The Joy Luck Club

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THE
Joy Luck Club

Amy Tan
Characters
Characters: Suyuan & Jing-Mei Woo

Suyuan Woo

- Loses her twin baby daughters during the siege of Kweilin
- Emigrates to America with her second husband Canning with whom she has June
- Never gave up search for her daughters
- Develops a Joy Luck Club in America
Characters: Suyuan & Jing-Mei Woo

Jing-mei "June" Woo

- Lacks the talent and drive to be a piano prodigy like her mother wills her to be
- Works in small advertisement firm
- Easily humiliated by those who have more self-confidence
- Finds her identity through pursuing her twin sisters that her mother left in China
Characters: An-Mei & Rose Hsu

An-mei Hsu

- Her mother was the wife of a respected scholar who dies, leaving her widowed.
- Her mother is raped and becomes the concubine of Wu Tsing.
- Her mother kills herself for An-mei's freedom.
- Comes to America and marries Bing, her youngest kid, drowns.
Rose Hsu Jordan

- Learns to assert herself after a break down instigated by her husband Ted's desire for divorce and the house
- Timid and unable to make decisions
Characters: Lindo & Waverly Jong

Lindo Jong

- Betrothed to Tyan-yu at infancy; married at 12
- Treated badly, so tricks family into letting her leave the marriage
- Comes to America and marries
Characters: Lindo & Waverly Jong

- Childhood chess prodigy
- Successful tax accountant
- Married once, and has kid named Shoshona
- Shoshona is integral in teaching her about motherhood

Waverly Jong
Characters: Ying-Ying & Lena St. Clair

Ying-ying St. Clair
- Grew up reckless and wealthy
- Her husband leaves her for an opera singer
- She has an abortion
- Meets and marries Clifford St. Clair in America
- She has lost her spirit, believes in no God but she does believe in self-determination - must confront her past before she regain her identity
Characters: Ying-Ying & Lena St. Clair

Lena St. Clair

- Resentful and angry of her marriage
- Encourages the ideas and intentions of her husband monetarily and spiritually - he now makes 7 times what she does
- He insists on keeping separating everything equally between them, which is inherently not equal at all, and not the best way to manage a marriage
The following is a helpful link you can visit to give you more on the characters and their analysis.

Summaries... & Questions
Summary

There are four sections in the book, each with a parable

- Feathers from a Thousand Li Away - Mothers
- The Twenty-six Malignant Gates - Daughters
- American Translation - Daughters
- Queen Mother of the Western Skies - Mothers
Summary

Feathers from a Thousand Li Away - Mothers

The Joy Luck Club
• The other women in the Club give Jing-mei $1,200 to go to China and meet her half-sisters

Scar
• An-mei and her mother both share scars of devotion—her mother by cutting off a piece of her flesh for Popo, and An-mei, who was burned by soup as she ran after her mother

The Red Candle
• Lindo escapes an abusive and unhappy marriage through wit and courage

The Moon Lady
• Ying-ying is tossed overboard, stranded alone on a shore, and watches a play about the Moon Lady
Summary

The Twenty-six Malignant Gates - Daughters

Rules of the Game

- Waverly becomes a chess champion applying the silent strength that she and her mother share. However she is ashamed of her mother’s pride.

The Voice from the Wall

- Ying-ying is silent, understood, and broken. She has an intuitive way of things that leads her to predict her unborn son’s death. Lena compares the love of her mother with that of her much louder neighbor.

Half and Half

- Rose recalls the death of her younger brother Bing, and reflects that “fate is shaped half by expectation, half by inattention”

Two Kinds

- Suyaun encourages Jing-mei to play the piano. Jing-mei angrily rejects the piano. Playing the last piece she had played once again, she finds that two of the songs complement each other, “Pleading Child” and “Perfectly Contented”
American Translation - Daughters

Rice Husbands
- Lena and Harlod’s marriage is falling apart under the guise of equality for both sides in the marriage.

Four Directions
- Waverly is scared to mention her engagement to Rich, to her mother, because she fears her mother will dissuade her from marrying him.

Without Wood
- Rose stands up to Ted, in his effort to uproot their life with a divorce.

Best Quality
- Suyuan teaches Jing-mei about the best quality over a Chinese New Year dinner of crabs, and then gives her a jade pendant which she calls, “her life’s importance.”
Summary

Queen Mother of the Western Skies - Mothers

Magpies
- An-mei recounts the story of her mother’s life, and sorrows – a life which has taught her to withhold her sorrows

Waiting Between the Trees
- Ying-ying aspires to strengthen her daughter’s tiger spirit.

Double Face
- Lindo contemplates the Chinese and American aspects of herself, and what she has taught her daughter Waverly about her identity.

A Pair of Tickets
- Jing-mei learns more about her mother’s story, and the discovery of her half sisters. After taking a picture with her sisters she realizes the essence of her mother that is in all three of them.
The following is a helpful link you can visit to give you more information about each section of the book:

Themes
Themes: Cultural Communication

Challenges of Cultural Communication

In Joy Luck Club, each narrator faces the inability to break through the cultural barrier separating mother and daughter, separated by the incomplete knowledge of language and tension between the pairs.

Jing Mei tries to relate the story of her mother’s founding of the Joy Luck club only to be met by the idea that it cannot be explained in English, but only through the understanding of the Chinese heritage.
As a result, the daughter tends to think of the stupidity of the mothers for their broken English, while the mothers think of their children as impatient.

The mothers wait in anticipation for the day they can explain their culture to their daughters in English.
Themes: Stories

The Power of Stories

- The cultural barrier in Joy luck club is broken through the use of stories to communicate to the daughters by giving warnings and advice based on past experience.
- Storytelling also ensures that the mothers will have left a mark on their daughter, to help them understand their Chinese heritage and to leave a lasting legacy.
- Storytelling also becomes a way of coping with pain and hardship, by allowing inner feelings to be released and helping to forge one's identity and self-reliance.
Themes: Identity

Immigrant Identity

Each of the main characters undergoes an anxiety about their identity of their Chinese heritage in American surroundings. The daughters have been raised in Chinese household but have long sought to escape their heritage.
Themes: Identity

As the daughters become older, they realize they are missing a part of their identity and become interested in their heritage.
There lie many objects that represent hope and opportunity only ideally, but when various characters run into these objects they are not what they seemed to be.

Suyuan pictures Kweilin as a sanctuary and safe haven, to be taken over by filth and the aftermath of war and the evils of society.
Symbols

- An-mei has a Bible that she once read in faith of good fortune and an improving life. But once her son dies, her faith disappears in the Bible as she loses her belief in her symbol of sanctuary.

- **Tradition** plays an unexpected twist in Lindo Jong’s story of her youth when the usually male biased tradition of marriage works for Jong.
Symbols

The **Red Candle** that represents the *prosperity of marriage* for Jong becomes the stick of fate that ultimately represents a tradition that Jong uses for her own good. She ultimately takes control of fate by blowing out the candle and decisively ends the marriage knowing that despite her family’s expectations, she must seek her own goals elsewhere.
Ying-ying, in the "Moon Lady," is at the moon festival and is absolutely intrigued by the art of catching fish through cranes.

Cranes in the Chinese culture represent long-life and prosperity.
But in this case, Ying-ying watches as young boys use a crane chained by the neck to fetch fish from the water. The crane picks at fish to eat them only to be rejected by the metal ring that doesn’t let the crane swallow.

Like the ironic disposition of the supposedly long-life representing bird, Ying-ying wishes for something so fundamental as eating, which is to feel the desire to be found, or have a family that cares about her.
The following is a helpful link you can visit to give you more information and analysis on the book’s themes and symbols.

Visit: www.sparknotes.com/lit/joyluck/themes.html
Devices
Tan’s novel incorporates ten different narrators in twenty stories and vignettes spanning two continents and more than 70 years. Instead of a jumbled mess, the result is a well-woven narrative. In this section, we will see how Tan achieves such cohesion.
The vignette at the beginning of the section represents the themes of the next four stories.

- ‘Feathers from a Thousand Li Away’ is the mothers’ chance to tell their stories to their daughters in “perfect American English.”
- In ‘The Twenty-Six Malignant Gates’ the daughters talk about their relationship with their mothers, and maternal love that was so indirect that the daughters began to see them as opponents.
In ‘American Translation’ the stories examine maternal stereotypes.

In ‘Queen Mother of the Western Skies’ the stories follow the vignette’s theme of losing innocence, but not hope and laughter.
Vignettes

Together the vignettes describe the life cycle.
The final vignette suggests a theme for the entire novel.
Unity

Allusions among stories add unity.

- An-mei's sapphire ring
- Ying-ying's first son
- Lindo's chang
- Suyuan's twins
ESSAY ASSIGNMENT FOR THE CLASS:

Directions:

Write a 500 word essay using MLA format (with proper heading, title, page number, etc.)

Include an introduction (with thesis), body, and conclusion

Due the first week of school! You may email a copy to Mr. Phanthai at http://dphanthai.tripod.com
ESSAY TOPIC:

Novels and plays often depict characters stuck between colliding cultures -- national, regional, religious, ethnic, institutional. Such collisions can call a character's identity into question. Discuss how a character from the Joy Luck Club responds to such a cultural collision. Write an essay in which you describe the character's response and explain its relevance to the work as a whole. Avoid plot summary and cite specific examples to support your ideas.

Please email Mr. Phanthai if you have any questions or comments regarding your summer reading assignment for PACE Advance English 10

Have a great summer!