, Kelly examines the social factors that render the story's "game" metaphor nearly irrelevant.

In her short story "Rules of the Game" Amy Tan takes a risk by using a metaphor that has become so over-familiar that it comes close to falling into cliché: she compares the rules of a chess game to the rules that lead to success in life. What keeps the comparison fresh and saves it from that worn-out feel that truly dead metaphors have is the ease with which Tan fits it to the situation that she describes in the story. "Rules of the Game" offers readers what Tan does best: it ties the confusion felt by firstgeneration Americans, who are forced to turn from their parents' customs and find their own paths, to the similar confusion most adolescents feel as they grow up and find their independence.

Most stories about the parallels between life and chess focus too narrowly on the action on the board. They concern themselves with specific moves, while this story uses the fact that there are rules to tie life and chess together. Too much attention to detail can cause a story or novel to miss the social situation that brings the players to the game, and end up making the fiction seem mechanical, something like a game itself. Tan's familiarity with the culture she is writing about is so strong, though, that it is able to shrink a big obvious symbol like the chess game down to its proper proportion. This is one situation where a story's sense of reality is so strong that it overpowers the technique that molds it, even though the technique is an old standard.

"Rules of the Game" starts out with a powerfully stated generalization that seems to mean more than it really does. It is the sort of grand pronouncement that sounds like it just might hold the key to all of life's mysteries, while it actually just expresses, in sweeping terms, a little common sense. The narrator, Waverly Place Jong, explains in the first sentence that her mother taught her the "art" of "invisible strength."

Apart from the exotic and poetic way that the mother explains this art, there is no indication that it is actually an art at all. It shows no particular style, and is instead just another way of expressing the time-honored technique of keeping one's mouth shut, a piece of folk wisdom that has served all cultures of all generations. In this story, "invisible strength" is presented as a magical equation that gives young Waverly the wisdom and grace to rise to national prominence in the chess world within a few short years of first taking up the game.

Although Tan does not say as much outright, the story is arranged to let readers know that silence, even if it is the chosen way of those who have the most influence on Waverly, is not the only way. Silence just happens to be the best advice they have to offer her. The young Waverly does not take to the advice very easily; rather, it is a lesson that has to be reinforced after her mother first teaches it to her. The reader does not learn of the lesson in the present tense, but learns only that Waverly's mother taught

her about the secret of "invisible strength" when Waverly was six years old, presumably before the story's beginning. Tan does show Waverly learning what amounts to the same lesson from Lau Po, the older man in the park who offers her guidance in how chess is played. The lessons he gives, referred to in the story as "the fine points of chess etiquette," resemble her mother's advice that Waverly should practice restraint. Both adults use mysterious, colorful language to advise Waverly to hold in her emotions. Their lesson to her is that success comes from suppressing individuality.

This is a natural lesson for a generation of immigrants to pass on because it is one that newcomers often find useful to remember when surrounded and outnumbered in a strange new culture. The characters in the story who have to realign their Chinese view of the world into an American social order show a common tendency of the socially transplanted, which is to keep their thoughts to themselves. One of the reasons *The Joy Luck Club* works as well as it does—winning approval of critics and readers alike—is that it makes clear in every line that Tan understands Chinatown culture inside and out: from the perspective of immigrants looking at their new world, as well as from mainstream Americans viewing the closed world of the immigrants.

It is easy to understand why those from other countries tend to cluster in small communities, where their old customs are at least recognized, if not fully dominant, and the Chinatown that Tan describes operates on just such a level. Waverly's mother speaks freely to other Chinese people in the markets, in the streets or on church. It is only when she is up against the unfamiliar ways of Americans that Waverly would have to call upon her "invisible strength." For those transplanted to a new culture, social situations are uniquely like board game strategies, requiring thought and detachment. This is why the social reserve that Waverly's mother has taught her serves her so well when she is playing chess.

To a certain extent, Waverly has learned her lesson a little too well. It is her dominance of whatever she tries to do that causes the story's conflicts. Few stories concern themselves with success that comes too easily, especially when the main character is a child. Like most stories about success, Waverly's comes in two stages: first, there is the relatively minor struggle to achieve her goals. Tan does not present Waverly as someone with a psychological compulsion for success. She is not driven by any need to escape from her past, which could be why her success arrives more quickly than she seems to have expected, with much less urgency on her part. After she becomes a national chess master before even reaching puberty, Waverly comes to the unpleasant realization that she has, unavoidably, changed too much to fit into her old relationships.

Waverly's primary motivation for pursuing her chess career seems to be her family's economic situation, which is presented so breezily here that readers may be tempted to underestimate its importance. The Jong family's situation is not one of desperate poverty—as Waverly takes care to point out early on in her narrative, there has never been a scarcity of food—but it is nevertheless an uncomfortable situation. The point is made no more clearly than in the fact that the children receive their Christmas presents from a charity function at the local church. It does not bother the children to know that the family's first chess set is second hand, but it clearly affects Waverly's mother, who is

outwardly grateful but privately bitter, telling her son to throw it away. As an adult, Waverly makes little about the family's economic situation, but her mother's discomfort with charity shows a wish for more prestige, which she tries to suppress to give herself "invisible strength."

The problem comes when the mother, who is trying to keep quiet and unobtrusive, sees her daughter's success, and starts to bask in it as her own. Awed by the attention that the girl's career brings, she is compelled to give Waverly preferential treatment over her sons, even at the risk of stirring their resentment. For a family that has fled the Chinese civil war to live in a two-bedroom apartment in a distant city, having a daughter pictured in *Life* magazine and matched in competition against adult intellectuals is a miracle for which no one could be ready. Assuming that Waverly is the family's hope for the future, then, it is not at all surprising that her mother would shower her with favoritism, a circumstance that Tan's narrator admits to exploiting. She finds herself in the dilemma of wishing to be inconspicuous because her mother taught her to be so while her mother breaks her own law, becoming too loud about her feelings, showing the sort of uncontrolled pride that she has always warned about. Waverly, who has become stronger and stronger through her invisibility, sees her mother being too loud and too proud. She understands things that her mother does not.

This, in the end, is a curse that both children of immigrants and all adolescents share: they outgrow their parents. First-generation Americans find themselves better able to function in society than their parents are, owing to the fact that they are in a world they have known most of their lives. Similarly, adolescents are destined to eventually reach the age when they recognize that they are self-sufficient humans, able to survive outside of their parents' control. The same social dynamic that is at work in both cases would also apply to the case of a famous child like the story's chess prodigy, whose parents are ordinary people. All three situations lead to frustrated rebellion: unlike the rebellion of children who break away from the hold of dominating parents, rebellion is not satisfying for those who simply outgrow their parents. Part of the reason for this is that such rebellion is just too easy. The fact that Waverly ends this story so abruptly, contemplating her next move like a chess player, seems to be Tan's admission that she has her character in a situation that has no easy solution, one which may, in fact, have no solution at all. Waverly is bound by love to her mother, but her mother has made her grow up too fast to cope with the social elements that are destined to force her in new directions.

Games are always a reflection of life, with the main difference being that their rules are laid out in advance, instead of being discovered. The distinction is crucial: it is the reason that most comparisons between life and games fail when given serious scrutiny. Of all games, chess is probably the one most often used in literature to symbolize life's strategies, if for no other reason than that it has existed in cultures around the globe for fifteen centuries. In "Rules of the Game" Waverly Jong, being just a child, takes the relationship between chess and life too seriously, mainly because the rule her mother gave her about "invisible strength" gives her nearly supernatural power in competition. She fails to see the difference between the game and real life, and as a result finds that life is grander but less manageable than she thinks it should be. Her frustration is

natural—it comes from being a child, particularly the child of an immigrant family—but it is made all the worse when circumstances force her to grow up too fast. Readers who interpret this story as the tale of Waverly learning life's rules are missing an important part of it: the point of the story is that there are no rules that cover all of life's possibilities.

Source: David Kelly, Critical Essay on "Rules of the Game," in *Short Stories for Students*, The Gale Group, 2002.

Adaptations

The Joy Luck Club was released as an audio book in December 1989. It was published by Dove Books and read by the author. This media adaptation is an abridged version of the book.

Director Wayne Wang's *The Joy Luck Club* was released as a film in September 1993 by Hollywood Pictures and starred Vu Mai as the young Waverly, Tamlyn Tomita as the older Waverly, and Tsai Chin as Lindo Jong. The screenplay was adapted by Tan herself with Ronald Bass, and Wayne Wang directed. The movie is available on VHS from Hollywood Pictures Home Video.

Topics for Further Study

The story takes place in San Francisco's Chinatown, an Asian community, and one of the many culturally diverse areas in the United States. Research the closest large city to your area and see if you can find at least three distinct cultural communities within that city's region. How do these communities differ from your own? In what ways are they the same?

Although the advent of communism in China in 1949 is not discussed at length in the story, the larger work, *The Joy Luck Club*, is based upon the experiences of four Chinese women who have fled communism and emigrated to the United States, as many did at the time. Research this period of terror and uncertainty in China and write a journal entry from the perspective of a man who is fleeing China at the same time. How would this man's experiences be different from the women's?

Waverly Jong's main talent in this story is playing chess. Research the history of the game, including finding out where and when it originated and when it began being played in the United States.

Chess sets come in all shapes and sizes, from cheap, mass-produced plastic sets to one-of-akind sets crafted out of marble or other exotic materials. Limited-edition chess sets often follow a theme, which can be something historical such as World War II or something as pop cultural as the characters of a television show. Keeping the story's major themes and background history in mind, design a sample chess set—using any medium you would like to present your ideas, such as drawing, painting, or sculpture.

Compare and Contrast

1950s: Chairman Mao Zedong rules as Communist dictator in the People's Republic of China.

1980s: Chinese students in Beijing's Tiananmen Square stage a pro-democracy demonstration. Hundreds are killed when the Chinese government suppresses the protesters with tear gas, rifle fire, and tanks—which crush protesters.

Today: China is the only remaining Communist major power in the world.

1950s: Fifteen-year-old American, Bobby Fischer, becomes the world's youngest chess player ever to attain the rank of grand master, making chess history.

1980s: After two decades of programming computers to play chess, Deep Thought, a computer designed to play chess at the level of the grand masters, is created. At the same time, HiTech, a computer developed at Carnegie Mellon University, defeats a human grand master for the first time.

Today: Deep Blue, Deep Thought's successor, defeats Russian Garry Kasparov, world chess champion, in one of the biggest upsets in chess history.

1950s: Senator Joseph McCarthy instigates national fear and panic, by claiming that there are many Communist sympathizers living in the United States. Through a series of witch-hunts and trials by the United States Congress House Committee on Un-American Activities, many Chinese Americans, the victims of racial profiling, are put under suspicion, interrogated, and otherwise harassed.

1980s: Many multicultural authors—like Tan, Louise Erdrich, and Oscar Hijuelos—who have been assimilated into modern American culture, try to reconcile their two cultures through their fiction. Many of these books are received well by American readers, and the field of multicultural literature expands.

Today: Wen Ho Lee, a Chinese-American scientist at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, is investigated to determine whether or not he leaked nuclear secrets to China. Many Asian Americans claim they are being discriminated against as a result of this negative exposure.

1950s: Following World War II, the relaxing of anti-Chinese immigration laws, and the advent of Communist rule in China, many Chinese settle in the United States, in ethnic enclaves like San Francisco's Chinatown.

1980s: In films like *Gremlins, Big Trouble in Little China*, and *The Golden Child*, San Francisco's Chinatown is depicted as a mystical place, often for humorous effect.

Today: Due in large part to the Americanreleased films of popular actors like Hong Kong's Jackie Chan and Chow Yun Fat, other Asian enclaves in America are depicted.

However, in these films, pure martial arts and other forms of action often replace Chinese mysticism.

What Do I Read Next?

Love Medicine, written by Louise Erdrich and originally published in 1984, was reprinted in 1993 by HarperPerennial Library when the author added five new chapters to the novel. This book is a series of interwoven stories about different generations in a Native American family. In 1985, Amy Tan read this book and was influenced heavily by it when she wrote *The Joy Luck Club.*

The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts, originally published in 1976, is a memoir of a Chinese-American girl growing up in Stockton, California. There are two worlds that the girl lives between, America—the place her parents emigrated to —and China, which the girl hears about in her mother's "talk-stories." Written by Maxine Hong Kingston, the first critically successful Asian-American writer in the United States, the book helped pave the way for Asian-American writers like Amy Tan.

How To Think in Chess was written by Jan Przewoznik and Marek Soszynski and was published in 2001 by Russell Enterprises. This book uses psychological experiments to show how professional chess players really think, how they "see" the chessboard. It then teaches readers to examine their own thought process when playing chess, so that they will be able to discover how they may be limiting their potential.

The Bonesetter's Daughter, by Amy Tan, was published in 2002 by Ballantine Books. This book is about a mother who has been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and becomes determined to write a record of her birth and family history, so that she will not forget the details of her life as her memory continues to deteriorate. Her daughter, a ghost writer for self-help books, has little knowledge of her mother's history. The daughter becomes determined to improve the bad relationship she has with her mother and to try to find out who her mother really is before she loses the opportunity forever.

The Kitchen God's Wife, Amy Tan's second novel, was published by Putnam in 1991. The book further explores the generation gap between Chinese-born mothers and their American-born daughters, but, unlike *The Joy Luck Club*, the story is limited to only two heroines.

Searching for Bobby Fischer: The Father of a Prodigy Observes the World of Chess was written by Fred Waitzkin and published in 1993 by Penguin USA. This book is the story of Waitzkin and his son, Josh. It covers the time period from when a six year-old Josh first sits down at a chessboard until he competes for the national championship. Through this journey, father and son must also work through the challenges of their own difficult relationship.

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Chess was written by Patrick Wolff and published in 2001 by Alpha Books. Wolff, the current United States Chess Champion and International Grandmaster, teaches quick and easy strategies for learning the basics of chess. This book contains essential information on basic openings and endgames, as well as tips on how to read a rival's moves.

Further Study

Bloom, Harold, *Amy Tan*, Modern Critical Views series, Chelsea House Publications, 2000.

This book is a great introduction to the current criticism about Tan's works, including her first novel, *The Joy Luck Club.*

Huntley, E. D., *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion*, Greenwood Publishing Group, 1998.

Author Amy Tan has become well-known for her ability to present her Asian-American stories in an accessible way for many different families. This book is an in-depth study of Tan's first three novels: *The Joy Luck Club, The Kitchen God's Wife*, and *The Hundred Secret Senses*. All aspects of these novels are explored including the characters, narrative strategies, plot development, literary devices, setting, and major themes.

Lohr, Steve, *Go To: The Story of the Math Majors, Bridge Players, Engineers, Chess Wizards, Scientists and Iconoclasts Who Were the Hero Programmers of the Software Revolution*, Basic Books, 2001.

This book details the strange history of computer science, a field where chess wizards were one of many kinds of people recruited by companies like IBM, Microsoft, and Apple for their interest in computers and logical skills in programming. It details the life stories of these people, starting in the 1950s at the dawn of the technological revolution, and discusses the little known but important role of women during this time.

Williams, Gareth, *Master Pieces: The Architecture of Chess*, Viking Press, 2000.

This book is a stunning visual exploration of the art and design of the individual pieces contained in a chess set. It includes information on the history, evolution, and symbolism of chess pieces and discusses the craft of creating chess pieces. Finally, it presents full-color illustrations of some of the most beautiful and famous chess sets from all over the world.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) 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, SSfS 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 SSfS 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 SSfS 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 SSfS 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 SSfS 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

SSfS 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 Short Stories 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 SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS 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 Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories 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 SSfS 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.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories 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 SSfS, 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 Short Stories 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 SSfS, 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 Short Stories 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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